

DESTINATIONS

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QUOTE

"ONE SHOULD MAKE A VACATION TRIP TO THE LAKE PARK REGION OF MINNESOTA . . . ITS INNUMERABLE PLEASURE RESORTS, BOATING, FISHING, OUTDOOR SPORTS WILL MAKE YOU STRONGER, PURER AND NOBLER." — PROMOTIONAL BLURB, 1906



In the north woods, classic lodges are remnants of a vanished era



A moose head mounted on a fieldstone fireplace dominates the great room of Spider Lake Lodge near Hayward, Wis.

Golden oldies

In the north woods, only the passage of time creates a classic. There's nothing like the feel of a vintage lodge. Whatever it comes from — the burnished logs hewed by ax, the hearths made of stones picked from local fields, the faint fragrance of aged pine and cedar — it can't be ordered from the local furniture store.

Jim Kerkow and Craig Mason know, because they own a furnishings business and they love old lodges. They were building a cabin near Hayward, Wis., and staying at nearby Spider Lake Lodge when its elderly owner pointed out the obvious.



BETH GAUPER

"She said, 'You'll never be able to re-create this place, so why not just make this your own?'" Kerkow said.

They bought the old log lodge, built in 1923 by an auto mechanic from Chicago and an Ojibwe carpenter, and they fixed it up. But they were careful not to extinguish the personality it had acquired from years as a lake resort, hosting parties of vacationers.

"I like to tell people that the logs absorb all the laughter, all the neat stuff that has floated through here over the years," Kerkow says. "People touch the logs, and they can feel it."

Once, the north woods of Wisconsin and Minnesota were full of lodges. The first were built as fishing camps, after loggers left in the 1890s, and guests were affluent sportsmen who arrived by rail.

Then, roads were built in the 1920s, and automobiles became more affordable. Families streamed north, and the now-familiar log-cabin look — massive geonung middle class made resorts with housekeeping cabins popular. But their numbers are shrinking fast as

lakeshore property values go through the roof and aging resort owners sell to people who tear down the cottages to build one "cabin."

Today, only a few classic lodges survive to give us a glimpse of a golden era. Usually, it's because the lodge has found a friend.

"This place just screamed, 'Take care of me, make me good again,'" Kerkow said of Hayward's Spider Lake Lodge. "When we saw it, we knew it had the bones."

RUSTIC ELEGANCE

Last month, I visited some of the classic lodges when I was in northeast Wisconsin. In the far corner of the state, I stopped by the Hazen Inn, which started life as a gentleman's hunting and fishing camp in 1900, with three chinked-timber cabins. A log lodge was built in 1901, with additions in 1911 and in the '20s and '40s, when it was Long Lake Lodge.

By 1993, it was falling apart and had been vacant for two years. Then, Iowans Joel and Janet McClure saw it, fell in love with it and bought it for a B&B.

"Then, we started with the vast repairs," Joel McClure said. "At first, 'You have to have that,'" McClure said. "That's what people are looking for when they come up here."

Not far away, near the Michigan border west of Land O' Lakes, Bent's Camp began life in 1896 as a camp for sportsmen, brought over from the railroad landing in a wooden scow called the Tar Baby. A log restaurant was built in 1906, with interior walls covered by thick squares of birch bark held in place by cedar strips.

Today, it's one of the north woods' most treasured spots. In the bar, old photos illustrate the resort's early history and a fire crackles in the stone fireplace; diners sit in a room lined with paneled windows overlooking Mamie Lake or in the wood-paneled big room, under the gaze of a giant stag head.

It's as far off the beaten path as it can be, but the specials when I was there were pure uptown — Chilean sea bass with a langoustine cream sauce, duck confit and a delectable phyllo-wrapped lamb with gorgonzola, rosemary and garlic.

"We have a new chef, and he's cooking some pretty wild things for us," a waitress said.

