



Please don't come to Leelanau County

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By Kurt Luedtke

Kurt wrote this essay about 20 years ago, and in light of the Sleeping Bear Dunes being selected "The Most Beautiful Place in America" by Good Morning America, we thought it was a fitting op-ed.

Here are some reasons you may not want to come to Leelanau County:

- It's out of your way. No matter where you are going, Leelanau County is not on the way unless you are in Leelanau County already, in which case you must either go back the way you came or get seriously wet. This has to do with the nature of peninsulas and there is nothing to be done about it.
- There is no place to stay. In Leelanau County, there are no TraveLodges, Best Westerns, Howard Johnsons or Marriotts, or Sheraton, Red Roof, Ramada or Holiday Inns. There are some rooms, lodges, cottages, motels and resorts but none of them has miniature golf or pillow mints. There is miniature golf in Glen Arbor, next to the flower shop, but the porcupines have gotten at the front nine. There is a motel in Cadillac which has a Polynesian dining room but Cadillac is not in Leelanau County.
- There is no place to eat. In Leelanau County there are no McDonalds, Big Boys, Burger Kings, Taco Bells or Kentucky Frieds. There is a good hamburger at Joe's Friendly Tavern in Empire, but no Joe; another good hamburger at Art's Bar in Glen Arbor, but no Art. Joe's and Art's are owned by Mike who is usually out of sweet vermouth at both places.
- There is good food at the Leelanau Country Inn, but it is not expensive and some of the waitresses are married. LaBecasse sometimes has the best chocolate mousse in America, depending on who did the desserts that day, but the rest of the food is so terrific, why is the maitre d' a lawyer? The Epicure in Suttons Bay has ambition, elan, imagination and often a chef but it does not sell stuffed animals or maintain a parking lot. The Glen Lake Inn is not on Glen Lake. The Bluebird in Leland has cinnamon rolls, but you cannot have as many as you want even if you pay extra for them. Also smelt, which is favored by the sort of people who like to eat little dead fish with their fingers. Also waitresses. The Leland Lodge has a deck, a view and Special Events, some of them friends of mine. There are



places to eat in Northport but nobody goes there. The best restaurant in northern Michigan is Tapawingo, near Ellsworth, and Leelanau County is not on the way to it.

- There is nothing to do. There are no bowling alleys, roller rinks, shopping malls, driving ranges, discotheques, public pools, presidential museums or large monuments in Leelanau County. There are some video games, but not the good ones. There is a movie house but it has no matinees. There is cable television some places but mostly not. Mollie Weeks has a bookstore in Glen Arbor, and Prudy has one in Leland but all they have are books. The Indians run a poker game near Peshawbestown if you like playing poker with people who are looking to get even. The celebrated poet Jim Harrison has a house off M-204 but if you come on his property, he will set the dogs on you. Some people hunt, fish, ski, sail, swim, golf, hike, hang-glide, canoe, windsurf, para-sail, jet-ski, shoot skeet and trap, play tennis, croquet and lawn bowl, principally because there is nothing to do indoors. There is a national lakeshore, if you like that sort of thing.

Also, there are deer in Leelanau County and it is a rite of passage among them to leap gaily over your car as you pass by. These deer are not smart: thus far none of them has made it. For general understanding of what happens when a deer falls short, drop a hundred pound sack of cement from an overpass on a poultry truck.

Also there is an undertow. For complex geological reasons, the waters of Leelanau County are uniquely vulnerable to a most violent undertow which strikes without warning even on the calmest days and against which struggle is impossible.

Frankly, I don't see the point of going out of your way to get to a place where you can't even swim, but suit yourself. The whitefish is good almost anywhere. Unless you are a scaredy-cat about PCBs.

Kurt Luedtke is a retired editor of the Detroit Free Press, wrote the screenplay Absence of Malice, and won the Academy Award for his screenplay of Out of Africa. He and his wife Eleanor are rumored to be holed up somewhere in Glen Arbor during the summer months.

Addendums:

- The hardware store replaced that miniature golf, but The River is now open.
- The Friendly Tavern is now owned by Frank, and Art's is now owned by Tim, and both now have sweet vermouth but not the good kind.
- Leelanau Country Inn became North, but is currently closed and for sale.
- The maitre d' at La Becasse is not a lawyer anymore, and will no longer chase you into the parking lot if you stiff the wait staff.
- The Glen Lake Inn is now Trattoria Funistrada.
- Tapawingo has also closed.
- Mollie is retired and her bookstore is now owned by Barbara.
- Diana owns Leelanau Books, and Prudy has passed on.
- Harrison has moved to Montana but still owes money around the county.

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