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Steep Rock, Manitoba's Mediterranean

BARBARA EDIE

The finest workers in stone are not copper or steel tools, but the gentle touches of air and water at their leisure with a liberal allowance of time. *Henry David Thoreau*

Mother Nature is a fabulous sculptor. And on Lake Manitoba she has chiseled a fine stretch of shoreline in the Interlake's signature rock, limestone. These stunning cliffs, when coupled with crystal waters and intense summer heat invoke the Mediterranean. Welcome to Steep Rock, Manitoba, cottage country that on a sizzling July day can rival the French Riviera (or at least a tiny piece of it).



Lake Manitoba is the third largest lake in the province, but is arguably underrated as prime cottage country. Although the lake is not as high-profile, nor nearly as big, as Lake Winnipeg, Lake Manitoba's coastline, particularly at Steep Rock, is no less pristine.

My first experience with this rim of stone gently rocked my world. As I basked in 34C heat with my friends on a limestone ledge, the crystal lake beneath me glistened like liquid topaz. Nearby, on a sandy alcove tucked in the cliffs, a bikini-clad woman and her male

companion sipped martinis on the beach – it felt far removed from a just another day in Manitoba lake country, and more like a scene from Club Med.

Steep Rock may well be “Manitoba’s Mediterranean” without the arrogant tourists and pricey hotels. This splendid shoreline is located 225 km north of Winnipeg in a quiet community of pebbly beaches, weekend cottagers and only a few permanent lakeside residents.

The limestone rock formations that jut out from the water's edge are 10 metres (40 feet)

high in some places, and the rounded cliffs have been smoothed by lapping waves, eroded by winter ice, and sculpted into ledges, seats and impressive towers of stone. In some areas, the waves have hollowed out the base of the cliffs creating caverns and added mystique. Those with an adventurous spirit can explore the limestone caves for bats.

Several trails wind around the cliffs and behind them, some leading down to the base for views with a different perspective. High above the cliffs or down along the shore, one



Getting there:

- To reach the village of Steep Rock, drive north of Winnipeg on Highway 6 until 5 km north of Grahamdale and then turn west at PR 239 for 15 km.
- To get to the beach, turn off PR 239 at Kyler Road for 3 km, then turn west on Lakeshore Road for 1 km.
- Steep Rock has about 80 seasonal cottagers.
- Steep Rock (village) has about 30 full-time residents.
- Moosehorn is the nearest large town, and also has a grocery store.
- Steep Rock Beach Park Campground is open May to September.
- For more information visit: www.steepprockbeach.ca



can find a perfect place to a walk, hike or picnic in the sun.

Steep Rock is a charming place to kick back and relax among the oak and poplar trees, lush green foliage and dramatic sunsets. The clear shallow water makes for a refreshing place to swim or cool off after a lazy day on the beach. It's also a good location to bird watch or pick Saskatoon berries when in season.

If you're a bird-watcher, sightings here may include belted kingfishers, white pelicans, harebells and sharp-tailed grouse, as well as many hawks, owls and, of course, gulls.

Cottagers, campers and day-trippers can make their own fun or take advantage of the services offered at the Steep Rock Beach Park, an area that encompasses 160 acres of natural parkland. Facilities at the park include the Beachside Cafe restaurant, a small store and an ice cream parlour to help take the edge of the summer heat.

For the active types, there's a sandy beach with a volleyball net, a designated swimming area, and a children's playground. Golfers may enjoy a round at the nine-hole Chip and Putt.

The area can be enjoyed by land or by water, cyclists can ride through the park while those who like to tour by boat or canoe can explore one of the most scenic shoreline routes of Lake Manitoba.

The Steep Rock Beach Park schedules entertainment on long weekends during the summer. And in the evening you may catch one of nature's best shows – the northern lights dancing in the sky.


If you're staying overnight but don't have access to a cottage, there are both serviced and unserviced sites for campers, and the park's showers and laundry facilities make for a more comfortable stay.

The village of Steep Rock, a small, picturesque Manitoba town is just a few kilometres from the cliffs and the beach. At the east end of the



PHOTO: TRAVEL MANITOBA

town, a retired steam engine is a community landmark and an important piece of its history. For many years, the steam engine was used to haul limestone and crushed rock from a nearby quarry, which operated from 1913 until the late 1980s.

Upon arriving at these stunning cliffs that rim a turquoise lake, it is surprising that the area is not over-run with tourists and sightseers. Although photographs of the famous cliffs have appeared in several publications and brochures, Steep Rock remains one of Manitoba's best kept scenic secrets. 



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