



Hiking the *Viking Trail*

Newfoundland has always had two valuable assets—the charm of its people and its pristine scenery

by Dale Dunlop & Alison Scott

We came to hike Gros Morne National Park and to visit L'Anse aux Meadows National Historic Site—both UNESCO World Heritage Sites. We came to take in what we expected to be a very scenic drive from Gros Morne to Port aux Choix National Historic Site and then to the Grenfell Historic Properties in St. Anthony.

That was the plan, but in reality, we experienced so much more. Along the way, we discovered a fascinating coastline dotted with vibrant small communities and a stunning number of tiny restaurants that have made it into Anne Hardy's *Where to Eat in Canada*. Needless to say, the seafood was superb everywhere we went.

The number of hiking trails and the range of terrain were equally, or perhaps even more, impressive than the food. Our experience with accommodations was also very satisfying, with some refreshingly unusual options available—everything from a luxury resort, to "Uncle Steve's Place" (one of several heritage guest houses available for rent in Woody Point) to a quaint island inn.

From Deer Lake airport, we headed to Gros Morne National Park, which is divided into north and south sections by Bonne Bay. In keeping with the Viking theme, Bonne Bay is actually a true fjord that extends deep into the western coast. The southern section of the park contains the geological Tablelands that are the principal reason for the designation as a World Heritage Site; it also contains three great hiking trails and several interesting communities.

The Gros Morne Discovery Centre in Woody Point is the perfect place to start your tour. From the second floor, visitors have a panoramic view of Bonne Bay and Gros Morne Mountain. For an even better vista, the Lookout Trail, which begins at the Discovery Centre, offers a two-kilometre hike up above the tree line, with spectacular views of the Tablelands and Gros Morne. The exertion of the climb is worth it.

On our visit, we picked up a complimentary GPS unit at the Centre, which featured an audio-visual tour of the Tablelands trail. We were advised that we would meet our guide, Fred, at the Tablelands parking

ot, but we did not find anyone named Fred at the parking lot. Instead, the GPS unit clanged like an old school bell, and a guy named "Fred" appeared on the screen. He then proceeded to tell us the rare geological history of the Tablelands, and explained why this area achieved its UNESCO designation. He also pointed out interesting plants, rocks and other features along the trail—just as a real guide would.

The hike is a two-kilometre gentle walk into a canyon, which becomes increasingly unearthly as you proceed—the Tablelands terrain bears an uncanny similarity to footage beamed back to earth by the Mars Rover.

It's only a short distance to Trout River and the renowned Seaside Restaurant, where just about every variety of Newfoundland seafood

side of the plateau, the views are, quite literally, breathtaking. Hundreds of metres below lies Ten Mile Pond, with towering waterfalls plunging into it from the surrounding cliffs—a scene right out of *The Lost World*.

Halfway up the peninsula, at Port aux Choix National Historic Site, we found an impressive interpretation centre that guided us through the geologic, floral and archeological history of this unique area, which dates from Paleolithic period. From the interpretation centre, the Dorset Trail (named for an early indigenous people) circumnavigates the point, and Phillip's Garden Trail takes you through a natural "garden" that has some plants that are not found anywhere else in the world. At the tip of the point is the pretty Point Riche lighthouse.



Previous page: the dramatic scenery at Gros Morne National Park, NL, is a big draw for hikers. Clockwise, from left: the James Callaghan Trail; a carnivorous Pitcher plant waiting for its next meal of insects; Bonnie Blake-Hynes as Thora, in a recreation of a Viking settlers' sod home at L'Anse aux Meadows; a moment of rest on Gros Morne Mountain.

s available, including cod tongues, cod cheeks, capelin, sea catfish and turbot. The pan-fried codfish burgers were exquisite, and provided the fuel we needed to walk a portion of the Green Gardens trail, which descended steeply to sea stacks and towering cliffs on the seashore.

Returning to the well-preserved waterfront village of Woody Point for the night, our accommodation was one of a number of what had been, until recently, family homes (grosmorne.com/victorianmanor). These accommodations are pleasant, with personal touches like family photos that make visitors feel rather like they are house-sitting for a relative.

Up Gros Morne Mountain

After a mildly vigorous ascent through the forest and over boardwalk-covered marshes, we reached the point of no return—the gully. Here, hikers must decide whether they are going up or not, because once they have started to climb this very steep gully, it is not a viable option to turn back. Signage warns not to underestimate this mountain. At best, it will be four or five hours back to this spot.

The gully was a challenge, but once above the tree line, the views become increasingly stunning. The Long Range Mountains, the Tablelands and Lookout Hills are all below. At the top lies a barren tundra plateau that towers over the landscape in every direction. On the north

At the top is L'Anse aux Meadows, first inhabited by the Vikings almost 1,000 years ago and the only authenticated Viking settlement in North America. The hardship of the crossing and life on this barren spot comes alive in the interpretive centre and in the replica of the village.

From here, travellers during the high season can stay at the Quirpon Lighthouse Inn, on Quirpon Island (linkumtours.com), accessible only by ferry. It is a great place to watch whales, and, in June and July, to view the icebergs coming down "Iceberg Alley" from the Labrador Sea to the Gulf of St Lawrence—all from the comfort of your room.

After a night in St. Anthony, we made a short side-trip to Goose Cove, and were again treated to spectacular vistas of craggy lichen-covered cliffs and crashing surf. This tiny village also offered easily accessible hiking routes along the coast, and great photo opportunities.

From St. Anthony, it was a short drive to Fishing Point, where the Viking Trail ends. We found no fewer than four interesting trails here, including the Santana trail.

Newfoundland has always had two valuable assets—the warmth and charm of its people and its wild and pristine scenery. For those interested in a unique outdoor vacation, western Newfoundland is a delight.

Hiking in Gros Morne: www.pc.gc.ca/pn-np/nl/grosmorne/activ/randomnee-hiking.aspx