

R U S T I C A T I N G *up to Camp*

Where we natives went to relax

BY NANCY HARMON JENKINS

SUMMER PEOPLE coming to Maine in the late 19th century called themselves rusticators. They came usually for the whole summer, and although they traveled in grand style, once they reached Maine they settled in to what they hoped was a local way of life. They swam, sailed, picnicked on the shore, went for hikes, and gathered blueberries. They slept in grand, unheated cottages and took cold showers for self-improvement. In short, they rusticated, living, insofar as they could imagine it, just like us locals.

But we rusticated too. If summer people built cottages on the shore, we natives more often retired to a camp at the lake. Any lake would do as long as the housing was not permanent. We called it “going up to camp,” as in, “We’re

spending August up to camp.” When a boyfriend came to visit, I showed him my family’s camp on an island in Lake Megunticook. Said he, a camp? This is no camp! Where he came from out in the Rockies, a camp was a lean-to with a couple of bunks and a space for an open fire in front. Our camp, to him, was a house, albeit a primitive house with kerosene lamps, water from the well, and an old Glenwood cook stove that was fed by kindling from an occasional chopped-down birch tree.

In camps like that, people of my parents’ generation spent the summer, or as much of it as they could afford to be away from home.

For me, the all-time champions of going up to camp were my Aunt Doris and Uncle Howard, both of them born

in the first years of the last century and, you would think, happy to leave behind them the hardships of life in the country in old-fashioned Maine. Yet, well into their 70s and early 80s, they took off from Camden every spring around the first of May and headed downeast to Forest City, right on the border with Canada, and a camp my uncle had built back in the 1930s on the shores of East Grand Lake. There they stayed, usually until the first of November.

Unlike most camps, this one had no name. It was deep in the woods, down a long gravel road that cut through land owned by a paper company—Great Northern most likely since at one point Great Northern owned most of the Maine woods. It was a comfortable place—a log cabin well chinked against

the weather, the outside logs shining deeply with yearly applications of dark varnish, the inside spacious with comfortable, overstuffed furniture, a great room encompassing kitchen, dining room, and parlor, with a bedroom attached, a massive fieldstone fireplace that was lit on chilly nights, and a wide verandah, screened so they could sit out at sundown and watch lake activity without the nuisance of blackflies or mosquitoes.

Not that there was a great deal of lake activity. Three or four boats at most passed each day, primarily fishermen trolling for smallmouth bass or other fish in which the deep, cold waters of East Grand are notably prolific. Even from far out in the middle of the

Flawless tranquility, I often thought, was the real appeal of camp for Doris and Howard. After the gregarious hubbub of winter in Camden, it must have been a welcome plunge into stillness.

lake, the helmsman would lift an arm in salute, and Doris and Howard would dutifully wave back. “That’s Everett,” sharp-eyed Howard might say, “haven’t seen much of him so far this year.” Canoes would come in closer, gliding in among the reeds along the shore’s edge, sometimes stopping and hauling up for a chat, maybe a cup of tea or a glass of Kool-Aid, before going on. But the lake was mostly quiet with few boats and even fewer camps. On the times I visited, its glossy, glassy surface was like a bolt of faded blue-green silk, unruffled except for an occasional ripple of breeze. Storms there were from time to time, I’m certain, but I never witnessed them. For me, East Grand was a place of utter tranquility.

That flawless tranquility, I often thought, was the real appeal of camp for Doris and Howard. After the gregarious hubbub of winter in Camden (baked bean suppers on Saturday nights, church on Sunday mornings), it must have been a welcome plunge into stillness.

Often there was still ice on the lake and snow in the woods when they got there. Frequently snow had started to fall again by the time they left. They were used to a little snow, they said.

A smallmouth bass caught in Spednic Lake by wildlife blogger Robin Follette. These days only catch-and-release-fishing is allowed on the lake.



East Grand Lake as it looked in the 1950s when the author used to visit her aunt and uncle as they “rusticated” there during the summer months.

(Opposite) Courtesy Penobscot Marine Museum. (This page) Photo by Robin Follette.



Spednic Lake is clear and calm, perfect for a fishing expedition.

East Grand Lake is one of those Maine treasures that is relatively unknown to the outside world. At 16,000 acres, it's one of the largest lakes in the state, long and irregular with deep narrow rocky bays and sandy reefs that are home to an impressive variety of fish, from those smallmouth bass to landlocked salmon, trout, and togue, as well as less desirable sticklebacks, bullhead, and suck-

ers. Passamaquoddy Indians may have been the first fishermen to penetrate East Grand. The adjoining watershed, which feeds into the St. Croix River system and eventually down into Passamaquoddy Bay, is still considered Passamaquoddy terrain. But it is also a boundary water system, a small but significant part of the 5,000-plus-mile border between the United States and Canada.

