



Road Tripping on The Rock

Three drives through Newfoundland's remote wilderness, coastal fishing villages and historic sites

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY KIT BERNARDI

Like a wizard casting a magic spell, fishing guide Peter Michael's fluid arm movement makes the line loop back, unfurl ahead, suspend over the rushing water and land softly in the Humber River on Newfoundland's Great

Northern Peninsula. The river is swollen and fast, but Atlantic salmon are still jumping Big Falls in Sir Richard Squires Memorial Provincial Park.

It's my turn. My squiggly cast makes it look like I'm flinging silly string.

Shadows of towering fir trees grow taller in the sinking sun's slanted orange light.



Michael says, "We've seen 'em risin'. None bitin'. But anything can happen now in the witching hour."

I've waded into a Newfoundlander's wild world ruled by fickle fish, weather's whim and nature's rhythm. While I never caught a salmon, these three drives got me hooked on the friendly people of this far-flung North Atlantic island.

1

ROCK MEETS SEA IN GROS MORNE

"This is as beautiful as the Pacific Coast Highway, but without traffic," says my friend, Annette Thompson. We're on a girls' road trip in August, yet few cars or RVs share Route 430 in Gros Morne National Park on the northern peninsula's west coast along the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

Newfoundland is affectionately called "The Rock," and Gros Morne's geological formations show why. The park, a 697-square-mile UNESCO World Heritage Site, and its stark Tablelands display proof that supercontinent Pangaea once »



Watch the sun set in Gros Morne National Park from the Lobster Cove Head Lighthouse, on a rocky point overlooking the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

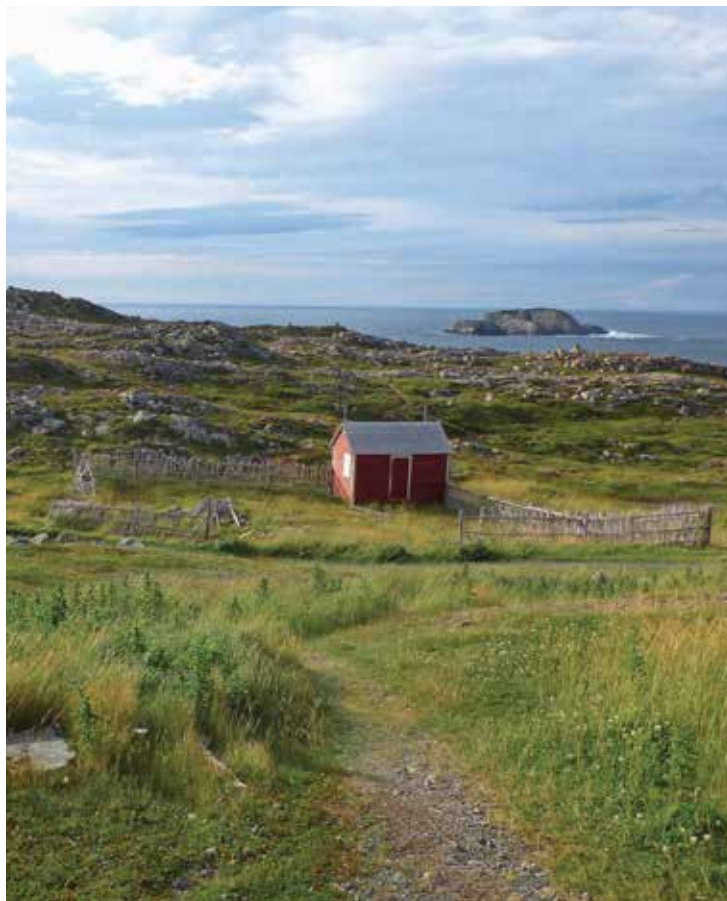
existed and colliding plate tectonics heaved chunks of the Earth's mantle to the surface. Take Route 431 there, and continue to beachfront fishing hamlet Trout River's wharf of brightly painted fishing boats and stacked lobster traps.

