OUTDOORS: Adventure travel for women is increasing in popularity – a chance for real bonding and an escape to nature from a tech-driven world

The moon over a lake in Killarney Provincial Park, which the author and her travelling companions admired while listening to the ‘haunting lullaby of the wild’ – the cries of loons.

Women gone wild

I am a wild woman.
Please let me clarify – I am just back from my second Wild Women’s Expedition – hence my claim.

Wild Women Expeditions is an all-women’s adventure travel company based in Canada. At least from my perspective, they are less about “women going wild,” than they are about getting women back into the wild.

Women’s adventure travel is a growth industry, with several new companies cropping up throughout North America in the past decade. Wild Women Expeditions was an early start—its roots date back to 1990. When founder Beth Mairs packed up her career as a social worker in Toronto, bought a backpack in Northern Ontario.

LINDY MECHefske

with WWF at the Deer Lake air
port. She spoke with an east
coast accent (I had been warned
not to use the term “Newfie” –
only bona fide Newfies can do
that). She asked me if I’d like to
go and have dinner in Corner
Brook to kill time while we wait-
for a later flight to land with
the arrival of another wild wom-
an. So we sat that evening, eat-
ing cod, of course, and drinking
white wine, in a dining room
perched up a large rock face,
looking out at across the magnif-
cient Gulf of St. Lawrence as the

a steak. I should have stuck with
cod.
And so, I did fall in love.
I fell for Newfoundland. I
found a sense of connection to
the land and the history of this
country that bowled me over
and smacked me in the face.
A migrant in this land, I’d never
felt so Canadian in my life. I
loved the bleak but beautiful,
rugged, open landscape. I loved
the legendary but very real hos-
pitality of the locals – the music,
the art, the spontaneous story-
telling. I loved the coastal vil-
lages with their painted chip-
board homes and lighthouses
blowing in the wind. I loved
magnificent Gros Morne Park. I loved being
in the company of women and
moody I loved the wildiness of
Newfoundland.

A year after my first Wild
Women Expedition, I was still

My waterside cabin was per-
fect – extremely rustic but fabu-
los, with exposed wood walls,
decorated in an Indian theme:
pink silk and bead, a double
platform bed, an eclectic array of reading materials, the air on
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closed my eyes it was as though I
was still on the highway. Some-
where between awake and
dream, I kept seeing telltale
trucks on the road in front of me and trans-
ports barrel-like behind me. I
sat up in my bed, turned on
the light and started to read the book
I’d brought with me. I awoke an
hour or so later, and the light
still

The group pushes off into the frigid waters off Newfoundland's coast.


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Page 2 of 2

I found being on all-women trips less intimidating and more reassuring'

Our guide was amongst the youngest members of our group, and more used to canoe-tripping with teenagers in Algonquin Park. Our group, aged twentiesomething to 58, posed our own special challenges — probably the most obvious being that our skill and fitness levels varied dramatically. And we were also likely more resistant to instructions than a group of teens. Most of us had our own agendas - something we wanted to get out of the trip. I wanted some time alone in the wild and a physical challenge. Overall, for a bunch of "wild women" we actually were remarkably tame.

Not having men along means a lot more freedom in some ways. It's easier to use the "facilities" (there were none). It's easier to strip down and go swimming (but don't think body image isn't still an issue). There's a tiny bit of smugness about not needing men. Okay, more than a tiny bit.

Over the course of the four days, personalities emerged. "Miss Congeniality," for example - a necessary member of every group - pulled more than her weight, smiled constantly and remained consistently pleasant. Bless her! Two were smokers. Several were snorers. A couple were cranky. Some shirked. By the final day, tempers had spiked and one member accused another of not pulling her weight. It struck me that in so many ways, nothing had changed since high school days. I wanted some solitary time. And I trusted that I could still be surrounded by people and feel lonely.

Still, one of the many great things about women's adventure travel — about any organized adventure travel — is that it takes the complicated logistical work out of travelling. Park permits are increasingly difficult to come by — often offered on a lottery system or a first-come-first-serve basis months ahead of time, long before ordinary mortals get around to actually planning trips. Equipment is far too big a deal, too. We were using beautiful, expensive Kevlar canoes. And then there's the packs, paddles, life jackets, tents, towels, and the planning and packing of food, fuel, and supplies. All we had to bring was our personal gear - clothing, rain gear, tolerances, flashlights and sleeping bags. After years of planning family holidays and backwoods trips, I appreciate somebody else doing the planning for me.

On the whole, I found being on all-women trips less intimidating and more reassuring. I would not have booked this trip if it had been co-ed. There's a safety, comfort, and familiarity level with all-women travel that just isn't there with co-ed travel.

The night after I returned from Killarney I was back in my kitchen in Kingston, smiling, missing the eight women and especially my canoe partner, who managed at one point to tip the canoe and dump me in. I was still thinking about being out on the open water, about finally being able to stern a canoe, about swimming in crystal clear lakes, about owls calling during the night, and loons and whippoorwill, about bear darts, and full moons reflecting in dark lakes, and thick mist hanging over the mornings.

I was remembering some more of the campfire made with premium dark chocolate and our unanchored tent sliding down the rock face toward the lake during the night.

I realized how much I cherished being in the open air for a few glorious days in the wild. I love being a wild woman. Shame I waited so long.

Lindy Macauley is a Kingston writer. For more information about Wild Women Expeditions, see http://wildwomenexp.com/

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