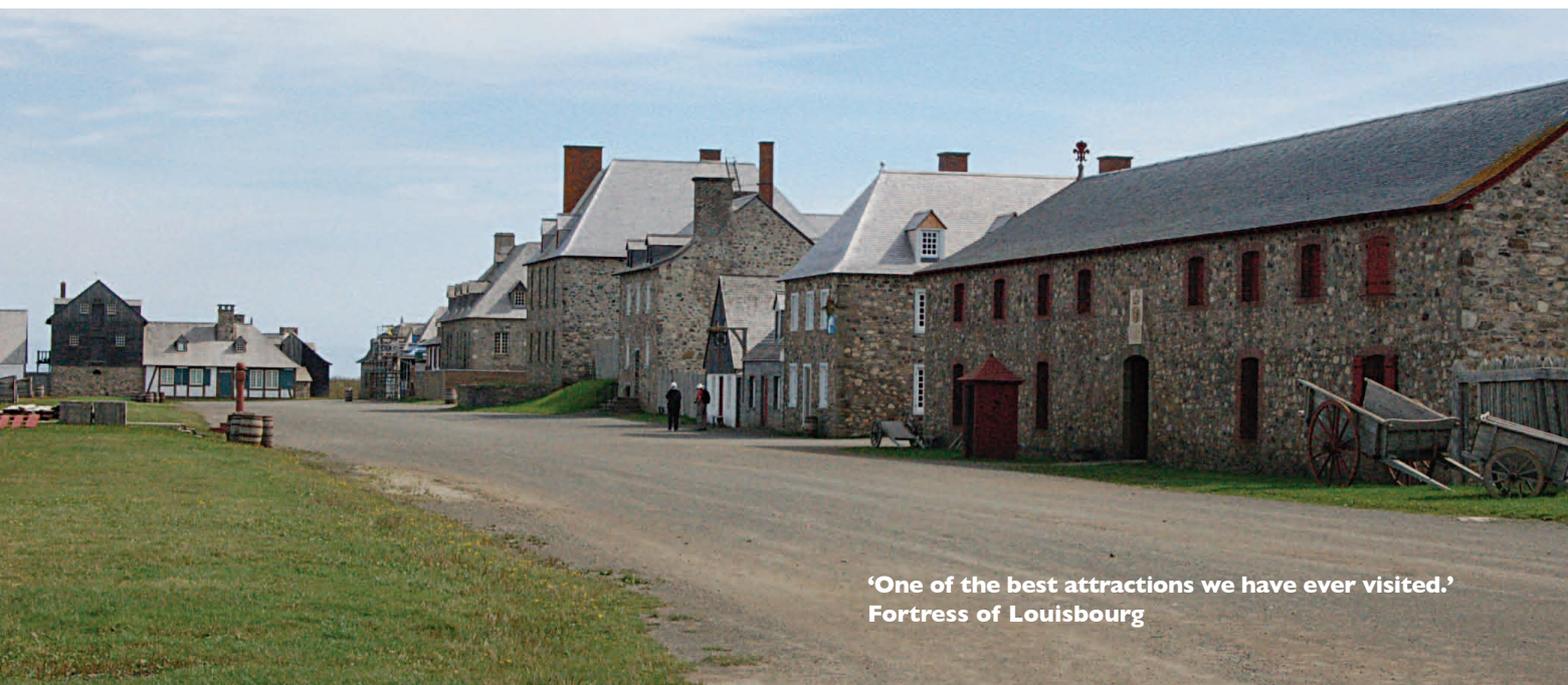


We became RVers in Nova Scotia!



'One of the best attractions we have ever visited.'
Fortress of Louisbourg

A tent just didn't cut it!

By Shari Talbot



'Glad we're not in a tent'
Five Islands Campground, NS

Early in 2012, my husband started joking about selling everything and taking a big trip. I laughed along with him, right up until the closing date of our house, in August of that year. I truly didn't expect it to happen, but it did. With the contents of our house in storage, we packed up our tent and the rest of our camping gear. Then, with only a sketchy plan, we squeezed our daughter (age 6) and son (age 4) into the little space that was left in the truck, and headed east.

Earlier in the year, we discussed buying a travel trailer at length. We scoured Kijiji and Facebook ads, stopped to look at many roadside sales, and often sighed wistfully as we drove past RV dealers. Sadly, we decided the upgrade wasn't in our budget, and resigned ourselves to the fact that we would be travelling with a tent.

We spent almost two weeks camping and hiking through Quebec provincial parks, and exploring the Saguenay Region, north of the St. Lawrence River. The ground was getting cold and the weather was not cooperating in the evenings. Of course, we stayed in a motel here and there to warm up and break the monotony. The kids coined the name "Superhuit" for the motel in Quebec City. It remained one

of our most memorable stays because of the bright yellow water slide. Thankfully, the daytime weather was beautiful. We loved the mountains, scenery, and wildlife, and I'm sure we will spend much more time there in the future.

As we enjoyed Quebec a little more than we expected, time was flying. We knew we had a lot to do in Nova Scotia, so we drove through New Brunswick without stopping. In Nova Scotia, we spent one night near Truro, and then headed toward the Cabot Trail. Years ago, we spent some time in the southern part of the province. On this trip, our plan was to focus on the northern region and the Halifax area.

Our first stop, in the north, was the Cape Breton Highlands National Park (<http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/pn-np/ns/cbreton/index.aspx>), just north of Cheticamp. Late in the camping season, the campground felt all but abandoned. We did, however, meet a wonderful Polish/German couple there. In their broken English, they shared many stories of their lives and their travels, while they showered the children with small gifts from around the world.

