

# SPECIAL PLACES:

## *Photography and the Landscape of Memory*

Ulli Diemer

Special places are not necessarily spectacular places. What makes them special can be subtle. What makes them special *to us* is how we experience them and how we remember them. These are a few of my personal memories and reflections from places special to Miriam and me, accompanied by a selection of our photos.

These descriptions and reminiscences draw on memories, many of them shaped by photographs, of particular places, special places, that Miriam and I spent time in.

Much more could be said about these places, and there are others, just as special in their own way, that have not been mentioned. Left out, for example, is Toronto, with so many areas to explore – High Park, the Toronto Islands, Leslie Street Spit, the Brickworks, Colonel Sam, Scarborough Bluffs, the Humber, the Don, the Rouge, and of course various swift chimneys – all places Miriam loved to visit, usually camera in hand, and often with me tagging along.

There is Algonquin: memories of winter, chickadees, Canada Jays, a moose standing quietly beside the path. North to Arrowhead, Temagami, and New Liskeard. Trips to the East Coast: the St. Lawrence, Caraquet, Miscou, Kouchibouguac, Saint John River, Bay of Fundy, Wolfville, Cape Breton – all unique, and remarkable in their own ways.



Why take photos? Why *this* photo?

I find myself thinking about these questions as I try to choose photos for this, the fifth and probably last calendar featuring nature photos by Miriam Garfinkle.

I don't know if Miriam ever asked herself those 'why' questions. The closest she came to asking them in my presence, as best as I can recall,



was one occasion when we were about to set out on a long hike, and she was trying to decide whether or not to take her camera, with its added weight. She decided quickly: *"Yes, I'm taking it. I'm a photographer. This is what I do!"*

That is how she was about her passions. She danced, she swam, she skated, she played piano, she painted, she threw herself into life. I doubt if she ever asked herself *why* she did those things, and if she had

been asked, I can well imagine her answering *"This is who I am. This is what I do!"*

The reason that I now find myself asking 'why this photo' is, most obviously, because this autumn, for the fifth time, I have set myself the challenge of selecting photos for a calendar, a task whose parameters are set by the stern discipline of 12 months + 1 cover = 13 photos. No more and no less. (In this final calendar, it's true, I have cheated, by adding this photo essay, which allows for additional photos.)

But there is more to it than that. I know that in looking at her photos, I am also looking for Miriam, trying to find her, trying to see and feel what she saw and felt at the moment she took the photo. I am remembering when and where it was taken if, as was often the case, I was with her when she took it, usually doing my part by carrying her camera bag: *"Quick, Ulli, give me the other lens!"*



Photography is different from most of the other activities Miriam devoted





Chauvet Cave paintings

herself to in that it leaves a material legacy (even if the material consists only of pixels on a screen). There are some recordings of Miriam speaking and playing piano, but aside from that, photographs are probably the most tangible record of Miriam swimming, skating, painting, gardening, or dancing, as well as of her passion for nature.

We often speak of photographs ‘capturing the moment’ or ‘preserving memories’ because we can return to them later and recall the moment captured in the photograph. There is truth in this idea, even though our memories, far from being fixed, are something we constantly reshape. Of photographs we might say even say, echoing Heraclitus, that you can’t look at the same photo twice. Nevertheless, there is *something there* which stands apart from our mental reworking of our memories. Leaving aside digital manipulation, the photo itself doesn’t change. It is the person looking at it who changes, and so sees something else, something different, in the same image. The same photo can stir up varying memories and emotions at different times, and can prompt us to ask questions that lead us beyond the photo itself. A photo will evoke different responses depending who is looking at it, when they are looking at it, and what the subject of the photo means to them.



Nature photography seeks to capture a particular dimension of our reality, our sense that there is a ‘natural world’ beyond, and distinct from, our human world, even though we also know that the earth has been so transformed by human activity that ‘nature’ itself is no longer ‘natural.’ Nature photos, like all photographs, portray the vision of the human behind the camera as much as they capture what is in front of the lens.

It also appears to be natural for us, that is, part of *human nature*, to create representations of nature. We have been driven to create images of animals and their place in our lives for a very long time. There are cave paintings of animals in Indonesia which are more than 40,000 years old. The horses painted on the walls of the Chauvet cave in France are 30,000 years old, and they are still alive, still galloping, seemingly about to leap off the rock. Mishipeshu, the Great Lynx, one of the Mazinaubikiniguning (Agawa Rock) pictographs, still looks out over Gitchi Gami, the great inland sea we late arrivals call Lake Superior.

Scholars have devoted much time to trying to explain why people who lived long before us created cave paintings and rock paintings, speculating about their cultural

and religious motivations. Those interpretations undoubtedly offer some insights, but I suspect that if it were possible to ask the creators of these images why they did what they did, their answer might well echo Miriam’s: “*This is who we are. This is what we do.*”



Photographs and paintings of nature are always of a particular moment and a particular place. An older tradition of landscape painting tended to deny this: landscapes were typically presented as something static and eternal, even if the painting nostalgically depicted an idealized picture of a time that was past. Such paintings could be said to portray a ‘memory’ of something that never was.