Forest City straddles the border. On the American side, it's an unincorporated township with a total residential population of five (15 if you include the New Brunswick side) that in summer swells to 30. "More trees than people," they like to say around there. You can still buy 40 acres of undeveloped land for less than \$1,000 an acre. (I know—I just checked the real estate listings.) Until recently, people went back and forth across the border several times a day, hailing the customs officers as they passed through as if the frontier didn't really exist—and it didn't in the minds of those who lived and worked there. But since the United States got paranoid about terrorists entering from Canada, you have to have a passport, and that presents problems of sometimes-ridiculous proportions for a Canadian who wants to go shopping in Houlton, Maine, or a Mainer who wants to cross over to fish in Spednic Lake.

You might think going up to camp entailed idle times for Doris and Howard, but you would be wrong. If there was always a lot to do, however, there was also plenty of time in which to

do it, whether that meant digging a garden, mending fences, mucking out the out-house, repairing the wood-duck boxes that perched on poles over a swampy inlet, tinkering with an out-board motor, raking brush, and gathering fallen limbs. In an unhurried but well-structured way, they did the kind of things their parents and grandparents had done before them.

They kept a prodigious vegetable garden that once dug in the spring, had to be fenced off from deer and other varmints. As they harvested the vegetables, they put them up in jars, storing food that they carried back to Camden for the winter. While no grand gourmet, Aunt Doris was a fine Yankee cook who could turn out crisp-crust fruit pies or feather-light biscuits or dense, savory pots of baked beans. Even carrots, even beet greens, even summer squash—all were simple but tasty when she prepared them. Everything she cooked came fresh from her own garden or from the jars she put up.

Pickles were one of her great specialties. The table was never considered ready for a meal until it had two or three



Spednic Lake divides Maine from Canada. The small stake in this rock marks the boundary line.

dishes of pickles—vinegary beets, sweet bread-and-butter cucumbers, or big fat whole cukes they called sour pickles—these were considered de rigueur on chowder nights. Or Pottsville pickles, a relish that was the apotheosis of green tomatoes.

Uncle Howard was a pretty good cook, too. Moose meat, or venison, is often tough and stringy, Howard said,

but it could fill you up nicely if you cooked it for a very long time. Bare Bones Pot Roast is what we came to call his recipe—a piece of chuck steamed in the oven for at least three hours in an inch or so of water with nothing but salt, pepper, and an onion, then vegetables thrown in to cook at the end. ("Vegetables? Oh, what you have to hand," Howard said, remembering back, "car-

Photos by Robin Follie (2)

Robinhood MARINE CENTER

Slips and Moorings Available Summer 2015

Maine Cruising Begins Here

Robinhood Marine Center, near the mouth of the Sheepscot River is the perfect summer cruising home port or stopover, your safe haven and gateway to the coast of Maine. Share the quiet, unspoiled, secluded natural setting with ospreys, eagles and harbor seals. Our fantastic Midcoast location lets you spend less time driving and more time boating.

"Home of Robinhood Marina, Spartan Marine, Riggs Cove Rentals, Robinhood Yacht Brokerage (David Perry), and the Osprey Restaurant."

RobinhoodMarineCenter.com • RiggsCoveRentals.com
Georgetown, Maine • 207-371-2525 • 800-255-5206

ISLAND TEAK COMPANY

Celebrating 16 Years In Business!

Hundreds of Benches, Tables and Chairs in Stock

Stop by and see our new Interior Furniture Annex!

Don't miss our spectacular wood carvings and Teak bowls.

See our large selection of 2" thick countertop slabs in Teak, Acacia, Lychee and Tamarind 2' to 4' wide, 6' to 9' long!

681 Bath Rd. (U.S. Route 1) Wiscasset • 207-882-7225
and 38 Sea St. Boothbay Harbor • 207-633-9899
Open April 15-October 15 Daily, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

www.islandteakcompany.blogspot.com

FARRIN'S BOATSHOP

Bruce A. Farrin & Sons

Common Sense Yachts & Workboats

At Farrin's, pride in our workmanship has been continuously applied in over 40 years of building boats. Our craftsmanship in design and construction will give your custom project the quality that has made Maine famous in the boat building industry.

