

Deluxe diners

Not for waistline watchers—but oh, so good!

by Sandra Phinney



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Jean Knowles



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Sandra's picks

NEW BRUNSWICK

Ossie's Lunch, Bethel: The neon road sign says it all: "The best seafood in North America." The cream of coconut pie is also very popular. After the first bite, I knew why. (506) 755-2758.

Steve's Diner, Riverview: This place has a '50s and '60s feel. The hot turkey sandwich smothered in gravy is popular and the fish is always delicious. (506) 387-2885 or stevesdiner.ca.

NOVA SCOTIA

The Battered Fish, various locations in Halifax area: As one fan noted online: "That big white roll of lobster claw and knuckle meat, with Dijon mayo and baby spinach, has me swooning." I second that. (902) 491-3474 or thebatteredfish.ca.

Mr. Fish, Shelburne: It's just a tiny blue bungalow, but I love that you can get your fish battered or with a crumb coating. I get one of each! The owners are commercial fishermen, so you can also buy fresh lobsters and other seafood here. (902) 875-3474.

NEWFOUNDLAND

Ziggy Peelgood's, St. John's (and area): You'll find Ziggy Peelgood's chip wagon around town and also at special events. For a walk on the wild side, try the Mex-Zig-An fries: salsa, sour cream, mozzarella and jalapenos piled onto your fries. (709) 738-3788.

Ches's Famous Fish & Chips (various locations in NL): Founder Ches Barbour said: "There is one fundamental theme in Newfoundland's history: Without the fish, we wouldn't be here." This place is legendary, operating more than 60 years! chessfishandchips.ca.

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

Rick's Fish 'n' Chips, St. Peters Bay: Owner and cook Rick Renaud knows a thing or two about seafood. Along with great fish and chips, Rick makes some wicked Cajun mussels and a great seafood pizza. (902) 961-3438 or ricksfishnchips.com.

I've fallen in love with **John's Lunch** in Dartmouth, NS. It all started when I posted a note on Facebook looking for diners and take-outs that serve "wow" food—places with burgers so big they're a challenge to chomp; fish cakes as good as your grandmother's, and mile-high pies that add an inch to your waistline just by looking at them.

That's how I ended up at John's Lunch, recently declared to have the best fish and chips in the country by *Canadian Living* magazine. Lots of big names pass through, ranging from former Governor General Adrienne Clarkson and author John Ralston Saul to musician Joel Plaskett, actor Rob Lowe and the cast from *The Trailer Park Boys*. Although I didn't meet a celebrity, I met Kathy Hilchey, who has been a staffer there for more than 13 years.

"I'm pretty much the new girl," Hilchey says with a chuckle, "And, yes, you'd have to kill me to get my job. Customers come in happy and leave happier."

I had a fish burger and fries—the largest and best fish burger I've ever eaten—bar none. The fish was flaky, sweet, and had never seen the inside of a freezer. I was also in awe of Hilchey, who simultaneously scoots around taking orders (but never writes them down), delivers food, cleans tables, acknowledges everyone as they come in, reels off a few jokes here and there and never misses a beat. She already knows that the next time I waltz through the doors, she'll call out for an order of clams.

Something else I love? Fish cakes. But they have to be made from *real* salt fish and *real* potatoes—no instant stuff. A few years ago, I went on a hunt for the definitive fish cake—and discovered it at **The Old Mill Seafood & Dairy Bar** on the Hardscratch Road in Yarmouth, NS. Owner and manager Theresa Ritchie also won me over with her clams—easy on the batter, sweet, juicy and never overdone!

There are lots of great diners and take-outs in Atlantic Canada. Mind you, I still have a few to suss out, especially in Newfoundland, so I turned to photographer, colleague, and self-proclaimed "junk food queen," Jean Knowles. (Knowles has a blog, at easternedgephotog.blogspot.ca, where she posts as "a photographer and cultural interpreter living on Canada's East Coast.")

Keith's Takeout & Family Restaurant over in the Goulds, NL, is one of her favourite places for "Fi & Chi" (a shorthand used for fish and chips by those who take the orders and those in the know, pronounced "fee and chee"). What always gets her attention on the menu is the "loaded" order of chips. It comes topped with

fried onions, dressing, gravy and peas. It would get my attention, too, only I'd need a stretcher and a couple of able-bodied guys to carry me out.

Another place that Knowles endorses is **Long Dick's Sausage Emporium** in St. John's, NL, owned by Steve Smith. The menu might sound highfalutin for a food truck ensconced on a concrete pad in the middle of the city, but its claim to fame is a half-pound German sausage cooked in a broth of onions and spices, then grilled and served on a custom-baked challah bun with a choice of toppings.

In case you're wondering, the name Long Dick (no snickering please) comes from the owner's grandfather, Richard Noseworthy, who was born in Spaniard's Bay. There were three Richards in the community, and in keeping with Newfoundland tradition, each had a nickname: Goat Dick, Little Dick and Long Dick. After rum-running in Boston, Richard "Long Dick" returned home, and was quite innovative in producing whisky. But in 1949, he promised his 76-year-old mother he'd give it up; a few years later, he opened a general store, and ran the store until he retired.

Smith says he has a real passion for food. "I just decided to do what I was passionate about. My dad always said I was the daughter my mother never had, because I was always in the kitchen; I really do love food, and this is just my way of doing what I want to do," he says, adding that his sausage stands out because, "instead of doing it the usual way, which is what I call 'boil and burn,' I cook the sausage in a broth of onions and with my own seasoning." Smith also says he loves the immediate feedback he gets from his customers. "If you're not eating my sausage and groaning, I've done something wrong," he laughs.

Sounds like he's following in his grandfather's footsteps—the enterprising and daring part, that is.

Based on Knowles' recommendations, I'll be heading to those places the next time I'm in St. John's—the heck with my waistline. 🍷

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