

# BONNY good time in Lac du Bonnet

## Add LDB to your summer tour

GORD MACKINTOSH

**“W**HERE are we?” Margie anxiously asked in the bush.

I assured her, “We’re right here!” Despite Margie’s reluctance on a scorching day, I’d convinced her to hike Blueberry Rock Trail near the town of Lac du Bonnet, about an hour’s drive outside Winnipeg. Described online as a breathtaking loop, the trail was created by previous volunteers who relish the beautiful Canadian Shield and running from bears.

Without carrying a map, blue arrows guided us to a lookout tower where we bounded up rocks and steps. I exclaimed, “Whew. Breathtaking alright!”

Those arrows then apparently pointed in divergent directions. Margie deduced, “Teens did it. A prank. Something you’d do.”

Disoriented from stooping for free blueberries, I confidently obeyed one arrow and we left the loop somewhere behind. Margie further deduced, “We’re lost!”

I replied, “No. Maybe slightly.”

With sweat dripping, she muttered something about bearing a cross, having a map and someone’s head. I exclaimed, “Great blueberries, eh?” and soon waved to vehicles on an inexplicable road as we surprisingly returned to the car for a quiet ride to Lac du Bonnet.

The boreal gateway town called Lac du Bonnet, population 1,064, sneakily isn’t on a lake. It’s on the Winnipeg River where it’s wide and wondrous. Like other playful Manitoba towns such as Ste. Rose du Lac and Swan Lake, the lake lies kilometres away. The amusing ruse continues with a Lake Avenue.

To blend in with residents, you should pronounce “Bonnet” as “bon-nie,” call the lake “Lake Lac du Bonnet” and the town “LDB.” There’s LDB Auto Supplies, LDB Masonry, LDB Pure Water. For diversity, a dock company is LMB Diversified.

Among rolling hills, Black Bear Golf Club houses a peculiarity. It’s not the suspicious “Bear Patties” on the menu; they’re potatoes. It’s the taxidermized black bear. He’s brown. A rare mutant!

Claiming it is Manitoba’s most spectacular golf course, Granite Hills Golf Club exudes hilltop views, lakefront fairways and, transplanted from a Group of Seven painting, large rock outcrops that I took for granite.

I’d heard about the “Jumping Rock.” I asked friends Judy and Bill, who invited us to their cottage, for a boat ride to the Rock. I explained, “I’ve seen a river that runs but never a rock that jumps.”

Their son-in-law Darrell captained us among Lee River’s boaters to the Rock. From various heights on the juniper-laden cliff, youths leapt into the water. One developed a change of plans. A parent bobbing in a boat yelled, “Whatcha waitin’ for? Come on, jump!” That would be me up there.

LDB boasts a cement and steel mega-dock awaiting the arrival of the Royal Canadian Navy, plus an inviting sand beach — downtown! It maintains alluring parks and play structures including, out of its element, a big blue elephant.

A log cabin accommodates LDB’s loaded museum. It’s bigger inside than outside. For the lowdown from its historian, take time for Terry Tottle’s terrific tale-telling.

The Legion hosts “Happy hour every hour.” The bartender explained, “The slogan just reflects low regular drink



The Jumping Rock that, as Gord discovered, doesn’t jump.



Saturdays in summer, LDB proudly hosts Manitoba’s second biggest farmer’s market.



LDB’s first-rate dock and sandy beach.

prices.” It also hosts poker. I questioned, “What’s poker?” Members referenced bingo, rummoli, poker. A chap urged, “Join us Tuesdays. We need young folks.” I’m a youngster! I hereby declare LDB The Pokemo Capital of Canada.

Small-town stores endearingly serve customers by stocking mismatched merchandise. Here, Gran’s Bake Shop sells baking and children’s sweaters. I asked, “What’s the connection?” The answer: “Comfort!” The Yellow Door sells electronics and wine kits. What’s



Granite Hills Golf Club claims natural beauty second to none in the country.

the connection? Getting wired? The remarkable Manitoba Made store sells what’s also made in Mexico, Nicaragua, Honduras.

Three packed hardware stores attest to cottagers who, without exception, carry a hammer, screwdriver, or duct tape. Dancy’s Fine Foods produces tasty Kurtwurst sausages and patties. Campbell’s entices with cream cheese-covered cinnamon buns; arrive early. MSG Foods means, not monosodium glutamate, but Mel, Steph, and Glen.

