

TRAVEL

The Columbus Dispatch

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VOLUNTEER VACATIONS

Giving while exploring

Tribute to music

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WHERE TO EAT?

Dispatch.com/dining

On Lake Huron, summer is savored

By **Anne Z. Cooke**
FOR THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

HESSEL, Mich. — The cottage looked just as I remembered it, although 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 under a stand of tall pines, a forest so quiet and cool it seemed lost in time.

Lake Huron gleamed through the undergrowth.

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 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: Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie and Superior.



STEVE HAGGERTY | COLORWORLD

Boathouses line Lake Huron on the Upper Peninsula in Michigan.

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CHECKING IN

Taking a 'staycation' is a bit of an art

Let us review: Moving 5 yards of topsoil? Not a vacation. Staining the deck? Not a vacation. Cleaning out the refrigerator and catching up on laundry? Definitely not a vacation.

Spending an afternoon at the pool? Now that's more like it.

Welcome to the summer of the "staycation," in which frazzled Americans are spending some of their precious downtime in and around home.

The reasons are obvious: Gasoline prices are up; airfares are up; the dollar is down.

People are continuing to travel despite all that, a number of surveys report, but the stay-at-home

vacation is also on the rise.

One reason for the seemingly contradictory findings is that some folks are trimming the expense of their travels to cover the expense of them. A second explanation is



CINDY
DECKER

that stressed-out people are taking time out specifically to relax near home.

People have taken at-home

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HURON

FROM PAGE F1

Each summer, my friend Margy and her family headed for their cottage in Hessel on Lake Huron. Here, deep in the woods and with few neighbors, the Raymonds 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.

Mr. Raymond, a fishing enthusiast, kept the frying pan busy. And the Raymonds were 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, see whether time and tourism had spoiled Hessel's quiet simplicity.

Thirty years ago, summer meant downtime. You 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.

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

Green before it was a buzzword, the community was quick to realize that the Upper Peninsula is, in the words of

If you go

HESSEL, MICH.

Hessel, a small town that originated as a fishing village, sits along Lake Huron.

GETTING THERE

Hessel is on the Upper Peninsula, 450 miles from Chicago. Fly to Chicago or Detroit, then on to the Chippewa County International Airport, serving Sault Ste. Marie, Mich.

STAYING THERE

Lodging options abound in the area. Here are a few.

▶ **Sunset Bay Cabins:** Cabins start at \$135 a night. Call 906-484-3913.

▶ **Lakeview Motel & Cottages:** Rooms start at \$48.50 a night. Call 906-484-2474.

▶ **The Raymond Cottage:** A double room and breakfast for two costs \$125 a night, or \$75

for the Nature Conservancy, one of the world's "last best places." Although 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," Margy said. "There's a nice nature trail there. The Birge family — my mother's friends — donated it to the community to save it from being subdivided and developed. After that, talk to Jessie Hadley. She's done her best to cultivate and enhance a love of nature, sans Jet Skis and snowmobiles."

for a single. Call 401-596-7820 or 906-484-3954.

PLAYING THERE

Woods & Water Ecotours, 20 Pickford Ave., Hessel, offers visitors many ways to explore the outdoors. Call 906-484-4157 or visit www.woodswaterecotours.com.

LEARNING MORE

For more information on the Hessel area — including restaurants, additional lodging options and activities — visit these Web sites.

▶ www.hunts-upguide.com/hessel.html

▶ www.lescheneaux.org

▶ www.lescheneaux.net/lodging.html

▶ www.greatwaters.net

▶ www.fs.fed.us/r9/forests/hiawatha

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

"The Nature Conservancy saw what was happening, so they bought private land and transferred it to local preservation agencies," she said. "If you're into wilderness or natural history or geology or kayaking and camping or just sightseeing, you can find amazing places around here."

During summer, Hadley's staff members lead kayaking, canoeing, hiking and biking tours through Les Cheneaux Islands. Her themed trips



include birds, botany, geology and caves, but she also will customize half-day, full-day or overnight trips for couples, families and small groups.

After Margy's parents died, she and her brother inherited the cottage. During one 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 bed-and-breakfast, 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 — along the pier.

The house has a spacious living room with an oversized fireplace, shelves stuffed with books, and a large dining-

room wing. A serving pantry connects the dining room to a large kitchen.

Upstairs, seven small bedrooms paneled in fir have twin or double beds with down comforters, dressers and closets. Some bedrooms share a bathroom. One has a private bath. Historic photos, watercolors, posters and pictures of friends and favorite fishing boats recall the Raymonds' early years in Hessel.

A covered front porch that runs 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, families from Chicago, Cleveland and Detroit have owned cottages for a century. Some are operated as seasonal bed-and-breakfasts.

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 8 miles east of Cedarville, on Lake Huron Scenic Drive (Mich. 134). The nearby sand dunes are popular with photographers.

Our week was gone in a moment. We hiked in the woods behind the house, compared book clubs, talked politics to death and pored over the graduation photos in our high-school yearbook.

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.

HOW TO REACH US

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