
Chapter 2 - Nova Scotia - September, 2005



Figure 1, Lunenburg Nova Scotia (view from the Lobster Boat)

Preface - August, 2005

At this time, Diana is on a 12 month contract with her Ohio State University job teaching ESL (English as a Second Language). This means that this year any long vacation trip would be limited to the break between the summer and fall terms. Since the fall OSU term starts near the end of September, our main summer vacation had to be around Labor Day.

We decided that this would be the year to explore parts of the northeast section of the United States and Canada that we had not visited before. Our first goal would be to visit Diana's sister Gail and her husband in Vermont. We would then head for Maine and the Maritime Provinces with no real schedule or itinerary. The Big Turtle provides the advantage of not having to make reservations for lodging. So, we could putter along and stop wherever the mood (or weather considerations) might dictate.

Wednesday, August 24 - Heading Out

After packing the Big Turtle, we headed out. We followed Interstates 71 and 271 from Columbus, Ohio north to Interstate 90. After crossing the northeast corner of Ohio and clipping the tip of Pennsylvania near Erie, Interstate 90 becomes the New York Thruway. From Buffalo east to Albany, the Thruway generally follows the path of the old Erie Canal. We would learn more about that on the return trip. We learned that it is OK to park overnight at Thruway Service Areas, so when it was time for a rest, that is what we did.

Big Turtle Adventures



Thursday, August 25 - Sackets Harbour

There is no direct high speed route from here to Bradford, Vermont, where Gail lives. You can stay on Interstate highways to near Boston, Massachusetts and then go north, or you can travel on small roads from Albany, NY across Vermont. We have gone both of these ways, so we decided to take a different route completely. We decided to take Interstate 81 north for a bit, poke along the St. Lawrence Seaway for a while, pass north of Lake Champlain, and then cross Vermont to Bradford. Feeling a need to see lots of water, we left the Interstate and drove to a small town on Lake Ontario called Sackets Harbor.

This is charming little town that played an important role in early USA history. It is only about 50 kilometers by water from Kingston, Ontario. During both the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, Sackets Harbor was a strategic location. We didn't know anything about this place until we stumbled into the local museum. There, we started with a self-guided tour of an old stable that has been converted to a museum building. The displays feature details of what it was like to be a sailor stationed there during the War of 1812. Next, we were provided a guided tour of the commander's house. The guide was a school teacher who gave us a lot of insight into the area, its importance during the 1812 War, and the people who lived there during those times. After our museum tour, we strolled the town streets and had lunch at a nice restaurant overlooking the harbor.



We then followed the Seaway Trail along the coast of Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River. This is the area of the *Thousand Islands* in the St. Lawrence River, a popular tourist destination. We stopped at a few places to enjoy the view and watch the cargo ships cruising along the river.



We followed the Seaway Trail until we came to Massena, New York. Here, we took some time to view ships going through the Eisenhower Locks. A high chain link fence around the observation deck (added after 9/11) made it difficult to take pictures, but I did manage to snap a few pictures of a big freighter entering the lock.





Friday, August 26 - Vermont

This ship, the Dayra Devi out of Hong Kong, was carrying a big load of steel. Ships of this size traveling through all of the locks pay tolls of up to \$50,000.



After the ship enters the lock and the gates are closed, the plug is pulled and water from the upper level quickly lifts the ship 42 feet. Then, in this case, it sails on to the west.

By now it was getting late. We strolled for a while in the very large Massena shopping mall and ate at the food court. Since there did not seem to be a big enough population to support a mall as large as this, I asked a food court worker about the size of the local population. It seems that this mall serves an area of about a 150 mile radius (including part of nearby Canada). We moved a couple of blocks to a Wal-Mart parking lot where the Big Turtle rested for the night.

Friday, August 26 - Vermont

The next morning we headed east again. We found that we were crossing a Mohawk Indian reservation. We took a few minutes to walk around a Mohawk casino, but resisted the temptation to gamble. We did, however, take advantage of the Mohawk tax-exempt status to fill up the Turtle gas tank at an Indian operated service station.

We crossed a bridge at the top of Lake Champlain and entered Vermont. Once again avoiding the Interstate, we followed secondary roads across Vermont, stopping for lunch along the Lamoille River.

We admired the Vermont countryside and stopped for a visit at a craft shop at Joe's Pond, a picturesque mountain lake. Some Internet surfers have discovered Joe's Pond as the location where every spring they can enter a pool to see who makes the closest guess as to when the ice melts from the pond. The way it works seems to be that they place a cement block on the pond ice attached to a rope that is in turn attached to a plug for an electric clock. When the ice melts, the cement block sinks, and the rope pulls the plug and stops the clock. I'm not sure how much the prize is, but the profits go to buy fireworks for the local Fourth of July celebration.



We soon arrived in Bradford, where Diana's sister Gail lives. Bradford is along the Connecticut River which is the border between Vermont and New Hampshire.

Big Turtle Adventures



Saturday, August 27 - Scottish Festival

The next day Gail and her husband Ashley took us first to visit a local farm (and craft) market.

Gail once raised sheep and spun her own wool, so she and Diana were interested in examining some of the local wool offerings.



Then, we were off to the annual Quechee Scottish Festival.



As is the custom at these events, many of the clans have a tent filled with genealogy information, maps, and pictures of the homeland. Ashley, whose ancestors were among the Scots removed from their homeland by the English, was not able to find a tent for his clan. At the official opening of the festival, the clan flags and colors are on parade accompanied here by 5 different bag pipe bands.

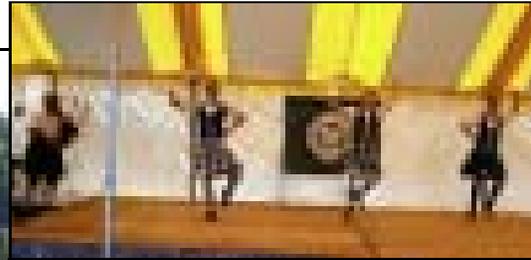
Colorful costumes are the order of the day.





Sunday, August 28 - Maine

A number of events are ongoing throughout the afternoon including dance and music competitions, caber tossing, and sheep dog trials.



In the evening we had a nice relaxing barbecue and visit with Gail and Ashley on their patio overlooking the Green Mountains, the orchard, and the sheep pasture.



