



Arowhon Pines

TRAVEL

LEAFING THROUGH BOUNTY

→ Algonquin in the fall offers stunning vistas, fresh air, plenty of exercise, fantastic food... and no bugs

Story **Gordon Bowness**

They greet you upon arrival without fail, saluting like Mounties in their scarlet uniforms. The maple trees at the western gate of Algonquin Park always blaze red at the end of September. It's a promise of more autumnal marvels to come as you explore Ontario's oldest, most visited park. (And I promise to avoid

more clichés. It's too easy to wax poetic about Algonquin; the purple prose flows freely when walking on a red-leaf carpet through a forest cathedral. Oops. Sorry.)

Algonquin in the fall is a wonder. You can do it as a day trip, but who wants to spend seven-plus hours in a car, especially with a big lunch and vigorous

hike squeezed in the middle? And it's too late to curry favour with that friend of a friend who owns a cottage in the Muskokas. The elegant solution is to stay for a couple of nights in one of the three private lodges in the park: Arowhon Pines, Killarney Lodge and Bartlett Lodge.

A recent trip to Arowhon and

Killarney confirmed that, while both resorts treat their visitors extremely well, they offer very different experiences.

Arowhon Pines is a 50-room resort dating back to the 1930s. It has a dining room that must be experienced, a three-storey-high hexagonal log structure built around a towering cen-

tral fireplace, ringed by windows and a verandah, all dramatically perched on the unblemished shores of Little Joe Lake. Dinner here is a special event (so is lunch or breakfast for that matter). After an active day in the fresh, fresh air, who doesn't want to be rewarded by surprising choices, like osso bucco or smoked had-dock crab cakes? The mains aren't overly large, which is good since you've already grazed away at a tantalizing appetizer buffet (that would stand in for dinner at most places: fresh greens, house patés and pickles, herring, sushi, chicken wings...). Then there's that long table of des-erts and cheese to work through. The resort doesn't serve alcohol, so dinner is bring your own bot-tle; another opportunity to spoil yourself.

This place is elegant. They advice smart casual dress, but don't be afraid to work a fancy outfit at dinner. As the sun sets and the warm glow from inside spills onto the verandah, the place assumes a timeless air, as if you were back in the 1930s or '40s. You half expect frock coats or zoot suits.

Arowhon was started in 1938 by Lillian Kates (grandmother to food reviewer Joanne Kates) and is now run by her son Eugene and his wife Helen. The resort is a lovely 20-minute drive from the park's western gate. And definitely worth visiting for at least

one meal while you are in the area (prix fixe lunch is \$32, dinner is \$70). Accommodation costs \$240 to \$400 per person per night; that includes three honking meals, canoes, kayaks, sailboats and other amenities, the park fee, plus a location that can't be beat. And no Wi-Fi.

The accommodations range from fine to gorgeous. There are a few lovely private cabins for rent and a number of small but com-fortable rooms with private baths, with three to 12 rooms housed together in large lodges that have a shared sitting room with a fire-place (ideal for groups and fami-lies). Most log cabins and lodges look out over the lake, though some of the individual rooms are oriented away from the water, toward a pretty creek, in some cases, and less auspicious green spaces, in others. Don't worry about securing the best rooms because you'll be spending the whole day in the park. Arowhon offers easy access to the park interior by canoe or walking trail — take along one of the kitchen's tasty packed lunches.

This isn't a wilderness resort. You can't avoid people. The huge sundeck and swimming dock (if you are lucky weather-wise

→ **DRAMA** The dining hall at Arowhon Pines (opposite page) sits on the shores of Little Joe Lake. One of the adorable cottages of Killarney Lodge (above right) and the region's ubiquitous loons (bottom right).

in September) fills up with less-active sun-worshippers and folks with kids. But the social demands are easy to negotiate... and the park always beckons. This place really offers the best of both

worlds: fantastic food, top-notch service and unspoiled nature. And you get to glam it up at night. Divine.