As I look over Miriam’s photographs from these five calendars, I am struck by how they both capture a moment, and remind us that the moment is about to pass. The tree canopy above the Spicebush Trail is just turning a delicate green, with birds flitting among the branches. Just a few days ago, those leaves were buds; in a few short months, a mere moment in time, they will turn brown, fall to the ground, and the trees will be bare again. The Prothonotary Warbler has briefly landed: in a second it will take off and disappear back into the woods. The Humpback Whale is breaching beside our boat; it too is about to disappear, back under the water. The Monarch butterfly feeding on autumn flowers will shortly leave them behind to embark on a long and perilous migration, a migration from which it will never return.



Mishipeshu



A good nature photo takes you beyond the photo. It makes you wonder 'What is this place?' 'What happens next?'

For me, Miriam's photos nearly always evoke moments we shared and places we went to together. They are important pieces in the landscape of my memories. These broader landscapes of memory may lie outside the frame of the photos, but they are at the heart of my own engagement with them. I don't imagine that I am alone in this: most of us have places that have special memories and meanings for us, and photos can transport us back to them. Many of the people who have Miriam's calendars on their wall will, I suspect, have been to many of the places where her photos were taken, and will have their own special memories of them.



Our memories of special places include dimensions that photographs can't capture: sounds, smells, touch, taste. But photographs can stimulate



Prothonotary Warbler, Rondeau

our memories and our imaginations to connect us to those other dimensions.

There are many photographs which I strongly associate with a memory of sound. I look at photos of Cape St. Mary's or the Witless Bay bird sanctuary, and I can't help but remember the dimension that photos can't capture: the sound of *millions* of seabirds on their nests and in the air.

I see pictures of MacGregor Point, and I smile as I think of the frenzied cacophony of frogs in the marsh – Spring Peepers, Wood Frogs, Leopard Frogs, Chorus Frogs, Mink Frogs – all



advertising their craving to mate, *right now*. Images of MacGregor also remind me of a couple of solo trips Miriam made there. In the evening she'd phone me back in Toronto so I could hear the sounds of the night, like the nighthawks nesting close to her campsite: "*Listen, Ulli, listen!*"

Other sounds of campsites we stayed in: whippoorwills somewhere off in the darkness, the wind in the trees, rain falling on the tent in the night, the dawn chorus of birds, chickadees announcing their presence at various times during the day. And off on the lake, the cry of a loon.



Miriam's photos of the places we went to together are woven into a series of mental maps I carry with me. These mental maps, and the places and landscapes they represent, are marked by motion and change, not surprisingly, since our time in nature involved moving: along trails, over rocks, up and down cliffs, along bicycle paths, down rivers, across lakes, as well as driving down the road to see where it would take us.

We used maps – paper maps – on our travels. Avoiding Google Maps and GPS was a conscious choice. Google Maps can be useful if you *have* to get from where you are to a particular destination, say a business meeting, an airport, or a hospital, as quickly and directly as possible. They aren't much use if you are exploring,

for example on a road trip, because they are defined by the reductionist assumption that there is a 'right' way to get from where you are to where you are going. In reality, there are usually *many* ways to get where you are going, and, in any case, maybe there are better places to go than where you think you want to go.

One fundamental problem with a map on a mobile device is that all the information has to fit on a screen roughly the size of your hand. *Here's your assigned route*. Alternatives? Why would you want to know about alternatives? Zoom in, and surrounding geographic context disappears. Zoom out, and what little detail there is vanishes.

A paper map, on the other hand, displays its information on a page that is more than 100 times as big as a screen on a mobile device. It shows you, not only the direct main highway



Lost? No, just on a journey

that you *might* choose to take, but the many alternatives, nearby and distant, the interesting possibilities you might want to explore. It shows you rivers, wetlands, conservation areas, picnic areas, campgrounds, historic sites, small communities, ghost towns, canals, ferry crossings, bicycle trails, 'secondary' highways, rural concessions and unpaved back roads: any number of possibilities.

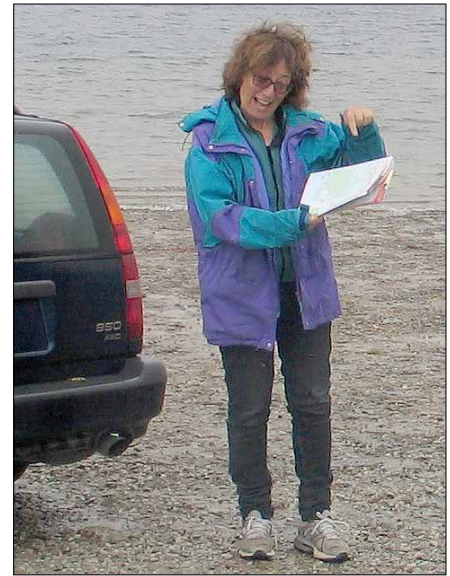
Even if you have plans, a paper map may tempt you to change your mind, if you are open to doing so. Shakespeare: "*By indirections find directions out.*"

Another excellent way of navigating is asking directions. Since Miriam was far more outgoing than I am, that was her job. The resulting conversations led to some interesting conversations, information and opinions you wouldn't get any other way,