Sunday, August 28 - Maine

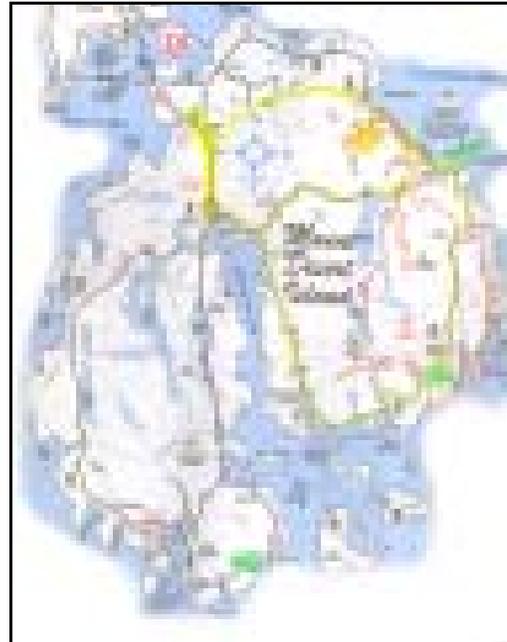
After several months without any rain to speak of, Sunday morning started with grey clouds and a light rain that was to continue for the better part of the next week. We left Bradford northbound on Interstate 91. The pavement here is smooth blacktop; however, the traffic has pushed parallel depressions into the road that collect water and cause a likely possibility of hydroplaning. Driving was a little tense. Fortunately, there was very little traffic to worry about. We left the Interstate and headed east on US 2 across New Hampshire. We passed near Mount Washington, the highest peak in the area, but with the thick clouds, there was not much point in exploring the area. So, we pushed on to Maine.

We headed for Bar Harbor and the famed Acadia National Park. Construction on the road to Bar Harbor included a section where *all* of the pavement had been removed and we drove at a snail's pace on very rough dirt for a long time. It was getting dark when we got to the Bar Harbor area, the roads were winding and confusing, so we stopped at a handy KOA campground for the night.

Big Turtle Adventures



I found navigating around the Bar Harbor area very confusing. First of all, our time there was spent under a thick canopy of clouds with no sun or compass to know which direction was which. Then, there was the confusion of local names. In this part of the world, a town is similar to a township in some other areas. There is a town of Bar Harbor that contains several villages, one of which is Bar Harbor. Bar Harbor is on an island called Mount Desert Island (pronounced by some as Mount *Dessert* rather than Desert). Because the island is hilly and has many ocean inlets and a number of large lakes, there is no such thing as a straight road. Then there is the fact that Acadia National Park occupies about half of the area of the island, but the boundaries are very irregular. There are some National Park roads that loop around the island (sometimes one-way) that cross state roads, but not always with intersections or access.



Monday, August 29 - Acadia

Anyway, Monday morning we left the KOA campground and followed a narrow local road across the island until it led to a road to the National Park Visitor Center. At the Visitor Center we inquired about the park campgrounds. There are two, Blackwoods and Seawall. One, Blackwoods, on the east side of the park required reservations. The other, Seawall, on the southern point of the island did not require reservations, but it was a long way on narrow rough winding roads from the rest of the park and the village of Bar Harbor. We decided to try to find out if there were any openings at the Blackwoods campground. This could not be done from the Visitor Center. All reservations had to be made by phone.



We tried calling from a pay phone at the Visitor Center, only to discover that the reservation center was somewhere else (possibly India) and was not yet open. So, we decided to drive to the Blackwoods Campground and try our luck. We headed off on one of the Park roads. Although we saw some nice (foggy) scenery, we did not find the campground.



It turns out that you do not access the Blackwoods campground from the Park road. You access it from local route 3. After circling the island for a while, we finally found the campground entrance. The good news was that they had cancellations, and campsites were available. The other good news was that a free shuttle bus could be taken from the campground to the *village* of Bar Harbor and from the Bar Harbor village square, other shuttle buses ran to most places on Mount Desert Island.



After parking the Turtle, we checked the bus schedule and found that we had enough time for a brief walk before the next bus to the village. We found a path through the campground down to the shore. By the way, this path crossed the park road that we drove on earlier, but that did not provide access to the campground (I am still confused about getting around this place). The scenery was nice, but would have been better if the weather had been clear.



We managed to catch the shuttle and rode from the park to the *village* of Bar Harbor. (Remember, Acadia National Park is within the *town* of Bar Harbor. Got it? Neither do I.) The rain held off enough for us to walk around and get the flavor of the place. There are lots of little touristy shops, various hotels, and a very nice path that follows along the shore, providing good harbor views.



I couldn't resist taking a picture of this candy barrel. So this is what happened to penny candy!

Big Turtle Adventures



One thing we observed was a 4-masted sail boat that took loads of tourists out a ways and provided demonstrations of what it is like to hoist the sails on such a craft.



We found a restaurant that provided harbor view seating, and had a lobster lunch.

We strolled along the harbor view path and made our way back to the village green.

There, we caught a shuttle bus and went to a Nature Center and museum that is inside the park boundaries. The shuttle bus system here is pretty good and seems to be subsidized by the Lands' End clothing company.

Next to the Nature Center is a place called Wild Gardens of Acadia. A group of mostly volunteers have created and maintain a large garden featuring local wildflowers.





Tuesday, August 30 - New Brunswick

The history of Acadia National Park is different from most National Parks in that most of the land for the park was donated by private individuals. It seems that Bar Harbor was once a popular place for summer homes of the rich and famous. A few such homes can still be seen in some areas. However, a big fire went through the area destroying most of the homes on the island, and many homes were never rebuilt. Perhaps I am getting a little too cynical, but I suspect that folks (like old man Rockefeller) who donated land got a good tax break and avoided the expense of rebuilding their expensive homes.

We fired up the Turtle in an effort to explore more of Mount Desert Island and Acadia Park. After making a circle around the east part of the Island, we finally found our way to the Park road that leads up Cadillac Mountain. The views were great until we got near the top where clouds obscured everything.



The Turtle handled the steep mountain climb pretty well. At the top, we discovered another Roadtrek owned by a fellow from West Virginia who spends winters 600 miles south of Mexico City. He was just one of many interesting travelers we met along the way.