PAST PRESERVED

A half-hour to the south, Eagle River draws hordes of snowmobilers but also is surrounded by very good cross country ski trails. Downtown, there's a little ice palace, made of blocks cut off Silver Lake and stacked by local firefighters and volunteers.

Five miles east of town, on Carpenter Lake, the Inn at Pinewood was built in 1934 as a hunting and fishing lodge. It became a youth camp in 1969, a college-prep academy in 1974 and a B&B in 1991. Today, each era contributes to the lodge's charm. The current owners, Bill and Jane Weber, are avid collectors of antiques.

Even the rafters have stashes of this 'n' that.

"I walk around here, and even I see things I've never seen before," says manager Michele Richardson, who serves a full breakfast in the porchlike Grinder Room, where 92 grinders hang from the beamed ceiling and walls.

The same weekend I stayed at the Inn at Pinewood, Tricia Olson of Pella, Wis., was there with her husband, Kenton. Olson, who spent childhood summers with her grandparents at a lake resort near Vergas, Minn., loves the old resorts and has built a collection of nearly 1,000 vintage postcards of lodges and cottages. When she can, she visits them.

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Jim Kerkow, proprietor
Spider Lake Lodge

"It's amazing, with the technology and tools today, that we can't build the gorgeous places they built years and years ago," she says. "A lot of these places don't even exist any more. So many have been turned into condos, or small lake lodges near Hayward, Wis.: It was built in 1923 as Ted Moody's Camp, and an old film shows Moody hewing the logs and Hank

Smith shaping the wood between them. The resort is from Al Capone's 1925 retreat in Chicago, Moody as a mechanic at a garage that served Capone's cars.

"The link is there; then, it's just get into legend and hearsay," says owner Kerkow. "(Moody) was a young man when he came here, bought the land, and it seems he had financial backing. And there are a lot of pictures of shady characters roaming through here."

Today, the handsomely restored lodge serves as a showpiece for Kerkow and Mason's design by Northpoint Designs. With no TV or cell-phone service, the atmosphere is intentionally quiet and for only a full breakfast is served rooms go for \$139 to \$179. Call 1-9472, www.spiderlakelodge.com.

Inn at Pinewood B&B near River, Wis.: This B&B on the private Carpenter Lake, started in 1934, is a very good spot for a group. The main level has many areas where people can congregate, including a cozy room with satellite TV, video library. It's also good for traveling together, since all rooms have king beds and many additional twins.

It caters to skiers, and the Lake Trail is three miles east, with miles of groomed trails and a where chickadees feed from hands. Eagle River, five miles west, has many good restaurants.

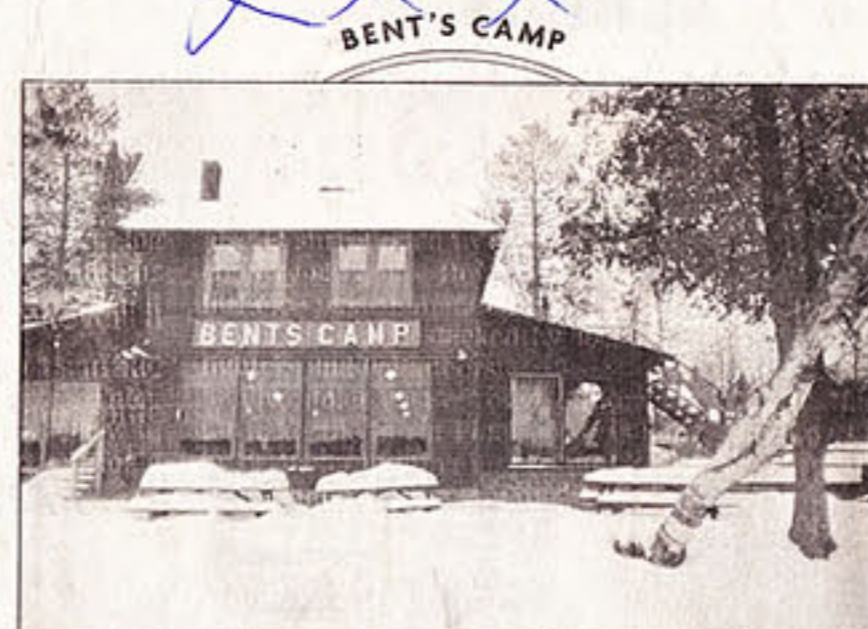
Eight rooms go for \$104-\$150. Three-bedroom home next door for \$290. Call 1-715-477-2377, www.innatpinewood.com. Four dinner rooms for \$325-\$345 for two nights in

