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The “Picture Province”

Part 1

New Brunswick is a magical place!

By Dale Dunlop

As a kid, I always remembered New Brunswick as a place we drove through on the way to and from my parent’s relatives in Nova Scotia; but there were one thing about New Brunswick that I never forgot – it had magical places. There was a place where cars were mysteriously pulled uphill, there were waterfalls that ran one way and then the other, seashores that became seafloors when the tide changed, and rivers that ran upstream. Now, more years later than I care to admit, my wife Alison, whose father was from New Brunswick, and I were going to revisit those mysterious places of childhood in a week long RV trip to the “Picture Province”.

Our trip began at Moncton RV where we picked up a Class C motorhome courtesy of Tourism New Brunswick. It was a sweltering last day of August and people were making the most of it at Magnetic Hill Theme Park (www.magnetichill.com) which

features the world famous Magnetic Hill, Magic Mountain Waterpark, Wharf Village and Magnetic Hill Zoo. Our first stop was at the top of a fairly sharp incline where we were told to drive down the hill to a white post, stop, and then we would roll back up again. Frankly, that seemed preposterous, but with Alison taking pictures, I drove as advised, and sure enough at what seemed like the bottom of the hill the RV started rolling backwards up the hill at a pretty alarming pace. It was all I could do not to slam on the brakes, but I resisted and about 30 seconds later was back at the top.

Of course, Magnetic Hill is really an optical illusion, but all the same, it is an incredible experience made even more so by being in an RV. It might sound hokey, but it’s not.

Next, we headed for the zoo, but couldn’t help being envious of the many people that were beating the heat right next door at Magic

Mountain, just sitting in inner tubes and floating gently around the park. The more daring were trying out the waterslides, including one that seemed nearly vertical. You could hear their screams all the way to the zoo.

We had last visited Magnetic Hill Zoo (www.moncton.ca/zoo/) over twenty years ago with two small children. On this day, it seemed like at least half the visitors were still little kids, who were constantly giggling at the antics of the otters, monkeys and other animal entertainers. While not a large zoo in terms of size or number of species, Magnetic Hill does a very good job of displaying what it does have. The enclosures are large and modern, and the animals generally appeared healthy and clean. Undoubtedly, the highlights of the zoo are the large cats. Two jaguars of the black colour morph were incredibly powerful looking as was the largest cougar I have ever seen, dead



or alive. However, the real stars are Amara and Azizi, a male and female lion pair that are housed in an award winning display that lets the visitors look down on the animals without intervening bars or fencing. Despite the heat, the two lions were quite 'frisky' shall we say, much to the delight of some, and consternation of others. Construction is under way to build a similar enclosure for two Amur tigers, and it should be open for 2014.

By now, we were ready to head to Camper's City, our first night's destination, on the outskirts of Moncton. However, on leaving Magnetic Hill, we noticed a sign for a winery of the same name just down the road. Magnetic Hill Winery (www.magnetichillwinery.com) has a terrific location overlooking the theme park, casino and downtown Moncton. We noticed a large RV parked in the overflow parking lot.

The winery is housed in the lower part of an elegant wooden building dating from 1867 that was completely restored by Jeff and Janet Everett, the owners. On entering the tasting room and gift shop, we saw that about a dozen people were in the middle of a tasting conducted by, as we found out later, the owners' son. Instead of making us wait until it was over, another employee gave

us a private tour and tasting, and tasty it was. Although the winery grows grapes, the main ingredient in most of their wines is other types of fruits. I must admit that Alison and I were sceptics on hearing this, but our scepticism disappeared upon tasting the wines, which were not overly sweet or too fruity. The one wine that was deliberately designed

to have fruitiness could rightfully have been named Apple Pie in a Bottle. Suffice to say we left with several different bottles to go with the smoked Gouda we also purchased.

We also found out about the RV we saw parked outside. It belonged to the Everetts who have enrolled their winery in the Harvest Hosts

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programme (www.HarvestHosts.com), which is a North American collection of wineries and farms that welcome RVers to stay on their properties at no charge.

