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If you haven't experienced a boating adventure on Canada's Georgian Bay, plan one now.

BY MARILYN DEMARTINI

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UMMER IN SOUTH FLORIDA makes “hot and humid” superlatives. So, when we received an invitation to go boating on Canada’s Georgian Bay, we started packing. On top of visiting great friends and boaters to enjoy the scenic wonder of Canadian summer on one of the most beautiful bodies of water I have experienced, we were to travel on a 42’ Mystic Powerboat with an icon of the performance boating world, Bob Barnhart. That just fueled the enthusiasm as we boarded our Air Canada flight.

Stepping out of the bustling hub of Toronto Airport to catch our Lyft, we enjoyed a fresh breath of cool air—by our standards—and headed off to suburban Kitchener to meet our host. A peaceful evening prepared us for the three-hour drive to Midland Ontario, our launching port for the rest of our journey through Lake Huron to Killarney Mountain Resort.

THE BACKSTORY

The “cottage country” of Georgian Bay is an architectural wonder, as is everything built on rocks. There are 30,000 islands—mostly consisting of rock—and everyone owns an island with a respective cottage. Barges are brought in carrying materials, workers and equipment to build what residents call cottages but can more accurately be described as mansions or “substantial” lake houses. “Cottage” is merely a term left over from the Gilded Era, when the wealthy built seasonal lake escapes from Canadian

cities. Georgian Bay is part of a UNESCO biosphere reserve, with 1,240 miles of gray-pink granite shoreline, and is often called the “Sixth Great Lake.”

In these waters, local knowledge is primary, as many a prop and rudder have been sacrificed to the rock gods. The water is either windswept chop or full-blown waves, so hidden rocks are hard to see. Many are marked, but most are not, so boaters travel carefully, often with a friend who knows the waters and channels.

Bob Barnhart is one of those locals, having boated on Georgian Bay for decades, cottage hopping to visit friends from his own property on the prestigious island of Muskoka. The opportunity to ride in his 2019 42’ Mystic with quadruple Mercury 350 HP outboards—a top-notch build and one of his favorites—was an experience itself, but as we took off from Central Marine, a major but sheltered commercial port servicing the quaint little town of Midland, the 130-mile ride to Killarney became a grin-filled phenomenon.

ON THE WAY

Our trip began on a sunny day with no wind—an exceptional occasion on Georgian Bay. Joined by another friend in a “vintage” Baja with inboard Mercury engines, we could not achieve Barnhart’s customary cruising speeds, so we agreed on a 45mph pace.

On such a perfect boating day, we were astounded to discover only a few boats on the water, but we enjoyed literally reflecting on the sheen of the surrounding sun and clouds. Our wakes left the only ripples on the wide expanse of Lake Huron, which, at 5,792 square miles, feels like an ocean since looking far and wide only water is visible. Part of the Mystic’s appeal to Barnhart for Georgian Bay and the ocean is its high freeboard and balanced build, making it user-friendly and reliable. Its durability is aided by the tough Mercury outboards, which he deems “trouble free”—an asset when often traveling in faraway places.

ARRIVAL TO RUSTIC REVELATION

On our approach to the town of Killarney and its newly renovated Mountain Lodge, we were greeted by one of its historic short and sturdy lighthouses, built in the 1860s to protect area fishermen. Originally named “Shebanwaning” by Objive natives, meaning “safe canoe passage,” this