GAUPER, 4G



TORSTEN MUELLER, SPECIAL TO THE PIONEER PRESS

The sprawling Great Room of the Inn at Pinewood has many nooks where guests can play games, read books or watch a fire.



BETH GAUPER, PIONEER PRESS

On Mamie Lake, the 1906 Lodge at Bent's Camp faces Wisconsin's border with Michigan.



BETH GAUPER, PIONEER PRESS

At the Hazen Inn, walls are lined with windows that overlook a snowy forest around Long Lake.

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Gauper

(continued)

Call 1-800-335-6904, www.hazeninn.com. (The inn is for sale.)

Bent's Camp near Land O' Lakes, Wis.: This is a great destination even for a beer, but try to make time for a meal at the Lodge Restaurant. It serves burgers and such, but order one of the specials, \$17-\$25. Entrees include a very good soup and salad bar. Don't skip dessert and the excellent coffee.

There are two cabins open in winter, patronized by snowmobilers, \$100-\$150. It's 10 miles west of Land O' Lakes on County Road B. 1-715-547-3487, www.bentscamp.com.

lodge motif, with suits of armor and strings of muskies, foxes, stags, bobcats and ducks mounted in the two-story great room, next to the equally atmospheric restaurant. The restaurant and many rooms have great views of Lake Namekagon.

Seven lodge rooms, six with fireplaces, and a suite go for \$75-\$215. Other rooms and cottages go for \$85-\$2,560. Call 1-800-794-2204, www.garmischresort.com.

Naniboujou Lodge near Grand Marais, Minn.: This lodge, 15 miles northeast of Grand Marais on the shore of Lake Superior, is one of a kind. Opened in 1929 as an exclusive private club — Babe Ruth and Jack Dempsey were among its charter members — it foundered after the stock-market crash just a few months later.

But it's still gorgeous, with its weathered copper shingles and red

resort in Minnesota until its founding family sold it in the 1980s. It began life as a North Shore hunting and fishing camp on land homesteaded by Swedish immigrant Charles Axel Nelson in 1885.

Its 1952 timber lodge is cozy and inviting, with its big stone hearth, polished-leather chairs and picture windows overlooking the lake. There are 31 old-fashioned rooms upstairs, \$79-\$139, and cabins, villas and condos nearby. There's a restaurant in the lodge and an adjoining pool. Call 1-800-258-8736, www.lutsenresort.com.

Golden Eagle Lodge on the Gunflint Trail: This resort on the central Gunflint has a rustic 1945 lodge with walls lined with old logging-camp tools and a mixture of older and new cabins, some with whirlpools. It has its own ski trail lit by kerosene lamps and is on a trail system that connects

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Michele Richardson, manager
Inn at Pinewood

with shared bathroom, go for \$125-\$170. The 1903 gatehouse, with whirlpool and fireplace, is \$225, and four suites in the newer Log Bungalow are \$185. The Carriage House is closed for the winter. Five-course dinners in the restaurant, \$49, are served with advance reservations. Midweek, the lodge offers a package that includes dinner for two and the best available room, \$239. Call 1-715-653-2323, www.sevenpineslodge.com.

Grand View Lodge in Nisswa, Minn.: This was one of the first big log lodges when it was built in 1919,