I used a lower gear to descend the mountain and once again the Turtle performed very well. This kind of place makes me very aware of the differences between the Turtle with its big Chevy V-8 engine and our old VW Microbus with its little 4 cylinder air-cooled toy engine.

After we got tired of circling around the Island, we headed back to our Blackwoods campsite and settled in for the night.

Tuesday, August 30 - New Brunswick

In continuing rainy and cloudy weather we headed back across the causeway that separates Mount Desert Island from the mainland and turned northeast. After stopping at a local restaurant for a blueberry pancake breakfast, we followed Route US 1. It turns out that this area is a major producer of blueberries. US 1 is no 4-lane Interstate. It follows the coast and once again we ran into a stretch of construction where all the pavement had been removed. With the wet weather, the muddy potholes slowed what little traffic there was to a crawl.

Big Turtle Adventures



Along the way we happened on a sign for an International Historic Site called **Saint Croix Island** (or, I'le Sainte-Croix, in French). This small park commemorates a French settlement on a nearby island in 1604.



Although the sky was dripping a little, we took a brief walk along a path overlooking the ocean. The path is populated with a collection of very nice slightly larger than life-size bronze statues representing characters from the 1604 settlement.



Stumbling onto places like this nice little park is one of the happy accidents that can occur while traveling.

We followed Route 1 until we came to the Canadian border. The town of Calais, Maine on the US side and St. Stephen, New Brunswick was on the Canadian side.



We stopped for a short time in a parking area in Calais and had lunch in the

Turtle within view of the bridge separating the two countries. We still had some tomatoes and cucumbers from Gail's garden and were not sure if they would be confiscated. We gobbled the tomatoes and all but two of the cucumbers.

We then got our passports in hand and crossed the border. (Oops, don't forget to change the clocks to a different time zone.) Passports are not yet required to cross between the USA and Canada (however, they *will* be required in a year or so) but we figured they would make identification easier. After a couple of general questions (like do you have any guns or pepper spray? but no questions about contraband cucumbers) we entered St. Stephen. Within a couple of blocks of the border crossing we parked and visited Ganong Chocolatier, a local chocolate factory. After partaking of a couple samples and picking up a supply of treats, we moved on to a nearby Visitor's Center where we picked up information about the area. We also found an Internet terminal where I could dump any recent junk E-mail and send off a couple of brief notes.



Wednesday, August 31 - Happy 42nd Anniversary

We continued northeast toward Saint John, New Brunswick. However, even in mid-afternoon the fog was so thick, that driving was no fun at all. Consulting a map showed we were near the *New River Beach Provincial Park*, so that is where we headed. It turned out to be one of the nicer campground facilities that we experienced, in spite of the weather. Very up-to-date *washrooms* (as they are known in this area) including the latest motion activated sink faucets. This was not very common in the campgrounds we have visited.



After selecting our campsite and plugging the Turtle into the 30 amp electrical connection, we took a walk to the beach.

Fog was the ruler of the day. The waves were barely visible until we walked across the big flat sandy beach that is splashed by the Bay of Fundy, famous for its high tides.



We retreated back across the sand to a stairway leading from the beach to a nearby concession area (sorry, no ice cream, closed due to bad weather). Within just a few minutes we saw the incoming tide cover the area of sand where we had been standing.



Back at the Turtle we found that we needed a few supplies, so we braved the foggy road and traveled a few kilometers to a local convenience market and back. We then settled in for a damp and dreary night.

Wednesday, August 31 - Happy 42nd Anniversary

It's amazing, but we have now been married 42 years. We woke up to damp weather outside, and a soggy spot under a mattress inside. Also, our left rear turn signal quit working.

Consulting our Roadtrek group Membership Directory, we located a Roadtrek dealer just beyond Saint John, New Brunswick, only 60 or so kilometers up the road. This it turned out, was a waste of time. The Roadtrek dealer had a couple of technicians out sick, was booked full of appointments for the next couple of days, and had bad stories about how the complete tail light assembly would probably have to be ordered from Ontario for around \$180.

Since the weather was not very conducive to sightseeing, we went back to Saint John, parked at the McAlister Mall, and spent the rest of the day exploring the similarities and differences between Canada and US malls. (Not too much.) Across the road from the mall was a Wal-Mart where we spent the night next to a collection of other RV's.

Here we started hearing about the devastation that hurricane Katrina had left in New Orleans. However, news on the radio was limited because CBC (the Canadian Broadcasting Company) was in the middle of a labor dispute and management had locked out the workers. Except for a few minute long news summaries on the hour, they were only broadcasting (a nice collection of) classical music.

Big Turtle Adventures



Thursday, September 1 - Nova Scotia

We did get news that a Rolling Stones concert was scheduled soon for Moncton, the next city along our way and predictions were for major traffic problems. Also, the weather appeared to be a little better to the east. So, we decided to make a run for Nova Scotia. The drive across this area of New Brunswick passed through large unpopulated stretches of forested hills where tree farming is the dominate agricultural activity.



We crossed the border between New Brunswick and Nova Scotia at **Amherst**. At the Visitor's Center we met part of a group of bicycle riders that were near the end of a ride from Vancouver, British Columbia to Halifax, Nova Scotia. Over one hundred individuals ranging in age from seventeen to seventy had made the 60 day trip.



We left most of the clouds behind us to the west as we drove about 30 miles (of fairly rough paved road) to **Joggins**, a tiny village along the east side of the Bay of Fundy. A small house there was advertised as a fossil museum. As a matter of fact, visiting the Joggins fossil cliffs was why we headed here. The house seemed to have two rooms, a small shop and a larger room in the back. A sign announced that admission was \$5 for adults and \$4 for seniors. Diana asked if I thought we should go in, and I replied that after traveling this far we probably should. A slightly built older gentleman who was lurking nearby suggested that it would be well worth the visit. He disappeared into the other room and soon returned with a lady who collected our admission fees.



It turns out that this man has spent his entire life searching for fossils at the nearby cliffs. This museum represents one mans' lifetime of effort, and we quickly decided that he was a rare National Treasure. He began showing us around a room that had nearly every surface covered with large and small fossils. Everything from person sized tree-like lycopodia trunks to small dinosaur and horseshoe crab tracks were on display. He brought out a small black rock, placed it under a microscope, and adjusted it so that we could see a beautiful complete set of fossil teeth that were no more than 3/16 of an inch across. He showed us a miniature claw, and dozens of tracks that had been made in the mud many millions of years ago.