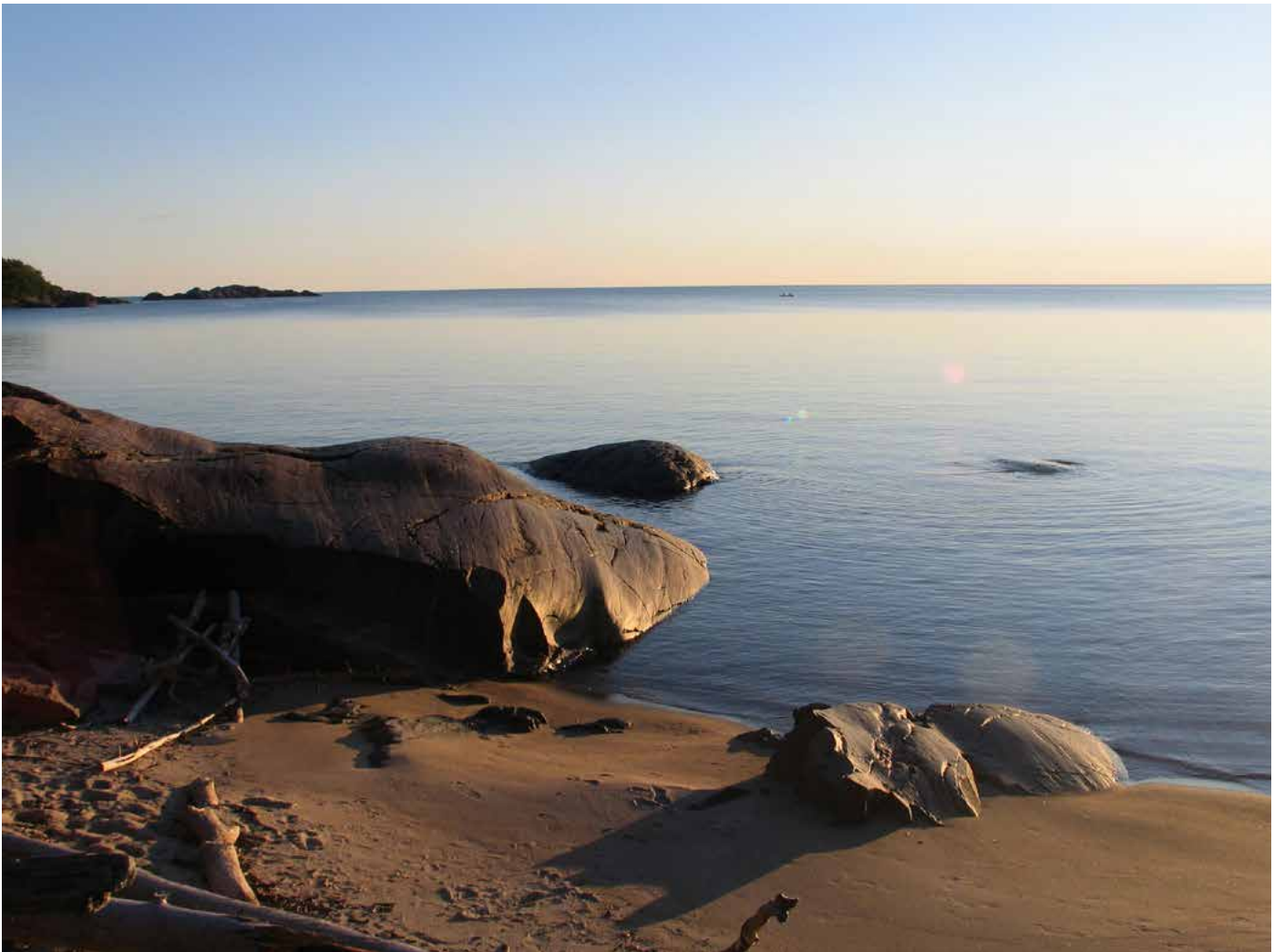
and sometimes included suggestions about other places we might like, places we'd never heard of. "*Have you been to Salvage? Oh, you really should go. It's just up #310 a little ways.*" We went: Salvage is beautiful.

Looking at photos of our travels in Canada, I am reminded how often we ended up in places we hadn't been planning to go, because we left plenty of room for serendipity, changes of plan, and suggestions from other people. Not every whim and change of plan worked out, and sometimes we got a bit lost. Being lost isn't always so bad either. "Lost" can be thought of as a synonym for "somewhere else," and sometimes the somewhere else turns out to be pretty good indeed.

There is a lot to be said for serendipity, and for ending up in places you didn't know you wanted to be until you got there.



THE USES OF MAPS. Coming off Manitoulin we had different ideas about which road would take us where we wanted to go, so we stopped and consulted a map. Here Miriam is pointing out, in her typically understated way, that she is right and I am wrong.



Pukaskwa



## The Escarpment

A map of the Niagara Escarpment can be read as an invitation. This outcropping of ancient rock winds its way through southern Ontario from Niagara Falls to Tobermory, disappears underwater, then re-emerges on Manitoulin Island. The rugged terrain has constrained urban development and intensive agriculture. The Bruce Trail runs along its entire length. Conservation areas, provincial parks, and a national park straddle parts of it.

