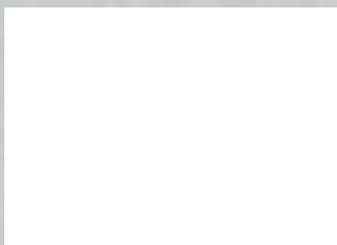




The Magazine of Naturist Living

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FAMILIES SIT AND play alongside the river at Bare Oaks Family Naturist Park.

photos courtesy Stéphane Deschênes

Bare Oaks Family Naturist Park is a growing club and campground just north of Toronto, Ontario. The owner, a past President of the Federation of Canadian Naturists, describes Bare Oaks, then tells in detail how he positions it with respect to one of the major challenges facing private naturist locations.

Stéphane Deschênes

BARE OAKS IS A YEAR-round naturist park near Toronto. It's a place where the entire family may experience traditional naturist values in a modern setting. It is nestled amongst the natural wilderness of the Ontario Greenbelt and Oak Ridges Moraine. Bare Oaks offers day-use memberships and seasonal campsites but also welcomes visitors.

By *traditional values* I recognize that many naturist clubs have lost the philosophy of naturism. To many, it is only an occasional recreational activity and represents simply an alternative to wearing a bathing suit. Gone are the social, psychological, environmental, and moral aspects of the movement. While I don't want to revert to the days of mandatory calisthenics, vegetarianism, and alcohol/tobacco bans, I do want to reintroduce naturism as a philosophy and a way of life. I'm sure

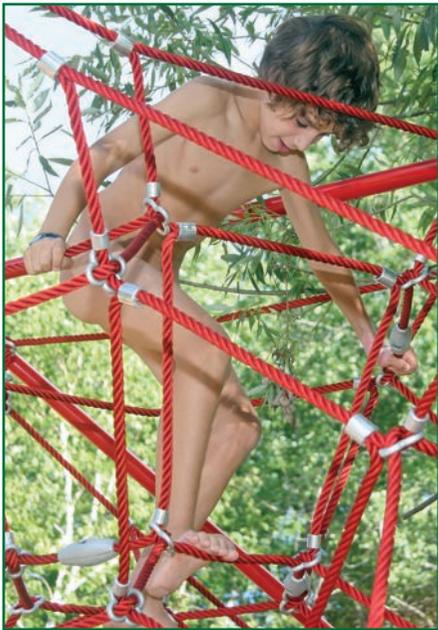
that's not for everyone; but since there are many alternatives out there, I don't feel any need to apologize for it.

The *modern setting* refers to the fact that many clubs are behind the times when it comes to services, facilities, and customer service. Fully serviced campsites, a staffed office open regular hours, a salt-water pool and hot tub, wireless internet service, computerized reservations/point-of-sale system are just a few of the improvements we've made, with many more to come.

Among our 50 acres are 19 acres of conservation land and 13 acres of untouched forest. We enjoy two ponds, one small spring-fed lake, two streams, and a river. On the grounds are over a hundred camping sites, most of which have water and 30 amp electrical hook-up. Several sites have direct sewage connection, while others use our mobile pump-out service.

The clubhouse is open year-round and acts as the centre of our park, where most services are concentrated. Here you may find the park office; six motel rooms; a store for purchase of food, ice, and merchandise; a sunning and socializing deck and lawns; a lounge with sofas, satellite TV, and fireplace; two saunas (one dry and one for steam); an indoor hot tub; a solar-heated outdoor swimming pool; an exercise room; massage, facials, manicures, and pedicures; billiards room; the New Forest hall, where events are held; a laundromat; lockers; and washrooms and showers.

Activities at Bare Oaks are limited only by imagination. Members and visitors alike enjoy our property for relaxing, socializing, swimming, walking, bicycling, volleyball, petanque, horseshoes, children's playground, BBQ, bonfires, dinner/dance, tournaments, and more.



CHILDREN PLAY AMONG the rope gyms.

Bare Oaks' history goes back more than 35 years. Eric and June Jarvis purchased the 50 acres in 1972. The land consisted of a road to a bridge over the river and three cleared areas that were covered with ferns and brambles. The year 1973 was the first for the site as an official nudist club, the Toronto Helios Society. Only eight couples joined; most visitors found the facilities too primitive.

Gradually the Jarvises built up and added facilities. But by 1984, they could no longer operate the club for nudists only. They changed it to a trailer park open to the general public. The property continued to hold non-naturist businesses after they sold it in 1992.

In 2001, Carol and Larry Bean purchased it, to return it to its former status as a nudist club. Unfortunately, by then much of the infrastructure needed significant work. The Beans did that and much more, naming the park The New Forest Family Naturist Resort. Their most visible addition was a 2.5-acre lake.