Thursday, September 1 - Nova Scotia

The amazing thing about this collection is the variety. Most places where fossils are found seem to have all fish or all trilobites, or shells, or whatever. At Joggins, however, there are plants, tracks, teeth, claws, shells, dragonflies, horse-shoe crabs. all found in fairly close proximity. It was by now late afternoon and after viewing the collection for a while we had to get to the cliffs. Less than a kilometer from the museum a small road leads to a parking lot. From there it is a short walk down to a stairs that lead to the beach.



The high tides of the Bay of Fundy sends waves crashing into the cliffs twice a day dislodging pieces of rock and possibly exposing new fossils for a sharp eyed hunter. At this point you are allowed to keep anything you find that you can lift and carry away. Perhaps this policy will change when the place becomes a UNESCO World Heritage Site, which is scheduled to happen in the next few years.

As the pictures show, the rock strata here is tilted at about a 17 degree angle. This means that as you move up or down the beach, you are moving through millions of years of time when each layer was formed. The problem is that a casual visitor has no way of knowing which is the most likely strata to find fossils, or a particular kind of fossil. A serious hunter would have to do quite a bit of research and spend more than an hour or so in the search.

Big Turtle Adventures



Nevertheless, an intrepid naive tourist can pick among the rocks and imagine that the next rock might contain precious dinosaur tracks, or perhaps a nice fish tooth among the fossilized crushed shells. Imagine that this rock was once primeval mud where creatures ran and slithered and plants fell. Imagine that waves once smashed sea shells into a formless pile before millions of years of pressure compacted them into a matrix of black rock.



Imagine that the sun will soon set and it is a 30 kilometer drive over a rough road to get back to Amherst and a friendly Wal-Mart parking lot.

Friday, September 2 - Peggy's Cove

Finally, a morning without rain. It is clear that like most travel destinations there is way too much to see in Nova Scotia for the time available. So, we traveled directly from the north to the south sides of Nova Scotia, a little less than 300 kilometers. The main highways we followed, Routes 104 and 102, are as good as the best Interstate highways in the US.



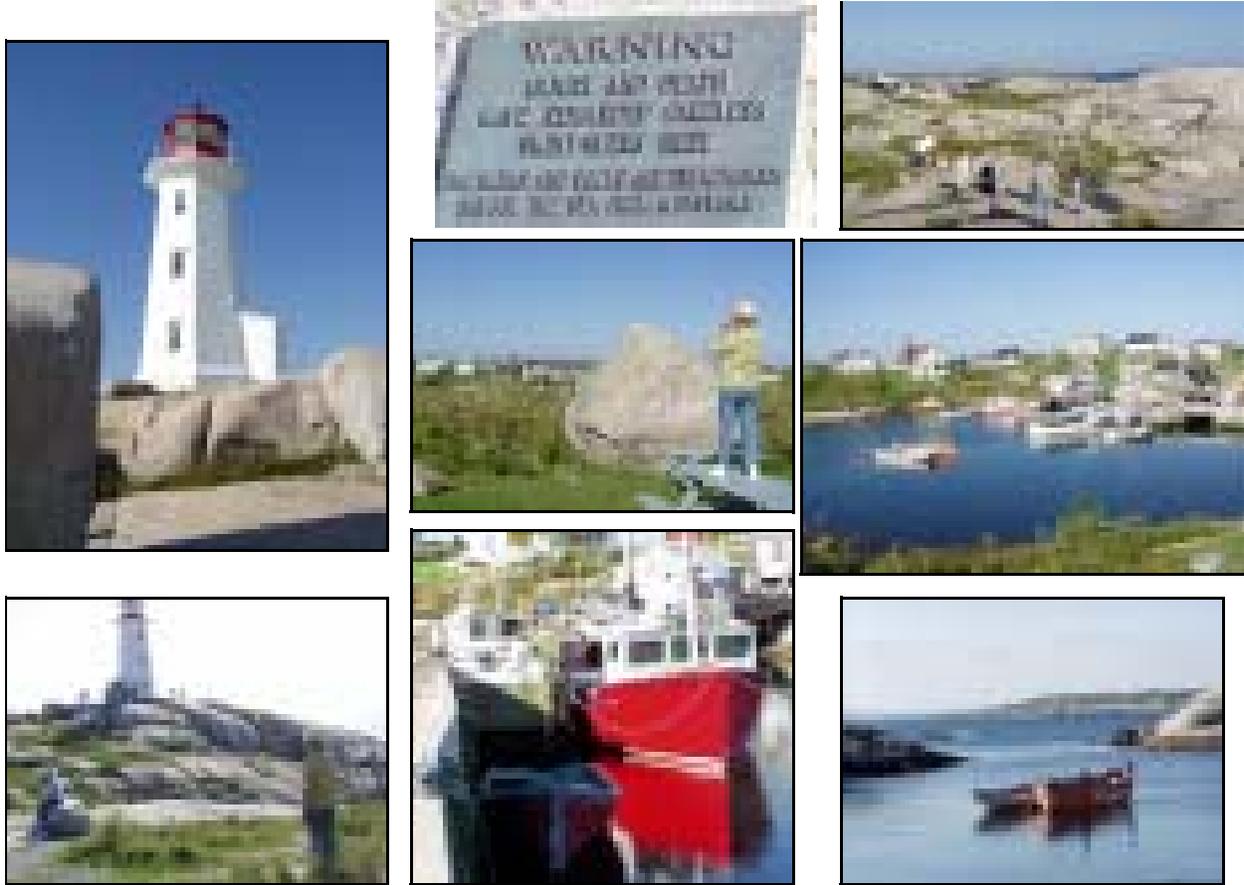
We decided to check in to the KOA Halifax West campground and make it our base for exploring the area. After selecting a nice site beside a slow moving river, we analyzed the various sightseeing options and determined that we would do Halifax tomorrow, and spend the rest of the afternoon exploring a place called *Peggy's Cove*.



