

2007 Christmas News From Canadian Vacations

There is a first for everything and for Canadian Vacations this is it. Most of you will be reading this on your computer screen as I have been dragged screaming and kicking into the 21st century. For those without a computer, and I hope to guess who you are, you can read this the regular and traditional way ... on a sheet of paper.

A month from today is Christmas Day. I have even received the first Christmas card so best get the afterburners on and get this finished - or started at least. I spent yesterday checking the old calendar, the reservation sheet and any spare notes I had made to help remember the events, fish, critters and parties.

I was back to the campground by mid April this spring so it was really early for me. It was impossible to stay at camp, so I went into Kenora and bunked down at my 3rd home with Laurie, the carpenter. Seems like we always have a good time together, at least I enjoy it so that's 50% of us happy. Friends refer to us as the "Odd Couple" while I'm there, and then just "odd" when I head back to camp! I came back early expecting a resolution to the legal property situation at camp, but it was not to be, so back to square one.

One of the first things to greet me at camp was one of the deer starting to mooch for apples and oats. I ended up seeing several and they were all in great shape after an easy winter. I can only guess now who is who as the mother deer we knew that had the scar on her neck was missing. I think that these very friendly ones that seem to know your voice right away must be some of her fawns from past years. One of the fawns is now old enough to be a mother and sure enough just a little later on in the spring she showed up with a new fawn that learned the feeding routine very quickly. Another fawn was a little buck and he has stayed with the family group and seems to have added another couple of does. As a 4 year old, he has a nice rack, and by late this fall there was a group of 7 around the back of Ron & Stacey's site. While trying to get the deer fattened up for the coming winter, their food bill became bigger than mine. I had to leave!.



This summer we had our full share of nature's critters what with our deer plus a family of woodchucks that started out wanting to party under Art & Peg's trailer. They got so tame you could throw bread to them and they would sit on the roadway eating it. There was also a really big, fat raccoon, who, along with several skunks, would sit on my trailer deck this fall eating whatever I put out and they would not bother each other. When cleaning out the spare fridges you always come along a bit of this and that, which a pine martin and a fox enjoyed, again, right on my deck, and they didn't seem to bother too much with each other. As luck would have it I don't think we had any bear trouble in the campground this summer or fall, so all the bird feeders are still intact and ready for next spring. Speaking of bird feeders - it seems that the hummingbirds are making another comeback as there were lots of them after they started leaving their nests. We were buzzed from early morning to late night. The last one I noticed stayed until almost mid September. The American goldfinch also grew in numbers. There were many more of them in camp this year than most years, and it was great to see several males sitting on the feeders at the same time. With all the pine siskins, blue jays, gray jays, purple finches, 2 types of nuthatches, chickadees, about 4 types of woodpeckers, the pair of ravens that decorate Quesnel's deck from the big overhead tree and the usual crows and seagulls, at times it seemed camp was going to the birds! The best comeback story over the years has to be the eagles. How many of you remember that in years past we had to go to Kilvert Lake to see the eagles on the island? Now all it usually takes is a few fish guts in the pail, a trip out to the little rock where I feed them, the eagle whistle and here they come. There are usually several of them sitting in the trees waiting. A regular day has between 5 and 8 showing up to get fed, but we have had days where at least 15 have been there for a feeding. Thank goodness I have a few witnesses to that, because it must be most unusual to get that many in one group and all eating at once. Sure makes your day to see how they have recovered from a scattered few. There have also been some great pictures taken. I have noticed in some of our eagle pictures that one of them is wearing a band that was probably put on when he was still a young one in the nest. It's tough to try and read the number with binoculars while he is hopping around. It would be interesting to get the number and find out where he came from. Another example of sometimes "things do change for the better".



Thinking of things that are better - it will have to be an amazing year to get a better blueberry crop than we had this year! It started early, and you just kept finding spots to get great picking. The berries were so large that they looked like grapes hanging on the bushes. When the Henry family from Winnipeg came out to Pine Point, Donna exhausted her family trying to find a better patch than the last one, and the last one and the last one. Whatever she did I think it was wonderful. They invited me over for pie, and of course I was primed with a steak first. Bet their family is still eating blueberries for all they were able to cart home.



There was a bit of excitement one late afternoon in mid August when lightning hit a pine tree along the shore right across the bay from the campground. I happened to be looking out along the dock and actually saw it hit the tree. Sparks and flame exploded off it and a big black coil of smoke went up. We thought that was the extent of it until that evening and the next day people were trying to use their battery chargers, trolling motors, depth finders and even the bilge pumps. That electric charge must have run all over, even as far as my cabins at Pine Point and Pine Cove. Stove clocks were out, microwaves ruined, satellite TV fuses blown, and so on. I don't think there was much left working in the Shen's cabin. Even their air conditioners went out. So it turned out to be a costly experience for a lot of us for 2 or 3 seconds of flash.