If you live in downtown Toronto – say near the intersection of Barton and Clinton – you can answer the question of ‘where should we go today?’ by looking at a map of the Escarpment. If it’s a day trip that is being contemplated, there is a wealth of choices: Mount Nemo, Crawford Lake, Rattlesnake Point, Forks of the Credit, Noisy River, Inglis Falls – the list goes on, and the memories add up. There were many of those day trips, and browsing the photos reminds me of how many different places we explored.

Day trips were good, but we wanted more. Follow the Escarpment as it winds its way northwest, and it leads you to the Saugeen (Bruce) Peninsula. Cape Croker Park at Neyaashiinigaming, on the territory of the Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation, close to the base of the peninsula, was one place that we stayed. Often our destination was a cottage on Shouldice Lake, about halfway up the Penin-



Garter Snake

sula, which we rented on a semi-regular basis, the first time in 2003, the last time in 2017. The cottage served as our base to explore the Peninsula and hike the Bruce Trail. It also had many attractions of its own, including a lake you could swim in and canoe on, a variety of plants, butterflies and dragonflies, leopard frogs in abundance, turtles and fish, herons that would sometimes stand on the dock, and lots of chickadees. Most of our photos are Miriam’s, but one of my favourites is one I took: it shows Miriam lying in a hammock, grinning from ear to ear, surrounded by a flock of curious noisy chickadees.

Shouldice Lake is within easy cycling or driving range of many places on the Peninsula. Often we’d simply head out on our bicycles on the side roads. You see more, hear more, and smell more when you are on a bicycle. Sometimes we’d see sandhill cranes, picking through a field after the grain had been cut. If we were early, we might see turkey vultures sitting on big bales of hay, waiting for the sun to warm the air and produce thermals they could soar on. There’d be old apple trees by the side of the road, and we’d stop to pick a few apples and bring them back to cut up and add to our pancakes the next morning. It’s true: stolen fruit is sweeter.

We’d hike on the Bruce Trail, covering many of the stretches between Wiarton and Tobermory. This is cedar territory. Eastern White Cedars are plentiful along the trail, and they also cling to the sides of cliffs where it seems nothing should be able to grow, let alone a tree. These cliffside cedars grow slowly, very slowly, but they persist for an astonishingly long time. Some are hundreds of years old; some more than a thousand years old. You’d sometimes see vultures sitting on those cliffs: it’s a startling moment to be at eye level with these birds which you’d normally see hundreds of feet up in the sky.

Down on the ground, there would be forest flowers and many varieties of ferns, and among them, sometimes, we’d spot snakes: garter snakes, milk snakes, rattlesnakes.

And there were the nights, the sky dark with a darkness that long ago vanished from urban areas. We talk about extinguishing a light, but our civilization has done the opposite: we have extinguished darkness and erased the night sky. On the Bruce, it is still possible to look up and see stars, an infinite number of stars in every direction. You can actually see the Milky Way, and remember that we too are part of the Milky Way, and of the infinity of the universe.





Miriam, Cup and Saucer lookout, Manitoulin Island

## Manitoulin

Once you have come to know and love the Saugeen Bruce Peninsula, you are very likely to feel something pulling you to go further: to Manitoulin Island, lying over the water, out of sight but easily accessible. The Chi-Cheemaun ferry will take you from Tobermory to South Baymouth, and two hours later, you are on Manitoulin, the world's largest lake island.

The geography of Manitoulin Island is defined not only by the waters of Lake Huron which surround it, but by the deep bays that fragment its shores, and by the lakes, more than 100 of them, found on the Island it-

self. The three largest lakes, Manitou, Kagawong, and Mindemoya, are so big that they have islands of their own. Miriam declared that Lake Manitou was the best for swimming, and she swam in it often, swimming, as she liked to do, far, far out into the lake.

You don't drive straight across Manitoulin in any direction. The roads curve and meander around the lakes and the bays. Much of Manitoulin is relatively flat, but the Cup and Saucer formation ("Michigiwadinong") is a steep cliff offering a panorama which allows you to look across the North Channel to the mainland and the white quartzite cliffs of the La Cloche mountains.

*Road Rocks Ontario*, a book about Ontario's geology, says that "Without a doubt the Cup and Saucer Trail is the most spectacular trail in Ontario." Miriam and I reacted to heights in a very different way, and the Cup and Saucer lookout brought this out. Miriam would stand at the very edge of the cliff, a 70-metre drop directly in front of her, and glory in the view. I'd stand about 20 feet back: about as close to the edge as I could comfortably handle.

The Cup and Saucer Trail is popular and busy during tourist season, but Manitoulin offers many less busy places to explore. We spent hours exploring the Misery Bay Provincial Nature Reserve, especially the memorable coastal alvar. At Kagawong, which we visited every time we went to Manitoulin, we watched with our hearts in our mouths as salmon struggled to fight their way up the Kagawong River to the pool at the base of Bridal Veil Falls, the place where they lay and fertilize their eggs, and then die. For some of the fish, the compulsion to migrate up the river is so strong that they actually attempt to leap up the 11-metre-high waterfall.