In 2006, the Beans sold the property to me. I changed the name to Bare Oaks Family Naturist Park. It's now up to me to grow the club and provide for naturism in

the 21st century. One way I'm doing that is by making the grounds nudist, not clothing-optional.

I am often asked why, if naturists are so tolerant of others, at Bare Oaks we do not allow people to remain clothed if they so desire. (When the environment permits, of course!) On the surface, this "call" for tolerance seems very logical. That and an aspiration to be more inclusive have been the drivers of the clothing-optional movement in recent decades.

I admit that I used to believe that naturism should be clothing-optional. I wanted the utopia where nobody cares what I'm wearing or not wearing, and therefore I should not care about anyone's state of dress.

That may be possible some day. But in our world it's impossible, because of constant social pressure which fosters an incredible amount of body shame and obsession with clothing. These messages are deeply embedded in most people since childhood, and reinforced constantly through the way our world is built and the reactions of others. Most people's fear of nudity and their body is so deeply ingrained in their psyche that it has become completely subconscious, instinctual, and emotional.

In my extensive travels I've seen many variations of clothing-optional nudist locales. They don't work, because they don't operate independently of the rest of the world. Naturist places are a subset of society, not a truly independent culture. Since the pressures of the textile world are ever-present in naturism, we must apply an equal, balancing pressure in nudist clubs to maintain nudist values.

Naturism at Bare Oaks cannot be clothing-optional, because we are:

Living a philosophy

NATURISM IS A philosophy of life. It's a way of thinking, acting, and looking at the rest of the world. We are fostering respect for self, for others, and for the environment. Complete nudity is fundamental to those values.

Fighting powerful social conditioning

EVEN THE MOST LONG-time nudist still harbors some discomfort at nudity in



SWIMMING IN the pool.



A FAMILY ENJOYS the nature at Bare Oaks.

certain situations. Whether it's dancing, eating in a restaurant, or sitting in certain positions, many of us still feel that. Because of the incessant outside influences mentioned above, nobody is making a truly free choice when they opt to stay clothed. In this social experiment we call naturism, we must help all people get comfortable with their bodies in all situations.

I have met naturist men who wear shorts when walking because they feel it is more comfortable. Is it a physical comfort or psychological comfort? In a conversation with a naturist woman, she informed me that she felt more feminine with a wrap. How can she view a piece of cloth as more feminine than her own natural form?

When asked why he wraps his towel tightly around his waist, a naturist young man told me that it was the most convenient way to carry it. Is wrapping really easier than throwing it over your shoulder? Is it convenience or rationalization?

In all the examples above, the individuals truly believed what they were saying. I've learned that the unconscious mind is tremendously adept at rationalizing the reasons for the emotional discomforts created by nudity.

Promoting equality

CLOTHING IS USED TO denote social, economic, political, or professional status. We use clothing not only to shield our bodies when we are ashamed, but to elevate ourselves socially. That leads to an endless cycle where people seek to outdo, or at least match, others. By removing our clothes, we are showing respect for others through real modesty.

As stated by Marc-Alain Descamps, the brilliant French social psychologist whose treatises on naturism are the best I've read, "the reciprocal visual bestowal of complete nudity defuses the exhibition-

ist/voyeur relationship." If one person is dressed while others are nude, it is difficult, even for a naturist, to get away completely from voyeurism. Conversely, a nude person in front of dressed people, such as a nude model posing for photographers, comprises some elements of exhibitionism.

Making it easier on new people

WHILE A CLOTHING-optional policy might seem to make it easier on new people, my observation is that it only allows them to delay, indefinitely, the reason for their visit. The more nude people are around, the easier it is for visitors to disrobe for the first time. As has been widely reported, once people finally break their social conditioning in a naturist environment, they usually become comfortable in a short period, sometimes only a few minutes.

Excluding aberrant individuals

IT'S AN UNFORTUNATE reality that some members of our society have developed views of sexuality and the body that are inconsistent with naturist values. Since their intent in visiting a naturist environment is inappropriate, they must be excluded. When forced to be nude, they generally feel vulnerable because naturist ideals are not consistent with their mentality. Then they leave, or their intent becomes noticeable and they're asked to leave.

Keeping company with like-minded people

SO MUCH OF THE WORLD is intolerant of our values that we spend most of our time feeling that they are under assault; so much so that many naturists are afraid to even tell others of their beliefs. A visit to a naturist club should provide a time when we feel surrounded by like-minded people who share our passion. **N**