Staying with excitement ... late one evening the "card crew" playing on Leigh's deck heard a crash and screeching of tires from out on the highway. Going out to investigate they found a couple who had been in the LOWISA sailboat race on Lake of the Woods. They were headed home to Rapid City, SD when a deer ran out in front of them just south of our road at the highway. They hit the brakes and their large sailboat broke loose, ran over the front support and up into the cap on the back of the truck. All that weight to the front bent the trailer tow bar down and there they were stuck. Our crew managed to get them off the highway, bring them back to the campground and put them up for the night in an open trailer I had. They came over to my trailer in the morning for coffee and abuse (seems no one is immune). Once the boys had had their coffee, they got organized and ventured out to the highway to check damage in the daylight and work on repairs. Marty and his big truck soon had the sailboat pulled back onto the trailer. It was all lashed down to keep it in place. The couple then headed back to Northern Harbor for some trailer repairs and were then on their way home the same day. The following week a very nice letter to the editor appeared in the Kenora paper explaining what had happened and how our bunch came to their rescue. They seemed like such nice folks that maybe if they ever get a smaller sailboat we might see them back at Dogtooth Lake. It's not every day we are called "Good Samaritans" and in the newspaper yet!



More excitement - and really unusual ! Early one Saturday morning we heard a helicopter go over. It then came back, flew lower and finally came down the lake almost like a hovercraft and landed on the beach. It was the ambulance helicopter. We all thought at first that someone at the Resort was sick. But it was there, waiting to intercept an ambulance with a very sick patient coming from the Sioux Narrows area. I later learned that they were trying to save time rather than meeting in Kenora as they were taking the patient straight into Winnipeg. Now it's an unfortunate reason to have it land on the beach, but it did give some of the kids a great chance to have their picture taken with a helicopter and you can see the excitement on their faces.



While on stuff, we had a couple of trailer replacements in the campground. The Sauder family replaced their old motor home with a great trailer in like new condition with all the bells and whistles. Kathy had the whole family working hard , and within a few days, the trailer looked like it had been there for several years already. Marty & Sandy Severson treated themselves to a very nice 5th wheel, again all decked out in everything you could ask for. It was a bit shorter than the old one, but the big slide out and the high roofline made you feel like you were in a cabin. It was very fortunate that they really enjoyed it this summer because in early November, Marty suffered a massive heart attack and passed away at age 59. Now here is a guy who will be missed. He shared everything with us- his recipes, fish he caught, new lures he bought and his excellent fishing knowledge. He would take you to where the fish were and show you how to catch them- very unusual for most fishermen! He was a big guy with an even bigger heart!



But we don't stop there for losing campground buddies. Earlier in the fall, we lost one of our originals, Bill Mitchell, who had been camping at Dogtooth for over 32 years. Bill & Viv had just bought a condo in Victoria, BC when they learned he had lung cancer. He was too sick to make it to Dogtooth last summer. Playing cards, telling jokes or fishing, Bill had a terrific sense of humor and a great laugh. Those here in the fall will miss Bill being at his 2 or 3 spots down in the 3rd Narrows area all day. Bill caught many fish and several big ones, but would only bring back 3 or 4 in a year. His favorite was top water bass fishing with Irv Pielet on Lake of the Woods. He really looked forward to that every spring and couldn't wait.

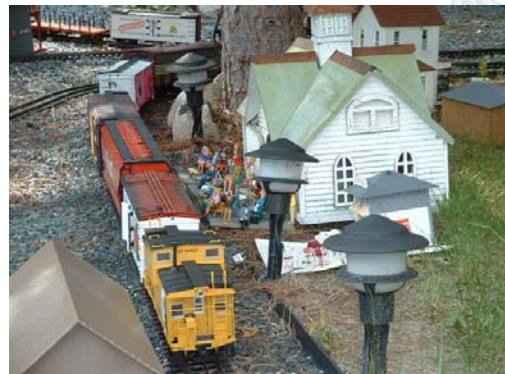


Still on the topic of fishing, most campers have never met our resident pro in action, Cap'n D. He always has a good day out be it rain, shine or even snow. He figures the fish are always wet so the weather makes no difference to them except when the Cap'n is around and they will get caught.

This year we had a little competition going on but it was in one family. Grampa Bob and son Jeff were trying hard to out fish each other. Jeff had been very successful catching walleyes. Bob caught a great trout that put up such a fight that it knocked his best rod and reel in the lake. It's in about 120 ft of water so I think he can kiss that one goodbye, but he did bring back the trout. One of them asked me not to put in print whose fish was the biggest, but if you ask either, they will say it was theirs. No wonder some of these guys get along so well at coffee in the morning!

It was a good fishing year to which many of the groups out in the cabins can attest. Most of them caught enough for action, some to eat and also enough to take home some to enjoy. It's a pity that I never get pictures of their fish as they take their own pictures.

