

Sabbathday Lake: A Quiet Place for Families

IN THE 1800s, THE CHILDREN of Sabbathday Lake Shaker Village often walked down through the fields to Sabbathday Lake with Sister Aurelia Gay Mace, who liked to teach summertime lessons beside a waterfall. Today, that spot is called Aurelia's Cascade.

Kids still gather at this tiny gem of a lake in New Gloucester, but these days they come with their families to play instead of study. One afternoon last June, a gaggle of them splashed in the shallows at Outlet Beach, on the northern shore, as I sat at a picnic table eating a Hot Dog Indochine. Piled high with pickled veggies, cilantro, basil, Fresno chili, and hoisin sauce, the exotic wiener is one of the surprising items available at the snack bar here.

Sabbathday Lake is a perfect place to paddle a kayak, canoe, or SUP, or tootle around in a small sailboat or outboard.

A few years ago, the 100-year-old yellow shack was purchased by James Beard Award nominee Krista Desjarlais, who'd closed her celebrated Portland restaurant, Bresca, and moved with her family to New Gloucester. She christened the snack bar Bresca & the Honey Bee, and shook up the menu with such dishes as wood-grilled maple-glazed pork belly and shaved Brussels sprouts with candied walnuts, pecorino, and roasted garlic.

Desjarlais embraces Sabbathday Lake's family atmosphere. "There's no alcohol, and of course no smoking," she said. At two miles long by one mile wide, the lake is not appropriate for big powerboats.

"By the time they get going, they reach the other side," she said. "Besides, our launching ramp isn't very large."



At the top of pocket-sized Sabbathday Lake in New Gloucester, Outlet Beach offers low-key recreation and a snack bar serving unexpectedly exotic treats.

Rather, it's a perfect place to paddle a kayak, canoe, or SUP (Desjarlais rents some on a first-come, first-served basis) or tootle around in a small sailboat or outboard.

The lake itself has less name recognition than the Shaker Village, and residents are fine with that. "We're happy it isn't well known," Sabbathday Lake Association President Chris Ricardi told

me. "We welcome responsible boaters, but the larger and better known a lake is, the more potential there is for problems. We're vigilant about milfoil, for example."

The water is free of invasive plants (like milfoil) that clog some Maine lakes, and the association works hard to keep it that way. "The volunteer courtesy inspectors at the launching ramp edu-

cate boaters," Ricardi said. "All it would take is one person dropping an anchor with milfoil on it."

Shaker land—1,800 acres, more than 1,700 of them protected by a conservation easement—stretches to undeveloped lakefront as well as to a swath with camps and homes (owners of the structures lease the land from the community).

According to Michael Graham, director of Sabbathday Lake Shaker Village, the lake has long been important to the community. "Before the days of refrigeration, the Shaker Brothers harvested ice there," he said. "In times of drought, dairy cows were driven to the lake to drink. After chores were done, the children and their caretakers sometimes picnicked by the lake. The boys were allowed to fish and enjoy a rowboat built for them by one of the Brothers."

I have always been drawn to the village, its evocative 18th- and 19th-century buildings lining a ridge just west of the lake. The world's last active Shaker community, it is today home to two members. I've taken the tour more than once and attended a harvest festival. On this visit, I stopped at the store to buy tins of dried herbs—the best I've found anywhere.

The village's summertime offerings include guided nature walks that loop to the lake. "They visit Aurelia's Cascade, enjoying the cool breezes and rambling stream where Sister Aurelia and her pupils held their classes," Graham said.

How lovely that the lake's serene, simple gifts keep on giving. ★

Contributing Editor Mimi Bigelow Steadman lives on the Damariscotta River in Edgecomb.

Sabbathday Lake Shaker Village
Museum open Memorial Day weekend through Columbus Day, Monday-Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. See website for tour schedule and costs. 207-926-4597; www.maineshakers.com

Bresca & The Honey Bee
Open Memorial Day to Labor Day. Lunch served Wednesday-Sunday, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., weather permitting. 106 Outlet Road, New Gloucester. 207-926-3388; brescaandthehoneybee.com

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