



# Setting Lake

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“Let us permit nature to have her way. She knows her business much better than we do.”

- Michel de Montaigne

The vast Grass River System in Northern Manitoba offers one of the most spectacular and breathtaking voyages in the country. It stretches a staggering 570 kilometres from west to east vacillating across most of the entire width of Manitoba. In the last third of its magnificent, and often tumultuous journey towards the Atlantic Ocean, the river rests for awhile in the remote and gorgeous Setting Lake.

Setting Lake is rich in history and culture and derives its name from the Cree. There is archeological evidence that suggests Canadian Ab-originales have been paddling the Grass River system for over 5000 years! These historical waterways with all of her lakes, rapids and falls, have been heavily roamed by Native people, European explorers, fur traders, trappers, prospectors and missionaries. Excavation of an old Norwester Site uncovered remains of a trading post dating back to 1792, at Chim-

Grass River PHOTO: MICHELLE GRIMMELT



ney Narrows, just three miles from the cottage area on Setting Lake. The Grass River is one of the few Canadian rivers accessible to people that has no control structures. This allows it to flow uninhibited, which results in fluctuating levels throughout its many lakes, narrows, creeks and falls. “A lake to set nets on” experiences these fluctuations, to a point where most cottagers now enjoy a floating dock, rather than the challenges presented by a standard stationary dock.

Situated just off Highway 6, about 20 kilometres north of Wabowden and 90 kilometres south of the mining community of Thompson, the Setting Lake area has become a northern paradise for cottagers, campers, fishermen and sightseers. The area is extremely romantic in its seclusion, yet close enough to amenities not to be isolated.

The first log cabin sprung up along the magnificent shores of Setting

Lake in the 1960s, as the busy life in the growing city of Thompson gave way to people seeking out a reprieve from the bustle of the mining hub of the north. Northerners have always referred to their cottages as cabins, and one resident still refers to his contemporary and luxurious cottage, as his “cabin by the lake.”

Since then, almost 200 cabins have now been built around the lake, with each one enjoying over 100 feet of private lakefront, and each cottager is rewarded with his or her own unique and spectacular view of the lake. Privacy, peace, and quiet is ensured for the Setting Lake cottagers, as all roads leading into the cottage community from Highway 6 are a dead end. There is no camping along this particular stretch of cottage country, but campgrounds are available in Wabowden and just a few kilometres north of the cottage community, further down Highway 6, at Sasagiu Rapids.

The cottage community of Setting Lake is one of unique circumstances. In the early years of development, all lots were leased from the government, but for a 10-year spell in the 1990s, government opened up the opportunity for cottagers to purchase their own properties. Many did. Since then, the rules changed again, resorting back to leased properties only. During the early years, as Setting Lake was being developed, the provincial government was responsible for supplying necessary services to the community, but as it grew, the Setting Lake Cottage Owners Association approached government with the proposal to care for their own community. This small group of cottagers banded together and were successful in their bid to control and care for their own environment.

The Setting Lake Cottage Owners Association collects a nominal yearly fee from all cottagers, and relies solely on volunteer labour and participation. They have taken charge of their own affairs and in the last 10 years have built their own garbage dump and lagoon at a cost of one third of that which would have been paid, if they had hired out the work. All specifications were detailed by government, and followed by the association. This association has also formed their own fire brigade, and takes care of all roads in and out of their cottage community. With as many as 30 per cent of cottagers making Setting Lake their year-round home, road maintenance is critical, especially during their fantastic northern winters. The success and enjoyment of this spectacular cottage community can be attributed to the community’s collective goal of ensuring that the romantic and pristine lifestyle desired is enjoyed by all who call it home – or “home away from home.”

Though the cottages are tucked in the heart of thick boreal forest, problems with wild animals are rare, however, it is fairly common to spot moose or black bears along this great stretch of northern highway. Setting Lake offers a bounty of fish; namely perch, northern pike and walleye, and cottagers enjoy a catch and a feed simply by casting from their private docks. A wide variety of birds including pelicans, ducks and geese are also plentiful, and the haunting call of the loon is a staple in this beautifully rugged setting.

Though a lot of cottagers relish the season from May to September, many delight in the cottage experience all year long. Winter cottagers enjoy opportunities to snowmobile, ice fish and ski and are provided with a stark contrast to the summer season. Campers are non-existent and the north adopts an esoteric tranquility and intense beauty during the cold winter months.

Though the cottage area of Setting Lake is all privately owned or leased, tourists can also enjoy the area by continuing along Highway 6. Just a few kilometers passed the cottage community, Highway 6 sees the road suddenly drop down and reveal a bridge that spans the restless and exciting Sasagiu Rapids (pronounced Sasgew). There is no stopping on this bridge, but the campground west of the road will bring you to the north side of the bridge, that will allow an opportunity to become intimate with the rushing sounds and relentless water. Sasagiu Rapids



Pisew Falls PHOTO: GORDON WAKELING

derives its name from the Cree, meaning “where fast flowing water runs through slippery rocks”.

Another 10-minute drive further north along Highway 6 will bring you to one of Manitoba’s star attractions, Pisew Falls. A short boardwalk will lead you to the observation platform at the falls. The Rotary Suspension Bridge offers a magnificent experience of the breathtaking falls, as they plummet a staggering 14 metres over rugged Precambrian rock. Another Cree name, “Pisew” meaning “lynx”, is so named because of the persistent hissing sound created by the continuous cascading water. A must-see for anyone visiting the area, and an added bonus for those who are fortunate enough to call this area of Manitoba “home.”

For these northern cottagers, the Setting Lake community is their precious “piece of gold” in Manitoba’s extensive mining area, and offers unparalleled northern beauty and private tranquility in a gorgeous, untamed land. There is no need to remain envious. The attractions and campgrounds along the way invite and encourage everyone to experience the history and the beauty that engulfs this exquisite area of northern Manitoba. ■

## Getting There

To reach Setting Lake, take Highway 6 north from Winnipeg. Turn right at the junction of Highways 39 and 6, towards Thompson. The Setting Lake Cottage Community is about 50 km from this junction.

Wabowden is about 20 km southeast of Setting Lake along Highway 6 and is the nearest small town offering most amenities.

Thompson is 90 km northwest of Setting Lake offering all amenities of a city, including air service.

One of Manitoba’s star attractions, Pisew Falls is just 15 km northwest of Setting Lake, and camping is available at Sasagui Rapids, a few kilometres north of the Setting Lake Cottage Community. Both are along Highway 6.

For more information on the Grass River system visit the Manitoba Conservation website [www.manitobaparks.com](http://www.manitobaparks.com).