Killarney, on the other hand,

Continued on page 24



Christopher Dew



Peter Ferguson

Continued from page 23

is less glam, more ham. It too dates back to the 1930s and now offers 30 pretty lakeside cabins (one to three bedrooms) bursting with nostalgic charm. The small log cabins are boldly painted black, white and red, giving Killarney almost a funhouse Canadiana feel. You wouldn't be surprised to see a photo shoot by Canadian designers like DSquared2 or Klaxon Howl who mine old backwoods' looks.

There are a few original cabins dating back to the 1930s, like the restaurant and lounge buildings. All are decked out in attractive antiques. Accommodation ranges from \$240 to \$340 per person per night. All three meals are included as are canoes and park pass. The restaurant, also BYOB, is perfectly adorable and welcoming, the food big and hearty — get the pie. Packed lunches are available.

The only problem with Killarney — and it may be a deal-breaker for some — is that it's located right off Hwy 60, the busy highway through the park. A couple of the cabins even look across a narrow bay onto the highway. It's noisy during the day. Despite that, Killarney's location is great for exploring some of the best fall-view trails in the park (see "Fall Trails" at right). And with cooler weather and closed windows, you may find highway noise to be not that much of a problem. Again, this place is well-worth visiting, at least for a meal (prix fixe lunch is \$26, dinner is \$54) and a look-see.

Be inspired. Make that trip to Algonquin you keep promising yourself.

AROWHON PINES 1-888-633-5611.
arowhonpines.ca.

BARTLETT LODGE 1-866-614-5355.
bartlettllodge.com.

KILLARNEY LODGE 1-877-767-5935.
killarneylodge.com.



Peter Ferguson

TURN COLOURS

TIMING

The third week in September is always your best bet to see Algonquin Park's peak colours. For updates see the fall colour report at algonquinpark.on.ca. I ask park naturalist Rick Stronks if he'd hazard a guess at when the peak will hit this year. "Nice try," he says with a laugh. "No. There's too many variables — temperature, precipitation, sunlight...." He points out that "peak colour" refers to the crown of the trees; there is still plenty of red after the peak. "And then a couple of weeks later, it's the turn of the tamaracks," says Stronks. "They turn a lovely golden colour." Because Algonquin is situated on a highland, the trees turn first there, so a later trip still catches a lot of drama in the surrounding areas. Arowhon Pines and Killarney Lodge are open until Mon, Oct 10.

ECONOMICS

There are cheaper options than resorts. Camping in September is great. The campgrounds are less crowded and there is less

demand on the easily accessible canoe camp sites. I've even lucked into warm swimming weather late September. And no bugs! You can rent everything you need onsite.

Since 1996 Algonquin Park has offered an alternative to camping in a tent. There are a number of small rustic rangers cabins, very basic, with no heat or water, for rent. Most are in the interior and may not be suitable for fall camping. But there are also a few year-round yurts, with electricity, heating and beds. All camping options can be booked ahead of time (ontarioparks.com).

FALL TRAILS

For colourful fall vistas try Lookout (1.9 km), Hemlock Bluff (3.5 km), Booth's Rock (5.1 km), Track and Tower (7.7 km) and Centennial Ridges (10 km). Be prepared to hike. There are also great bike trails. Located on an old railway bed, the Old Railway trail (10 km) is nice and flat with conveniently located rentals at the Lake of Two Rivers store.

→ **TRADITION** Whether an easy paddle or camping in the interior, there's nothing like experiencing Algonquin Park by canoe.

BY TRAIN

Who knew there was a train to Huntsville? Ontario Northland's Northlander train runs between Toronto's Union Station and Cochrane every day except Saturday (ontarionorthland.ca). Muskoka stops include Gravenhurst, Bracebridge and Huntsville. You take a lovely three-hour ride along a tree-lined single track to Huntsville (\$90 return), then rent a car (they'll pick you up at the station). You only have to drive that perfect last hour into the park. On the return you also get to make the most of Northlander's bar car. (Note: In Huntsville, only Discount rental is open on Sundays, even if the central reservation call centre says it isn't.) It may cost a little more, but this was the first time I returned from up north totally relaxed, no tension in my shoulders and a little red in my cheeks.