On our first trip together to Manitoulin, someone recommended Abby's restaurant on the M'Chigeeng First Nation. We went, and liked it so much that we went back again the



Idle No More, M'Chigeeng

next night. The owner/chef spotted us on our return visit and came to chat and tell us the story of his journey from Manitoulin to chef school in Toronto, and back to Manitoulin to start his own restaurant.

M'Chigeeng became a place we returned to often. We spent hours looking at exhibits and films at the Ojibwe Cultural Foundation, and more time at Lillian's Crafts, with its marvellous collection of traditional Ojibwe quill boxes. You can hike the M'Chigeeng Aboriginal Trail, which takes you up a steep hill, past exposed rock formations, to the top of a bluff. We encountered a very co-operative Pileated Woodpecker on that trail, which pleased Miriam by ignoring her while she took one photo after another as it hammered into a tree.

Surrounded by Lake Huron, and with large lakes in its interior, Manitoulin Island offers a wealth of opportunities for watching the sun set. At various times, we'd find ourselves at Providence Bay looking out over Lake Huron, or on the shore of Lake Manitou, or – our favourite – Lake Mindemoya. I think it may have been on one of those occasions, looking across Lake Mindemoya, and watching the sun disappear in the west, that we started making plans to head further west ourselves, beyond Manitoulin.



Mother bear with three cubs,  
Sleeping Giant Provincial Park

## Gitchi Gami

Two routes take you from Toronto to Lake Superior, the greatest of the Great Lakes, known to the Anishnabe people as Gitchi Gami. You can head up the Bruce Peninsula, let the Chi-Cheemaun take you across the water to Manitoulin Island, and then take the causeway from Little Current to the mainland. Or you can head up Highway 69 along the eastern shore of Georgian Bay, up to the French River (*picnic lunch on the rocks overlooking the river – check for rattlesnakes before you sit down*), and then head west. Acting on the principle that when you have two good options, you should choose both, we'd usually head out up Highway 69, and come back via Manitoulin.

It's a long drive heading west along the North Channel, which separates Manitoulin from the Mainland, and then along the north shore of Lake Superior. The first time we went out, we'd reserved a room in a B&B in Echo Bay. It turned out to be a rather atypical B&B: we were the only travellers they'd hosted in many months. They did have a permanent guest, a hydro worker who'd been living there for several years. Miriam being Miriam, we were soon friends. He lent us his canoe so we could go out into the marsh, told us where to see eagles close by, and explained how to tell the difference between ravens and crows, something we'd struggled with up to that point. Crows, he said, look very well-groomed, whereas ravens always look disheveled, like they just got out of bed. It's true!

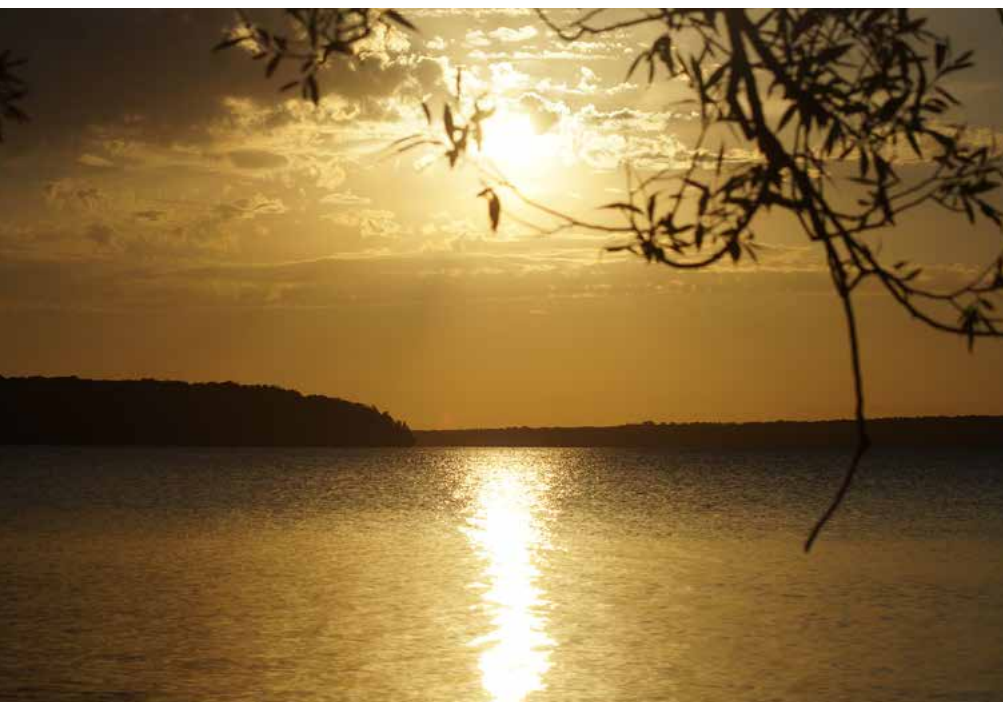
Sometimes we'd camp for a night or two at Lake Superior Provincial Park on our way out or. Miriam's goal – our goal – was a campsite right on Rabbit Blanket Lake. Miriam's idea of a perfect spot was one where you could go swimming from your own campsite, and from which you could see and hear loons out on the lake. Rabbit Blanket fit both requirements. In addition to swimming spots, the park has trails and beaches to explore, and Agawa Rock, with its pictographs on a cliff facing the lake, lies within the boundaries of the park.



