

TRAVEL

Fall is fine for family camping in Ontario

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SPECIAL WRITER

Visions of lazy Labor Day potluck picnics have faded fast. Summer's casual pace has been replaced.

School project deadlines, cupcakes for the Brownies, soccer and more soccer, are sandwiched between late night business meetings, dentist appointments and PTA activities. You anticipate each precious weekend, only to spend them grocery shopping, cleaning the house, hauling the kids to soccer games and dance classes, catching up on the laundry, cleaning the yard, repairing that leaky whatever, visiting with the in-laws, 45 minutes for church and spending an entire 20 minutes of quality time with the family. WAIT!

The fall season offers a scrumptious milieu for family outdoor adventure. Plan a quick fall fix right next door, camping at Canada's Pinery Provincial

Park, only about a two-hour drive northeast.

"Ugh! You say. If sleeping in the dirt without TV isn't exactly your idea of a family quality experience, look at it this way: You will be traveling to foreign soil, no passports necessary. When crossing from Port Huron to Sarnia, Ontario, I advise a detour to the duty free. Opt for the giant bottle of Bailey's (it's a great value), just to take the chill out of the evening air.

Bring your camper, your trailer or your tent; lots of easy-fixin' comfort food; your camera; and a comfortable pair of walking shoes. Oh yeah, and do bring the kids. If you don't own a camper or a tent ... consider borrowing one. Camping devotees -- and we all know them -- have every conceivable outdoor gadget and gizmo that would make feasible even a trip to Antarctica. Just ask to borrow their gear. One caveat though, be prepared for a

lengthy oration as they perform like Felix the Cat and his magic bag ... And this turns into a table for day, a bed for evening and a kayak for fishing. See!

The amber, sanguine and saffron foliage, and the crisp weather is perfect for Patagonian-clad hikers and hares to roam the 10 hiking trails that showcase distinctive conifers and mammals. Trails vary in difficulty as well as scenery, ranging from .8 km to 3 km in distance. (That's about 5 to 1.88 miles for those of us who never grasped the metric system.)

The crowds are minimal this time of year. Take time and stroll the well-kept trails, complete with wooden stairways that make it easy to climb hills and cross swampy areas. Trails ramble along the river, around ponds, through forests and some even to Lake Huron's shoreline.

We found the campsites to be private, quiet and relaxing. So relaxing, that we forgot the cardinal rule of camping: secure all food. A nocturnal visitor absconded with half a dozen apples (those large delicious ones) and several navel oranges. This was no squirrel. Although temperatures may dip considerably, we were snug in our zero-degree rated sleeping bags. Actually, we cheated and hooked up to electricity, since it was only 60 feet away. Serenaded by a pair of hooting owls, we all slept like babies.

Need more reasons? Did I mention that the Provincial Parks are clean, clean, clean! Maybe it's as much an honor to be one of the Provincial Park's Toilet Police as it is to be a member of their Mounted Police. They have full-service comfort stations with steamy hot showers, in addition to out houses. A little advice: hit the showers before 8 a.m.

One gem you will want to include is Rock Glen, located just outside the tiny town of Arkona, about 16 miles south of the Pinery. Established along the Au



Rock Glen: Alex, left, and AJ with their father Mike Stankovich on the Au Sable River, which offers great fossil hunting opportunities.

sable River, Rock Glen is a delightful 64-acre conservation area teeming with fossils. Fossil specimens like brachiopods, horn coral, crinoid stem sections and trilobite geological formations, as well as Indian artifacts are on display in Rock Glen's quaint museum. Playing Indiana Jones, you can meander the nature trails, past scenic waterfalls, along the Au Sable River bed and into the dam ruins, on a treasure hunt for traces of marine life from the Devonian Era. We successfully unearthed all but the elusive trilobite. If you've never fossil hunted, let me tell you, it rates right up there with scavenging the Great Lakes shoreline for that perfect skipping stone, or tramping white ocean beaches in search of the supreme shell. Some of the horn coral

even have an uncanny resemblance to dinosaur teeth. These fossils are actually older than many dinosaurs (that's pre-Jurassic Park), some 345 to 395 million years old! Is this not sounding more like a Disney vacation?