Beginning with a 43' Lowell Brothers bare cored hull, we will custom build this flybridge cruiser complete with soft top Bimini. We construct the decks, superstructure, install the engine, drive train, electrical, plumbing and all the interior joiner work. The boat will be turnkey at delivery. The projected delivery date to our customers is summer 2016.

Construction times available

Walpole, Maine • 207-563-5510 • www.farrinsboatshop.com

Allen

Insurance | Financial

Your Personal Insurance Specialists

Focused on

- High Value Properties
- Vacation Homes
- Waterfront and Island

Call now for a free flood insurance analysis

Cale Pickford
cpickford@allenif.com
(207) 230-5818

Best Places to Work in ME

Offices in Rockland, Camden, Belfast and Southwest Harbor

(800) 439-4311 | AllenIF.com

rots, parsnips, potatoes.” “Garlic?” I asked. “Lord, no!” he said, “no garlic,” as if he’d never heard of such a thing. Frenchmen might use garlic, but not good Yankees.)

One summer when I visited with my then ten-year-old son, we crossed over into Canada. Howard wanted to introduce Nicholas to the fine art of lake fishing. I’m not sure why we had to go to Canada but it had something to do with licensing and the fact that a ten-year-old didn’t need a license in Canada. In any case, we waded to the border guard and sped over Pendleton Ridge, then dropped down to Spednic Lake, part of the same spectacular chain that feeds the boundary waters.

“It says Pendleton Ridge on the map,” Uncle Howard said, “but it’s really called Skeddaddle Hill.”

Why?

Like many very large men, Uncle Howard had a high-pitched voice that belied his big frame. “You think your generation invented running off to Canada to get out of the draft,” he said with a soft chuckle. “But back during the Civil War they did it too. They skee-dad-

dled right over this hill and away they went. Skee-daddlers is what they called ’em.”

Among other things, Uncle Howard was an antiques dealer. Although he hadn’t much of an education, he knew his history, especially his Maine history. He had lived a lot of it. Too young for the First World War and too old for the Second, he had experienced the Depression first-hand. Once he described to me how they went hunting off-season, timing the hunt to coincide with Fourth of July so that shots in the woods would mingle with fire crackers and bottle rockets—an astute sharpshooter could bring home venison or moose meat for a hungry family, even at midsummer.

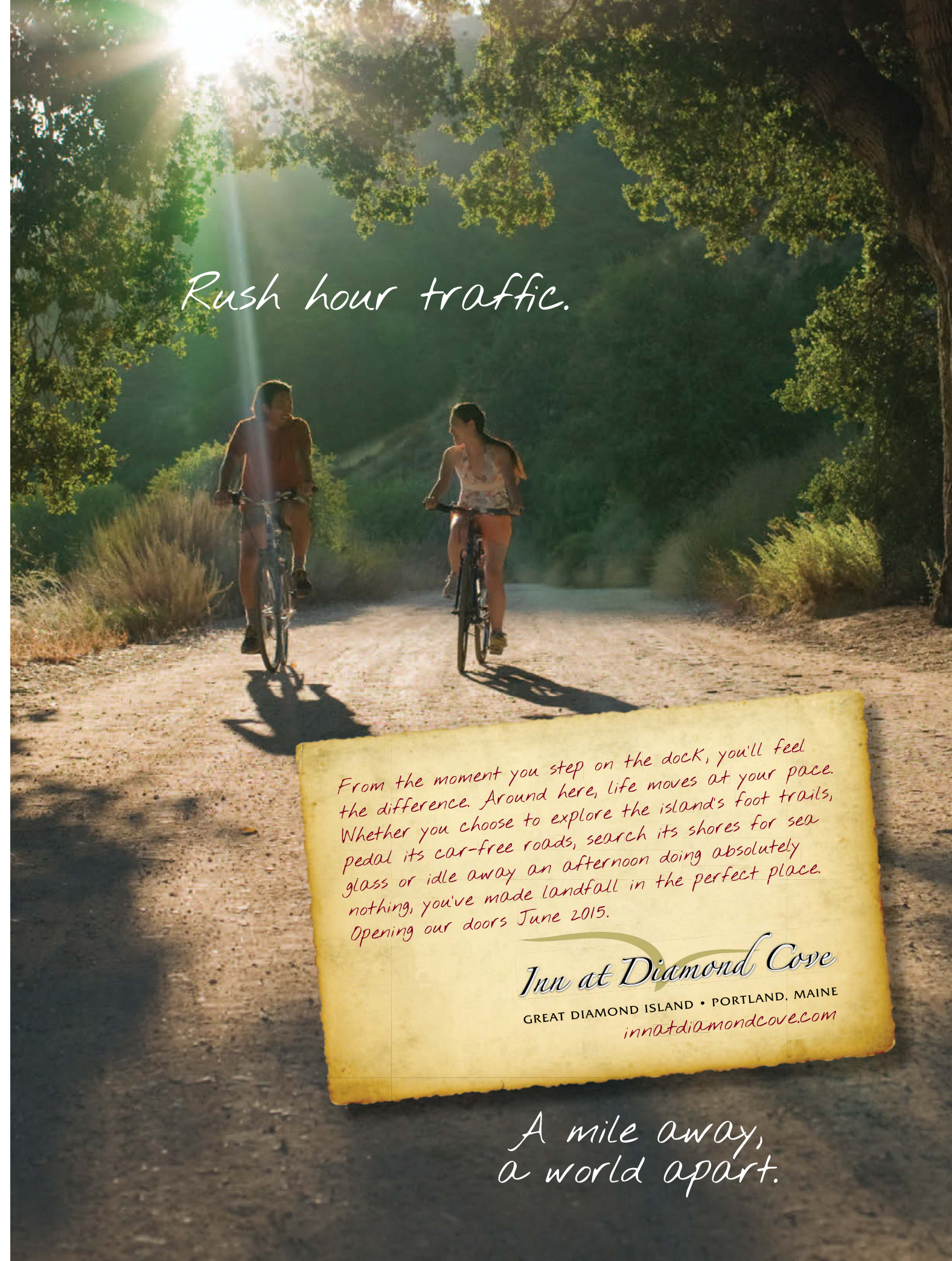
We fished this time from the grey granite ledges of Spednic. Nicholas, bless him, brought up a fish, a small yellow perch that Howard cooked for the boy’s breakfast the next morning, first cleaning the little fish, then tossing diced salt pork in an old black iron skillet. He rolled the fish in cornmeal, fried it in the pork fat, and served it with the crisp pork nuggets on top. Nicholas was weak with pleasure—it turned him into a life-

