



travel log

Iris Sanderson Jones
contributing travel editor

Shovelful of memories from Cape Breton pits

Miles McCabe is a part of the people experience, a sturdy smile-eyed man who worked 47 years in the coal mines of Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia.

McCabe started in the mines at age 13 and retired in 1969. Nowadays, he is one of many retired miners who work as tour guides in the Glace Bay Miners Museum, a few miles from Sydney, Nova Scotia. The red brick museum fronted by an old mine wheel and two old coal carts, is adjacent to a restored village of gray board houses and an excellent museum restaurant.

Guides like McCabe take you through the museum exhibits for 50 cents or on a \$2 tour of a mine built specifically for this purpose. This was never a working mine, but it was built by real miners to emulate one. They dug out several thousand tons of coal to re-create an authentic mine setting.

MEN LIKE MILES know exactly what they are talking about when they lead you level by level down a 6-foot-high seam of coal that extends at least 20 miles under the sea.

"My father started in the mines in England at age nine," Miles said. "In England he worked a seam that was only 18 inches high, so he always worked lying down. Here he worked on a six-foot seam, so he could stand up."

McCabe started at a beginner's job: opening the doors underground to let the horsedrawn coal carts pass through.

"On a six-foot seam we use horses and on a three-foot seam, we use ponies," he said. "They spent their lives underground, sometimes six miles down the shaft from the surface."

The horses were fed and shod and lived underground in their own movable stables. As the seam was worked further underground, the horses and their stables were moved to new locations.

THEY NEVER saw the light of day until 1942, when miners were given vacations for the first time. Those were war years. A miner's job was frozen because he was an essential worker in the war effort, but he finally got a week's vacation.

The horses were brought to the surface and were blinded by the light for the first half-hour. Then they began to go crazy with pleasure, running around the fields in their new-found environment. They didn't want to go below when the time came. They had to be blindfolded and led into the shaft and were seldom let out again.

They don't use horses in mines anymore. The museum mine shows you an old fashioned method replaced now by new technology. It is, however, one of the many fascinating things to do on Cape Breton Island, a land beloved by the people who live there and little-known by the rest of the world. One of the highlights of the Miners Museum is a Tuesday night concert by the singing miners called the Men of the Deep.

The experience had a particular attraction for me because of men like Miles McCabe who work there.

Ridin' the rails to Nova Scotia

By IRIS SANDERSON JONES

I have seen many elegant old, but deserted, railway stations in the U.S., their carved marble ceilings staring down at abandoned rooms sideways. It is a long time since I have been in a modern, busy, terminal integrated into the downtown life of a city, as Gare Central is in Montreal.

This is no 12th Street location. Signs lead you down new glassed-in walkways to the Queen Elizabeth, the Bonaventure, and other hotels, and to Place Ville Marie. Place Ville Marie was one of the most elegant. It is a perfect way to spend an afternoon while waiting to board the train to Nova Scotia.

A sunny fall afternoon can easily lead you out to a terraced cafe or to an unbrellaed sidewalk drinking spot on the street. Pigeons flutter in the sky between the shops, where French is heard everywhere and sale signs read "Reduction."

Back at the train station, where I haul my suitcase out of a locker, I must line up at the sleeping car desk to get an assignment for a lower berth. The dining car serves dinner at 6:30 and 7:45 p.m.; I reserve for the late sitting.

ViaRail continues the passenger rail service once offered by Canadian National and Canadian Pacific railways in a new system that has brought shiny new equipment to many Canadian railway lines.

THE TRAIN FOR Nova Scotia begins its familiar squealing crawl out of the rail yards at 6:30 p.m. Soon we are crossing the rough blurred surface of the St. Lawrence River, with the bridge making shaped lines across the water in either direction. We will change trains at Truro, Nova Scotia, tomorrow afternoon and get into Sydney, Nova Scotia, at 9 p.m. later that night.

A voice begins to move down the aisle. "First call to dinner. First call to dinner." That's the first sitting.

The train follows the suburbs and then the rich, green farmland out of Montreal going east. An hour later, another voice calls out in French. She is calling the second sitting for dinner and I nearly miss it.

In the dining car, the maitre d' seats me at a table with a mother and child, and leaves both the menu and an order form which we must fill it out. I order roast pork, apple sauce, carrots and salad with hot rolls and small bottle of red wine.

The service is friendly and good, the food and ambience are nice. The prices are reasonable. I cannot help remembering childhood days when trains had elegant, expensive dining rooms and silver finger bowls.

Diners drift into the parlor car for after-dinner drinks and head to bed early. By 9:30 p.m. the berths are made up and the passengers in the sleeping cars are lined with blue curtains that button shut for privacy. It's not easy to undress in a berth, but there is a lineup for the tiny washrooms.

The berth is wide enough to sleep comfortably, but the train lurches and sways on this run because the old track hasn't been replaced. I watch the lights shining outside the speeding window until I fall asleep. At the first light of dawn, the early morning scenery is of back-lit trees against a dawn sky and the sun rising over woodlands. I have coffee and breakfast in the snack bar towards the front of the train. It serves much the same food as you'd find in the dining room, but it's cheaper.

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Coffee shops on trains always attract crowds, and this one on the train to Nova Scotia was no exception.