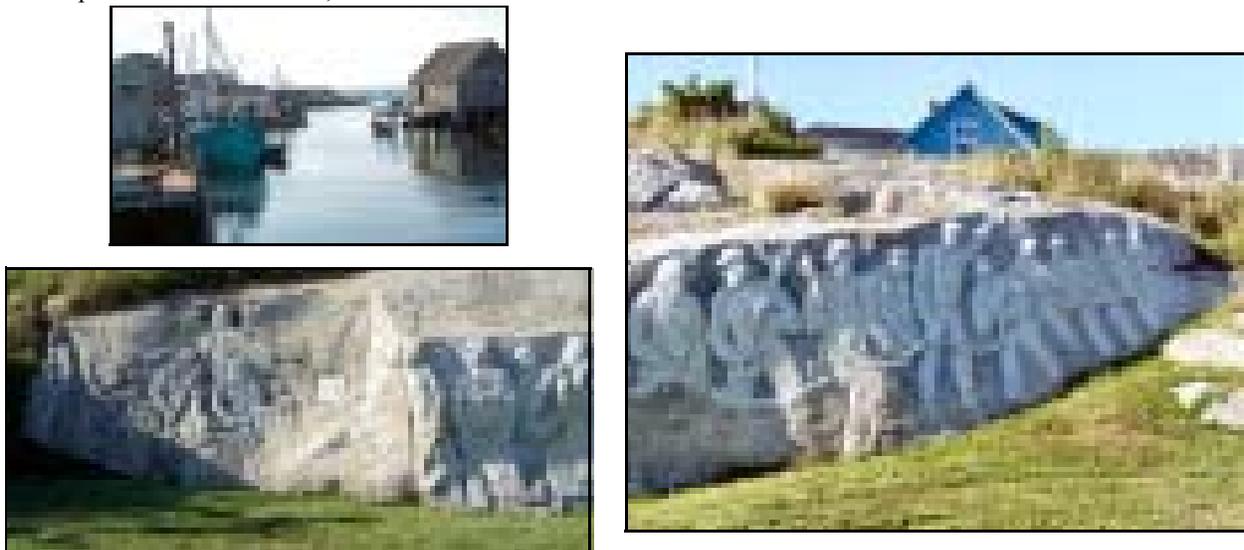


Friday, September 2 - Peggy's Cove

Unlike the Joggins Fossil Museum, Peggy's Cove seems to be on every Nova Scotia travel recommendation list. So, we were not the only tourists there. It is small, built on large smoothed boulders splashed by waves, and features a picturesque village and lighthouse. Therefore, we took lots of pictures.



In one place in the native rock, an artist has carved a memorial to the area sailors.



A pleasant place to spend the afternoon.

Big Turtle Adventures



Saturday, September 3 - Halifax

While at the Halifax KOA, we discovered that our left rear brake light was not working in addition to our turn signal. This was a safety issue and caused a little loss of sleep. The KOA manager reported that there was an RV center nearby, however, they were closed on Saturday and Sunday, and Monday was Labor Day when everything would also be closed. Since the RV place was not much out of the way, we took a chance and paid them a visit. What luck! A mechanic was there waiting for a customer to come and take delivery of an RV. After listening to our tale of tail light grief, the man quickly dug into the problem. Although he had never worked on a Roadtrek before, he was familiar with Chevy cargo van taillight assemblies. After checking the wiring for continuity, he discovered that wiggling the bulbs in their sockets solved the problem. This was not as simple as it sounds since it takes three different types of screwdrivers to get to the light bulbs, and it was not at all clear how the assemblies were mounted in place. Anyway, with our lighting problem solved, we headed for Halifax.

It was a 30 minute trip from the KOA Campground to downtown Halifax. We found a parking spot near the harbor and right across the street from the Brewery Market, an old building converted to shops and enclosing an interior area reserved for a farmer's type market. There was a fee for parking... either by the hour or by the day. Since we did not have enough Canadian money to pay for more than an hour, we hurried off to find an ATM. We located an ATM machine inside the crowded market and waited in a long line only to discover that our card would not work in that machine.

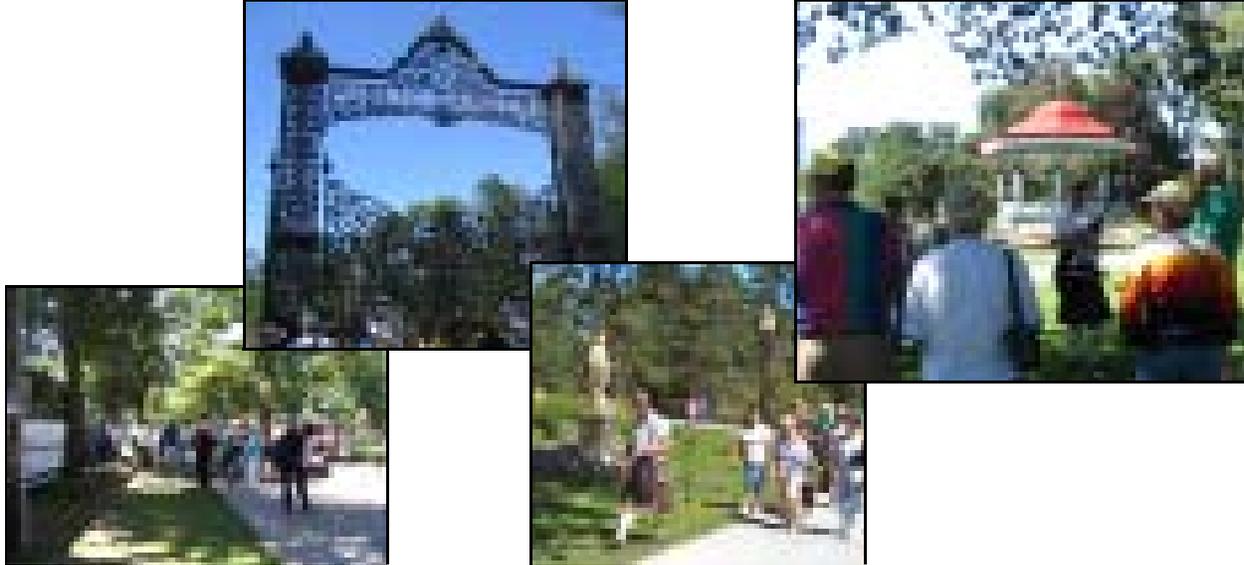
A few blocks away was a banking district and we found a collection of ATM machines that we could use. It was then back to the parking lot to upgrade our parking ticket to last the rest of the day. Back at the Brewery Market, we located a small local restaurant and had lunch. The Grey Line outfit offers an number of options for tourists. One is a hop-on, hop-off deal where you get a pass that allows for jumping on and off their shuttle buses at a number of locations around the city. Because we were unfamiliar with the city, we elected to take a Grey Line Historical Tour, a narrated tour that includes several walking stops along the route.





