

travel

Nova Scotia

Scotland meets the 20th century

By Iris Sanderson Jones
special writer

THEY CAME to Nova Scotia by sea. John and Sebastian Cabot came to explore the northern tip of land in 1497. The French fur traders came to build settlements, and the Jamestown colonists came to burn them down.

French soldiers built Fortress Louisbourg here after they lost the rest of the New World to the British. The British came to blow up the fortress and to expel the Acadians immortalized in Longfellow's story of Evangeline.

Finally, the Scottish settlers came, because the highlands of Cape Breton Island reminded them of the Highlands of home. The Scots gave this land its name — Nova Scotia, or New Scotland — and they brought the motto that is still the official welcoming sign for visitors: "Ciad Mile Pailte," meaning One Hundred Thousand Welcomes.

Nowadays, the fishing boats sail in and out of the 4,625 miles of coastline that crinkle the edge of this 60-by-100-mile province. And one by one, the tourists come — quietly, because they like to keep this little secret to themselves.

They come by ferry from Maine, by cruise ship from the south, by air into the capital city of Halifax, and by land down that peninsula that connects Nova Scotia to the rest of Atlantic Canada like an umbilical cord.

They come because it is still here: Picturesque fishing villages, seacoast scenery, fresh seafood, old-fashioned lodges, and restored historical sites — with just enough sophistication thrown in at Halifax to keep you firmly rooted in the 20th century.

This is not everybody's vacation; it is not slick enough for those who like slick. It is for the traveler who likes to sit on a dock at twilight, eating fresh-

caught crab, while the butter runs down his chin into his running shoes. The Nova Scotia tourist industry is an unusual combination of public and private enterprise. The federal government has restored the old forts and settlements, with an awesome attention to authentic detail.

The provincial government manages three of those grand old-fashioned hotels with lawn chairs overlooking the sea and seven-course dinners that go with the price of your room. For fast reservations, the province-wide hotel system as well as farm vacations and bed-and-breakfast sites have been computerized, under the name Click-Inns.

Both governments also work with smaller hotels and restaurants, as well as crafts people and tourist attractions, so that the tourist industry can begin to replace the dwindling mining industry and the uncertain fishing industry as a base for the economy.

The good news for tourists is that the land is unspoiled, and the population of 850,000 lives primarily in picturesque fishing villages stitched to the edge of this almost-island by the masts of ships. The bad news is that the season is short (May to October), and you can sometimes drive two hours looking for a place to have breakfast.

The three provincial hotels provide a good base for touring surrounding areas: Lunenburg, a rustic motel; Digby, a special interest to fishermen, east of Halifax; the Digby Pines, near several historic sites on the northwest coast; and Keltic Lodge, on the Cabot Trail in Cape Breton Island.

CAPE BRETON is not a single island but a broken-up mass of land and water, crisscrossed by bridges and attached to the mainland by a causeway. It contains the city of Sydney, the Fortress Louisbourg and the hundreds

of villages, museums and scenic lookouts of the Cabot Trail, which describes a circle around the Cape Breton Highlands.

The Keltic Lodge, managed by the provincial government inside Cape Breton National Park, is a grand white clapboard lodge spread across the top of a cliff overlooking the sea. It costs roughly \$75 a night for two, including a multi-course breakfast and dinner in the sprawling dining room.

A typical dinner includes smoked trout, pea soup, salad, poached salmon, Duchesne potatoes, fiddleheads, dessert and coffee. Fiddleheads are tasty greens peculiar to this part of the world.

Between meals, you can play golf, swim or hike north on the Cabot Trail to watch the fishing boats come in at Neil's Landing New Haven, where crab costs 50 cents a pound and lobster \$2 a pound off the dock.

The lobster catch end in April, and lobster is north to July 15. The day they haul the lobster pots in from the sea, they set out the crab traps for a two-month season. Then it's cod again, and mackerel until January, when they start repairing their boats for the next season.

If you drive south instead of north from the lodge, you will reach the Gaelic College of St. Ann's, where kilts and bagpipes, the music and language of the Celts, and the Alexander Graham Bell museum at Baddeck.

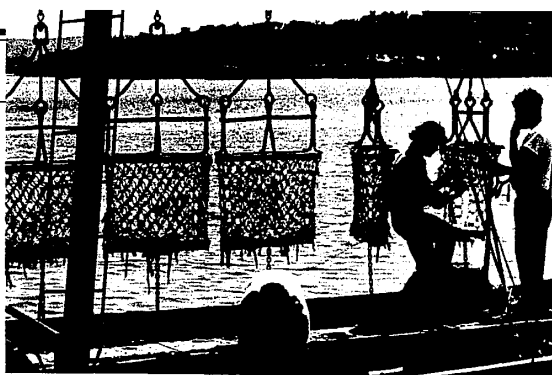
Bell spent the last 30 summers of his life on this bay, perfected his hydrofoil here and is buried on a point of land across the water from the excellent contemporary museum.