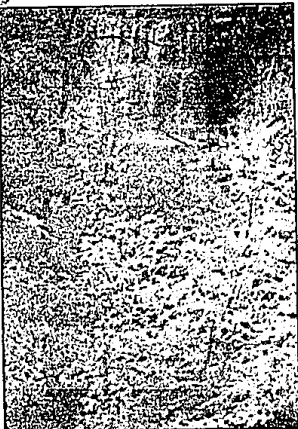
For conifer-lovers, the area offers southern climate trees of sycamores, aspen, black walnut and tulip-trees, standing side by side with sugar maples, beeches, white elm and basswood that generally grow in the North. It's yet another great reason to make a quick weekend trip to visit our Canadian neighbors.

The Pinery boasts nearly 1,000 campsites available in three areas: Burley, Dunes and Riverside campgrounds. They also offer 400 year-round sites at

Riverside Campgrounds. But if you plan to include a trip to Rock Glen, make sure you get there by late October, when it closes for the winter.

It's still a bargain, remember that the fees are all in Canadian currency. The camping fees are \$17.75 a night non-electrical; \$20.75 a night electrical, plus a \$6 reservation fee. Admission to Rock Glen is \$2 per person or \$5 per car. And duty free is a bargain. For information and reservations (recommended) for the Pinery, on Hwy. 21, 8 km southwest of Grand Bend, Ontario, call (519)243-3099. For information about Rock Glen, call (519)828-3071.

Theresa L. McFarland is Farmington Hills freelance writer.



Magnificent falls: The Au Sable River boasts terraced waterfalls and great fall foliage.

GREAT ESCAPES

WINTER'S COMING

Do you have some favorite winter vacation getaways. We'd like to hear about them for travel stories. Whether you enjoy escaping the wind and snow of Detroit by flying to a tropical isle or you believe in embracing winter by skiing Whistler or dog sledding Alaska, let us know. Call Hugh Gallagher at 734-553-2118, or fax him at 734-591-7279 or e-mail him at hgallagher@oe.homecomm.net

LEAVES ARE FALLING

Michigan's fall color season is beginning moving from the Upper Peninsula down to the state line from mid-September to late October.

For information about the Upper Peninsula, you can write for the Upper Peninsula Fall Season Planner at (800)662-7134.

MUSHROOM HUNTING

The Michigan Mushroom Hunters Club is sponsoring a mushroom hunt at Cedar Lake, Waterloo Recreation Area near Chelsea. Mushroom experts such as Walt Sturgeon and Alan and Arleen Bessette from the North America Mycological Association will be on hand to help identify edible and poisonous fungi. Daily seminars, guided field tours and cook books will be available. A Michigan State Parks Pass is required at the entrance. For additional information, call Jim at (810)463-6213 or Peter at (734)483-0290.

CREATIVE HARVEST

The Creative Harvest Fine Arts Festival will be held in Gaylord, Oct. 2-3. Gerhardt Knodel of the Cranbrook Academy of Art will be the special guest luncheon speaker Friday. For information and reservations, call (517)732-6181, ext. 360.

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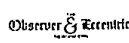


September 25, 7:30 p.m.
September 26, 3:00 & 7:30 p.m.

Groves High School Auditorium
Adults \$15 Students/Seniors \$10 Patrons \$50

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Gilda Snowden



Tuesday, September 22, 7:30 p.m.

Join us at the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Center for Gilda Snowden, the first lecturer of the 1998-99 season in the Captive Audience Lecture Series. Gilda Snowden, respected Detroit artist and educator, is a featured artist in the exhibition *Capturing the Essence of the African American Experience through its Artists*, October 9 - October 31 presented by Links, Inc. in the Art Center's Desalle Community Gallery. The BBAC is located at 1516 S. Cranbrook Rd., just North of 14 Mile. For further info call 248.644.0866.

The Captive Audience Lecture Series is sponsored by the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, Inc.