

Title:

Nostalgic WWII Ducks Provide Adventure In Wisconsin Dells

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Summary:

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Keywords:

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Article Body:

For more than 60 years, families visiting Wisconsin Dells have enjoyed the tradition of seeing the region's famous scenery by way of a "Duck." The unique amphibious vehicles shuttle visitors through exclusive scenic wilderness trails and splash down into the water for river and lake excursions.

"If you haven't done the Ducks, you just haven't done the Dells," said Dan Gavinski, general manager of Original Wisconsin Ducks, the largest fleet of tour Ducks in the country. "A Duck tour is a staple part of any Wisconsin Dells vacation."

Ducks began operating in Wisconsin Dells in 1946. World War II had just ended and surplus military equipment and supplies were abundant. Among the most unusual offerings were these quirky landing crafts that could travel on both land and water. DUKWs, as they were officially dubbed, had been nicknamed "Ducks" by the soldiers who used them during the war effort.

General Motors built more than 21,000 Ducks from 1942 to 1945 and, despite early doubts about their usefulness, they soon became a hit. Compared to most other military craft at the time, they were small but rugged and very versatile. Military leaders lauded the Ducks' ability to handle rough seas and literally just pull itself back up onto shore and drive on. Ducks were extremely useful in reaching the varied shorelines of Europe and the South Pacific. They earned their reputation as workhorse vehicles on D-Day when more than 2,000 Ducks were used to shuttle troops and supplies to the craggy beaches of Normandy, France.

"Military experts consider D-Day the greatest amphibious operation in history and, at the time, Generals MacArthur and Patton touted the vital role Ducks

played in that invasion and beyond," Gavinski said.

Today, Original Wisconsin Ducks continue to preserve the legacy of the vehicles and the men who drove and rode them into war. Most Ducks in the fleet bear the name of notable WWII leaders, significant locations or famous battles. Along the 81/2-mile journey, tour operators splash in a bit of history while showing off the versatility of the Duck as it maneuvers through the stunning rocky bluffs that are Wisconsin Dells. Being a Duck driver is a specialized position that takes intensive training--six weeks to be exact--which is one week more than the GIs who drove them into battle. Above and beyond skill, Original Wisconsin Ducks' operators also serve as the first line of charm, making a Duck tour a memorable experience for the entire family.

"People always ask if these were the actual Ducks that were used in the war," said Jared Hinze, who has been a tour Duck operator at Original Wisconsin Ducks for six years. "It would be cool if they were; however, these were surplus Ducks that never saw action, and thanks to our expert maintenance staff they are almost like new vehicles."

Original Wisconsin Ducks employ a staff of eight who work year-round to maintain the vehicles. With more than 190 years of experience among them, the crew probably knows more about these novel military craft than anyone else in the world. Their dedication ensures that Ducks will continue to be enjoyed by generations to come.