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## Upper Midwesterners can't resist lure of lake

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Boathouses on the eastern Upper Peninsula, Lake Huron, Mich. (Photos courtesy to Pioneer Press: Steve Haggerty/Colorworld)

HESSEL, Mich. — The cottage looked just as I remembered it, though I hadn't been there for years. A turn-of-the-century log cabin, darkened by age, it stood at the end of the lane beneath 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.

For a moment, we were alone with our thoughts, remembering. Then, the back door opened, and Margy, our host for this impromptu high school

reunion on Michigan's Eastern Upper Peninsula, hurried out to meet us. Smiling, she hugged me, and the years dropped away.

If you're born and bred in the shade of the North Woods, you know what "HOMES" stands for. The true test for any son or daughter of the Upper Midwest, it was my Dad's favorite riddle, a tradition he trotted out at the end of every long car trip.

"Where's home with an s?" he'd ask, grinning into the rear view mirror, while the three of us kids, crowded into the back seat, squealed in unison, "Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie and Superior!"

If you lived in Chicago, most of those lakes were just names. But not Lake Michigan, a few blocks away. Its sandy shores and gentle waves were our personal inland ocean.

Many were the hot summer days we spent at the beach, pretending to ignore our male classmates. Even better were the August weeks we spent with my grandmother, at Loon Lake, near Cecil, Wis. Her green-roofed cottage, shaded by birch trees, had a screened porch, a cold-water pump that wheezed when we cranked it, a narrow pier that ran out into the lake and a drafty two-seater outhouse.

Eventually, I discovered thousands of lakes spangle the great North Woods, like city lights on a dark night.

And then Margy joined our circle of friends. Each summer, when school was out, she and her family headed for their cottage in Hessel on Lake Huron. Here, deep in the woods and with few neighbors, this family shed their city skins. They lived in their bathing suits. They picked blueberries. They cruised the bay on their speedboat. They water-skied, launching themselves straight off the dock, a stunt I secretly envied.

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Visitors enjoy a sandy beach along Lake Huron in Hessel, Mich. (©Steve Haggerty/ColorWorld)

Margy's father, an enthusiastic fisherman, kept the frying pan busy. And the family was generous to a fault. Each summer after school closed, they invited a bunch of us to the lake for a week.

What better place, then, for old friends to laugh over the past, update the present and, for me especially, see whether time and tourism had spoiled Hessel's quiet simplicity.

#### TOURISM IMPACT

Thirty years ago, summer meant down time. We dunked in the lake, sunned on the sand, picked flowers in the meadows and read novels on the front porch. Adults watched the sun go down. Kids swam in the lake and prowled the woods unsupervised.



Lakeside cottage at Gordon Lodge on Green Bay Peninsula.

But with tourism on the rise, Clark County's 2,000 residents have adapted. Hessel and neighboring Cedarville, now linked as the Les Cheneaux Islands, cater to visitors with restaurants, snack shops, motels, cottages, BBs, gift stores, boat docks and sports rentals.

"Green" before it was catch phrase, the community was quick to realize the Eastern Upper Peninsula is, in the words of the Nature Conservancy, one of the world's "last best places." Though many old forests were already in national or state parks, additional tracts of private land were protected when their owners donated them to conservancy groups.

"You ought to walk through the Oliver and Edna Birge Nature Preserve," said Margy. "There's a nice nature trail there. The Birge family — they were my mother's friends — donated it to the community to save it from being subdivided and developed.

"After that, talk to Jessie Hadley. She has done her

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best to cultivate and enhance a love of nature, sans jet skis and snowmobiles."

Hadley, 37, the owner of Woods & Water Ecotours, is Hessel's go-to girl for outdoor recreation, as well as for information about local history, sightseeing, wilderness destinations and conservation efforts on the Eastern Upper Peninsula.

"The Nature Conservancy saw what was happening, so they bought private land and transferred it to local preservation agencies," she said. "If you're



The village center in Hessel, Mich. (©Steve Haggerty/ColorWorld)

into wilderness or natural history or geology or kayaking and camping or just sightseeing, you can find some amazing places around here."

In summer, Hadley's staff leads guided kayaking, canoeing, hiking and biking tours through the Les Cheneaux Island archipelago on the Peninsula. Her regular themed trips include birding, botany, geology, cave tours and moonlight paddles, but she also is willing to customize half-day, full-day or overnight trips for couples, families and small

groups.

"If my clients are interested, I'll even book their lodging," she said.

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

## REUNION SUCCESS

After Margy's parents died, she and her brother inherited the cottage. During one very busy summer, when Hadley couldn't find enough lodging for a prospective tour group, Margy volunteered to house them. Since then, she has run an informal BB, hosting guests during some summer weeks.

If you're staying at her place, you can swim and sun in front of her house off a small beach, half sand and half rocks, alongside the pier.

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 Route 134). The nearby sand dunes are popular with photographers.

