

GUEST VIEW

Smart regulation needed for ride sharing apps

The following editorial appeared Wednesday in the Grand Haven Tribune:

(TNS) — Uber and Lyft are popular services where people use their phones to hail a ride.

Unlike a taxi service or public transit, Uber and Lyft drivers could be anyone — your friends, neighbors, even yourself.

Uber says every driver in the U.S. "is thoroughly screened through a process that includes county, federal, and multi-state criminal background checks that go back as far as the driver's state's law allows, and ongoing reviews of drivers' motor vehicle records throughout their time driving with Uber."

The service also relies on anonymous user feedback to rate drivers, and drivers' profiles include their picture, name license plate number and rating.

Similar policies and procedures are in place for the Lyft service.

While the services have measures in place to protect passengers, some state lawmakers want to see tighter rules.

Senate Bill 184 would regulate Uber drivers under an amended Limousine Transportation Act, requiring drivers have the same insurance and safety inspections as limousine and taxi drivers.

Senate Bill 188 would also require drivers to carry a chauffeur's license.

We like the concept of services like Uber, especially in an area like Grand Haven where your choices for taxi service are limited, and Harbor Transit service only runs on limited hours and doesn't go beyond the Tri-Cities.

Having a slew of entrepreneurial residents who want to make some extra money providing rides to the people who need them is a great opportunity, especially during the summer when there are plenty of tourists and people out celebrating late at bars, restaurants, and other festivities.

While there is immense opportunity, that doesn't mean the service shouldn't be subject to the same rules as other ride providers.

While it is nice that Uber provides background checks for drivers and holds them accountable with reviews and ratings, there should still be some regulations in place.

It's not fair that most mainstream companies providing rides have to follow one set of rules, while anyone can set up an Uber account and begin their own ride service without any rules or oversights.

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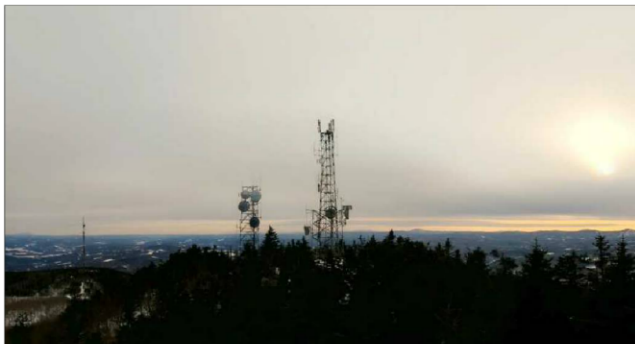
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Logan T. Hansen/Courtesy Photo

A view to the south from the summit of Mount Ascutney in Windsor, Vt.

That time I climbed a mountain alone



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One thousand seven hundred and sixty-nine miles. Thirty-three hours and 15 minutes. Ten states. Two countries. And a cabin in the woods.

These are the logistics, the extremely pared down details of a solo journey to the eastern coast of the United States, a road trip I planned in January.

But they don't mention how I ended up taking a "selfie" at the top of Mount Ascutney at the edge of a small town in Vermont.

I returned to school downtown shortly after New Year's Day, and soon discovered that besides the freshly laundered clothes (thanks Mom) and the book bag and school supplies I'd brought with me, that I'd also brought something a little less tangible.

It was an itch to see new places, a bug that seems to bite me quite often.

After some debate, I set my sights on New England, and mapped out the extensive route using Roadtrippers.com.

On the crisp cusp of a mid-March morning, my vehicle's headlights were pointed at Detroit's Ambassador Bridge and the thought broadcasting through my brain was something along the lines of "Am I really doing this right now?"

I was alone. The friend I'd asked to join me had backed out, spurring one of my roommates at school to deem the trip my "Henry David Thoreau" moment, whatever that meant.

And apparently I was really doing it, because sooner than I knew it I was sailing down the highway Ontario-401 East, on a crash course with the rising sun.

Some 12 hours after departing the comfy confines of Michigan, I crossed from the Canadian province of Quebec into Franklin County, Vt., where—upon the U.S. border officials saw fit to "randomly" select me for further inspection.

One cup of complimentary Green Mountain Coffee, one brief tour of the University of Vermont in Burlington and one glance at Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream Factory in Waterbury later, I set up shop at the rustic cabin I'd

rented from a rugged, gray-bearded gentleman named Mike. That night in the cabin, the feeling of loneliness that had been tugging at me since I'd left Michigan became very real.

Not only was I physically by myself, but the cell service was horrendous. And every creek of the wood, every twig snapping outside the door in the woods was another miniature heart attack.

Discovering that the lock on the door didn't work did not help matters. At that point, I remember thinking of all the awful possibilities. Maybe Mike was a serial murderer. Maybe he'd fabricated an online presence to lure people out there. Maybe the little note that said, "Welcome Logan. Enjoy!" was just a cruel joke.

When I woke up the next morning and was still alive, I knew I was just being paranoid the night before. I'd been awake for almost 24 hours, after all.

That day I made the somewhat questionable decision to hike up a mountain all by my lonesome. The lucky contestant was Mount Ascutney, a monadnock in Windsor, Vt., which peaks at 3,130 feet.

The Windsor Trail, off of Back Mountain Road, a section of Vermont Route 44A, spans three miles on the mountain's north face.

It was March. It was cold. Snow was everywhere. And the only other living, breathing creature I saw the entire time was a white rabbit that scurried out from under some brush near the summit. That was another tally mark on the mini heart attack counter.

While at times it was peaceful, the overall aura leaned toward the creepy side, one of those way-too-quiet moments that happened to last for a few hours.

Probably a half mile from the top, I discovered a wooden lean-to around the backside of the mountain with a blue tarp swaying in the breeze at its entrance.

The inside was shrouded in shadow and for about 10 minutes, I just stood, staring at it from a distance. I shouted hello just to see if someone — or something — would react.

When no one did, I walked up to

the structure and peaked inside. It was an old loggers' cabin, complete with two metal bunks along the right wall and a stonework fireplace to the left.

Outside, visitors had scratched their initials and some dates into the wood. The markings overlooked a valley that faced the lower half of western Vermont.

Mount Ascutney's summit popped up after what seemed like forever. But while the hike had been long and tiring and just a pinch fear-inducing, the view from the top was incredible.

The Green Mountains were visible to the west, New Hampshire's White Mountains were on the eastern horizon; mountains were everywhere.

Then it was a race back down the trail because I had no intention of meandering around on a forested mountainside after the sun had set. I left Vermont the next morning, and eventually illegally parked in front of Paul Revere's house in Boston; drove around Brown University's campus on a rainy Providence afternoon; spied the Connecticut home used for the exterior shots in the movie "The Family Stone"; managed to weave through traffic and pedestrians in Times Square; and settled in for a night at a Holiday Inn near Pennsylvania State University.

I don't know that I can recommend traveling alone, but I did read somewhere that everyone ought to try it at least once.

My experience, while brief and at times blood pressure-raising, is one I'm glad I can now tell stories about. It even spurred two short stories, one of which I used as part of a final project for an English course.

For anyone seeking their own "Henry David Thoreau" moment, I recommend proceeding with caution. Any number of things could have gone wrong while I was venturing throughout the East Coast; I'm just lucky they didn't.

It might be a good idea to see just what Thoreau has to do with all of this anyway, too.

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