



Road A, barn atop a hill whilst driving through NB towards Fundy National Park.



# Into the wide blue yonder

3,000 miles exploring Canada's Atlantic Provinces

**At just five hours from London, Canada's east coast is seldomly explored. We sent our Adventure Correspondent Hugh Francis Anderson on a road trip to the Atlantic provinces of this vast country to discover more.**

Sunlight dances off the water before me. In this twilight, the scene is a dappled artistry of brunt oranges and reds. Sailboats rock gently at their anchorages, wooden homes shimmer off the water's surface and the air is tacky and warm. The scent of cut grass lingers in the evening breeze as I inhale deeply, gazing over the bay and out to sea. I'm reminded so much of the west coast of Scotland that it's strange to believe that I'm in Canada and even stranger to know that, if I were to set sail now, the next land I'd meet would be Great Britain over 2,800 miles away. But I am in Canada, in the quaint town of Mahone Bay, Nova Scotia, coming towards the end of an almost 3,000-mile road trip across the country's Atlantic Provinces.

Ordinarily, Canada summons thoughts of vast mountains, dense boreal forests and expansive tundra. The frequented west coast draws international tourists in their millions each year. And while this offers

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Whitewater rafting, Grand Falls-Windsor, NL.

plenty in the way of exploration, adventure and journeying, it is by no means the pinnacle of what the country has to offer. Now, if you were to look to the east, to the provinces of Newfoundland & Labrador (NL), Nova Scotia (NS), Prince Edward Island (PEI) and New Brunswick (NB), you'd find a far quieter part of Canada to explore. It is here that a mammoth maritime history merges with a dramatic coastline, vibrant towns, endless winding roads and adventure aplenty; and it is this Canada that I set out to explore.

I landed into St. John's, the capital of NL, and immediately hit the road in a Land Rover Discovery. This miniscule capital exudes small-town delight. The famous painted houses throw colour onto the landscape like an impressionist painting, while trendy coffee shops bubble with youthful atmosphere. Yet up on Signal Hill lies evidence of the town's, province's and nation's brutal history. Many conflicts between the English and the French took place here during the 17th and 18th centuries and it is on Signal Hill, that the final battle of the famed Seven Years War occurred.

As I travel across Atlantic Canada, evidence of the fierce disputes between the British



Hugh at White Point Beach, NS, after a refreshing surfing session.



St John's Mallard Inn.

and the French have made a definite and clear impact on the cultural heritage of this region. In Nova Scotia, near Sydney on Cape Breton Island, the Fortress at Louisbourg has even been meticulously reconstructed to full 18th century accuracy.

Throughout the region, further evidence of its history can be viewed at any number of its historic lighthouses, many of which predate Canada's confederation in 1876. Today, the provinces appear to share both British and French histories - as I drive across New Brunswick and deep into the protected forested areas of Kouchibouguac and Fundy National Parks, the Acadian flag flies on almost every street corner and the first language remains French here too.

But the history of the region goes far deeper than this. It has been home to the native Mi'kmaq for thousands of years and there is plenty to discover if you're so inclined. In Kejimikujik National Park, NS, you need only wander to the shores of McGowen Lake to discover hundreds of petroglyphs, some estimated to be over 800 years old; or ask Parks Canada Warden Eric Tremblay in

Kouchibouguac nicely and he might show you the skull of a walrus hunted by the local Mi'kmaq over 200 years ago.

Within these dramatic historic settings lies an underpinning of outdoor pursuits: white water rafting, sea kayaking, surfing, canoeing and cycling, to name but a few. You can hike literally everywhere - the Alexander Murray Trail in NL and the Skyline Trail on Cape Breton Island, NS, are of particular note. You can also discover the wonder of Hopewell Rocks on the Bay of Fundy, where you'll witness the almost-unbelievable effects of the world's highest tides. Wildlife also abounds here.

At Bay Bulls, I explored the Witless Bay Ecological Reserve, home to the largest population of puffins in North America, alongside one of the primary spots for humpbacks between June and August. Spotting a breaching adult humpback is surely one of life's delights; and while sea kayaking in NS, I even spotted bald eagles soar through the sky.

There's a luxurious side too in the east Coast of Canada. Over on the small province of

PEI (Prince Edward Island), which is protected from the Atlantic by Nova Scotia and therefore benefits from temperatures as warm as 30 degrees, the capital Charlottetown is alive with independent coffee shops (Receiver and Kettle Black were particularly good) and fresh lobster can be devoured by the waterfront.

On the island's northern shores lies the Inn at Bay Fortune, proffering delectable farm-to-table cuisine with its Fireworks Feast offering. To the south, at Valley Pearl Oysters, you'll find some of the biggest, juiciest oysters you've ever eaten.