The Cabot Trail turns northwest down the Margaree Valley here to the other side of the mountainous peninsula, with fascinating little museums along the way to distract you: the Salmon Museum, Cape Breton Heritage Museum, Museum of Musical Instruments, etc.

At Margaree, there will probably be a Highland Piper in front of the Schooner Restaurant, where the road turns again along the coast to the French fishing village of Cheticamp.

The green and blue and pink houses of Cape Breton make distinctive flat patches of color against the rough grass hills that edge the sea.

Cheticamp is visible for 15 miles,



Scallop boats line up in the town of Digby at the eastern end of Nova Scotia.

IRIS AND MICKY JONES

spreading across a point of land with a church spire rising above the town roofs. The town is a photographer's delight — colored fishing boats moored row-on-row in the harbor against the equally colorful rooftops of the town.

The most scenic highland sea views are north from here, until the Cabot Trail bends eastward again and completes the circle to the Keltic Lodge.

THE MOST important and interesting historic site on Cape Breton Island is the fortress at Louisbourg, which could easily set a standard for restored historic forts in North America.

The Basque fishermen fled here from Newfoundland after the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht, and the King's men followed to build a royal military fort here in the 1720s.

They began building the walled city in 1719 and had barely completed the last fortification when the British came in 1745. The British literally leveled the town, leaving the foundations to be found among the coastal grass 200 years later when Parks Canada rebuilt it to the exact specifications of the original city.

When you park at the Parks Canada building, you can see it across an arm of the sea: a great 18th century walled city glowing in the sun on a distant peninsula. The park bus carries you from the headquarters building to the gate, where a grass-roofed sodhouse, typical housing of Basque fishermen, is waiting to plunge you back 200 years.

The fortress is a masterpiece of houses, restaurants, wharfs and barracks, with costumed 18th century "citizens" to make it real.

The nearby modern village of Louisbourg is a good place to absorb all that history, while the seafood butter runs

down your chin into your shoes at the Lobster Kettle, a rough wharf building with picnic tables and pools of live lobster for cooking and eating.

The lobster boils for 20 minutes, the crab legs for five. You'll need a bath before you've finished licking the shells which spill over those cardboard plates onto the checked table cloths.

THE SAME combination of good eating and history is available at the other end of Nova Scotia, along the road that leads up the "back of the dragon" from Yarmouth to Digby, past Port Royal and Port Anne to Evangeline Country.

Port Royal is the oldest settlement north of St. Augustine, built by Champlain and burned down by Jamestown soldiers who feared the migration of the Catholic Church into the New World. Fort Anne is the British settlement that followed.

Both are meticulously restored as Louisbourg. Parks Canada is also responsible for the church and museum at Grand Pré, where a statue of Evangeline ties the Acadian expulsion to Longfellow's popular story.

There are several motels and hotels in the Digby area, but the best known is the government-operated Digby Pines, another of those grand, sprawling, peak-roofed hotels built for another age.

From a lawn chair at the Pines, you look down past yellow umbrellas, swimming pool and tennis courts to the Bay of Fundy, and across a few hundred yards to the town of Digby. At sunset, seagulls scatter across the docks and rooftops of town. The scallop boats are docked in rows.

Buy the scallops deep fried from

Bill's unpretentious little take-out window near the dock, and eat them at public tables down the street with a million-dollar view.

WHEREVER YOU go on this interesting almost-island, your itinerary will probably either begin or end in Halifax.

From the original Citadel, a fort which dominates the very center of the downtown city, you can look past the Old Town Clock and through the new high-rise buildings to the harbor.

The historic project has already converted several old warehouses along the waterfront to colorful restaurants and boutiques. If you look that way, and you are lucky, you will see the black prow and the high sails of Bluenose Two, descendant of a fishing schooner famous on these shores.

You can tour the harbor on a regular tour boat or on the Bluenose Two. Halifax, like everything else in Nova Scotia, faces the sea.

Nova Scotia's best-known fishing village is an easy day trip out of Halifax: Peggy's Cove. This beautiful cove, usually shrouded in fog, is unfortunately overrun by tourists; in fact, it's the only coastal village most tourists ever see.

A great tumble of giant rocks sits treeless beside the sea, with colored clapboard houses and misted fishing boats down every rocky view. It is the only cove of its kind in Nova Scotia; the rest of the coastline is wrapped in trees.

Standing in the mist, with the high masts rising close to the rocky shore, it is easy to imagine all those who came by sea before us: the Basque fishermen, the French and British troops, the Scots, all of whom came out of the mist in their tall, tall ships.

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