We also camped at Sleeping Giant Provincial Park, close to Thunder Bay, and there too Miriam found us a site right on Marie Louise Lake, perfect for swimming. The campsite came with a gratifying abundance of wildlife: a low-flying eagle directly overhead, several deer passing through, ducks waddling in from the lake, and – oh, oh! – a skunk checking to see if there was any food under our picnic table. Elsewhere in the park ("*Look, Ulli, look!*") we saw a mother bear with three cubs walking along an old logging road.

The photos of our Lake Superior trips recall memories of visits to Ouimet Canyon, with its 100-metre cliffs, and to Kakabeka Falls, the second-highest waterfall in Ontario. Near Thunder Bay, we stopped at the Terry Fox memorial, which I've previously written about ([www.diemer.ca/TerryFox.htm](http://www.diemer.ca/TerryFox.htm)). We also visited an old surface mine site, now a rustic tourist attraction, where you could pick over and buy pieces of amethyst for a modest price. Rocks being one of Miriam's greatest passions, she picked out a few to take home. Knowing we were in the midst of the Canadian Shield, with its 3-billion-year-old rocks, she asked the owner of the property, an American, how old these rocks were. "I don't believe in that," he said. "I believe in Noah."





Lake Mindemoya, Manitoulin Island

## Pukaskwa

From the moment we first came to Pukaskwa, we knew that this was an extraordinary place. On our first visit, we dropped thoughts we'd had of heading further west, and stayed until we had to leave, reluctantly, for home. We knew we would have to come back, and we did, as often as we could.

Our arrival that first time we went was out of the ordinary in a way that not everyone might have appreciated. As we waited to check in at the registration booth, we were puzzled to see the driver in the car in front of us stop at the booth, engage in a brief conversation with the person inside, and then make a U-turn and leave.

We pulled up. "Hello" the woman in the booth said. "We're just informing people that a woman was attacked by a bear in the park yesterday." "That's too bad," said Miriam. "Is she going to be OK?" "She's in hospital, but it looks like she'll be all right." "That's good," said Miriam. She looked at me, read my expression, then said "We'd like a site for a tent." We knew each other well enough that we didn't need to discuss whether we'd be staying, bear or no bear.

In Pukaskwa, the granite of the

Canadian shield is the literal bedrock which underlies the landscape, but Lake Superior is an always-dominant presence which has shaped both the natural environment and the human history of thousands of years. Pukaskwa has many hiking trails, with a great variety of terrain: forest, rocky shores, beaches. We went on many hikes: longer ones that took several hours, shorter ones that were good for an outing after dinner.

Whatever we were doing, when evening fell, we would always head

out to the lake to watch the sunset – and Miriam would often take photos. When we first went, it was still possible to rent canoes in the park, which gave us another way of exploring. The Harper government put a stop to that frivolity.

Pukaskwa is remote, with no services nearby and no cell phone reception. We'd regularly head out to the store in the nearby Pic River First Nation (Biigtigong Nishnaabeg) where we could buy necessities like bread, milk, eggs, chocolate chip cookies, and ice for our cooler. There was also cell phone reception, so of course Miriam would say: "I'll just phone Leah while we're here."

Swimming was part of the agenda too, as it always was with Miriam. The Hattie Cove campground, where we stayed, offered a choice of two swimming spots: Hattie Cove itself, where the water was warm enough that I was willing to go in too, and Horseshoe Bay, where Miriam would dive into the frigid waters of Lake Superior without a moment's hesitation, while I sensibly stayed on shore.

Wherever else we went, we repeatedly returned to one special place, *Bimose Kinoomagegnan*: the walk of teachings, created by the Anishnabe people whose ancestral land this is. The rocks, trees, and water of Bimose Kinoomagegnan are the landscape that is foremost in my memories when I think of Pukaskwa.



Bimose Kinoomagegnan





The Tablelands

## The Rock

Newfoundland looms large in the landscape of my memory. I first glimpsed it when I was six years old, on the ship bringing my mother and me from Germany to Canada. My family ended up moving there; later divorce brought my mother, brother and me back to Toronto. In the years that followed, I made many trips back: nineteen in all, if my memory is correct, including several with Miriam. In my own collection of photos, there are many from Newfoundland, including many from the trips Miriam and I took. Here, I will just mention our first two trips, both of them to the west of the island: Gros Morne and the Northern Peninsula. For our 2015 trip, see [www.diemer.ca/Photos/AtlanticTrip2015-1.htm](http://www.diemer.ca/Photos/AtlanticTrip2015-1.htm).

