

A Toast to Borestone

By
Elizabeth Peavey

When my friend the painter Marguerite Robichaux invited me to join a group of artists for a stay last July at Maine Audubon's Borestone Lodges, of course I said yes.

Although it sometimes feels like I have written about every corner of the state, this pristine, rustic outpost was one spot that had eluded me, and I'd long wanted to visit. There was also the prospect of rubbing elbows with some of the state's preeminent painters, to observe these creatures – *artistus americanus* – in their natural habitat. A habitat, I might add, with mountains to climb, ridges to explore, ponds to swim in, birds to be looked at, and a rich history to delve into. Yes, all these factors informed my decision, but let's be frank:

It was really about the food.

Marguerite (with whom I often collaborate) and I have traveled widely together—and we've always eaten well. Some of the highlights have been: crawfish *étouffée* while winter camping in a yurt near Moosehead Lake; her famous caviar pie while on the trail of Thoreau in Northeast Carry; and red beans and rice with deer-meat sausage during a mud-season birding trip on Mount Desert Island.

A Louisiana native as much at home at one of her Newbury Street gallery openings as on a smelting expedition, Marguerite has shown me one needn't sacrifice the niceties of the table for the beauty of the backcountry. That means stemware, no plastic. We use table linens and votives. And the martini shaker is agitated promptly at 6.

Marguerite assured me that fellow Borestone trip leader, painter Alan Bray – whose roots in the area run deep – shared similar culinary sensibilities and would be inviting artists of the same mindset.

Who wouldn't say yes?

OK, so it wasn't really *all* about the food. The turn-of-the-century Adirondack lodge where we would be staying is situated in a big bowl, gouged into the side of Borestone Mountain, 1,300 feet up. It perches on a necklace of three ponds and under the shadow of Peregrine Ridge to the west and Borestone's twin summits to the east. The whole deal is hemmed in by dense woods, and, best of all, acres and acres of quiet.

For those who haven't attended adult sleepaway camp, it is exactly like what you remember from childhood, only without the curfew and counselors. There is the same initial awkward jostling – the introductions; the movement of gear, and gear, and gear (none of us packed lightly); the securing of sleeping quarters (Marguerite and I laid dibs on "The Office," a snug shack plunked on a cliff above the lodge, so we could giggle – our fellas call it cackling – into the night); the setting up of the kitchen; and the all-important Locating of the Loo. Then comes snooping around, getting the lay of the land, and, for the artists, staking out their individual parcels of real estate in which to paint.

This aspect was, perhaps, what most fascinated me. As a person who cannot write unless I am shut alone in my office with all my dishes done and phone calls returned – in other words, without an iota of distraction – I was amazed at how easily my campmates established their *plein air* or studio space.

Sheilia Geoffrion embedded her easel in a deep tangle of vines off a main trail thoroughfare. Marguerite and Phil Frey convivially set up their easels adjacent to one another near the dock. Tom Hall ensconced himself with his pastels on various outcroppings on Peregrine Ridge, where I'd almost literally stumble upon him while hiking. Dennis Gilbert and Becky Goodale staked out places on the front porch and in the main lodge. Only Alan and Dennis Pinette disappeared. Men after my own heart.

In the evenings, we would gather on the porch before dinner for cocktails and conversation and watch the light change. There was some shoptalk about techniques and tools. Sketchbooks were opened, and paintings in progress displayed. Most writers I know do not talk about their work. This relaxed *bonhomie* was refreshing.

But we spoke mostly about Borestone – its beauty, its history, our impressions of it. Alan generously shared his lifelong knowledge of the area. Eventually, we would wander into the dining room for the evening's meal, with one fabulous dish following another, and conversation stretching well into the otherwise still night.

The nourishment we took from Borestone went far beyond the table. Short of hard cash, the gifts of time and quiet are two of the most valuable things anyone can bestow upon an artist. That Maine Audubon is working to preserve this special place by opening it up to groups who produce pieces of art in return, is an act of preservation in itself.

Look around you, and you'll see Borestone. The food, I'm afraid, you'll just have to imagine for yourself.