

NEWFOU

where every road ends at a fishing village

When the blue and white catamaran slid by South Head, we lost sight of Bay Bulls. St. John's was about 40km to the north, but even on a clear Newfoundland day, one couldn't see that far.

STORY **Alex Eberspaecher**

The fog had lifted early in the morning and by the time we had set out on our whale-watching excursion, the sea that is often quite menacing, was apparently still asleep. Then suddenly and without warning, it happened.

Ten metres off our bow, the first whale surfaced and shortly after, a frenzy of activity ensued. There were Humpback, Minke, Pilot and Fin whales and although they didn't come as close as the dolphins, they were close enough for us to see their tiny eyes as they looked us over. As the large Humpbacks gracefully drifted past our vessel, the birds of the Witless Bay Ecological Reserve put on a show of their own. Few tourists have ever encountered a Puffin before, let alone Murres, Razor-Billed Auks or Kittiwakes; yet here we were suddenly in the midst of North America's largest Puffin colony. What made it so special was that we watched the birds fishing right under our noses in the crystal clear waters. We witnessed a spectacle of nature at sea off Bay Bulls, but that merely set the tone, as much of the Newfoundland experience exceeded our greatest expectations.

Directly west of St. John's, about 50km as the seagull soars, across Conception

Bay in the village of Cupids, Bill Gilbert doesn't dream of better times ahead, he digs for the past. As the head archaeologist in charge of excavating Canada's first and oldest English settlement, it took him years to locate the 400-year-old site. Bill told me that he's looking at ten more years of digging before he has located everything, but for now he spends much of his time talking to visitors at his dig and in the new Discovery Centre nearby.

For another journey into Canada's past, the trail from Cupids to the abandoned communities of Deep Gulch and Greenland is surely one of the most peaceful journeys we have ever undertaken.

Evidence of the past here, like most of Newfoundland, is all around and instead of the sheep and cows that grazed in the meadows a generation or two ago, you might encounter a moose or a few rabbits and eagles. You'll surely notice the collapsed remains of crumbling foundations, an old stove here and there or perhaps a bench where those who have been relocated by the government, rest for a while when they return each summer for a day or so to dream about the good old days and their old friends. ➤



UNDLAND

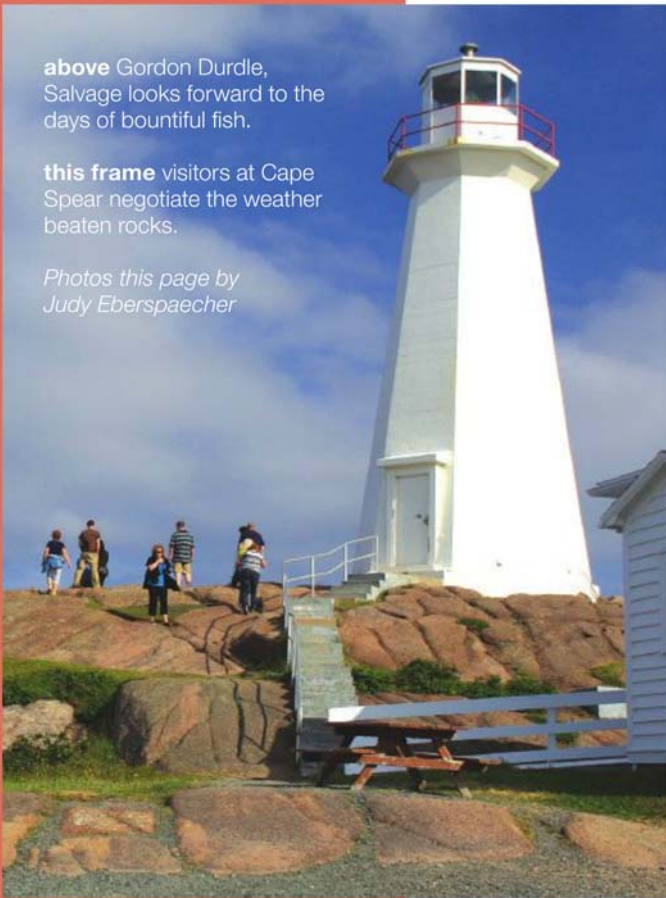




above Gordon Durdle, Salvage looks forward to the days of bountiful fish.

this frame visitors at Cape Spear negotiate the weather beaten rocks.

Photos this page by Judy Eberspaecher



◀ It took us a week to explore a few hundred kilometres, not because of the distance but because of the incredible scenery at each twist, turn or dead-end. Every road ends at a fishing village, be it Heart's Delight, Dildo, Chance Cove or Eastport just outside the Terra Nova National Park, and each one lures you in as long as possible. The family of moose or that black bear with her two cubs may delay your travels further as you must share the highway. In fact, it is highly recommended that you travel only by day. Just too many moose around, the locals will tell you.