After checking in to Camper's City, it was time to visit downtown Moncton for a bite to eat and hopefully see the tidal bore that sweeps up the Petitcodiac River twice a day. Moncton has done a very good job of revitalizing its downtown core with an attractive City Hall, lots of places to stay and eat, and the opening up of Tidal Bore Park on the riverfront. Our first choice to eat was the Tide and Boar gastropub, but it was booked for a wedding so we went to the Pump House, which is also a pub featuring ales and lagers made on site. Pump House products have a large following and are sold across the Maritimes. The I.P.A. was a perfect complement to a bowl of nicely spiced chilli. If pubs, even upscale ones are not your thing, we have enjoyed great meals in the past at Pastalli and Catch 22 lobster bar. All the restaurants are located a short walk from plentiful parking at Tidal Bore Park.

After dinner, we strolled over to the park where the time for the tidal bore's appearance was posted – 7:27. A tidal bore is a natural phenomenon that occurs when a rising tide forces water into an increasing constricted area until it literally forms into a rushing wave that drives its way upriver. Tidal bores are found worldwide, but some of the largest are found in the upper Bay of Fundy region. The Petitcodiac was famous for its tidal bore until a dam constructed in the 1960's caused the river to silt up and reduce it to a trickle. In 2010, the dam was removed and the bore has been getting stronger every year. In fact, only a month or so before our visit, two American surfers travelled a world record 29 kilometres riding



Keillor House, Dorchester

the bore. So we were psyched to see this great natural event, as were the several dozen other people waiting in the viewing area overlooking the river.

Well, Mother Nature has a way of doing her own thing, and on this evening, the tidal bore was a no-show. Apparently, it does occasionally happen depending on the phases of the moon, barometric pressure, etc. However, just because it made a rare non-appearance for us does not mean it should not be on every visitor's must see list. Chances are you will have more luck than we did.

The next day we set out early as we had a big agenda. The Fundy Biosphere (fundy-biosphere.ca/en/) is one of 531 unique landscapes in the world recognized by UNESCO as worth preserving, and certainly worth visiting. The primary focus of our trip was the 530,000 hectares of the biosphere that stretch from the Tantramar marshes at the Nova Scotia border to the village of St. Martin's not far from Saint John. Today, we were going to make a circular journey that would include the uppermost reaches of the Bay of Fundy, and then cross over to the Northumberland Strait and the town of Shediac.

We left Moncton via the pros-



Semipalmated Sandpiper

perous community of Dieppe, and began following the Fundy Coastal Trail as it wound its way beside the Petitcodiac to the head of the bay. The scenery was very pastoral, with river and salt marsh on one side, and rolling green hills on the other, many of which were topped by large white churches. The one exception was the little town of Dorchester where a large penitentiary has crowned the hill for more than a hundred years. However, offsetting the bleak architecture of the prison are a number of wonderfully built stone houses including Keillor House (www.keillorhousemuseum.com), dating

from 1813, and the even older Bell Inn, which has an excellent restaurant. Also worth noting was the statue of a semipalmated sandpiper on the grounds of the town hall. It was this little bird that caused us to turn away from the Fundy Coastal Trail and head down Route 935 towards the mouth of Shepody Bay.

The semipalmated sandpiper is an amazing bird. Virtually every single one of the entire species comes to the upper reaches of the Bay of Fundy from late July to early September to fatten up on tiny mud shrimp before making a non-stop 72-hour flight to South America. When the tide is high and the mudflats not much exposed, there may be hundreds of thousands of these birds in a tiny area between shore and sea. The sight of that many birds in flight draws birders from around the world to the Fundy region. At Johnson's Mills, we came down a steep



Confederation Bridge

hill, and there before our eyes were the mudflats stretching for miles, and dotted everywhere with birds. A few miles further on, we came to an interpretive centre run by the Nature Conservancy where there was a viewing platform and guides with spotting scopes to help us identify the birds. There are many more species than just the semipalmated

sandpiper here. On this day, there were a number of endangered red knots clearly visible along with the thousands of sandpipers. A number of truculent gulls seemed to take pleasure in putting the birds to flight by buzzing them repeatedly.

We reluctantly parted with the spotting scopes and continued down the road, which by now was



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World's largest lobster, Shediac



gravelled, but quite passable. Our destination was the pretty little town of Sackville, home to what MacLean's magazine consistently rates as Canada's top liberal arts university, Mount Allison. It was time for lunch and there were multiple choices on Bridge Street. We chose Pickles, which turned out to be a good decision. For \$5.85 I had the open-faced Reuben, while Alison had the special, a pulled pork sandwich and a large bowl of excellent tomato-basil soup for \$8.50. Nothing on the menu exceeded \$12.00. Feeling refreshed, we had to decide which of Sackville's many attractions we should visit.