Saturday, September 3 - Halifax

We were happy with our choice. The bus driver was a native of Halifax, and had a wealth of stories and information to relate as we toured the city. He stopped the bus in view of a number of points of interest and filled us in on the history of the area. At one point we got off the bus and were greeted by a bag pipe player in full costume. He acted like the pied piper and lead the group on a walking tour of the Victorian style Public Gardens. From time to time he kept everyone moving along to the beat of traditional bag pipe tunes.



In front of a lovely gazebo, he stopped and provided a mini-seminar on the history and construction of bag pipes. Did you know that some modern bag pipes are stuffed with kitty litter? I didn't think so, neither did we.

From the Public Gardens, we moved on to Citadel Hill and a visit to an old fortress.



Big Turtle Adventures



After viewing the changing of the guard, we entered the fort, explored for a while and enjoyed nice views of the city and the harbor.



Back on the bus, we learned more of the history of Halifax and it's former residents. We heard about the 1917 explosion when a collision of ships carrying supplies for WW I leveled a large part of the city and killed 2,000 people. Signs of the power of the explosion are still visible. A 517 kilogram anchor was thrown 3.8 kilometers from the explosion and rests today near its landing point. A few fragments remain embedded in building walls, and every December 6, a memorial service is held.

Another major tragedy is also commemorated in Halifax. This is where the bodies of the victims of the Titanic sinking were brought. Some of the victims are buried in one of three cemeteries. If a person was wearing a cross, they were buried in the Catholic cemetery. If the name sounded Jewish, they were buried in the Jewish cemetery, and the rest are found in Fairview Lawn. Since identities were in many cases not known, many graves are marked simply 'died, April 15, 1912.'



Our bus driver lead us through Fairview Lawn and told stories about some of the individuals. He also told of recent identification efforts and how some grave stones have had names added. One grave is marks as the grave of the unknown child and people leave coins, flowers, and toys here. It turns out that this child has now been identified, however, the family has elected to keep the original grave intact.



Sunday, September 4 - Lunenburg

Because the bus driver was so good about sharing the history of Halifax, we were very happy to have elected to take this Grey Line tour.

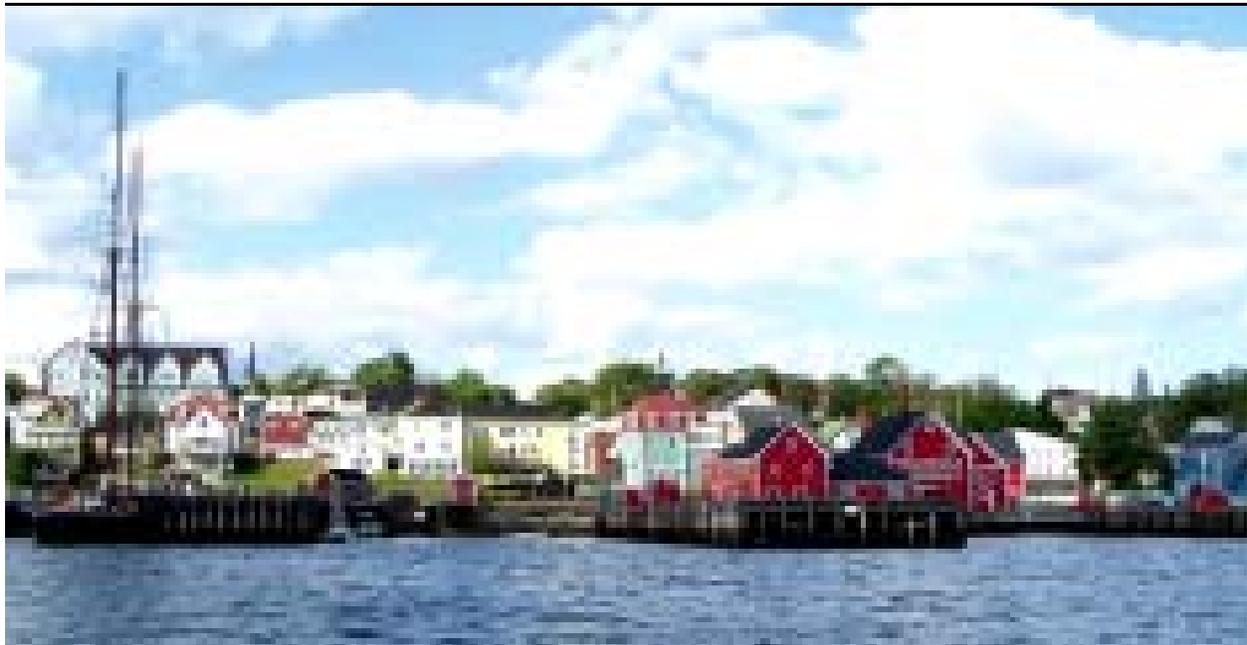
After the tour, we strolled along the Halifax harbor. Tourism is a big business here, so, as you can imagine, there are many shops and attractions to separate tourists from their money, including a casino.

By the way, the sign on the money box near the sword-dance girl reads 'graduate school or bust.'



Sunday, September 4 - Lunenburg

After spending another night at the Halifax KOA, our next destination was the village of *Lunenburg*.



Lunenburg is a post card picture type town along the coast west of Halifax, and is a very popular tourist spot in this area.

Big Turtle Adventures



The local Board of Trade operates a campground high on Blockhouse Hill overlooking Back Harbor. The Blockhouse also serves as a Visitor's Center. We selected a camp site with a great view, and got the assistance of a Visitor's Center staff member to help us make a reservation for the Cat ferry that runs between Yarmouth, Nova Scotia and Bar Harbor, Maine. Since it was the Labor Day Weekend, we thought the ferry might be full. It turned out that there was plenty of room for us.



