



# Lockdown from the

WRITTEN & PHOTOGRAPHED BY IRENE BAKARIC

# Escape City

EXCEPT WHERE NOTED

Last spring, when lockdowns were extended, my husband and I escaped the concrete confines of downtown Toronto to find hiking heaven on the South Bruce Peninsula.

The dock at the cottage on Bass Lake was perfect for eating meals.



▲ For Irene, a paddle in the late afternoon on the calm water of Bass Lake was the perfect end to a day of hiking. PHOTO BY SEÁN O'SHEA.

**W**hen my husband and I sold our home a few years ago and downsized to a condo in downtown Toronto, I never expected to be spending so much time within its walls. Like many city dwellers, the pandemic forced me into an indoor life that challenged me in many ways including my mental health. I endured the months of lockdowns and relative isolation by escaping to nature, hiking and cycling on the weekends.

In need of a bigger adventure, and hoping to flee the confines of the city, we installed a hitch on our vehicle, rented a trailer and booked reservations at a couple of provincial

parks. Unfortunately, the government extended the stay-at-home order that was in place and the parks cancelled our reservations. So we were stuck with a trailer and nowhere to go.

Then a colleague of my husband Seán presented us with an option. His parents had a cottage they rarely used on Bass Lake in South Bruce Peninsula. We were told they were not there and that we were welcome to park in their driveway. Our disappointment turned to relief and excitement for Plan B. The remaining challenge was where to find electricity and a place to dump the grey and black water. The trailer had solar panels and could go off grid, but, in the end, we were able

to use the exterior outlets at the cottage. We also found a private campsite nearby that allowed us to dump for a nominal fee. When we arrived to find that the driveway was paved, it was an added bonus. This was our first time with a trailer. Consequently, getting it level with all the jacks and blocks so that the fridge would work was much easier on a flat surface. Parking on someone's cottage driveway turned out to be a brilliant idea. Since sharing our experience, we have had other friends with cottages offer their driveways should we again find ourselves in need of a place to park a trailer.

Bass Lake is very peaceful with little development. Our hosts allowed us to use their

dock and canoe so a paddle in the late afternoon on the calm water was the perfect end to a day of hiking on the glorious Bruce Trail within the Grey Sauble Conservation Authority.

### Hiking Heaven

We were definitely in hiking heaven. Typically, we would hike one section in the morning and another in the afternoon. The cottage owners had given us suggestions for their favourite trails in the area and they were quite easy to find. Some were loops which we always prefer for the variety, but a few were also in and out trails.

We loved that we didn't need the masks we wore constantly in the city because



▲ The couple rented a travel trailer and ended up being offered the use of a cottage driveway on Bass Lake. This turned out to be a brilliant experience.

One of many spectacular Escarpment views was from Skinner's Bluff overlooking Colpoy's Bay and White Cloud, Griffith and Hay Islands.



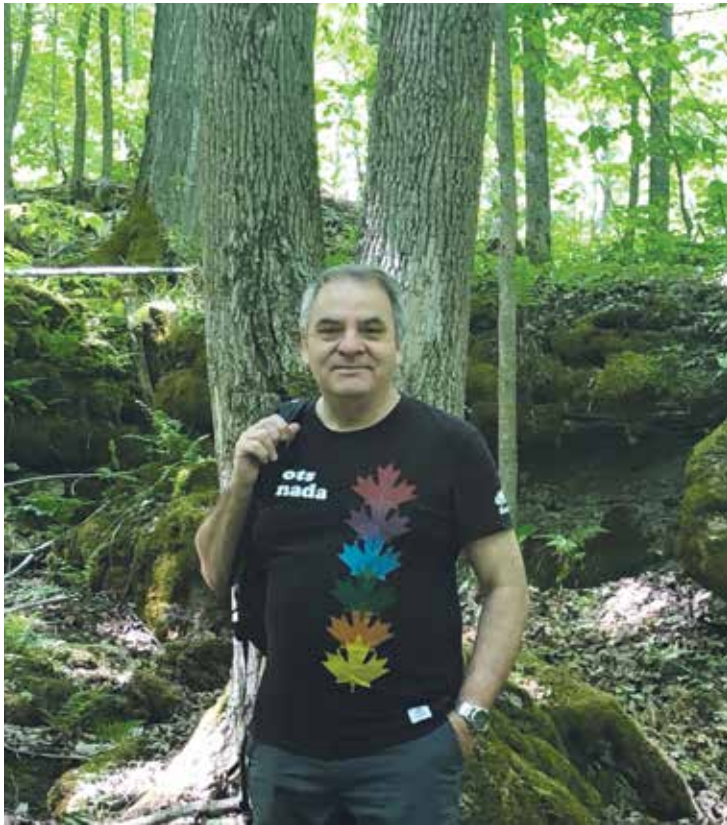
▲ A trail passes across from thundering Inglis Falls where the Sydenham River meets the edge of the Niagara Escarpment.

