

## **Why my lip balm tastes like Lobster**

One of the places that my husband and I had always wanted to go was Newfoundland, and we finally got the chance this summer. Friends of ours from Sudbury had transferred out there, about a year and a half ago; so this trip would be a wonderful way to reconnect with good friends, and also explore a bit of this easternmost province. We had booked our flights last winter, so all that was left to do was pack the night before, and head to the airport for our six am boarding time. Yes.....Gladys would be up and mobile just after three in the morning.

Just after five thirty pm, Newfoundland time, we arrived at Deer Lake, population of about 5,000. The experience struck me as a similar to arriving at Sudbury, or Thompson airport: you have to take the pilot's word for it that this is the place since all you saw on final approach, was rocks and bush. Our friend was there waiting for us. On the short drive to their house I got the impression of a somewhat large town, with pockets of business areas, scattered randomly throughout the community.

Deer Lake, the result of a widening in the Humber River, is located at the intersection of the Trans Canada highway, and the Viking Trail on Newfoundland and Labrador's west coast. It got its name from the first European visitors, who assumed that the animals crossing the Lake on their annual migration route were deer. It turned out that the animals they saw were actually woodland caribou, but by then I guess the name had stuck. People started arriving to settle this area back in 1864 from Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia. They had originally made their living from logging and trapping, but realised that the soil and climate were suitable for farming, so they took that up as well. The original town site was a work camp built in 1922 to support an international pulp and paper company. By 1925, a formal town site was constructed that offered a railroad terminal, a small hospital, and churches. The airport, a main one for that region, was constructed in 1955.

Supper consisted of good company, grilled sausage, and a tasty pink potato and pickled beet salad. After cleaning up the kitchen, we went for a short walk through a wooded trail that wound its way along the shore of the lake. As we walked, we could hear a band playing at the community centre. Most likely gearing up for the Canada Day celebrations the next day, our friend told us. July first, I was to discover, means more than just Canada day for Newfoundlanders. Since 1949 this date is also observed as their Remembrance Day. On July first back in 1916, the Newfoundland Regiment at Beaumont-Hamel was nearly wiped out by German machine gun fire, as the regiment advanced through holes in the barbed wire, through an open field. For many years, it had been the custom to wear forget-me-not flowers, in remembrance of these men and their sacrifice.

Well rested and ready to go exploring the next morning, we toured around the Deer Lake and Corner Brook area, stopping at a restaurant in a small village, for sandwiches and home baked snacks. We sat out on the deck enjoying a brisk breeze and a view of the Gulf of St. Laurence. Before we left, I bought a cup cake for the road. I don't usually go for dessert, but it looked too good to pass up. Back at the house we relaxed for awhile before departing for Cow Head. It was Lobster season, and our friends had purchased tickets for a supper held at one of the churches located in this community. They had also got tickets to a musical later that night.

To get there we traveled northwest of Deer Lake, through Gros Morne National Park. It has been named a World Heritage Park Site by the UNESCO (The United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) because of its unique geological and terrestrial makeup. My traveler's guide boasted that this park was the geological equivalent of the Galapagos, and the Great Barrier Reef. It was a spectacular drive through the mountains and along rugged coastline, where you could often spot whales surfacing the water as they swam close to shore. These mountains, believe it or not, are part of the Appalachian Trail that starts at Mount Katahdin Maine, goes through Eastern Canada, across Western Newfoundland and Labrador, and then extends into Europe.

As soon as we entered the church's recreation hall, I had no doubt that this was the place. The smell of fresh cooked lobster met us at the door of the packed room. We were quickly greeted and sent to help ourselves to an impressive array of salads, nestled in an ice filled wooden boat, resting on sawhorses in the middle of the room. By the time we had loaded up on salads and sat down, our lobsters had arrived. I have eaten lobster before in salads or dips, but never a whole one. As I stared down at my supper, I could've sworn it winked at me, but this was no time to be faint of heart. I picked up my over sized sea bug and began pulling its claws and tail off, dipping its flesh into the melted butter. I tried it with butter and without butter, and concluded that it was delicious either way. You can eat everything but the lungs, I was told, but my preference is strictly for the meat. Locally baked molasses cookies, and tea or coffee rounded off our meal. We found a hiking trail that cut through a field nearly over grown with wild flowers and small trees, and walked off supper, while waiting for the show to start.

The evening's entertainment was one, in a series of shows, presented every year throughout the summer. The traditional music and stories performed had often been enjoyed together by the folks of the Island in the days before mass media such as TV, radio, and the internet. In those times, as everyone knows, you made your own entertainment. We laughed, sang and clapped our hands as the group of four performers impressed us with two hours of music and stories. Some were very elaborate arrangements, others brilliant in their simplicity. It took me back to my childhood, when family and friends would get together to play music and tell wild stories..... I

really miss that now that I live so far away from the family. I guess we will just have to make a point of doing these things when I go back to visit.

By the time we pointed the van in the direction of home, it was starting to get dark, so we took our time and watched carefully for moose. A hunting brochure I had browsed through claimed that the province's moose population densities rival those of anywhere on the planet; and by the number of moose vehicle collisions that have occurred in the province, I am inclined to believe it. They have signs up everywhere warning people about wandering moose, as well as posting the collision tally so far for the year. Even during the middle of the day, I had often spotted moose feeding along the roadside. That same brochure claimed that they have the world's most southerly woodland caribou herd, and it is the only place in the world where non residents can hunt them. I imagine motorist might want to watch out for caribou as well.