With that detail taken care of, we settled in to our camp site and then walked down the hill to explore Lunenburg. Although these days they probably catch more tourists than fish here, Lunenburg is still active in the fishing and lobster industries. We had a snack on a balcony where we could watch the famous Bluenose II sail into port.



I remember this schooner being featured in a wonderful film about Canada in Epcot Village at Walt Disney World in Florida.

It is a classic sailing ship and you can take a tour on Bluenose if you want to get a taste of wind and waves.





Sunday, September 4 - Lunenburg

We elected a boat tour of a different sort. We took a ride on a lobster boat with a two-man crew who install seats in their fishing boat during the off-season and provide demonstrations of the lobster fishing process.

If you are brave, you can even get to hold a live lobster. However, since it was not a legal lobster fishing season in this area, the lobsters had to be returned to the sea.

The lobster tour of the harbor also provided us some of the best views of the trip.



We watched a nice sunset from our Blockhouse Hill site. We also visited a bit with some of the other campers staying there. There was one couple from Alberta, Canada and a family from Switzerland.



Big Turtle Adventures



Monday, September 5 - Shelburne - Yarmouth

Did you ever see the movie *The Scarlet Letter*? The one with Demi Moore that was made in 1994? Well, if you did, you had a peek at the small village of Shelburne, Nova Scotia. Once again we stumbled into a very interesting place without knowing much about it ahead of time. Shelburne is mentioned in the travel books, but it does not get the attention that places like Peggy's Cove or Lunenburg get. This is OK with us since it not as touristy as the more commonly known spots.



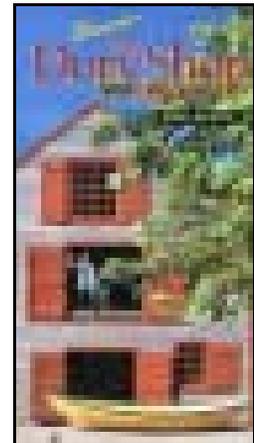
Shelburne is about 80 kilometers east of Yarmouth, Nova Scotia. It was the destination of a number of Loyalists (or Tories as they were called by the other side) who fled the colonies after the Revolutionary War.

Many of the buildings date from that period; however, the film company did a lot to restore and add to the village for the movie set. This building is dated 1785 and now serves as a Bed and Breakfast.



There is a small Visitor's Center with great views of the harbor, and where for \$2 you can get on the Internet and check your email.

There are four small museums there and we bought the package admission tickets. The first place we visited was a Dory Shop. A dory is a small fishing boat that was carried by larger boats out to the fishing banks. Then, two fishermen would spend hours in every kind of weather baiting hooks and hauling in fish. Many localities have their own version of dory design (and brag of the advantages of their design over others).



Our personal guide (since we were the only ones there at the time) provided details of local history of dories and of their superiority over other dory designs (such as the ones from Halifax or Lunenburg).





Monday, September 5 - Shelburne - Yarmouth

Across the lane from the Dory Shop is the Coyle House. This was built in 1784 and is owned by the local Historical Association. It is interesting to see the tool marks in the hand hewn floor boards and we listened again to a personal guide provide the history of the house and its occupants.

Here we learned that in those days a *store* was not a retail establishment, but rather more of a wholesale source for keepers of *shops*.

We also visited the County Museum where there were interesting exhibits of the local history.

We had lunch near the Turtle at a picnic table with a nice view of the harbor.



Down the street a block or so is the Shipbuilding Interpretive Center. A man was putting the finishing touches on a dory being readied to be sent off to a national museum.

Shelburne may not be such a quiet out of the way place for long. One of the local folks told

us that they would soon be using the harbor for ferries and cruise ships. Apparently the harbor here is naturally quite deep as opposed to Yarmouth where frequent dredging is required to handle big ships.



Speaking of Yarmouth, that was our next and last stop in Nova Scotia. We planned to take the ferry known as the Cat from Yarmouth to Bar Harbor, Maine. Since we did not know exactly how long it would take to get to Yarmouth, we had made a reservation for Tuesday afternoon. However, we made it by late Monday. Because of the Labor Day weekend, I expected that the boat would be crowded, but we discovered that the 8 PM sailing had plenty of room.



Big Turtle Adventures



The Cat is a big twin-hulled ferry that can hold up to 80 cars and 14 buses along with a bunch of passengers. It turned out that the Monday night sailing had only 33 cars, the Big Turtle, and several bicycles. We were first in the RV line and among the first to drive into the bowels of the ship.



It was dark by the time the ship was under way. We stood on the fantail and watched the crew cast off, and marveled at the big spray of water exploding out of the twin hydraulic jets as the Cat gained speed. This thing can go 50 miles an hour in calm seas, and it was calm for us. We explored the interior of the ship before settling down for the three hour cruise to Bar Harbor.

You cannot stay in your vehicle when the Cat is under way. The cabin of the ship contains two movie viewing areas, a couple of large seating areas, two food service counters, a duty free store, and a casino. To drive from Yarmouth to Bar Harbor takes about 10 hours compared to the 3 hour ferry crossing. Although it may be a little expensive (about \$300 for the Turtle and two passengers) the time savings and the wildly inflated cost of gasoline made it seem a reasonable alternative.

We were nearly the first off the ship and, perhaps because it was 11PM, or maybe because we look so clean cut and honest, we quickly passed through customs. We were on familiar ground since we had passed through Bar Harbor on the way out. We knew that there was a handy Wal-Mart in Ellsworth, just a few miles up the road, so that is where we spent the rest of the night.

Tuesday, September 6, Maine to New York.

Now we were heading in the general direction of home. Since we have been to many places in New England before, we decided to follow Interstate routes to get closer to home. After crossing Maine, clipping a corner of New Hampshire, and following the Massachusetts Turnpike to where it connects with the New York Thruway near Albany, we managed to get to a Turnpike Service Area before we ran out of gas. We paid the highest price for gas so far, \$3.55 per gallon.

We could overnight at a Thruway Service Plaza again, however, a check of the KOA Campground book showed that we were in striking distance of Herkimer, NY. We got there just before their closing time of 8PM. Most campgrounds have a late registration system where you choose a spot, fill out a form, and pay in the morning, so getting to a campground after closing is not usually a disaster. But, we were glad to get settled in before dark.



