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Hessel, Mich.: Little house on the lake

REUNION | Old friends relive childhood memories on Michigan's Upper Peninsula

April 20, 2008 [Recommend \(9\)](#)
 BY ANNE Z. COOKE

HESSEL, Mich. — Margy's summer cottage looked just as I remembered, though it was years since I'd been there.

The same rural lane turned off the highway through a stand of tall pines, a forest so quiet and cool it seemed lost in time. Lake Huron gleamed through the undergrowth, silvery streaks winking between the branches. As the road ended, the Raymonds' turn-of-the-century log cabin, enlarged many times since, appeared.

» Click to enlarge image



Avery Point, on Lake Huron, is named for early summer resident and millionaire businessman Sewell Avery. (Courtesy)

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Woods & Water Ecotours leads outings through the Les Cheneaux Islands, Mich. (Courtesy)

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IF YOU GO

GETTING THERE:

Hessel-Cedarville is on the eastern Upper Peninsula, 450 miles from Chicago. Drive east on I-90, northeast on I-94, north on I-96 (at Benton Harbor) and north on US 131 to Exit 180 (east of Cadillac). Turn east on Michigan 55, north on US 127 and north on I-75 to the Mackinac Bridge. Cross bridge and continue 15 miles to Exit 359 and MI34, the turnoff for Hessel-Cedarville. Continue 14 miles to Hessel.

LODGING: A double room at Raymond Cottage with breakfast costs \$125 a night or \$75 for a single. (906) 484-3954; Sunset Bay Cabins, (906) 484-3913; Lakeview Motel & Cottages, (906) 484-2474.

DINING: The Hessel Bay Inn at the harbor, (906) 484-2460. Snobs Bar and Grill in Cedarville serves good burgers, (906) 484-1203.

RECREATION: Woods & Water Ecotours, 20 Pickford Ave., (906) 484-4157 or Woodswaterecotours.com. Ask about camping, available in the general vicinity, near Search Bay Beach and near St. Martin's Point. For the Hiawatha National Forest, west of Hessel, see Fs.fed.us.

MORE INFO: Hunts-upguide.com, Lescheneaux.org, Lescheneaux.net and Greatwaters.net.

Peninsula, she's on deck all year at her tour center and gear shop in Hessel.

The Nature Conservancy saw what was happening, she said. They bought private land and transferred it to local preservation agencies, saving it from development. People who are into wilderness, or natural history or geology, or kayaking and camping, or just sightseeing, can find some amazing places around here.

During the busy summer season when the lake warms up, Hadley's staff lead guided half-day, full-day and multiday ecotours on water and land, from kayaking and canoeing through the Les Cheneaux Islands archipelago, to hiking on the Peninsula. Trip themes include birding, botany, geology, cave tours, moonlight paddles, cave tours and biking adventures.

I'm small enough that I can customize an entire trip for a couple or a family, and if they're interested, I'll even book lodging, she said.

Her store and rental shop in Hessel (it's the big red house with the yellow trim) sells top-quality outdoor gear, clothes, camping equipment and kayaks, and rents kayaks, canoes, paddle boats, wet suits, mountain bikes and other sports gear.

A needed respite

After Margy and her brother inherited the house, they continued to invite cousins and friends to visit. Then, during one especially busy summer, when Hadley was having trouble finding lodging for a tour group, Margy volunteered as a host. Since then, she's run a sort of informal B&B, hosting travelers during some summer weeks.

If you're staying at Margy's, you can swim in front of her house. Below the lawn there's a small beach made up of half rocks and half sand.

The house, furnished with classic mid-20th century casual furniture, has a spacious and comfortable living room with a huge stone fireplace, shelves stuffed with books and a large dining room. The butler's pantry, with shelves of glasses and stacks of dishes, connects the dining room to a large kitchen, equipped with a commercial-size stove and big enough to seat eight at the table.

Upstairs, seven small bedrooms paneled in fir have twin or double beds, dressers and closets. Some bedrooms share a bathroom; some have a private bath. Family photographs, watercolors, posters and photos of friends and favorite fishing boats of yore recall the Raymonds' early years here.

A covered front porch, running the length of the house, overlooks Lake Huron, with Marquette, Goat and Long islands on the horizon and Avery Point in the near distance. There, and on some of the larger islands, summer residents from Chicago, Cleveland and Detroit have owned family cottages for a century. Some are now operated as seasonal B&Bs; lists of these are available on local Web sites (see related story).

Even if you don't stay at Margy's, pack a picnic lunch and spend a day at her favorite stretch of shoreline: a gently curving arc of white sand known as Sandy Beach. This primo location, ideal for jogging and building sand castles, is about eight miles east, past Cedarville, on Lake Huron Scenic Drive (Michigan 134). While you're there, explore the sand dunes — a popular spot with local photographers.

Our week was gone in a moment but felt like forever. We hiked in the woods behind the house, compared book clubs, talked politics to death, discussed ex-husbands and laughed over the photographs in our high school graduation yearbook. We shopped for presents for family members and swam in the lake. We skipped the water skiing, but we walked on the beach and tossed endless tennis balls to Margy's dog.

Our reunion was a much-needed shot in the arm. So wonderful, in fact, that we're doing it again this year, this time in Colorado.

We've gone our different ways, but it hasn't mattered. Growing up in the same town, with the same neighbors and in the same schools, forged a lifelong bond. As did our long ago summers in Hessel's North Woods.

Anne Z. Cooke is a California-based free-lance writer.

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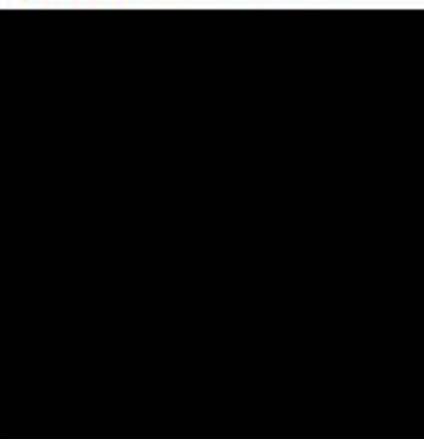
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