The next day we went on a day trip to check out the Table lands, located in the southern part of Gros Morne National Park. The table lands are a series of giant rocks with flat tops, scattered across a rather moonscape looking terrain. They were once part of the earth's mantle, but had been forced up through the crust by the shifting of the earth's surface. None of us felt up to hiking to the top, so we followed hiking trails that wound along the base of the rocks. It was not so barren in this area, and I enjoyed trying to identify most of the local flowers and shrubs that grew alongside the trails.

After exploring the table lands, we stopped for lunch in a small fishing village, where I enjoyed the best fish sandwich of my life. It was not only served on toasted bread, but the filet was pan fried cod, instead of deep fried whatever. With our tummies full we resumed our journey, meandering along to numerous lookout points to view fiords, extensive wet lands, breathtaking coastal views, and even a hanging valley.

We packed our bags the night before so that we could get an early start for the drive to the town of Twillingate; reputed to be the best iceberg viewing location in Newfoundland. Traveling east on the Trans Canada, I entertained myself by noting the beautiful wild flowers that grew in the forests and wetlands of the interior. Expanses of Blue flag, Bakeapple, (a member of the rose family) Crackerberry, Harebell, Blue Eyed Grass, Lupines, Wild Roses, Pitcher Plants, and many others that I did not recognise. We turned onto highway 340, which crossed over several Islands to arrive at our destination at about two in the afternoon. We spent the rest of the afternoon touring the local museum, winery, and ocean shore observation sites.

I found the museum small, but packed with interesting local artefacts, hand knitting, and a small stuffed polar bear. This bear had been one of two who had wandered into the town about a year ago. They were able to capture and release back into the wild the one bear, but this one decided that it preferred to hang around the public school, so they had to shoot it. The Auk Island winery

is named in honour of The Great Auk, North America's only flightless bird and the world's original penguin. They offer tours and the opportunity to sample their delicious wines, made from wild berries purchased from local pickers. If you purchase twelve, they will ship it anywhere in Canada for ten dollars: we bought two cases.

Then it was off to a dinner show put on by a local group called, All Around The Circle, held at a community centre. The entertainers prepared and served up a yummy home style meal, and then performed a traditional show of music and amusing skits. It was great fun. And I found out what an "Ugly Stick" was a homemade percussion instrument, not something you beat someone with. Later that night, my husband and I strolled along the streets of the waterfront, admiring the full moon hanging just over the water. It had been a very good day.

Thanks to heavy fog, the next morning you couldn't even see the across the bay. We had reservations for a boat tour that morning to hopefully see some whales, but everyone was optimistic that the fog would soon burn off by the time we got underway. It didn't. Our boat's captain and tour guide first showed us some of the boats that were used, and explained how to identify what each type of boat fished for. Next we headed out to explore the coastline and hopefully spot some whales or even icebergs. The fog started to clear for a short while and then came back with a vengeance, making it necessary for our guide to use radar to navigate. We didn't see any whales, but he was able to show us breathtaking views of coastline, and nesting areas. Most of the time I could comfortably stand if I hung on to the railing, but when we were in close to the Islands and shoreline, the boat pitched around so much that I had to sit down. The volume and power of the ocean can only be described as awesome. Back on dry land again, we thanked our captain for the fun boat ride and headed for St. Johns.

We arrived at around supper time, and quickly showered and made reservations at a restaurant located on a street downtown which is known for its high concentration of bars and eateries. It was very relaxing sitting out on the patio, watching the crowds walk by; and observing the local pigeons boldly strut through the open doors of the restaurant, to help themselves to any food they found unattended. I greatly appreciated the fact that they chose to walk instead of flying. True to my east coast theme, I ordered lobster tail and grilled shrimp, washing it down with the local beer. After supper we walked along the water front, and later ended up at a pub called Birdie Malloy's, where a very talented local musician was performing traditional Irish and east coast music. Our friend had planned to later take us to one of the bars known for Screeching In tourists, but we were having so much fun where we were, that we never did get there. Maybe next trip to the Island we will go drink screech, and kiss a cod.

It was chilly and over cast the next morning as our van climbed and wound its way up to Cape Spear, the most eastern point of Canada. Looking back, I observed the way St. John's started at

the water's edge and grew up the sides of the mountain, its steep streets lined with colourful buildings (referred to as "jelly Bean"), precariously clinging to the hillsides. The streets of the newer subdivisions were not quite so steep, but the roads that led to them were. Once at our destination, the view was spectacular from the windswept cliff looking out over the Atlantic. During the war a bunker and heavy guns had been built here as a first line of defence. The remains of these can still be seen there. We wandered about the site, walking out onto the many lookout platforms to admire the view, which was amazing. And then we saw them: whales! They were swimming just off shore.

It was a wonderful experience touring Newfoundland. We saw amazing things, eat tasty food, had fun adventures, and met warm hearted people; these memories will last me a lifetime. There is just not enough time for me to tell you every detail, but I hope that you have enjoyed what I have shared with you. My husband and I certainly hope to make the trip again sometime and stay even longer, because a week is not nearly long enough to see it all.

It seems no matter where I go, I always find something wonderful about that place. Even when going back to visit Trout Creek, I still find something amazing and new, each time I go. I can't honestly say that I like any one place better than the other, I just enjoying being where I am at the time I'm there. I guess that is what you might call living in the moment, or is it just a gypsie thing.

Having a fantastic time, wish you were with me too.

Gladys McElrea

The Northern Gypsie

Gladysmcelrea.com