

“FERRY”LAND, “FAIRY”LAND
or
MY NEWFOUNDLAND

By Rossanna H. Hays

Sitting in the foggy standby lot for the Smallwood Ferry at Argentia on Placentia Bay, you wonder where nearly 55 days have gone. They have been full days of adventure, exploration and visual beauty from north to south, east to west of the “Rock,” Newfoundland - Labrador. You cannot help but think of it as “Your” Newfoundland after such complete exposure. As a result of this intimacy, “Newfie” Land is now a part of your soul.

After multitudes of ferry trips in and around this island, “Ferryland” is an appropriate play on words. At times it was easy to believe in “Fairyland.” The Irish blarney and lilt in the voice permeates the island. In “The Rooms,” the Provincial Museum in the capital of St. John’s, a guide answered the question, “Which is the best direction to go in this exhibit?” By saying, “If you’re superstitious, I recommend you go clockwise.” With rare exception, each person encountered had a warm and friendly, happy go-lucky attitude accented by a great sense of humor and always eager to share their enthusiasm for their homeland. One Newfoundland lady who had just enthusiastically expounded on the virtues of her home, paused and with a shy smile on her face said, “Newfoundlanders are so full of themselves.”

When 31 Holiday Ramblers (recreational vehicles) first landed on “The Rock,” first impressions led you to believe it might be all rock but this was the deception of the shoreline which is bordered by rugged rock precipices and occasional sandy beaches. However, as one travels deeper inland, it becomes evident that this ancient rock is covered in lush forests of birch, spruce and myriads of wild flowers. But, no matter where the road led, you were near water be it ocean, lake, river or pond.

Bill and Karen Vanoy, seasoned Wagonmaster team, provide the best possible in-depth tour of Newfoundland-Labrador any traveler could hope for. Their homework and experience is evidenced by the smoothness of operation, quality of campgrounds, guides and multitudinous sites visited. If you are thinking this sounds exhausting, perish the thought. Lengthy stays in single locations with frequent “free days” to do your own thing, lends a relaxing pace to the entire experience. This is a group activity, but as any wise man or woman knows, you need your own space at times. Additionally, Tailgunner affectionately called “Thumper” for early morning tire checks, Don Lewis and wifely assistant, Irene, were the perfect compliment to our leaders. Each lent expert attention to any problem that may have arisen especially mechanical. If your sink had a sudden leak or your starter acted up, out came the appropriate tool for the job and the skill with which to apply it and always accompanied by a genuine smile.

Just this once the word “Food” will be referred to. Over 30 delicious meals were provided in the caravan. We were told to bring minimal food supplies because there

would be a great deal provided. This promise was kept. It was somewhat like a cruise – you needed to monitor you're eating or a post-caravan visit to "Jenny Craig" could be necessary. Our meals included many opportunities to enjoy Newfie cuisine. For example, there was lobster, lobster and more lobster not to mention Cod. One of our memorable meals included Cod's tongue and cheeks. One evening at Port au Choix on the Gulf of St. Lawrence we were "knighted" into "The Order of the Screech." The ultimate initiation required kneeling and kissing the Cod after downing a jigger of Newfie Screech rum. We learned about the popular meal "Jigg's Dinner." Interestingly, this originated with American servicemen stationed at one of the many bases during WWII who noticed the similarity between the boiled dinner served in Newfoundland-Labrador and the favorite dinner of Jiggs, a character in the American comic strip series "Bringing Up Father."

Newfoundland (say "understand-Newfoundland" for correct pronunciation) –Labrador were added to the confederation of Canadian Provinces in 1949. Their long standing independence is still somewhat Texan-like. You feel that if they wanted to, they would be happy to become independent again and yet, they are loyal Canadians. Flags of their country, province and history fly everywhere. A large percentage of homes display flags any and every day.

Culturally, music is the underlying thread that ties all Newfoundlanders and Labradoreans together. A believable theory is if you are born here, you will be musical. In some manner or form everyone sings, plays one or more instrument, dances a jig and enjoys all mediums. If your talent is somewhat limited, there is always the "Ugly Stick" and "The Spoons." You will participate and with great enthusiasm as experienced over and over again throughout the province. And, it is contagious for the shyest to the most outgoing of visitors. If you do not possess a musical library upon departure, you are unusual.

The first important lesson is to learn that the word fish stands for "Cod." Any other fish is referred to by their name i.e. salmon, trout, etc. Fishing has been the corner stone since first discovered by Norsemen/Vikings c. 1000 A.D. Until the 1990's when a moratorium was placed upon Cod fishing, this was life's blood for Newfoundland-Labrador. Cod had been fished almost to extinction and it was necessary to save it or lose it. Significant economical and cultural adjustment occurred as a result. Although the older generation clings to the old ways, many of the younger are moving to the city. The beautiful harbor city of St. John's is their primary destination. A walk down Water Street of this charming historic city is lined with idealistic, dynamic and enthusiastic youth.