My memories of the early trips Miriam and I took to Newfoundland begin with Bonne Bay. On our first visit, we flew into Deer Lake and drove to Gros Morne National Park in our rented car. Miriam's first photo, taken near the top of the road

heading down towards Norris Point, shows Bonne Bay, and, across the bay, mountains and the orange rocks of the Tablelands. My first photo is a photo of Miriam, taking pictures of Bonne Bay.

We stayed in a cottage (Big Garden Cottages) in Norris Point, and the town became the base for our explorations of the National Park, both on our first trip in 2005, and again our second trip in 2007. A number

of those explorations started at the harbour. We hiked up Burnt Hill, with its panoramic views of Bonne Bay and the Tablelands. We took a boat trip around the bay, over to Woody Point. Minke whales surfaced close to us. We rented kayaks and explored parts of Bonne Bay on our own. We toured the Aquarium attached to the Marine Biology Centre. On one visit to the harbour, a mackerel boat was at the dock preparing to unload its catch of







Pitcher Plants, Tablelands

fish. Miriam went over to chat with the captain, asking questions about the fish and how they were caught, which he readily answered, in considerable detail. After a while, the captain clued in to the fact that Miriam was a tourist. "I thought you were a Fisheries inspector!" he told her with a laugh.

If we'd been prepared to uproot ourselves, we could have stayed in

Norris Point. The community clinic, looking for another doctor, tried to entice Miriam to come work there.

From Norris Point, we headed around Bonne Bay to the Tablelands. The Tablelands are an extraordinary place. The rocks are from the earth's mantle, peridotite rocks rarely seen on the earth's surface. They are poor in nutrients, and full of toxic metals that plants can't tolerate, so it's a

barren landscape. But life is endlessly persistent, and here and there plants appear in crevices where soil has blown in from outside. And of course there are tiny plants, like serpentine sandwort and shrubby cinquefoil, miniature miracles which have figured out how to live with toxic rocks and with winters that bring brutal cold and hurricane-force winds.

Further down Highway 431, there is the Green Gardens Trail, which takes you across serpentine barrens, then through a forest of small trees, and eventually to the coast, where you can see green meadows, cliffs, and sea stacks.

At the end of 431, there is the community of Trout River (population 500), and Trout River Pond. We took a boat tour of the Pond, which is actually an inland fjord, about 7 km long, and starkly beautiful. We were happy to see moose on the hills beside the pond, less happy with the black flies that swarmed the boat.

When we were here in 2015,



Humpback Whale



we camped in the Trout River campground, up above the town, which we stumbled across by accident. It proved to be a perfect base for exploring the southern part of the National Park.

Naturally we set out to climb Gros Morne mountain. This is the highest mountain in the park. We made it to the top – a large rock-strewn plateau – and were rewarded with truly awesome views in every direction. On a clear day, you can see forever.

Another day, we hiked to Western Brook Pond, also an inland fjord, and took a boat tour of that Pond (which is really a substantial lake: only in Newfoundland would a body of water that is 16 km long, 165 metres deep, and surrounded by 600-metre cliffs be called a “pond.”)

Each outing tempted us to head further north up the Northern Peninsula. Quite by accident, we came across the site of the Wreck of the Ethie. The S.S. Ethie was wrecked off Martin’s Point in a storm in December 1919. There were 92 people on board, including a baby. All were saved, thanks to the efforts of local people who rushed to help, and a Newfoundland dog which swam out to the ship with a rope which was then used to get a steel cable hooked up to the ship. The baby was brought ashore



in a mailbag (“Special Delivery!”).

And – serendipity! – it turned out the Gros Morne Theatre Festival in nearby Cow Head was presenting a play about the Wreck of the Ethie. We booked a room in the motel, and watched the play. On another visit to Cow Head we watched *Tempting Providence*, a play about Myra Bennett, the legendary nurse who served this area for more than 50 years.

Eventually our ramblings took us all the way up to St. Anthony and L’Anse aux Meadows. In St. Anthony, we happened upon a ‘Mug-up,’ an outdoor community gathering featuring a traditional treat of a piece of white bread smeared with molasses, topped

with roasted sardines, and accompanied by a mug of tea. There was also music and dancing, and Miriam, of course, danced enthusiastically.

The next morning, we explored St. Anthony. The road ended at a fish plant. Do they offer tours of the plant, Miriam wonders. I’m doubtful: there is no sign saying anything about tours. “*Can’t hurt to ask*,” says Miriam. Into the fish plant we go. The woman in the office takes one look at Miriam and says, “I recognize you. I saw you dancing at the Mug-up last night. You looked like you were having fun!” Miriam asks about a tour. “Sure, why not!” is the reply. We get a tour. Miriam is right: *Can’t hurt to ask!*



Miriam at the wreck of the Ethie



A happy camper

# Lake Erie

When you live in Toronto and think about “getting out into nature,” Lake Erie is not necessarily the first destination that comes to mind. Of all the Great Lakes, the land around Erie has been the most affected by agriculture and urbanization: perhaps two percent of the original Carolinian forest, oak and tallgrass prairie savannas, and wetlands remain in existence. Nonetheless, Lake Erie has its jewels, no less precious for being relatively small and scattered.