Visitor centers and ranger-led hikes explain Gros Morne's geology, wildlife, indigenous Inuit peoples and European settlements. The 1897 Lobster Cove Head Lighthouse museum showcases seafaring people's lives, dependent upon subsistence farming and fishing to survive in Newfoundland's harsh environment. Exhibits explain islanders' traditions, artisan crafts, faerie folklore and foods such as salted cod, seal flipper pies and

bakeapple jam.

On a walk to Western Brook Pond, we stopped to join a local family picking bakeapple, wild berries commonly known also as cloudberry, in a squishy peat bog. The boardwalk also passes through tangled tuckamore forests of stunted, gale-wind-twisted evergreens. At the dock, we board the popular fjord cruise through 2,000-foot-high granite cliffs awash in waterfalls. A bull moose swims past our bow, his massive spiky antlers held high, and a bald eagle flies overhead.

There's a theater performance in the town of Cow Head, but we've seen nature's show today. We stay at our wooded campsite at Shallow Bay around a crackling campfire.



BONAVISTA PENINSULA'S SEAFARING HISTORY

When a Newfoundlander says fish, he means Atlantic cod. Historic sites on the Bonavista Peninsula tell the island's fish tale. Turn off the Trans-Canada Highway and follow Route 230 north, stopping at outposts, the local word for fishing villages. An 1843 striped lighthouse crowns a rocky cape pummeled by big surf.

Here in 1497, explorer John Cabot made landfall discovering Newfoundland. But Cabot's most famous discovery was cod in coastal waters, thus sparking a five-century fishing frenzy. Tour quiet Bonavista's once-bustling fishery merchant's complex, now the Ryan Premises National Historic Site.

Elliston on Route 238 is known as "The Root Cellar Capital of the World," boasting elfin, sod-roofed huts burrowed into rocky headlands where pudgy puffins nest. The Home from the Sea sealers interpretation centre thoughtfully explains Newfoundland's sealing history and perils.

Trinity is a bayside village of restored 1800s buildings housing museums, artisans and the acclaimed Rising Tide Theatre. Cliff-clinging Route 239 twists to fogbound New Bonaventure, filming location of the 2001 Kevin Spacey movie *The Shipping News*. »

This little red shed is a prime site for what Newfoundlanders call "shed parties," where locals and visitors alike gather for good times, live music and drink.



The Lighthouse at Ferryland Head



In Salmonier Nature Park, wooden boardwalks thread through boreal forest past spacious enclosures harboring rehabilitating owls.

3 WILDERNESS AND SETTLEMENT ON THE AVALON PENINSULA

We pitched our tent at the Irish Loop Resort 40 minutes south of St. John's, Newfoundland's capital and the largest city in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Karin Power, a weekend resident of this RV community, says, "We're just far enough away here where the stars shine bright and real life happens."

At the resort's dance (called a scuff), Power orchestrated a "Screech In" ceremony, making us honorary Newfoundlanders. Dressed like fishermen in sou'wester floppy yellow hats and rain coats, we kissed a cod's slimy lips, nibbled hardtack and bologna, swigged Jamaican rum (a local high-alcohol version known as "Screech") and learned Newfoundlander phrases.

The next day we drove the 194-mile Irish



Newfoundland and Labrador Tourism
800-563-6353;
newfoundlandlabrador.com

Reserve camp sites at Parks Canada
877-737-3783;
pc.gc.ca

Loop, a coastal road composed of Routes 90 and 10 ringing the Avalon Peninsula. We stopped at Salmonier Nature Park — a wildlife rehabilitation center — and the early 17th century Colony of Avalon archaeological site, artifacts museum and lighthouse in Ferryland.

Witless Bay Ecological Preserve cruises get close to frolicking humpback and minke whales as well as North America's largest Atlantic puffin colony. Icebergs silently float past on the frigid sea that swallowed the RMS Titanic in 1912 about 300 miles off the Newfoundland coast. The Cape Race wireless station, at the peninsula's southern end, transmitted the ship's SOS.

Caribou herds graze in the Avalon Wilderness Preserve's lichen-coated barrens laced with streams and littered by boulders glaciers left behind. Whales feed in deep seas just beyond sprawling St. Vincent's Beach.

Here, I stack a cairn tower of smooth oval stones marking my place on The Rock, a faraway island of Newfoundland friends. ●