We were located a few steps from a gurgling river. In the evening we met a couple from Germany who were on a tour with a small group of international travelers touring in a 12 passenger van. They had been to Boston, New York, Washington, Virginia, and were now on the last part of their trip. It was not the best experience for them because the driver was very bad at his job and did nothing to make their experience very enjoyable. It made us feel lucky that all of the guides we had along the way had been excellent.



Wednesday, September 7, Herkimer, New York.

Herkimer is a small town in the Mohawk River valley on the Erie Canal. The campground is a few miles up the Canada River from town. We were surprised to learn that right across the road from the KOA Campground are the Herkimer Diamond mines.



Actually diamonds have a hardness value of 10, while the quartz crystals found at Herkimer have a hardness of 8. What makes them unique is that natural diamonds are usually rough and have to be cut to bring out their beauty, while the Herkimer diamonds are naturally faceted.



In the morning, we first decided to extend our campground stay for another day. Diana took care of some laundry while I tended to dumping the black water tank. Then we crossed the road and visited the jewelry shop and diamond museum. We resisted the temptation to buy a ticket and try our luck smashing into rocks in search of our own treasure. Instead, we headed into Herkimer to take a ride on the Erie Canal.



We did not have a mule named Sal, and I am not sure we went 16 miles on the canal, but it was a good place to visit.

To attract tourists, they have created a place called *Gems Along the Mohawk*, a building that has a Visitor's Center and samples from 50 shops from around the *Leatherstocking Region* of New York. The place also includes the Waterfront Grille, where we had a nice lunch overlooking the canal while waiting for our cruise to start.

Our cruise boat was the Lil' Diamond, a 36 passenger water-jet powered launch operated by Captain Jerry. The captain worked as a civil engineer for the Erie Canal for 33 years before retiring and providing tourists with an excellent education on the history of the Erie Canal (according to Captain Jerry, 'the best canal in the world').



Earlier on our journey, we had watched a big ship navigate through a lock on the St. Lawrence Seaway. Now, we were getting a completely different viewpoint as the Lil' Diamond entered Lock 18 and prepared to be lowered to the next level.



Big Turtle Adventures



With our small launch, there was no need for elaborate tying of the boat in place as the valves were opened to let the water out of the lock. Captain Jerry simply used a boat hook, moving it between rungs of a ladder, to steady us as we sank.



The Captain's running commentary kept us interested for the entire two hour trip. Did you know that you could ride a boat from Buffalo (or even Duluth, Minnesota) through the Erie Canal, down the Mohawk and Hudson rivers, and along the Intercoastal waterway all the way to Texas, and only spend 25 miles of the trip in the Atlantic ocean? Although Captain Jerry might have exaggerated slightly the importance of the Erie Canal in the development of the Northwest Territory (ignoring the National Road and the Ohio River), his historical anecdotes were very interesting.

After exiting the lock, we turned around and entered again to be raised back to our previous elevation.

Unlike the heyday of the canal in the 1800's, when 5,000 barges were fighting for places along the 363 mile 40 foot wide canal, we pretty much had the whole place to ourselves.



Oops, I spoke too soon. On the way back through the lock we had to share the lock with a 300 foot long pleasure tour boat that runs from Buffalo to the tropics.



We fit together in the lock with no problem and then we watched the Grande Mariner cruise on toward Buffalo.

Once again, with no significant planning, we stumbled on another pleasant jewel of our vacation.



We drove a few miles down the Mohawk Valley from Herkimer to Little Falls, New York. Here they have restored some large old warehouse buildings along the river, and turned them into an antique shoppers' paradise. This town is a little out of the way, but has a long history, and it appeared to our untrained eyes that there were quite a few bargains to be found here.

On our way back to the KOA campground, we decided to have dinner at an interesting looking place we had seen along the way, the Heidleburg bakery and restaurant. It was more than a little disappointing, a little on the dirty side and quite understaffed. They were out of quite a few things listed on the menu. We don't recommend it.



Thursday, September 8, Pennsylvania.

Thursday, September 8, Pennsylvania.

The decision now was whether to retrace our path along the Thruway and on to Ohio, or to try a little different trail. We left the Thruway near Buffalo and took route US 219 south. This part of western New York state is very scenic with rolling hills, some big valleys, and some nice views here and there.

We stopped for fuel in Salamanca, New York at a Seneca Indian operated gas station (no sales tax) and paid \$3.19 per gallon (as opposed to \$3.68 that we saw nearby). Gas prices have gone completely crazy with jumps of nearly a dollar a gallon from one week to the next. Our gas pump attendant said that they had three price changes just that day.

We decided to spend our last night in the mountains of northwest Pennsylvania, near my hometown of Kane, Pennsylvania.

We passed through Bradford, Pennsylvania, but too late to tour the Zippo lighter factory. We were now on my home turf traveling through the Allegheny National Forest in sight of the Kinzua Reservoir. Unfortunately, only a couple of days after Labor Day, most National Forest sites were closed, spoiling our plan for a National Forest campground stay. At the Marina restaurant, they had a sign on the door that said simply 'gone fishin.'



We went to Lantz's Corners where we were able to find a camp site at the **Foote Rest** campground. (Len went to school with Dick Foote, a member of the family that once owned this campground; however, the family is no longer involved.)



Unlike the Halifax KOA, there were no begging squirrels or ducks here. However, as I went to plug the Turtle into the power outlet, a group of rabbits gathered around me. Black rabbits, black and white rabbits, grey rabbits, brown rabbits. I heard them talking to each other... 'Where is he from? Has he been traveling far? Does he have any snacks for us?'

Friday, September 9, Home Again

From Kane, it is 300 miles to Columbus. Kane, at 2,042 feet, is fairly high in elevation for this part of the world, and the climate is different than it is 50 miles away. Although it is still early September, here and there you could see a few hardwood trees showing a little hint of the fall colors that will peak in about a month.



Well, we made it there and back again. Three thousand four hundred miles successfully navigated in the Big Turtle. This is a convenient way to travel, and we had a lot of good experiences that we are happy to share with any and all who might be interested.

This version created on Sunday, September 25, 2005