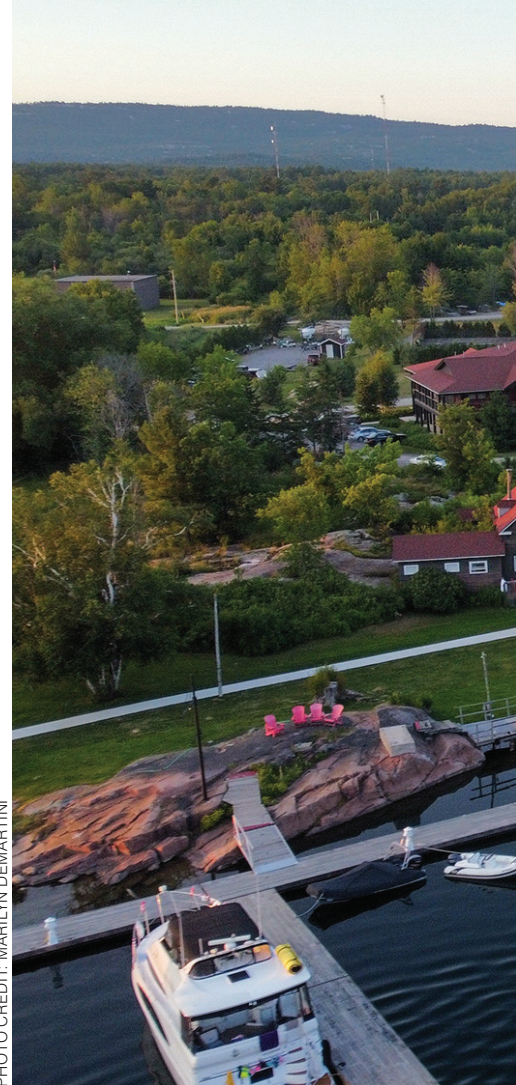


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over-200-year-old town was established for fur traders and the local indigenous people, who are respected throughout Canada. Logging, mining, fishing and farming were the primary trades throughout the La Cloche Mountains until 1962 when connection with the Trans-Canadian Highway brought tourism to the charming town. That access also turned ownership of the Killarney Mountain Lodge, built by a large American corporation as a hunting and fishing lodge for high-brow company getaways, over to Canadians, Annabelle and Maury East.

A new era of rustic tourism began, set around experiencing nature rather than luxury, and the immense Killarney Provincial Park (645 square kilometers, equal to nearly 160,000 acres) was created to protect the resort’s breathtaking wilderness. For 50 years, the East family devoted themselves to stewardship of their home and the resort’s reputation for hospitality, connection to



All guests of the lodge have access to The Marina at Killarney Mountain Lodge. It offers dockage, boat charters, fishing guides and tackle, charts, unlimited water and more.

the community and nature.

In 2015, Holden and Carey Rhodes purchased and embraced the resort and its heritage, continuing to develop its amenities, including the marina, without destroying its character. Renovations and expansion continued, including the construction of the world's biggest paddle, "The Big Dipper," a 110.5', 22,000-lb. display plaque and tribute to the fishing and fur traders who traveled by canoe through frigid waters back to this place of serenity and immense beauty.

The Rhodeses added rustic yet decorative, comfortable cabins and even the fabulous and monstrous Canada House, acknowledged as the world's largest log-constructed conference center. It was a major accomplishment, being that the property had overcome climate and a destructive fire. The entire resort speaks to the country's logging industry, with custom-crafted woodwork—and rocks,

Okeechobee Lodge & Marine Resort

Since the Okeechobee Lodge & Marine Resort on Manitoulin Island is only accessible by water, its shuttle can pick up at area airports and bring guests in by plane or boat. The Fullers also offer day charter fishing trips or sight-seeing adventures and hikes on mountain trails—after enjoying the heated pool, sauna, mini-golf, trapshooting and games at the Wheelhouse Bar. The resort is not open to the public and only rents cottages to guests pre-registered in advance through the website. The Lodge offers its facility for conferences and retreats seasonally from May through October, the owners then wisely winter in Florida. okeechobeelodge.ca.



THE RUGGED WOOD BEAMS, LEOPARD-UPHOLSTERED CHAIRS, AND FURNISHINGS OUT OF A BLACK-AND-WHITE MOVIE TRANSPORTED US BACK INTO THE 1950S WHEN THE LODGE WAS FREQUENTED BY THE LIKES OF JACKIE GLEASON, BOB HOPE, AL CAPONE, AND FORD MOTOR COMPANY EXECUTIVES.



Killarney Mountain Lodge's rooms are all named after local historical figures, locations or events, such as Hole-in-the-Wall, Group of Seven and Silver Peaks.

prevalent throughout.

The bright lobby welcomed us wind-chilled travelers. The adjacent outdoor restaurant, just off the heavily wooded and rustic Great Room, offered sun, food and refreshing beverages under red umbrellas, adding festivity to the décor. Two gentlemen in our party arrived by helicopter; we met them as the chopper touched down right beside the outdoor dining area. Sea planes arrived at nearby homes, landing alongside boats of every brand and description at the marina. From aluminum john boats to luxurious sportfish yachts, cruisers of all sorts commingled, with the Mystic and the Baja noticeably outstanding.

Our rooms in the main lodge were wood-centric and comfortable, with elegant furnishings—but no televisions or internet, though WiFi is available in public spaces. We took a walking tour of the resort to absorb the peaceful look and feel, including the Canada House's Ranch House steak restaurant with its impressive menu, decor and bay view. Strolling along the cabin-lined walks were pleasant staff, ensuring that all the comforts of home were at hand.

We opted for dinner in the Main Dining Room overlooking the Killarney Channel, where rustic furnishings are offset by linen tablecloths and magnificent paintings from local artists adorn every wall. The food was every bit as impressive as its presentation,

and our lively group filled two tables, savoring cocktails and sharing laughter between courses.

OFF TO OKEECHOBEE

The next morning after breakfast, it was off to our next cruise to the Okeechobee Lodge & Marina Resort. We Floridians were a bit surprised that Canada offered another "Big Water" location, also named by local Indigenous People, whom we in America know as "Indians." We picked up speed as our Baja friends joined us onboard and the calm, glassy water welcomed us.

