

## How I spent my summer vacation

Just a few minutes after launching our kayaks in the tiny village of Sinclair and ducking under a low concrete bridge, Douglas and I rounded a bend in the quiet waterway and glided to a halt.

“Uh-oh,” said my husband, who I’ve been married to for just shy of a year.

A few yards ahead, stretching from shore to shore, stood a formidable, 3-foot-high beaver dam.

Though the water had found ways to trickle around and through it in spots, the sturdy dam effectively blocked our passage. Uh-oh, indeed.

This was a Friday morning, almost at the end of our precious week of vacation — our first full-blown vacation together since we were married last September. We had traveled nearly the length of the state, from coastal Cumberland County near Brunswick to the northern tip of Aroostook, reconnecting with family and friends, exploring unfamiliar communities and landscapes.

That Friday evening, we had reservations at Canterbury Royale, a storied French restaurant in Fort Fairfield. The next day we’d return home to Sandy Point. So that morning in our boats, with the end of our adventure in sight, we were in no mood to be trifled with by a bunch of beavers.

We paddled up to the base of the dam and hoisted ourselves clumsily out of our kayaks, teetering barefoot on the wet, slippery twigs and branches at the bottom of the structure. Working together, we pushed and pulled the boats up and over the top, clambered up ourselves, got re-seated and traveled on, damp and happy, right into the heart of the boggy woodland.

We paddled in excruciating quietness, fully expecting to come upon a feeding moose at every turn. It was a perfectly moosey place, but no moose obliged us.

We did see birds — an osprey, scores of red-winged blackbirds, a few great blue herons and lots of ducks. We spied a frog and a few small fish moving through the languid, brown water. We shared our adventure with many insects — this is Maine, after all — including big, slow-moving dragonflies with iridescent blue bodies and transparent, smoke-colored wings.

In a protected spot we ate our lunch — cheese sandwiches and a shared bottle of beer — without getting out of the boats, because the bank was all mud and clay. Then we paddled back, still quietly, still not seeing a moose, the current lifting us along, climbing over the beaver dam, ducking under Sinclair Road and back to the car at the put-in.

From there, we drove back roads through high, green farm fields over to Route 1 at Lille, where we stayed too long at the Musee culturel du Mont-Carmel, the ongoing restoration of a stunningly graceful Catholic church constructed in 1908 and decommissioned in the 1970s. With the afternoon wearing on quickly toward evening and our 6 p.m. dinner reservation, we dropped down into Caribou and checked into Russell’s Motel.

We scrambled out of our mud-caked kayaking clothes into the outfits we had brought for the occasion and headed over to the restaurant for one of the best and most surprisingly formal meals I’ve ever had. On our way back to the motel, only slightly woozy with wine, we stopped for a shallow, moonlit dip in the fast-moving Aroostook River, fulfilling our daily commitment to the 2016 Summer Swim Challenge.

The greatest pleasure of our vacation was having the opportunity to step away from our daily routines and learn more about each other and the ways we interact. For example, Douglas learned that I am a good old gal who can scale a beaver dam in the morning, enjoy lunch in a muddy kayak and clean up good for dinner in a fancy restaurant. I learned that Douglas has a reliable instinct for interesting paddles and hikes, a keen interest in local history and a sharply tuned ear for funny conversations at the next table over. I’m prone to misplacing my sunglasses; he’s good at finding them. He’s a little uncomfortable swimming in fresh water; I’ve learned to enjoy the colder but more buoyant ocean.

We’re a good team. We knew that before went on vacation last week, but it was sweet to have some un-compressed time to enjoy the kindly qualities that brought us together.



MEG HASKELL



JULIA BAYLY | BDN

Former Fort Kent Squares Venette King (left) and Rita Plourde check out King’s old square dancing outfit, complete with bloomers. Costumes and other items (top) used in the St. John Valley’s square dance heyday are on display at the Fort Kent Historical Society. The exhibit officially opens Saturday with a reception.

## Hip to be square

### Maine dancers do-si-do through history in exhibit

BY JULIA BAYLY  
BDN STAFF

If there ever were a time when it was hip to be square in the St. John Valley, it was from the late 1960s to mid-1980s.

That was when the Fort Kent Squares were in their hey day, with weekly lessons, monthly dances and road trips around New England and Canada.

“My husband [Garfield] was not a dancer, but with square dancing you didn’t need to have rhythm,” former Fort Kent Square and retired teacher Venette King said. “The dances were just wonderful social events where we met all sorts of different people.”

King was at the Fort Kent Historical Society last weekend with several other Fort Kent Squares members, who were getting a sneak peek at an upcoming exhibit on the dancers set to open with a reception from 1 to 4 p.m. Saturday, July 16.

