

Ontario's lakes and shores beckon

by Mark Pavilons

The new school year is approaching and teachers will invariably ask their students what they did over the summer.

I think a more relevant question would be "what did you learn this summer"?

Whether we travelled, road tripped, spent time at the cottage, or just stayed home, we all had ample opportunities to learn new things. Perhaps we became more aware of our surroundings. Maybe we took time to reflect and look inside ourselves. If you were fortunate to have travelled, hopefully you learned a little something about the world around us.

Every new experience, whether it's playing board games inside the cottage on a rainy day, or watching the ducks dive for food in the lake, is imprinted on our brains. These snippets are like digital snapshots in our minds, a record of our life experiences and in a way, what it means to be human.

My eldest daughter, the world traveller, remarked that she wanted to see more of her own backyard "the beauty that is Ontario.

Good choice!

There's a very good reason why there's so much to see and do in Ontario. Our province is a little over one million square kilometres, bigger than France and Spain combined. Germany fits inside Ontario almost three times and we're four times the size of the UK.

A friend of mine noted he loves fishing, and is trying to cross off as many lakes as he can, through his retirement. Well, John, there are more than 250,000 lakes in our province, which contains roughly one-fifth of the world's fresh water! The word "Ontario" comes from an Iroquois word for beautiful water, beautiful lake or big body of water.

Manitoulin Island in Georgian Bay is the world's largest freshwater island, covering 2,766 square kilometres (1,068 square miles).

We didn't make it that far, but we did venture to Tobermory, at the tip of the Bruce Peninsula. This area is considered the fresh water diving capital of the world. It boasts shipwrecks and the clearest waters I have ever seen in my life.

One of the reasons the wrecks are so well preserved is the pristine, cold waters.

The deep waters at the mouth of Georgian Bay are home to Fathom Five, Canada's first National Marine Conservation Area. The park preserves a rich cultural legacy that includes 22 shipwrecks and several historic lighthouses. Fathom Five's freshwater ecosystem contains some of the most pristine waters of the Great Lakes. The rugged islands of the park are a reminder of the impressive lake-bed topography found beneath the waves.

We hopped aboard a glass-bottom ship at Tobermory, which took us to Flower Pot Island, an ancient remarkable gem. It's often depicted on websites as a postcard-perfect shot of the area, with the inverted rock formations.

Having spent many summers at Honey Harbour, we got to know Georgian Bay quite well. It has an amazing history and its waters are expansive. It's roughly 190 kilometres long by 80 kilometres wide and covers approximately 15,000 square kilometres. It's roughly 80% the size of Lake Ontario.

The bay has drawn the likes of the Group of Seven painters, and even the Wright Brothers to her shores. Today, many famous families enjoy their summer homes in the area.

Referred to as the "Malibu of the North," our cottage country is home to dozens of celebrities who love to get away from it all.

The sheer size of our province and its untouched portions are simply incredible.

This is one of the reasons it draws so many visitors from around the world "many just can't fathom the expanses.

Just think about it, a mere two hours away and you're transported back in time, to when these areas were formed after the last ice age. There is evidence that natives lived in and around Georgian Bay some 11,000 years ago. In some remote areas, yours may be the only footprints left behind by a human being!

Closer to home, we enjoyed kayaking along the shore of Lake Simcoe near Innisfil. This area has some affluence and there's a housing boom under way in Innisfil, which was once a quiet retirement community. Now, it seems to be a sought-after location. Friday Harbour Resort is also attracting a lot of attention.

It's really not surprising that we humans are drawn to the water. It has a calming effect and maybe, in some way, it connects us with our humble beginnings.

We all spent roughly nine months in a watery environment, and fetuses have a "gill slit" feature in early development.

Life on this planet emerged from the primordial ooze and roughly 71% of our planet is covered in water. Odd, that it's so abundant and yet water-front living is so expensive! It should be the other way around!

Our bodies are 60% water and we can't live without it.

Some say it's the key to all life and when we explore the universe, NASA simply follows the water trail.

For me, "sitting at the dock of the bay ... wasting time" suits me just fine. I am in awe of the beauty and force of nature. The sun on

my face, and sound of lapping waves soothe me. I am one with nature.

When I drive through Ontario's hinterlands, I glance across miles and miles of wide open farmland, thick forests and massive rock formations.

It is all waiting to be discovered.

What did I learn this summer?? Head north and a whole new world opens up!