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'A world that's Stargazing, off-grid adventure and mysterious 'constructs' at leTerrain in La Pêche

By Hunter Cresswell

The last sounds of civilization at leTerrain fade away into the woods as owner Steve Durand speeds off back to his farmhouse in a utility terrain vehicle, also known as a side-by-side, after dropping one off at a cabin in the heart of nowhere.

Then you hear it — nothing, except mother earth, father sky and the woodland critters that keep guests company.

leTerrain is a lot of things to different people. It's 450 acres of off-grid, undeveloped woods and wetlands in the far corner of La Pêche near Ladysmith, save for four dwellings and up to 20 kilometres of trails depending on the season. To Durand and his 10-year-old husky-malamute mix, Inook, it's home; to bird nerds, hikers, stargazers and shroom-lovers, it's paradise.

Durand, 51, originally from Ottawa, bought the land that became leTerrain five years ago without really knowing what to do with it.

He was living and producing music in Hudson, New York in

2015, when his mum sent him a Low Down classified ad for the 450 acres of land for sale, which piqued his curiosity enough to come visit the property. During his second day of wandering around the land, he came upon a bedrock clearing on a hill and made up his mind.

"I had an epiphany and I said I was buying the place," Durand explained, standing in that same clearing with this reporter.

"I just wanted to experience the massive wilderness. I've been to court like five times in the [U.S.] for trespassing," he said, laughing.

He said the diverse and pristine wilderness spoke to him and he wanted to protect, preserve and share it responsibly.

"If this speaks so loudly to me, it's going to speak to other people," Durand said.

So he started bushwhacking his new property to get to know it and find the inspiration he needed to decide what to do with it, using the off-grid farmhouse built in the 1800s by the original settlers, who were dairy farmers, as a homebase. He found an

old hunting lodge overlooking the headwaters of the northeast corner of the Quyon River watershed and 11 odd rock constructs.

After a year living there — getting to know the terrain, developing a trail system and sprucing up the hunting lodge — he started renting out the lodge, which became Dogstar Cabin, on a short-term basis. Soon after, he built a rustic yurt, called the Magical Wooden Yurt, tucked into the woods several stone throws from his farmhouse and started renting that out too. Just this year, he and a friend put the finishing touches on a cozy cabin named the Stargate 1, with a loft bed just an arm's length below a skylight.

Over the last year word-of-mouth saw his rentals spike and the COVID-19 pandemic has brought people flocking from Montreal, Toronto and Ottawa seeking to get away from it all, literally — good luck getting cell reception anywhere but on one of five peaks.

"They get here and it's like they breathe this huge breath of fresh air. People feel that

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L'inscription est requise avant le 22 septembre à www.centrewakefieldlapeche.ca
Si vous ne pouvez pas vous inscrire en ligne, veuillez appeler le Centre au 819 459-2025 de 9 h à 14 h du lundi au vendredi.

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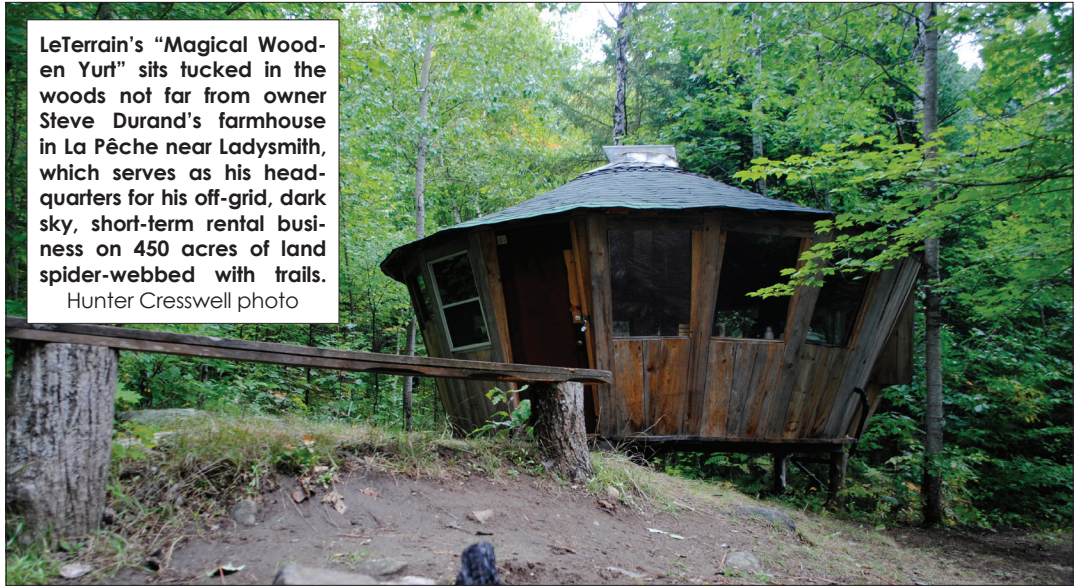
pre-COVID'