THE FIRST REAL sight of the Maritimes is at St. John, New Brunswick. Quick scenes: purple and yellow wildflowers against green, rocky hills; high, narrow wooden houses painted blue and yellow against the morning sky; and the unexpected sight of misted industrial plants hovering over waterways where the pollution floats like ice floes.

At the tiny modern station where we get out to stretch our legs, the train is a blue and yellow stripe against a hill topped with old churches, smokestacks, and high wooden buildings. A freighter is parked in the sea at the end of the street.

By now, I begin to recognize people: the man who made a row in the ticket line yesterday; the Via employee who handled him; the woman and child in matching red jackets, who last night asked the way to the dining car; the waiter who watched me stumble and fall in the snack car and now asks about my health.

Three St. John papers are being taken to the club car. I get one and promise to return it.

WE CHANGE trains at Truro at 2:15 p.m., moving to smaller, older coach cars, while the Montreal train continues to Halifax. As we track towards Sydney, the Nova Scotia scenery grows greener.

Lake and sea water scenes begin to appear in small doses. By the time we approach Cape Breton Island, it begins to look like a Nova Scotia picture book. Boats are pulled up on rocky, misted shores; colored clapboard houses rise mistily out of low hills.

At North Sydney, the last stop before the city of Sydney, passengers for Newfoundland get off to take the overnight boat to Port au Basque.

Why would anybody spend more than 24 hours going from Montreal to Sydney when you could fly in a few hours? If you are a train person, it's a wonderful way to relax and to plug into the life of the people who travel with you and those whose land you are crossing along the way.

tripping

Holed up in Lake Orion

Q: What's 8 feet in diameter, with a 6-foot center, weighs more than 200 pounds and hangs around with the Hills Brothers?

Let's not see the same hands now?
Time's up.

A: The dunker provided by Waltman's Bakery to the sixth annual Jaycee and Jaycette Doughnut Festival in Lake Orion Friday-Sunday.

Highlights include crafts booths, petting zoo, hay rides, old time movies, square dances and, whether you dunk or not, bees, hives, free bands, puppet shows and a light and sound show.

The festival is at Keatinge Antique Village on Joslyn Road in Orion Township and runs 5 p.m. to 1 a.m. Friday, 10 a.m. to 1 a.m. Saturday and 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Sunday.

The big doughnut, by the way, will be cut by the king and queen of the cakes at 5 p.m. Sunday. For more information, call 693-1230 or 553-8110.

● POLKAS ET AL

Step together, step, hop are the basics to a mildly successful polka, depending on a couple's agility and the rhythm and beat from the band.

Practice this week may net 10 top contestants \$400 in prizes at the 12th annual Michigan Oktoberfest Polka Contest in Fowlerville as part of an encounter with the hops Sept. 18-21.

Couples will be judged on style, originality and costume. The preliminaries will be from 8-10 p.m. that Thursday with the finals from 4-6 p.m. Sept. 21. Registration is free. To enter or for festival information, call Steve Chernoby at 1-517-223-3474 by Sept. 17.

There will be movies, steam engines, clowns and, of course, the beer festival in the old country tradition. Admission is \$2.50 in advance, \$3 general. Group rates available.

For information, write to the Michigan Oktoberfest, Box 164, Howell 48843.

● MILLING ABOUT

The 1980 Mill Valley Festival is on tap for Sept.

20 and 21 in Milford, sponsored by that city's Historical Society and the Huron Valley Arts Council.

Home tours, an arts festival, entertainment and craft demonstrations will happen during the two-day event. For times, places and prices, call 694-0215 or 655-3008.

● COLORFUL

The Southeast Travel and Tourist Association of Southeast Michigan has available its "Autumn Color Tours" guide for perusal by Michiganders and out-of-state traveling types taking in the tones of the trees this fall.

Thirteen tours are described within the brochure that includes year-round area attraction and seasonal space whereabouts, like cider mills, you-pick-'em orchards, and historical sites.

For a free copy, write: "Autumn Color Tours in Southeast Michigan," Travel and Tourist Association of Southeast Michigan, American Center Building, Suite 350, 27777 Franklin Road, Southfield 48034.

● MORE COLOR

Connecticut, like its counterpart pretty here, has published a tour guide to autumn. Carrying things a step further, the brochure takes the tourist into wintertime activities with a round-up of downhill and cross-country ski areas, private and public campgrounds and hay and sleigh rides.

For a free copy, write: "Fall and Winter in Connecticut," Travel, Connecticut Department of Economic Development, 210 Washington St., Hartford, Conn. 06106; or call 203-556-3948.

● GRANTED

The Detroit Historical Society received a \$150,000 challenge grant from the Kresge Foundation to assist in the restoration of the Commander's Residence at the Fort Wayne Military Museum.

To qualify for the money, the DHS must raise by Feb. 15, 1981, the balance necessary to restore the house to its original look. Entire cost of the project is \$318,000.

An Evening in Hawaii Travel Party

Thursday September 11, 1980 7:30 - 9 pm

Guest Speaker

Color Film Door Prizes

Sheraton Southfield Hotel

17017 West Nine Mile Road
located east of Southfield Rd.

Observer & Eccentric Third Annual

Deluxe Four Island

Hawaiian Tour

Nov. 1 - 16, 1980

\$1358

Per person based on double occupancy

No Reservations Necessary

Call our Travel Desk at 591-2300 Ext. 211

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