long fish lover, especially of any he managed to catch on his own.

Doris and Howard are long gone now and so is the camp. It was left to a favorite granddaughter and I’m not sure she ever went there or had much to do with it. I haven’t been back, though every now and then when I hear the haunted evening call of loons across a quiet lake, I think about East Grand and the simple camp that was so elegant in its splendid isolation. Could I ever live that way again? I’m not sure, but I’d love to try. Meanwhile I’ll put a pot roast in the oven, try out a bit of salt pork in a skillet, and fry me up a nice piece of fish. ★

Nancy Harmon Jenkins is the author of many books, and contributor to a number of publications, including The Wall Street Journal and Saveur. She lives in Camden and Tuscany. Her most recent book is Virgin Territory: Exploring the World of Olive Oil (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015).

Editor’s note: The spelling of the lake varies depending upon the source, so if your map refers to Spednik with a K, it is one and the same.



Rush hour traffic.

From the moment you step on the dock, you'll feel the difference. Around here, life moves at your pace. Whether you choose to explore the island's foot trails, pedal its car-free roads, search its shores for sea glass or idle away an afternoon doing absolutely nothing, you've made landfall in the perfect place. Opening our doors June 2015.

Inn at Diamond Cove
GREAT DIAMOND ISLAND • PORTLAND, MAINE
innatdiamondcove.com

A mile away,
a world apart.

Maine Boats, Homes & Harbors
Congratulates
the Camden Garden Club
on 100 Years of Flowers!

Thank you for 10 decades of flowers and trees, wreaths and baskets, classes and scholarships, and for helping make Camden one of New England's prettiest villages.

Master Builders of Classic Sailboats Since 1899

Herreshoff H-12 1/2 Marlin Heritage 23'

Cape Cod Shipbuilding Co.
Wareham, MA 508-295-3500
www.capecodshipbuilding.com

A Very Special House & Garden Tour
Celebrating the Camden Garden Club's 100th Anniversary
July 16, 2015 • 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. • Rain or Shine

Advance tickets (\$35) on sale at
CamdenGardenClub.com
and at shops in Belfast, Camden,
Rockport, Rockland, and Waldoboro

Tickets \$40 day of tour

CamdenGardenClub.com • camdengardenclub100@gmail.com

ARTISAN BOATWORKS
CLASSIC WOODEN BOATS

For the passionate sailor...

416 MAIN STREET • ROCKPORT, MAINE 04856
207-236-4231 • WWW.ARTISANBOATWORKS.COM