Founded in 1762, Sackville is one of Canada's oldest and most historic towns. Not surprisingly, there are numerous museums, historic buildings, and art galleries to visit. There are also the performing arts and artisan's shops usually associated with small university towns. However, we chose to stick to the Fundy Biosphere plan and visited Sackville Waterfowl Park (sackville.com/visit/attractions/waterfowl/) which, in a short period of time, has probably become the town's premiere attraction.

Sackville sits on the edge of the vast Tantramar marshes that mark the transition from the Cumberland Basin mudflats to salt marsh, and

eventually dry land. The marshes have always been a breeding ground for many species of waterfowl, including many rarities. The Sackville Waterfowl Park sits on the edge of the historic part of town, and can be accessed from a number of points. We chose the information centre just off the Trans-Canada as it had an interpretive centre, maps and a really good gift store featuring local arts and crafts. It took just under an hour to complete the circular route to and from the centre, much of which is on a raised boardwalk that traverses the marsh so that there are birds on all sides, including overhead.

Leaving Sackville, we crossed the Tantramar marshes almost to the Nova Scotia border, where we followed the signs to the Confederation Bridge to Prince Edward Island. At the very last exit before the bridge, we turned into the Cape Jourimain Nature Centre (www.capejourimain.ca). Here, we found yet another excellent interpretive centre, hiking trails to a sadly neglected lighthouse, and the real reason for stopping here – fantastic views of the Confederation Bridge. This bridge is one of the architectural and engineering marvels of Canada. Its sweeping curves and graceful arches heading into the seemingly unending Northumberland Strait are irresistible to photo-

graph, and there is no better place to do that than Cape Jourimain.

From here, we took Route 946 to Route 15 into the town of Shediac, which was our final destination for the day. Shediac calls itself the lobster capital of the world, and backs it up with a statue of the world's largest lobster just outside the Tourist Bureau. There are endless numbers of restaurants offering the tasty crustacean at prices far less than what you would pay in the big city. It also has world famous Parlee Beach, which attracts over a million visitors a year to its wide sandy shores, where the salt water is warmer than anywhere else in Canada. The combination of great food and a great beach has made Shediac one of the top tourist towns in Atlantic Canada.

The Shediac area is also home to more campgrounds and RV parks than anywhere we had ever visited. We chose Ocean Surf (www.oceansurf.ca) as it was the closest to Parlee Beach, and were not disappointed. Our lot had a view of the ocean over salt marshes, and there was a breeze blowing in from offshore. It had been a busy day, and we had done a lot of walking, so it was an early night.

Next morning, we returned to Moncton, crossed the Petitcodiac, and drove up the opposite side with views of downtown Moncton replaced by the rolling hills of the Memramcook valley. Our first stop was the New Brunswick Railway Museum (www.nbrm.ca) in the town of Hillsborough. As a former brakeman and operator, I never miss an opportunity to visit a railway museum. This museum has a very good collection of railway paraphernalia, including quite a number of rail cars and engines. The highlights include a gorgeous first class Grand Trunk passenger car, a 1700 series diesel, and a well-preserved 4-6-0 steam engine. The visit was made all the

more memorable by the stories of a couple of retired CN employees who accompanied us as we toured the premises.

In our next foray into New Brunswick history, we found the unlikely but fascinating duo of a Canadian Prime Minister and a murderer as the star attractions. The Albert County Museum (www.albertcountymuseum.ca), located in Hopewell Cape, was easily one of the finest regional museums we have visited anywhere. The exhibits are housed in original buildings of the county shire town, the tax and records office, courthouse, community hall and gaol. An exhibition hall is a recent addition. The courthouse is a most impressive building architecturally. From the outside, it is a fine looking rectangular building, but inside the courtroom itself is octagonal shaped with a beautiful rose and pink tin ceiling with gold accents. We learned that it was designed by a local man, Watson Reid, who later, with his brother, went on to found one of the best-known American architecture firms, Reid and Reid of San Francisco. The courthouse is no longer in use as a place for trials, but is very popular for weddings. There had been one the day before our visit, and the remnants of the reception in the Community Hall were still being removed.