We met the owners of the Lodge, Glenn and Laurel Fuller, as the lively couple had jaunted to the Killarney Lodge the day prior on their custom Cigarette center console. We were eager to see their fabled slice of history just 30 miles west on Frazer Bay.

But before we docked, Barnhart wanted to share another scenic experience: the fjord, Baie Fine, a 10-mile cruise through the North Channel of Killarney Provincial Park. White quartzite cliffs, deep green pines and pristine waters led us past the Evinrude family's cottage, which, curiously, docked a pontoon powered by a Mercury outboard. We continued to "The Pool," a protected fresh water cove where yachts anchored (and where the Walgreen yacht has often been spotted) peacefully without a sound, save for our outboards' hum.



Back through the fjord to the Okeechobee Lodge, we found the rest of our crew cocktailting by the newly refurbished 150-slip marina that can accommodate up to 100' yachts with a 10+" draft. Dockside, the Wheelhouse Bar beckoned with a rooftop deck, while inside, a vast number of international yacht club burgees, billowing from the wood beam ceiling, hinted at many raucous rallies. The colorful flags complemented the rustic decor with various games, a piano, casually strewn fitness equipment and a wooden bar.

Making our way back, we passed various wooden cottages, up to the main lodge—and there, time stopped. The rugged wood beams, leopard-upholstered chairs, and furnishings out of a black-and-white movie

transported us back into the 1950s when the lodge was frequented by the likes of Jackie Gleason, Bob Hope, Al Capone, and Ford Motor company executives. Stuffed bears, wildlife, fish, and wooden Indian figures, all strategically placed, call attention to intricate wood furniture, knotty pine log walls, and 12" pine plank, tongue-and-groove ceilings from which an antique 1913 Evinrude outboard engine hangs. Binoculars from a war ship sit on a picnic table with a schooner suspended overhead while a freestanding brass Kelvin & Hughes compass stands beside a wood ship wheel. It's a nautical museum, with Fuller as a docent, touring through each piece of art and memorabilia. (He also doubles as bartender.)



Left: Our adventurous author takes the helm. Below: A historical landmark, the Killarney East Lighthouse was built in 1909 and can be reached on land by hiking a trail that hugs the shoreline of Georgian Bay.



PHOTO CREDIT: MARILYN DEMARTINI

When the Fullers first visited, they thought, “This is cool!” They knew all the shareholders and made a deal to purchase and preserve the past while bringing it into the present with new windows, roofs, and maintenance. “Everything is functional, the infrastructure was in place, and we thought if we changed it, we’d take a piece of history,” explains Fuller. Compared to the \$7 million that the owners reportedly put into Killarney Mountain Lodge, the hospitable Fullers felt they made a sound investment and now keep the Lodge as a gathering place for friends.

We spent our last day cottage hopping through Georgian Bay with a neighbor on his Chaparral. Then it was off to a house with spacious wraparound deck built on a rock with an adjacent guest house, followed by an inherited vintage, antique-laden home complete with an indoor koi pond and an antique Shepherd wooden powerboat, *Bubbles*, at its second covered dock.

That night a full moon welcomed us, and after days on the water, we drifted into deep sleep with vivid images etched in our minds. Georgian Bay days and nights add up to an “out of country” and “out of body” treat for U.S. boaters. Tip for when you go: Bringing banished American bourbon is welcomed! 🍷



The original influencer: **BOB BARNHART**

Bob Barnhart was a social media influencer before that was a title. As “Bob the Builder” on boating forum Offshore Only, he entertained performance boat addicts for years with stories about his adventures on many boats—over 20 that he can recall, from diesel and gas-powered outboard high-performance hulls to center consoles that he has built and bought, transporting them between his homes in Muskoka and Waterloo, Canada, and Marco Island, Florida. He has traveled to 22 countries on his own boat, from the Caribbean, French Islands and Cuba—where he was detained by a gun boat—to numerous trips to the British Virgin Islands and Mexico.

Barnhart was intrigued by Reggie Fountain’s 2003, 8-hour and 35-minute one-way speed record from Key West to Cancun, Mexico (approximately 405 miles), which was done to deliver a 48’ Express Cruiser, powered by triple Cummins diesel engines. Just for fun, he planned a purpose-built 50’ Nor-Tech Powerboat powered by triple Yanmar diesels to break that record. Barnhart completed the trip in 2008 in eight hours, 23 minutes to Cancun and then in eight hours and 25 minutes on the return, successfully breaking Fountain’s record on both runs.

Barnhart was also the founder of the Fort Myers Offshore Club in 2007, a popular group of powerboat enthusiasts on Florida’s West Coast. For 10 years, he ran the club, which has held many recreational events, including some to raise scholarship money for a young woman with great aspirations whose family was killed in a powerboat accident. Barnhart showed it’s not just about power, but about heart.