▼ These cows were so curious and friendly that they galloped right up to the fence.



we would hike for hours without seeing anyone at all. It was effortless social distancing. The clean air, the light filtering through the trees, the moss-covered rocks, the unusual flowers, the sound of birds chirping and small animals rustling in the undergrowth were a balm for the soul. The weather was perfect, quite cool in the mornings and overnight, warmer in the afternoons.

One of our treks took us to Bruce's Caves, a rocky reminder of the last ice age. The enormity of the cave openings made one feel very small. We also discovered spectacular vistas like the one from Skinner's Bluff overlooking Colpoy's Bay and White Cloud, Griffith and Hay Islands. We passed by thundering Inglis Falls where the Sydenham River meets the edge of the Niagara Escarpment. And, another



▲ On vacation: Sean O'Shea, investigative and consumer reporter, Global Television, relaxing on a trail.

route found us walking by wetlands in The Glen that were vibrant with the sound of mating frogs.

We also met more domesticated animals along the way. I was attempting to capture some cows on camera when my husband started making "moo" sounds. I guess they were so convincing that the entire herd responded. I always thought that only horses galloped, but these cows galloped toward us at such an alarming speed, I thought they'd break down the fence in their attempt to be friendly.

### Self Sufficiency

This was a perfect pandemic travel alternative. We were completely self-sufficient in our trailer. It even came equipped with a small propane BBQ which made my husband, the BBQ king, very happy. We had packed enough food for four days so every evening, Sean would grill something while I made salad and we would eat our meals on the

dock. Then, we would end the day sitting around a roaring fire. We regretted not bringing marshmallows.

Initially, I had been reluctant to travel north in blackfly season, but, to my surprise, there were no blackflies and very few mosquitoes. We had come ready for the worst with brand new head nets, but we never had to use them. For me, the dearth of things that bite or sting made the trip even more enjoyable.

While in South Bruce, we ventured to see the communities in the area, stopping briefly in Wiarton, the home of Willie, the prognosticating groundhog. The park by the lake with the sculpture dedicated to the famous rodent was peaceful and uncrowded. The main street was blocked off for construction and we did not need anything so we stayed in the car except for a quick stop at a pharmacy because Sean forgot his toothbrush.



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▲ During lockdown, the park with the statue dedicated to Wiarthon Willie gave peace and quiet.



► Irene enjoying one of the hikes on the Bruce Trail. PHOTO BY SEÁN O'SHEA.



▲ One outing led to Bruce's Caves, a rocky reminder of the last ice age. Seán shows how the enormity of the cave openings makes one feel very small.

In Owen Sound, where things were a bit busier, we were focused on our search for butter tarts. This is a ritual whenever we travel in Ontario. We crisscrossed the town multiple times, but everywhere was closed. We finally had success at a coffee

shop where stringent safety protocols were in place. The butter tarts were pretty good, but I am not sure they were worth that amount of effort.

Aside from these drive-throughs, the real heart of our trip was in the cool quiet of the woods. We fell in love

with the South Bruce and are eager for another stay on the peninsula. We plan to explore the more northern reaches closer to Tobermory soon. And, if pandemic restrictions continue or return, it will make for another COVID-safe getaway.

*Former broadcast journalist Irene Bakaric is the principal of MediaPrep. When not media training clients, she is travelling the world. Closer to home, she searches for the best in hiking trails and butter tarts.*



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