The stories of the Prime Minister, R.B. Bennett and the alleged axe murderer, Tom Collins, have nothing in common, but provide intriguing foundations for exploration into the life and times of Albert County. R. B. Bennett was a native of Hopewell Cape, and went on to become the only Prime Minister from New Brunswick. He had the misfortune to take office just as the Great Depression got underway, and many blamed him for suffering that ensued. However, he was a progressive politician who was responsible for establishing two iconic Canadian institutions – the Bank of Canada and The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. The story of his life is told in a series of vignettes featuring actor Bill Carr, who bears a striking resemblance to Bennett, and a twenty-minute video.

It always amazes me the different perspectives Canadians and Americans take on their past leaders. While Americans venerate their presidents, we Canadians seem to take a ho-hum attitude. We were told that when the museum applied for federal monies to erect a statue of Bennett, they were refused, but managed to get around the refusal by erecting a 'monument' instead. So there is a memorial at the museum's entrance, but not a statue.

As far as Tom Collins goes, he was the only person ever hung in Albert County, and many think he was an innocent man. His story is told at the Albert County Gaol, which has a debtor's prison, a dungeon for real criminals, and a holding cell for those in between. The

walls of the cells are covered with some remarkable drawings and graffiti left by the prisoners who occupied the cells. Of the best, some were quite poetic, obviously very literate, and others excellent artists. Looking at these walls brought the past to life in a way no guide-book could.

By far the most gruesome exhibit is the actual axe that was used to stave in the head of poor Mary Stephens, along with two doors that the murderer pounded through with the same axe. It definitely gave us the creeps, and brought to mind Jack Nicholson in *The Shining*. The story of the murder and three trials that followed, is told by actors recreating the roles of witness, police detective, judge and reporter. We found it riveting entertainment.

By now, we had spent several hours at the museum and were pretty hungry. Donald Alward, the curator of the museum, suggested we try Ty's Fry's just up the road, which we did. It was a hole in the wall take out that made its own fries. The chilli cheese fries were great, as was the lobster roll that Alison ordered.

Next up was probably the most famous natural landmark on the Fundy shore – Hopewell Rocks (www.thehopewellrocks.ca). These are a series of rock formations that have been carved out of the soft conglomerate

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that makes up most of the shoreline in this area. What makes them doubly fascinating is that when the tide is out, you can walk around and through them on the seafloor, and when it is in, you can kayak between them. The tide rises and falls up to fifty feet here twice a day.

We had made arrangements for a guided tour, and it turned out that our guide, Kevin Snair, grew up only a few miles from where we live in Nova Scotia. We had a number of mutual acquaintances – talk about a small world! Kevin gave us a brief rundown of how the rock formations came to be, and then we headed for the staircase that leads down to the ocean floor where we walked around formations such as The Dinosaur, The Elephant, The Sentinel, The Mother-in-Law and many others. We were properly impressed by

how many natural arches there were, including one with two holes through it called the Double Eye of the Needle. After hearing a screech, we looked up to see a pair of peregrine falcons soaring along the edge of the rocks. Kevin pointed out their nest on a ledge high above the beach.

Apparently, most visitors return to the top by climbing back up the stairs, something we weren't particularly looking forward to, but Kevin led us over a short stretch of some pretty slippery and sometimes unstable rocks, and back to easy walking that led to the huge mudflats of Demoiselle Beach. In the distance, he pointed out Grindstone Island, which was eleven kilometres away, but was actually connected to the mainland at low tide. From Demoiselle Beach, there was a gentle path that led back

to the main entrance. Hopewell Rocks is the biggest tourist attraction in New Brunswick, and after our visit, we knew why.

We spent the night at Ponderosa Pines (www.ponderosapines.ca), which has a lovely location on a point between two small lakes. Our campsite had a view of the backside of Hopewell Rocks, and there was an old Acadian dyke nearby that we hiked almost as far as Demoiselle Beach. On the recommendation of Donald, we headed to Broadleaf Guest Ranch (www.broadleafranch.com) in Hopewell Hill for a traditional supper in a western setting. The lobster encrusted haddock Alison ordered was excellent.

Did we return to kayak at Hopewell Rocks in the morning? Our journey continues in the March/April issue of *RV gazette*. **RV**

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