Miriam first came to know Lake Erie in the early 1960s, when her parents sent her to Camp Kvutza, a Habonim (Labour-Zionist) summer camp near Port Maitland. Miriam loved being outdoors, loved folk dancing, and loved swimming. Sometimes, though, she wrote home, they weren’t allowed to go swimming in the lake because of a dangerous “under-toe.”

Lake Erie became a regular destination for us in the early 2000s. Our first trip, on a Thanksgiving weekend, was to Long Point, a 40-km long sand spit stretching out into the lake. Only 1 km wide at its widest point, Long Point is dotted and flanked by marshes used by enormous flocks of waterfowl, while the spit itself, extending so far out into the lake, is a major bird migration route in the spring and fall, as well as a gathering point for Monarch butterflies. Long Point and the immediately adjacent area harbour



Point Pelee

an extraordinary diversity of species: 370 species of birds, 102 species of fish, 46 species of mammals, 34 species of reptiles and amphibians, 91 species of butterfly, and 1,384 species of plants. Long Point was named a World Biosphere Reserve in 1986.

Long Point looks small on a map of Ontario, but in the map I carry in my head, Long Point is a vast place full of life. I picture us walking, on and on, along the dikes in the Big Creek Wildlife Area. *Walk carefully, don't disturb the turtles that have come up onto the dike to lay their eggs.* I see Miriam, scanning the distance with her binoculars because she heard something. *There! Sandhill cranes!*

Back out on the road, there's a big

snapping turtle. Cars stop. The turtle doesn't seem inclined to move off the road. One young man gets out of his car, grabs a hefty stick from the side of the road, and holds it in front of the turtle. The turtle lashes out, clamps down on the stick with its formidable jaw, and doesn't let go. Slowly, holding the end of the stick, the young man pulls the turtle off to the side of the road, in the direction it was heading, and then releases the stick when it is safely off the road. We onlookers are amazed. He smiles: “My parents are biologists. I learned that trick from them.”

Over the years, we widened our explorations of Lake Erie: Rondeau, Wheatley, Hillman Marsh, Point Pelee, and up to Lake St. Clair, which is only a short distance away.

We'd often camp at Wheatley Provincial Park, which is within easy driving distance of Pelee and Hillman Marsh. We'd always pick a campsite by the water. In the morning, we would lie in our tent, drifting in and out of sleep, and listen to the dawn chorus of forest birds. Sleep is over when, an hour or so later, the Canada Geese decide to launch into their rather more cacophonous clamour. Well before the dawn chorus starts, however, we would hear the sound of boats, large boats, not pleasure boats, heading out on the lake. You'd hear them for about five minutes, then they



Tundra Swans near Aylmer





Spicebush Trail, Rondeau

were out of earshot. How strange, we thought. What are they doing out there at 4:30 in the morning? One day, we headed out to Wheatley Harbour, which lies immediately to the west of the provincial park. There we learned that Wheatley, with a population of fewer than 3,000 people, is home to the largest commercial freshwater fishing fleet in the world. What we heard is the fleet, or some of it, heading out to fish.

## Rondeau

Rondeau, another peninsula extending far into Lake Erie, pulls us back, again and again, year after year. My mental map of Rondeau is as vivid and clear as my mental map of the neighbourhood I live in.

*The Marsh Trail:* Will we see the eagles on their nest again? Will we hear the Marsh Wren? Will the snapping turtles be laying their eggs? Should we ride our bikes all the way to the end, or leave them by the side of the (very bumpy) path and walk the rest of the way?

*The Tulip Tree Trail:* The trees are tall and magnificent. *Look! A Prothonotary Warbler!* And there's a Baltimore Oriole. *No, wait, it's an Orchard Oriole!*

*The Visitor Centre:* A cluster of bird feeders out back, busy with Goldfinches, Grosbeaks, Cardinals and

many more. Miriam takes photos of the birds. I take pictures of Miriam. Down on the ground, chipmunks and squirrels clean up whatever drops from the feeders. Next to the Visitor Centre are a few parking spots reserved for staff, whose responsibilities include running a program to protect the endangered Fowler's Toad. "Staff Parking Only" the sign says. "All Others Will be Toad."

*The beach:* A storm is gathering over Lake Erie. A tent is no place to be in a storm, so we sit by the lake in the car, watch the storm, and drink wine. We're adaptable.

*The South Point Trail:* Oh-oh, it's under six inches of water. Miriam has rubber boots. I forgot to bring mine. Miriam is annoyed: "*You should have brought your rubber boots!*" "*I know. I wish I had!*"

*The Spicebush Trail:* A magic place, wetland and dry land interlaced. Giant trees form a green canopy open enough to permit a variety of understorey plants to thrive, including the beautiful delicate spicebush. Birds dart through the branches. We walk the Spicebush Trail twice on our final visit to Rondeau, in May 2018. "*Breathe, Ulli, breathe!*" Miriam says.

We know that this will almost certainly be the last time we walk this trail together. In our sadness, it is somehow comforting to know that these trees were here long before us, and will be here long after we are gone. Several times, Miriam stops, puts her hands on the trunk of a tree, and stands there quietly. No words, just a gentle breeze whispering through the leaves.

