

# Lost and Found

by Sandra Phinney

I've been walking on a forest trail for three hours. I'm not only drenched with sweat and parched – I'm lost. I started this hike on the Mi'kmawey Debert "Paleo-Indian" site, one of the most significant Indigenous archaeological regions in North America, but I didn't anticipate that a little trek of 4.4 kilometres would turn into a 10-kilometre exhausting trudge.

As I'm trying to figure out where I took a wrong turn, the trail crests the top of a hill. I see a chain-link fence surrounding an enclosure the size of three football fields. The transition from old-growth forest to civilization is instant. Inside are transport trucks, cargo vans, and container vessels. Eventually, I spy a building and enter the front door of Kohltech, a well-known company that makes windows and doors. The receptionist takes one look at me and rushes over with a big mug of icy water. Could she tell me how to get back to the parking lot at the Mi'kmawey Debert trail? "I'll drive you!"

After a short, grateful, nap in my car, I head for my next destination. Within an hour I'm driving by a tired-looking sign: "Welcome to Historic Londonderry." Below, a second sign: "City Limits." The latter makes me smile as I know this is now a community of around 100 people, but between 1849 and 1909, Londonderry had been a thriving metropolis. Two million tons of iron ore were mined here.

Within seconds I see a small, grassy village square that has three interesting items from the days of yore. After taking a few photos, I return to my car, and check my guidebook: "Londonderry Provincial Park has mining artifacts, while historic slag heaps and 'beehive' coke ovens occur just north of the park."

Off I go in search of the provincial park. I drive. And drive. Run out of pavement. And homes. Backtracking, I stop at the first house and ask directions. "No provincial parks around here." I repeat this line of inquiry five more times when, finally, a white-haired woman in a tiny Hansel and Gretel house says, "Come in!" Setting glasses and cold apple juice on the table, she adds, "Yes. Just keep going and turn right where the Catholic church is." My hostess is 86, spry as a squirrel, and her blue eyes dance as if she's in a state of perpetual glee. She tells me the story of meeting her husband "out west," how they created a family of nine in this part of the world and ... would I like to see her collection of salt and pepper shakers?

An hour later, I still can't find the provincial park. I start composing a letter in my head to the folks who published the guidebook. I rant about poor directions, wasting my time, and how *not* to impress travellers. More side roads; more knocking on doors; more blank faces. Then, BINGO! A woman says, "Hold on! I'm Sally. I'll take you there."

Turns out that the provincial park was decommissioned years



ago. "Three of the artifacts are in our village square," Sally informs me. As the community couldn't afford the upkeep, the park went to seed – literally and figuratively. We walk through what looks like a hay field littered with brambles and errant alder bushes in the middle of a forested area. Out of the blue, she asks, "Would you like to see the coke ovens?" I could have hugged her.

We drive a short distance, park the car, cross the ditch, and veer into the woods. And there they are – 50 semi-circular brick coke ovens side by side, about four feet high and 12 feet wide – like camouflaged caves. "Sometimes we brought our children for picnics in the ovens. They loved that."

*So much invisible history*, I think to myself. Wondering out loud why there was no signage or easy access to this site, Sally explains that the coke ovens are on private property. The owner lives in the U.S. and is not interested in selling or partnering with the community.

Coming out of the woods, Sally asks, "Do you have time to see the slag mounds? They're just down the road." Within seconds I'm staring up at mini mountains created more than 100 years ago. "We used to slide down them in the winter," she says. I try and imagine what it was like when Londonderry really was a city.

Sally is 78 and doesn't have a computer, so we exchange phone numbers and addresses and promise to keep in touch. By now the hands on my watch tell me it's 5:57 p.m. I still have

a long drive to reach Spencer's Island, where I've booked a cottage for three nights. Surely, I'll be able to see more than two Geoparks tomorrow.

The area I've been exploring is part of the recently designated UNESCO Cliffs of Fundy Geopark located on part of the Glooscap Trail in Nova Scotia. UNESCO describes a Geopark as: "Single, unified geographical areas where sites and landscapes of international geological significance are managed with a holistic concept

of protection, education, and sustainable development."

Globally, there are 169 Geoparks in 44 countries. China has the most with 41; Canada has five. When I heard that the Cliffs of Fundy received the prized designation as a UNESCO Geopark, I was chuffed, and planned a three-day visit. With 30 "Geosites" of interest between Debert and Apple River – a distance of 137 kilometres – I assumed that I could visit five a day.

Having a Type A personality, I tend to cram a lot of activities in a small amount of time. My husband once bought me a T-shirt that said: "A driven woman lives here." The family joke is that I wore it out in three months.

My trusty guidebook also explains how "300 million years ago the continents collided to form Pangea; 200 million years ago – during the age of dinosaurs – it began to rip apart, and the modern world was born." I also learn that the Mi'kmaq have lived here for more than 11,000 years. This region is home to the legendary hero-figure Glooscap, whose stories are at the heart of Mi'kmaq culture and identity.

Arriving at Spencer's Island at 7:30 p.m., I realize that it's been almost eight hours since I had something to eat. As I'm checking in, one of the owners asks, "Have you eaten?"

"No, but I have food with me. No problem."

"We just finished supper and there's lots of leftovers. Here. Pull up a chair."

Within seconds I'm served a mound of roast pork laced with gravy, along with creamy mashed potatoes, and corn on the cob. I don't let on that I'm a vegetarian. Rather, I grin my thanks and dig in with gusto.