K’s Kitchen at Casey’s Inn makes great-tasting butter chicken pizza. Enjoy a brew and view at the old Lakeview Inn. Drifters Inn — with newer rooms — serves generous meals including crunchy wings with 40-plus flavours, including an improbable spiced-run-apple-BBQ. I Heart Coffee’s drive-thru customers crave its iced caramel macchiato. Adjoining Santa Lucia Pizza, the Ice Cream Baller offers key lime dipped cones among its treats.

LDB’s farmer’s market is Manitoba’s

second biggest. Its Facebook page insists pets aren’t allowed — as shoppers or vendors. “Good decision! I can’t imagine our dog, Pirate, shopping here or selling even his most unique little creations. Let’s admit it — pets aren’t good with money.”

Discover fanciful business signs. The Yellow Door could use a yellow door. The Lakeview Inn: a lake; Corner Auto: a corner. And driving one afternoon, homemade signs announced “Big garage sale on now. FREE BEER.” Margie remarked, “You sure turned fast!”

I couldn’t find beer. I asked the homeowner, “Where’s the free beer?” He replied, “You missed it — in the fridge I sold.”

“How many were there?” He admitted, “Not many. A couple.”

“When did the fridge sell?” “Early on, and if you wonder why I don’t remove the signs, they bring in lots of folks!”

Really? Who’d fall for that?

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LINKS TO THE PAST • FROM IT



The Balmoral Hotel is one of Edinburgh’s most striking buildings.

Air Canada flies daily between Toronto and Edinburgh, making it easy for us to connect from Kelowna and meet my parents at the Pearson airport in Toronto to jet to the Scottish capital as a family.

From our first base in Aberdeen, we take in the area highlights Grace has already discovered — the historic University of Aberdeen campus; the ruins of Dunnottar Castle and the UK’s best fish and chips at The Bay Cafe in Stonehaven; and Balmoral Castle, the favoured Scottish holiday home of the late Queen.

The second half of our multi-gen romp is spent in Edinburgh, the cosmopolitan and historic capital at the five-star Balmoral Hotel.

The hotel itself is a sumptuous destination, one of the city’s most distinctive buildings, located at the base of Princes Street resembling a castle with its clock tower and Scottish baronial-style architecture.

From the Balmoral, we are walking distance to all of the city’s greatest hits — imposing Edinburgh Castle, the Palace of Holyroodhouse and bagpipier-lined Royal Mile in Old Town and the Royal Yacht Britannia, Princes Street Park and the Johnnie Walker

Experience in New Town.

The Johnnie Walker Experience takes whisky tasting to a whole new level with an immersive, showy and high-tech look at the brand’s history and how the drink is made and enjoyed — yes, there are three cocktails along the way.

We also ended up at Johnnie Walker’s roof-top bar and restaurant for more drinks and eats with a spectacular view of Edinburgh Castle.

The pedestrianized Royal Mile is a buzzy, people-watching dream of a street flanked by endless pubs and souvenir shops, connecting Holyrood at one end to Edinburgh Castle at the other.

The most fascinating link between the two is Mary, Queen of Scots, who lived in both castles.

At Holyrood in 1566, in Mary’s bedchamber, her secretary, rumoured lover and possible baby daddy, David Rizzio, was brutally stabbed to death, likely on the orders of Mary’s jealous husband, Lord Darnley.

Me, my mom and my dad end up at Romanes & Paterson (established 1808), a tartan, kilt and souvenir shop at 158 Princes St. to dive a bit into our genealogy.

My dad already knows his grandparents died in Bonnybridge, near Glasgow, of tuberculosis and their five orphaned boys, including his father, were sent to eastern Ontario.

At the time of their death, they were using the last name MacNaill, the ‘Mc’ a throwback to their ancestors coming from Ireland.

It became MacNaill in a nod to Scottish ‘Mac’ spelling.

Either way, the name is rare in both Scotland and Canada, but it’s listed in the Romanes & Paterson database.

We find out the MacNaills weren’t rich enough to have their own family crest and tartan, so they piggybacked off the tartan of the Galloway District near Glasgow, the Galloway name again a throwback to many of the settlers there coming from Ireland.

So, tartan scarves in the Galloway tartan of modern red and hunting green are purchased, mementos of our multi-gen, fact-finding journey to Scotland.

Check out AirCanada.com and VisitScotland.com.

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