

COTTAGING OUT EAST 'AT WHAT POINT DID "COTTAGE" BECOME A VERB?'

BY VINCE HEMPSALL

A few weekends ago, I was lounging with a friend on the deck of his cabin near the tiny community of Spread Eagle, Nfld., when he asked, "At what point did 'cottage' become a verb?" He was reading a story in a glossy magazine from Ontario that referred to the "art of cottaging," and although it seemed we had the art down pat — we were relaxing, drinking cold beer and swatting the occasional black fly — we scoffed at the idea of calling it "cottaging."

In fact, even as a noun, the word "cottage" is seldom used in Atlantic Canada. Residents of Newfoundland and Labrador own cabins, while our Maritime neighbours to the south have camps or summer homes. They range from \$2,000 hand-built shacks to six-figure seaside mansions, but none of them are located in cottage country — rather, they're back in the woods, or on the pond, or around the bay.

And there are a lot of them. More than in any other part of the country, we East Coasters are inclined to own a place where we can escape our daily lives. (According to a 2002 Statistics Canada study, vacation property ownership is 2 per cent higher in the Atlantic provinces than in the rest of the country.) Upper Canadians might find this strange, given the fact that many Maritimers live in scenic, seaside communities year-round, but even the residents of Peggys Cove can get bored of the same view after a while.



ANDREW VAUGHAN/CP

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Nick McGrath, the president of Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador, resides in Labrador West, one of the most remote, natural places in the entire country. Yet he owns two cabins he visits on a regular basis. "I have one cabin on a large lake that's accessible by car," he says. "But when I really want to get away from it all and be surrounded by nature, I go to my other cabin on an island that's only accessible by boat." This from a man who lives in an area with a population density of 0.1 people per square kilometre.

The best part about living in Atlantic Canada is that it's extremely easy to get away from it all. This is true for all East Coast provinces,

even for residents escaping the "big cities" of Charlottetown, Fredericton or St. John's. Peace and tranquility can be as close as a 20-minute drive, and the only lineup one might encounter on the way to the cabin will be at the gas pump.

The same goes for out-of-province vacationers, McGrath says. "No matter what kind of holiday experience you're looking for, you're guaranteed easy access." There's everything from fishing camps and back-country ski lodges to beachside summer homes and secluded cabins in the woods. And unlike other areas of the country, East Coast cabins tend to be used all year long. (This is certainly the case in New Brunswick and Newfoundland and

Labrador, where snowmobiling is a popular pastime.)

A growing number of people are starting to realize this is one of the best and cheapest regions in the country to retreat from the daily grind. In Newfoundland, for example, good oceanfront acreage can be found for as little as \$50,000, which is why Americans and Europeans are buying up the shoreline at a staggering rate. In PEI, the provincial government responded to increased foreign attention by passing the Lands Protection Act in 1988 that limits the amount of property non-residents can own. Still, an outsider can own 165 feet of shore frontage in the island province, and it's not unheard of to find it for less than \$150,000.

Renting a summer home on the East Coast is a popular short-term option that comes with all the benefits of owning and none of the lawyers. Aside from the regular tourist channels, such as provincial tourism guides and travel websites like canadavacationrentals.ca and cyberrentals.com, one of the best ways to organize a cabin trip down East is to contact a real-estate agent in the area you wish to visit. They'll know of the summer homes that are available for rent, and they'll also supply you with local knowledge of the sights, activities and secret "nooks and crannies."

Just don't ask them where you can "cottage." We don't recognize that verb here yet.

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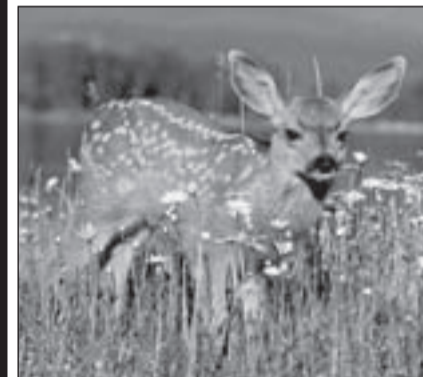
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