LeTerrain owner Steve Durand and his husky-malamute mix, Inook, playing around outside his off-grid farmhouse where they live and greet guests. Hunter Cresswell photo



LeTerrain's Dogstar Cabin overlooks the very northeastern corner of the Guyon River watershed in La Pêche near Ladysmith. Hunter Cresswell photo



LeTerrain's "Magical Wooden Yurt" sits tucked in the woods not far from owner Steve Durand's farmhouse in La Pêche near Ladysmith, which serves as his headquarters for his off-grid, dark sky, short-term rental business on 450 acres of land spider-webbed with trails. Hunter Cresswell photo

they've come to a world that's pre-COVID," Durand said.

People can either hike to their cabin or yurt or Durand can speed them along the trails in his side-by-side or snowmobile, pointing out areas of interest along the way.

One of his favourite conversation pieces are the rock constructs. He knew of two when he bought the land and was told they were rock piles made by the original settlers, but he now doubts that. "Why would they pile the rocks in such peculiar and distinct constructs, and where are the old pastures they would have cleared the rocks from?" he asks. He found a third last year and noticed that they were about equidistant from each other and were offset at the same angle. He noticed the pattern and followed where the next would be and he found another, and another and another — 11 rock constructs in total, each in a different shape and all encircling the clearing where he had his epiphany.

"I don't want to say anything too weird, but there's a lot of coincidences," Durand said.

He said he suspects an ancient people dwelt on leTerrain and, much like he and his guests, used it to gaze at the stars. They've yet to be studied academically, but the Quebec Ministry of Culture is interested in them, he said.

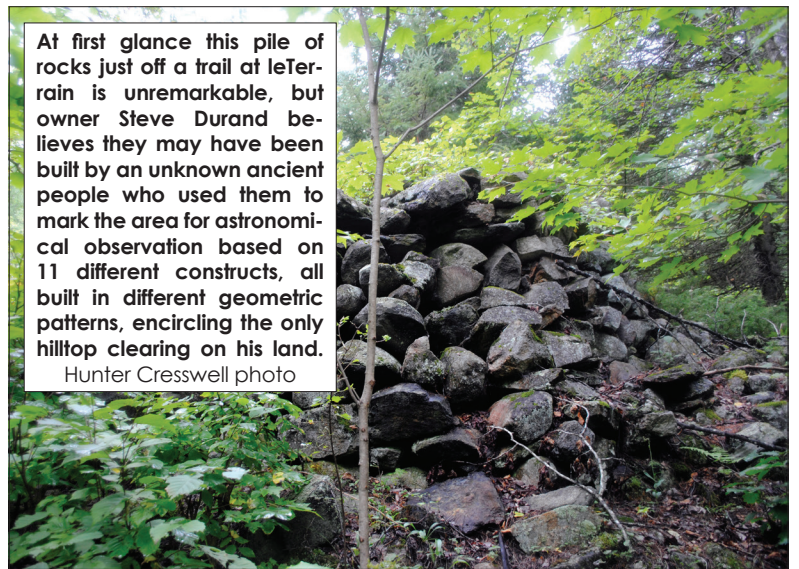
Accommodations range from \$150 to \$250 per night, visit leterrain.land for more information.



LeTerrain's off-grid farmhouse during a starry night. Photo courtesy Steve Durand



Durand stands at the top of the steps leading up to his short-term rental business' newest addition, the "Stargate 1" cabin, which people can rent for an off-grid, dark sky, nature-heavy getaway. Hunter Cresswell photo



At first glance this pile of rocks just off a trail at leTerrain is unremarkable, but owner Steve Durand believes they may have been built by an unknown ancient people who used them to mark the area for astronomical observation based on 11 different constructs, all built in different geometric patterns, encircling the only hilltop clearing on his land. Hunter Cresswell photo

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