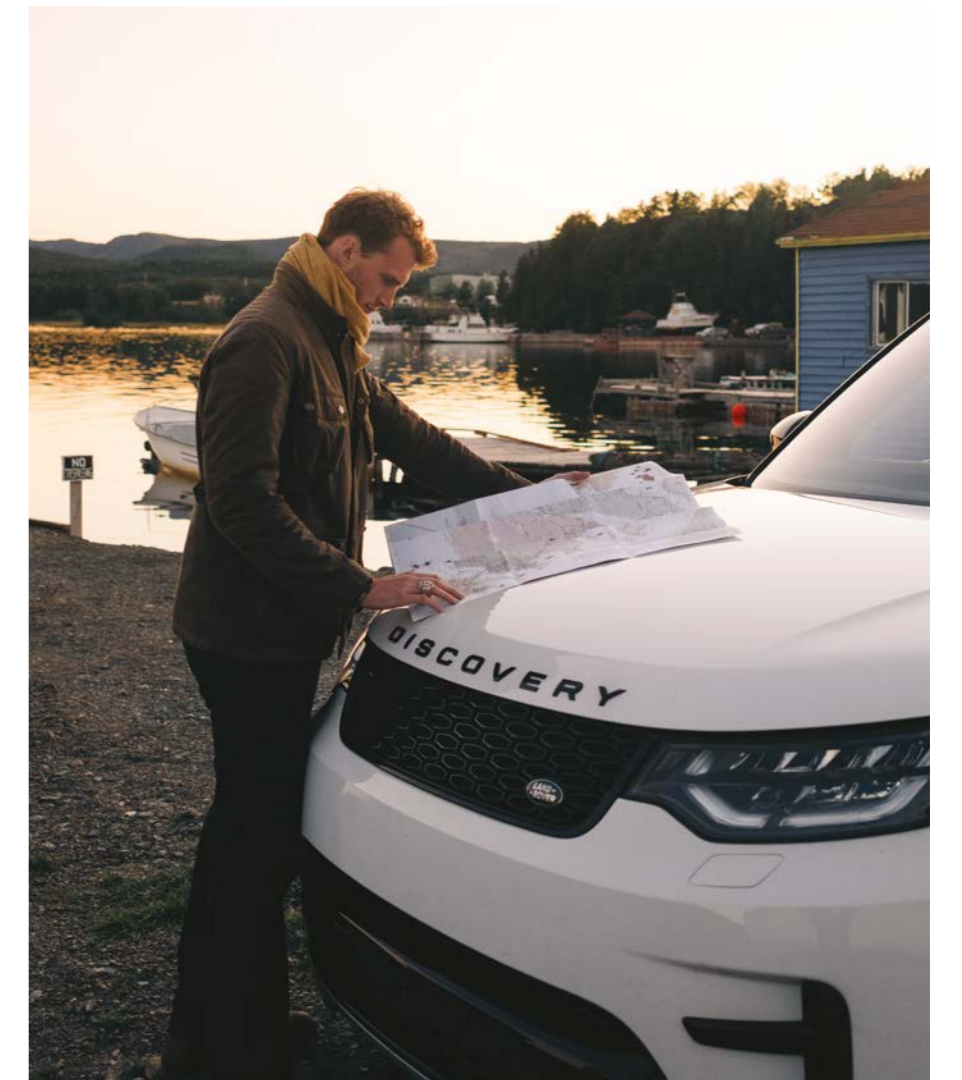
As far as the towns and cities themselves, the industrial redbrick buildings of Saint John, NS, offer yet another dimension to the journey. It feels as if stepping into a microscopic early 20th century New York. Yet again, there's a youthful atmosphere and I met one couple who have returned to live here from Toronto in pursuit of greater hedonism. With bars and restaurants aplenty, this is one of the best cities to recharge your road-tripping batteries. Further along the coastline, and not far from the border with Maine, USA, lies the prosperous town

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Hugh checks the route at King's Point, NL.





Food Market in Saint John.



The so-called drunken lampposts in Halifax waterfront.

of Saint Andrews, which I heard referred to as "the Hamptons of New Brunswick" on more than one occasion. This is evidenced by the extravagant homes, pristine streets and some of the regions more luxurious hotels – the Algonquin Resort, where I stayed, was once visited by HRH Prince Charles and Princess Diana.

Across the Bay of Fundy in Halifax, the capital of NS, the journey culminates in one of the most buzzing cities I've visited. In Atlantic Canada terms, it's huge, with a population of just under 300,000. But as far as a capital city goes, it's really very intimate.

If I can impart one word of advice for Halifax, you will not want to miss out on a visit to Bar Kismet for some of the best cocktails and fine, yet very relaxed, dining in the region. As I continue to gaze across Mahone Bay, it dawns on me that exploring such a massive region draws many fantastic elements to the fore - wildlife, culture, gastronomy and adventure are all available. And while, let's face it, the mountains to the west are more dramatic and impressive than the forests and coastline of the east,

It is a place where you can still get in with the locals, discover quirky spots that haven't been written about (and there are more than a few) and explore in the most 21st century sense possible. After all, travel is not about ticking a destination off a list, it's about creating lasting memories.

For more information on the provinces, please visit:

**Newfoundland and Labrador -**  
[www.newfoundlandlabrador.com](http://www.newfoundlandlabrador.com)

**Nova Scotia -** [www.novascotia.com](http://www.novascotia.com)

**Prince Edward Island -**  
[www.tourismpei.com](http://www.tourismpei.com)

**New Brunswick -**  
[www.tourismnewbrunswick.ca](http://www.tourismnewbrunswick.ca)

All pictures by Alexander Flemming

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A fisherman's cabin in Louisbourg Harbour, NS.