Our travel was an education to say the least. Since discovery by the Vikings and subsequently John Cabot in 1497, Newfoundland-Labrador has been the "door step to the new world." At the tip of Newfoundland's Great Northern Peninsula, L'Anse aux Meadows national Historic Site of Canada is the first authenticated Norse site in North America. It is also a World Heritage Site by UNESCO and deserving of such recognition. A ferry trip to Labrador led us to Red Bay, among other locations. Red Bay is considered to be the site of the first industrial enterprise in North America. Basque

fishermen produced the much in demand whale oil for European markets in the 16th century. An outstanding interpretive site captured our interest and increased understanding of the developing world at that time. The largest and historic city of St. John's is rich with stories. This writer urges you to take full advantage of all the many books you will encounter for in doing so, you will enhance your journey. Contemporary author, Ron Pumphrey, shares his Newfie life in best sellers, **Human Beans** and **Proper Gander**. A must is to read about Dr. Wilfred Grenfell. This extraordinary humanitarian from England chose Newfoundland for his base of medical operation which became known as the "Grenfell Mission." His huge impact is still felt today. This is just the tip of the iceberg, so to speak.

Without a doubt there is no way a complete description of everything experienced can be listed in this "500 words or less" report so, highlights as this author experienced it, are exemplified. At least 20 moose were observed along the route of travel. Moose crossings are everywhere and must be carefully observed. Interestingly, moose are not indigenous but were introduced around the turn of the 20th century. They have very successfully propagated. Caribou herds roam the land as well. Interestingly, there are no nuisance animals on Newfoundland or Labrador for example snakes, skunks, porcupines or raccoons. The black bear and red fox are present and an occasional polar bear that has floated in on an iceberg, makes infrequent excitable visits.

Icebergs – what a fascinating object! The northeastern and northwestern areas in particular are often referred to as "Iceberg Alley." Several of these awesome ancient sculptures were observed up close from boat trips as well as from land. On one occasion, locals informed that a calving iceberg was in one of Twillingate's Coves near the city dump. Not to be discouraged, many an observer traveled to said "dump" to find not only a fine iceberg but a field of the provincial flower, the Pitcher plant. A climb to the top of cliffs and lying somewhat precariously on one's belly, a great view was had of the death of a 10,000 year old iceberg. It would take some time before it was completely melted, but in the process, large chunks fell into the ocean making a great and noisy splash. The next day it had rolled over to some degree exposing more of the lower portion. It is important to note and hard to imagine that only 1/8 is exposed with the remainder under water.

In touring Newfoundland, you will learn ancient to modern history. From the Vikings to the oil fields of Hibernia, the land and its people continue to make a lasting mark upon world history. Did you know a significant Newfoundlander was with Abraham Lincoln at Gettysburg? They were the first to respond to the Titanic distress signal. As for the language, yes, it is English, but you may want to take a lesson in the Irish brogue. The lilt of the Newfoundlander and Labradorean is musical and catchy, punctuated with their own words and expressions. They are the only province of Canada to have its own dictionary and encyclopedia. They claim to be the funniest people in Canada – ask anybody. Incidentally, did you know the NASA space shuttle is able to land in Stephenville, NF?

Newfoundland is a beautiful island – a feast for the eyes. One to be explored and in doing so each turn of the road presents another “ah-ha” moment. It is never boring. How can one be bored floating through Etang Western Brook Pond in Gros Morne National Park on a gorgeous sunny day? It is hard to find new superlatives to describe the beauty of billion-year old cliffs and landlocked fiords with enumerable waterfalls fed by ponds atop the plateau cascading from heights of 2,250 feet to the crystal clear lake below. Wild flowers of purple iris, burgundy Pitchers, white flowering bakeapple plants, wild partridge berries and blueberries, vivid fields of yellow dandelions, ponds of water lilies, just to mention a few, dot the never boring landscape. Rolling hills and moors of Irish green heather with paths along the ocean that lead to an historic lighthouse like that of Rose Blanche and its fascinating line of occupants, offers the romantic soul a glimpse of literature’s Heathcliff longing for his love. The wild blue ocean white with foam beating against the iron laden cliffs gives one opportunity to imagine the many shipwrecks and stories of heroic rescue and failure. Behemoth humpback whales and porpoises dance on the ocean’s surface surrounded by some of the largest seabird colonies in the world. Parrot-like, adorable bird, the Puffin swims like a fish and flies like a helicopter. Harbor after harbor and cove after cove vary in their design and beauty. The foggy mist and dewy rain lend all the more atmosphere, as well as nourishment, to this grand beauty. Add the energy of warm and friendly hearted people and there is no way one can be bored.

If you have not considered Newfoundland-Labrador a destination, you must. You will not be disappointed. Just make inquiry of 31 travelers from California, Washington, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Montana, Oklahoma, Georgia, New Jersey, Florida, Maine, Texas, North Carolina, South Dakota and Maryland. No matter where one came from, their experience was one of pure pleasure. It is safe to say each came away with a piece of the land in their soul.

Nah if ahz tah tell ye ev’ry ting ‘bout me “Newfie” land, ya’d ‘av sech a wee bit of tot to cahmin’ here. So B’y, ah hopes ah be seein ya soon ‘long the path and we be havin’ a mug up!

Written by Rossanna Hamilton Hays

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