Our week was gone in a moment, but it felt like forever. We hiked in the woods behind the house, compared book clubs, talked politics to death, discussed ex-husbands and pored over the graduation photographs in our high school yearbook.

We shopped in Hessel and swam in the lake. We didn't water ski, but we walked on the beach and

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tossed endless tennis balls for Margy's chocolate lab.

As for our reunion, it was a shot in the arm. It was so wonderful, we're doing it again this year in Colorado. We've gone our separate 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.

## TRIP TIPS: HESSEL, MICH.

### Lodging:

Sunset Bay Cabins, 906-484-3913.

Lakeview Motel & Cottages, 906-484-2474.

Margy's Cottage (the Raymond Cottage): A double room and breakfast for two is \$125 per night or \$75 for a single, 401-596-7820 or 906-484-3954.

### Dining:

The Hessel Bay Inn at the harbor, 906-484-2460.

The Snows Cafe in Cedarville serves good burgers.

### Recreation:

Woods & Water Ecotours, 20 Pickford Ave., Hessel; 906-484-4157 or [woodswaterecotours.com](http://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, go to [www.fs.fed.us/r9/forests/hiawatha](http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/forests/hiawatha).

For books, visit the Village Idiom Bookshop, on Pickford south of Michigan Route 134.

For games, puzzles and gifts, visit the Pickle Point Store, at the Hessel Harbor.

### More information:

[hunts-upguide.com/hessel.html](http://hunts-upguide.com/hessel.html)

[lescheneaux.org](http://lescheneaux.org).

[lescheneaux.net/lodging.html](http://lescheneaux.net/lodging.html).

[greatwaters.net](http://greatwaters.net).

## A LAKESHORE ROUNDUP

Here are a few of the summer retreats that combine the best the North Woods has to offer.

### WISCONSIN

**Little Sister Resort**, a 60-guest family-style resort on the Green Bay Peninsula since 1947, nestles on a cove north of Bailey's Harbor in Door County. On the Peninsula's protected west shore, recreation includes swimming in clear water off two piers, sailing in the cove, biking into Little Sister village and exploring the peninsula's north end. There's no fee to use the resort's rowboats, paddleboats and fat-tire bikes or bring your own inflatable rafts, kayaks and small sailboats.

There's no beach, other than a man-made bit of sand for toddlers. An all-day pass to the adjacent nine-hole, par-3 golf course is \$20. Twenty-two cottages, cabins and newer rooms offer a choice of lodging. Owners Sue and Greg Sunstrom serve a full breakfast from mid-June to mid-July (included in the room charge). The romantic Tiki Bar & Grill, on the water, serves lunch and dinner. Shoulder-season rates for two start at \$80 per night. High season rates run around \$1,000 a week. Here, as at many established resorts, most guests are repeat

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customers. For more info, go to [littlesisterresort.com](http://littlesisterresort.com) . or [doorcounty.com](http://doorcounty.com) . or call 877-715-9405.

**Gordon Lodge** , on 130 private acres near Bailey's Harbor, is also on the Green Bay Peninsula but on the windy Lake Michigan side. The water here is shallower and warmer, and the beach is spectacularly long and sandy. One hundred acres of old-growth cedar and pine, with three miles of hiking trails, are among the peninsula's last native forest.

Gordon Lodge has been completely renovated and remodeled. The tennis court is resurfaced and lit for night play, and the volleyball and basketball courts are redesigned. Recreation equipment — including paddleboats, kayaks, road bicycles and fat-tire bikes — is free to guests.

The 39 rooms and cottages, for 115 guests, have lake views, minifridges, coffee makers and microwaves. Lunch and dinner are served in the Top Deck Restaurant. Posh lodge rooms start at \$200 per night, and rustic cottages start at \$150; all rates include breakfast. For more info, go to [gordonlodge.com](http://gordonlodge.com) . or [travelwisconsin.com](http://travelwisconsin.com) . or call 800-830-6235.

## MINNESOTA

**Lost Lake Lodge** , an 80-acre family resort on Brainerd Lake, in central Minnesota, is a summer camp for families, with a large lodge and comfortable lakeshore cabins. Daily activities are planned for all ages; most families come for a long weekend or a week. Fly-fishing and canoeing clinics are designed for kids. Parents and children can share horseshoes, nature hikes, canoeing, kayaking, bird watching and paddleboats. Ice cream socials are regular events, and a family campfire is held nightly.

The lake has a sandy beach, ideal for toddlers, and by June the water is warm. The setting is quiet and relatively isolated, a relaxing getaway for parents of older children. Other recreation includes golf at several top-rated golf courses off the property, massage treatments and guided fishing outings, each for an additional charge.

Prices include gourmet breakfasts and dinners, served in the Knotty Pine Dining Room or the Lodge Bistro. There's a per person charge and a minimum.

In midsummer, one-bedroom cottages are \$320 a night, a two-bedroom cottage is \$480 per night. For more info, go to [lostlakelodge.com](http://lostlakelodge.com) . or call 800-450-2681 or 218-963-2681.

— Anne Z. Cooke