The next morning, I meet my hosts at 9 a.m. Laurie and Cindy Currie operate "Local Guy Adventures," a biking-hiking outdoor tour company. I'm not a pretty sight on a bike, but I did book a four-hour hike – after reading this on their website: "Step back in time on this guided hiking tour within the Cliffs of Fundy Geopark. Feel like you're in Jurassic world as you make your way past beautiful waterfalls, old-growth forest, and trek through one of only three slot canyons in Nova Scotia. Be wowed as the nearly 200-foot



One of 50 coke ovens used in the heyday of iron production.



Partridge Island at low tide, with the traditional fishing weir that's been in use for generations.



canyon walls make way for lush, mossy forest and the sounds of the nearby George Fraser Falls welcome you."

What I don't know is that instead of viewing 200-foot canyon walls along our merry way, we'll be hiking down down down the canyon then up up up again. When this becomes evident, I gulp. *Get a grip old girl. You can do this.* Cautiously, I proceed down the long, steep incline, alternately holding onto trees

and Laurie's extended arm. At the bottom of the canyon, we proceed to walk along a slippery stream up to the base of the first set of falls. By now, I am so hot and exhausted I stand under the freezing-cold water and let it pound over my head and fully-dressed body.

Emerging, Laurie explains that we will now climb a rope up the side of the cliff, then zip-line over the gorge to the larger



Triassic-Jurassic Fault at Five Island and Old Wife.

set of falls. Although common sense is not my strong suit, a little voice inside my 76-year-old chubby body wails *Noooo! Stop now or they'll have to bring in a helicopter and medics to haul you out!* Sensibly, I call it quits; my hosts are gracious – perhaps even relieved. Leaving my pride at the brook, I proceed to do the return trek up up the forested, cathedral-like canyon – prayerfully – on my hands and knees.

Oddly enough, after a late lunch, I get a second wind, and decide to carry on to Economy Falls – a Geosite close by in the Kenomee Wilderness Area where “the majestic rock face is the edge of Avalonia, one of the tectonic jigsaw pieces of the ancient Appalachians.”

The literature says there are 186 steps to the base of the falls – or I can turn left at the steps, follow the path to a small wooden foot bridge that crosses the gorge, and view the falls from there. The latter sounds good to me. I take the River Philip Road as directed and start looking for signs to Economy Falls. The only sign I see says “Kenomee,” with an arrow to the right, so I continue straight ahead. The road narrows, then disintegrates into potholes the size of bathtubs and gullies that remind me of the morning’s canyons. The road is so narrow and horrid, I can’t turn around.

As my heart pounds, my anxiety level soars out of sight.

I remember Karen Armstrong – author of *Through the Narrow Gate* – and how she bartered with God to spare her little sister from dying of diphtheria. “Dear God,” she wrote, “If Lindsay gets better, I’ll think about being a nun.” Her sister survives; Armstrong becomes a nun, although she breaks free of the church after five years.

Becoming a nun isn’t an option, yet I can’t come up with another proposition. Instead, I fret about destroying the undercarriage, and wonder if I’ll have to spend the night in the car. An hour later, I’m still white-knuckling my way along, when *Hallelujah!* Telephone poles and power lines come into view. Miraculously – within 200 yards – is a house and a real road. I am so relieved I weep. After composing myself, I spot two gents having a yarn in a barn and I ask for directions to Economy Falls.

“Oh, it’s on the River Philip Road.”

“Yes, I was on that road but didn’t see any signs for the falls.”

“Did you drive by the big blueberry fields?”

“Yes, drove by and kept going.”

“You couldn’t have gotten far. That road’s no good.”

“But I just came through.”

“Not possible!”

“I just did. Came out just beyond your driveway. But I still don’t know where Economy Falls is.”

“Well, you should’ve turned right at the end of the blueberry fields.”

“But the sign said ‘Kenomee.’”

“Yes, but *that’s* how you get to Economy Falls.”

#### POSTSCRIPT

Historian and suffragette Miriam Beard once said, “Travel is more than the seeing of sights; it is a change that goes on, deep and permanent, in the ideas of living.” I looked up the word “travel,” which seems broadly defined as people moving between relatively distant geographical locations, usually by foot, bike, car, train, bus, or boat. Although this journey in the UNESCO Cliffs of Fundy Geopark wasn’t about taking a long trip distance-wise, I re-

alized yet one more time that travel is not about checking off a list of places or showing off a “done that” brag sheet. It’s about letting things unfold and having engaging experiences – the kind not typically found in a visitor’s guide. My encounters with people along the way proved that over and over again – although I did manage to see more sites the next day, including Soley Cove and its famous “Flowerpots,” the Triassic-Jurassic Fault and Old Wife at Five Islands, and the Wards Brook Age of Sail Museum.

Bonus: when I asked who could tell me about Glooscap and the Mi’kmaq legends, I was directed to Gerald Gloade – artist and educator – in Millbrook First Nation. He kindly agreed to meet; I was enthralled with his stories.

One of my favourites involves Glooscap’s grandmother and her magic cooking pot. “Her home was Partridge Island and she was always ready to receive company,” Gloade said, “and if she cut off a piece of moose meat, it would just grow back.” He also explained that if you go there two hours before high tide, you’ll see the water churning as grandmother stirs her pot. Although I had been to Partridge Island, I made a point to return again a few days later, two hours before high tide. Sure enough, the water bubbled and boiled mere feet along the length of the beach. It was both mystical and mesmerizing.



Soley Cove's famous Flower Pot.



Grandmother and her cooking pot at Partridge Island (Illustrated by Gerald Gloade).