Our campground railroad has gone under another round of expansion with more tracks, engines, buildings and rolling stock. Pretty soon Ray will have to move his trailer out for railroad right of way. An article and pictures about Ray and his trains was in the local paper again this summer. Now finally after about 4 tries at this, the paper finally got his name and town right. He has been Ray Whick since the last write up! Now he just needs to train the critters and he will have it beat. The squirrels and chipmunks keep chasing each other through the layout and the result looks like a major railway wreck. It's great! The kids really enjoy it ...and Ray, too !



I had a “sinking” feeling this fall when one morning I noticed that Leigh’s big blue boat was sitting very low in the water. In reality, it was sinking, about as far as a wood boat can. It was taking on water for some reason and its own bilge pumps had failed and now it was a mess. The water was right up into the upholstery, over the motor and batteries and many electrical parts. We immediately started an ongoing investigation. We met each week, pondered the situation and drank beer ... anyway back to the boat. We finally got it pumped out, Ron brought out the trailer for it from Winnipeg, we towed it over to Rushing River Park where we had to load it from their deep water ramp and then it was off to Winnipeg for repairs and storage. It seems it has been renamed yet again. Leigh was first, of course, with the name, “The Pedagogue”. Then it was Art’s turn. It’s been “The Blue Shed”, “2 Cords of Wood” and a few more that can’t go into a Christmas letter. Now Scott Sauder has really done it with “Valdez II” of Alaska fame. Ron & Leigh have been working on it this fall and I’m sure it will be hauling gangs of happy campers and kids around the lake again this summer.



The honeymooning couple of Derrick & Judy Alders from Carberry, Mb got more than they bargained for when they went out fishing. Derrick was using a big lure to catch a big one - and he did! I think he is about 200 lbs, if I guess right. He had caught a good northern on the biggest shad rap that they make, but when he tried to get the fish off, something happened and he set one of those large treble hooks deep into the fleshy part of his thumb. I ended up spending the first evening of his honeymoon with him at the Kenora Hospital. After a very long wait, a little freezing, and a little nick, the hook came out. I think he is going to keep that one as his “lucky lure”. Everyone should have something to remember on their honeymoon but I don’t think that’s what he had in mind.



We had 3 camp parties this summer. First was the Hog & Grog, which was very successful and tasty. Grampa Bob’s & Jeff’s BBQ skills are second to none! Next was the Fish Fry with another big crowd and fish done with Jeff’s magic batter and Dr. Leigh’s onion rings. Good combo! To wind up the season, the 10th Annual Campers’ Christmas Party was held on the Sept. long weekend. We went first class this year. Gord, who is Carly Laden’s Dad, brought us a great Santa suit for Santa, a.k.a. George Westfall. George pulled off the Santa part like a Broadway performer so the little kids couldn’t guess who it was. Parents provided gifts for the kids and with the Christmas tree, turkey and all the fixings it was a great finale for the camping season. But that was only Christmas party #1. Around the first week of Dec., the Laden Family is again hosting Christmas party # 2 at their house in Winnipeg. They had a great turnout last year with most campground people in the Winnipeg area showing up. I missed it by being out here in Victoria, but from the pictures of the food and the smiling faces I would say a great time was had by all.





We have had a big change in the campground in the last few years and it is really a “change for the better.” It’s those “wonderful kids” that now share the summers with us all. Their laughing, smiling faces (most of the time, right Matty), their excitement, ideas, projects and energy are really enjoyable.

We also came up with several new and welcome faces in the campground- Gord and Ruth Cockburn from Winnipeg- and they just happen to be Carly Laden’s parents. Gord is even managing to hold his own at the morning coffee, so he is a quick learner as well as being a teacher.

A big Thanks again this year to Gabby for a job well done in looking after the washrooms. Only 13, with 3 summer jobs and saving her money! Last but not least a special thanks to Michael, Kayleigh, Celeste & Marina. These are the little kids who come to visit me every day, check out the goodies box in the cupboard, bring me treats from their house, share their day with me and their little stories about fishing, water skiing, frogs, snakes, the beach, chipmunks, rock painting, hockey or ringette. What a way to spend the summer! Sharing it with the kids!

Now to come clean ... all this creativity of having the Christmas letter on a cd, complete with flickr picture site, and photos is not any of my doing! A BIG THANKS to Scott Sauder in our campground who suggested this and also made it all happen. Lots of work ...so thanks, Scott! If I have missed anyone or anything, sorry, but it’s not Scott’s fault!

My Best Wishes to you all for a Great Christmas and I’m looking forward to another fun summer together at our beautiful Dogtooth Lake.

<'((((>< 's and Holiday Wishes

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A growing collection of photographs is now viewable at
www.flickr.com/photos/12228186@N03/
If you have any pictures that you would like added to the site,
we encourage you to be part of it and contact Scott Sauder at
"sauder@mts.net" for assistance.

The camp also has a new web site. Check it out at
www.dogtoothlake.ca