Fisherman's tales

He had a kind old face, rugged, just like aged leather; the sun and wind had taken its toll over the past 89 years, yet he was still as sharp as the hooks he used on his long lines to catch fish. "That old house, the one you took the pictures of, belonged to my sister," he said, "but she is gone now along with the cod." Gordon Durdle doesn't fish anymore, not because his age is creeping up. "There is simply just not much to catch around here right now," he said. Newfoundlanders are resilient though, especially here in Salvage, where the road literally ends and hope is never far away. "Someday the fish will be back," he said as he pointed toward Bonavista Bay. For the longest time he just locked and said nothing. Perhaps he knew that his fishing days would soon come to an end, but for now, who knows, there could be some fish amidst the fog that rolls in each day. At least I hope so, for Gordon's sake.

Newfoundland means fishing, especially for cod and while most

visitors are under the impression that cod can no longer be fished, it came somewhat as a surprise when Tony and Joan Oxford invited us on a cruise to try our hand at cod fishing. Tony and Joan operate True North Charters & Tours, an eco-tour operation out of Cox's Cove. We caught few fish, just enough for a meal, as we were too enchanted by the scenery and its people. I did catch a fleeting glimpse of a tear or two on Joan's cheeks while she showed us the place of her childhood, a village that is no more. For generations it was home to her family, her childhood and all her memories, but then the government ordered it to be relocated. Later that evening, just as the sun was setting, I stood silently by the shore, and had it not been for the Osprey fishing or the Pilot Whale that suddenly broke through the mirror-like surface of Cox's Cove, a stones-throw from shore, I too may have shed a tear, not because of the relocated village, but because I felt privileged and somewhat emotional, to be part of this unique land and its people.

The true beauty of Newfoundland

Travelling around Newfoundland is something too few of us have experienced. The Newfoundlanders know the beauty of their country, yet few brag about it. They are naturally humble and indeed this is a land you must discover for yourself. Scandinavia is known for their fjords; Newfoundland has its own fjords, just more of them. Scotland has its highlands and heaths; Newfoundland is pretty well all highlands and heaths. The Caribbean Sea has its clear



turquoise waters; Newfoundland's waters are just as clear, albeit colder at the best of times. Then again, the Caribbean doesn't have icebergs flowing past in summer as they do in Twillingate, all around the Baie Verte Peninsula right down to Bonavista and past St. John's, only to disappear somewhere out beyond the horizon.

Many voyagers to Newfoundland begin their journey near St. John's after disembarking the ferry from Nova Scotia at Argentia. From the Avalon Peninsula, the Trans-Canada Highway will take you through the loop past Gander, Grand Falls-Windsor and Cornerbrook to Port-Aux-Basques, a mere 860 km on the Trans-Canada, but it will be the longest 860 kilometres you have ever travelled. Taking in all the coves, villages and points, it will be closer to 2000 kms and I wouldn't attempt that in less than two weeks.

Whatever you do, regardless of how much time you may have, make sure you allow yourself an extra day or so in Port Aux-Basques after you're scheduled to depart. It is quite possible that the ferry will be on time or it could be a day late. Make sure you take a final trip out to the hamlet of Rose Blanch and all the villages along the way before your return to reality. Experience a final goodbye at the Cape Ray Lighthouse during a very memorable sundown. Here you might suddenly remember those television ads depicting the high cliffs of Newfoundland and the end of the world. The vignettes are somewhat deceiving though, because we found many more cliffs along those little cove roads, which could have been the end of the world. Then again, we visited only part of Newfoundland; there is a lot more to see on our next visit. GL

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alex's travel notes

GETTING THERE

By Air

Direct flights available from Toronto to St. John's: *Air Canada* or *West Jet*. *Porter* flies there with stops in Ottawa and Halifax

By Land and Sea

Ferry from North Sydney NS to Argentia NL or Port Aux Basques NL; return to North Sydney NS
Reservations required
www.marine-atlantic.ca

LINKS

Newfoundland
www.newfoundlandlabrador.com
St. John's
www.destinationstjohns.com
Whales and Puffins at Bay Bulls,
www.gatheralls.com
True North Charter and Eco Tours, Cox's Cove
www.truenorthtours.ca
Cupids www.cupids400.com
Twillingate Icebergs
www.townoftwillingate.ca
Island View Cabins Cox's Cove: rustic with kitchen, clean and reasonable **709-688-2154**
Monroe House B&B, St. John's: excellent and upscale; wonderful breakfast www.monroehouse.nf.ca
Kelsies Inn, Twillingate: very clean, reasonable and friendly; good breakfast
www.kelsiesinn.com

MacIellan Inn, Doyles: reasonable, clean, very helpful and friendly; good breakfast
www.maclellaninn.com

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