“This group all started with [former Fort Kent resident] Herman Thibault, who was selling insurance in southern Aroostook in 1967,” Chad Pelletier, Fort Kent Historical Society president, said. “He saw a demonstration down there of square dancing, liked it and asked if someone could come up to the St. John Valley and give lessons.”

Pelletier said square dance caller John Mi-

chaud agreed to make the trek to Fort Kent from southern Aroostook, and Thibault immediately set out to recruit dancers.

“You needed 16 couples to make a square,” Pelletier said. “He got them almost immediately, and it just kept growing from there.”

One of the big attractions — other than the dancing — was the fact that it was an alcohol-free event, several former members said.

“One lady told me there was no liquor allowed at any of the dances,” Pelletier said. “Of course, she also said they’d go out and party afterward.”

Monthly dances were at the Fort Kent Elementary School, and King remembers decorating the old gym according to the month’s theme. But the group hardly needed the gym or decorations to do-si-do.

“We were ready to dance anywhere, any time,” Rita Pelletier said. “I remember going to a dance held in a potato house in Canada across the border from Fort Fairfield, [and] we’d dance in parades.”

Friends talked Rita Pelletier and her husband Leo into joining.

“They told us we had to try it,” Rita Pelletier said. “Those who were already there and knew what they were doing were so helpful, and whenever we got turned around they would gently turn us back into the right direction.”

Before the squares could Allemande left or bow

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## MDI scientists: You can live long, healthy

BY MEG HASKELL  
BDN STAFF

Who wants to live to be 150? Well, lots of people, probably. But while a long life of good health, good spirits and physical activity is worth living, few would opt to extend a life that is full of age-related disease and disability.

“What we want is to live longer, healthily,” Steven Austad, Ph.D., said, speaking at a recent course on the biology of aging at the MDI Biological Laboratory on Mount Desert Island. And since the average human lifespan in developed nations has increased steadily since the year 1900 at a rate of about 6.5 hours per day with no sign of abating, he said, “there is no obvious limit to human life expectancy.”

In fact, Austad is so confident that he’s made a small wager with a colleague that someone already alive today will live to celebrate his or her 150th birthday. They have each invested \$150, counting on the value to reach \$500 million



ROGIER VAN BAKEL

Students (from left) Aubrey Sirman of North Dakota State University, Asha Kiran Akula of the Leibniz Institute on Aging in Jena, Germany, and Ee Phie Tan of the University of Kansas Medical Center perform a laboratory procedure during a recent course, “Comparative and Experimental Approaches to Aging Biology Research,” at the MDI Biological Laboratory in Salisbur Cove.

by the year 2150. Austad said he expects to win the pot for his heirs.

But a longer lifespan doesn’t

equate with a longer healthspan, he cautioned.

“Because we’re getting so good at delaying death, we face a future

## Examining vision to prevent falling risk

### Agency to conduct risk assessments

BY MEG HASKELL  
BDN STAFF

Falling is a major cause of permanent disability and loss of independence among older adults, according to the National Council on Aging. It is estimated that one in three Americans 65 and older fall each year, many suffering serious injury, hospitalization or even death.

So it’s not surprising that the fear of falling prevents many older Americans from socializing, exercising and participating actively in their lives. Ironically, limiting activity results in rapid loss of muscle strength, loss of coordination and loss of confidence, all of which actually increase the risk of falling.

That’s why many social service agencies, including the Bangor-based Eastern Area Agency on Aging, actively promote evidence-based “falls prevention” programming aimed at building strength and balance in older adults, making their home environments safer and decreasing both the fear and the risk of falling.

“We have a huge commitment to falls prevention,” said Lisa Dunning, health programs manager for the Bangor-based agency.

In addition to offering exercise classes, including tai chi, yoga and strength training for seniors 50 and over, EAAA also conducts regular risk assessments to help seniors and their families determine strategies for improving home safety and reducing the risk of falling.

The next falls risk assessment will take place at 2 p.m. Tuesday, July 19, at the agency’s Airport Mall site.

The assessment will be preceded at 1 p.m. by a talk titled “Low Vision and Everyday Life” by Carolyn Dorfman, a professor of occupational therapy at Husson University. Dorfman recently completed a graduate certificate in helping individuals adapt to living with “low vision” and is looking to put her new skills to work in the community.

Low vision is defined as a non-correctable loss of vision that makes everyday activities difficult or impossible.

There are many reasons eyesight fails with age, Dorfman said. The most common is a general loss of visual acuity, which often can be corrected with eyeglasses, contact lenses or surgery. But other conditions cannot be corrected, such as macular degeneration, glaucoma and changes associated with diseases such as diabetes and multiple sclerosis. Head injuries and strokes can also affect vision, robbing individuals of the essential ability to see and interact with the world around us.

“People with low vision can become very isolated and feel very helpless,” Dorfman said. Not only do they lose the ability to read, drive and navigate safely in their bathrooms and kitchens — key to

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