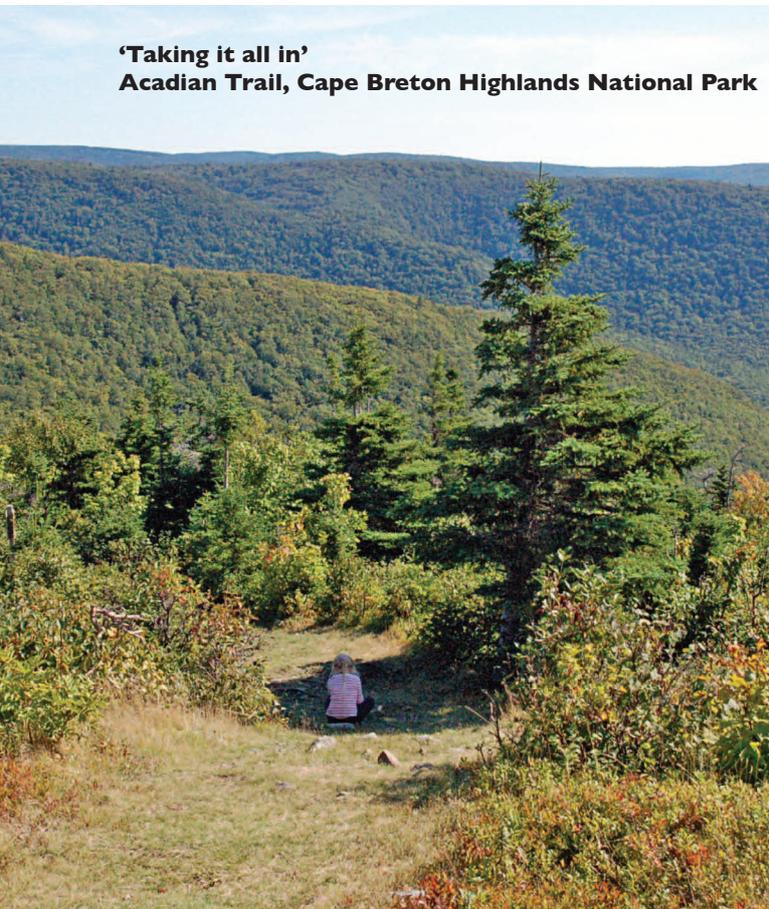
From the campground, we decided to spend the day hiking the Acadian Trail. Like the campground, the trail was very quiet, and we met very few fellow hikers that

day. Before we left, park staff warned us to stay together. Coyotes, bears and moose were about, and the coyotes in particular had lost all fear of humans. We hiked for about 5 hours. The vertical climb was about 1,200 feet (365 metres) with crazy high drop-offs where we couldn't see the bottom. We were pretty sure we followed a moose all the way up to the top, but his scat was the only evidence. At the beginning of the trail, the vegetation was so lush and green. It was interesting to note how it changed throughout. At the top of the trail, our surroundings of brown grass and short trees felt more like an African Savannah than the forest we had started in. There were several places to sit and enjoy the lookouts throughout the hike. The panoramic views of the ocean were incredible. We constantly watched for whales, and the children were positive that's what they were seeing. However, being so high up, it was impossible to tell the difference between whale spouts and whitecaps. The kids were wiped out by the end of the hike, but the promise of ice cream kept them walking until the end.

After our time at Cheticamp, we continued our drive on the Cabot Trail through the National Park. We had been told that the east side of Cabot Trail (North End Cheticamp to Sydney) was spectacular, and we were definitely not disappointed. If you are doing this drive, take time to ensure your brakes and tires are functioning well. The cliffs are steep, the turns are sharp, and the roads wind and twist like crazy. There are a lot of places to stop and take in the breathtaking ocean views, untouched wilderness, and rugged terrain. Taking full advantage of these pull-offs, it took us nearly 7 hours to drive about 200 kilometres. We stopped at almost every lookout to look out over the cliffs, scan for wildlife, and watch the waves crash into the rocks. We were so thankful for clear blue skies on this leg of our journey. Sadly, we did the drive in a day, but you could easily take several if you stopped in the communities to appreciate the festivals, history, music and culture. There are more than fifteen private and national park campgrounds along the Cabot Trail, so accommodation is not a problem. This is another place we will likely visit again.

We left the Cabot Trail by way of a five-minute ride on a small ferry from Little Narrows, and were excited to be heading toward Sydney. After nine straight nights of rain, a close call in a motel with bedbugs, and steadily dropping temperatures at night, we were ready for higher ground. A couple of days earlier, we had begun poking around on Kijiji again, and found the price of trailers to be quite a bit lower than they had been at home. We also found one we were very interested in! While we waited for the deal to go through, and the dealer to get our new home ready, we took in a few more sites.

**'Taking it all in'
Acadian Trail, Cape Breton Highlands National Park**



As a family, we rate the Fortress of Louisbourg as one of the best attractions we have ever visited. From its beautiful French architecture, to the 120 staff working each day, everything about Louisbourg is impressive. To date, they have only excavated 1/5 of the site, but their literature states that it is the largest reconstructed fort in North America. We spent about 5 hours there, and we could easily have stayed longer. Staff dressed and acted as if they were living in the 1700's, and they were very knowledgeable and friendly. In 1745, the fortress would have had 700 soldiers and 2,200 citizens. Our visit gave us a very good idea of what life in the Fortress would have looked like, from military drummers and soldiers, to natives, nuns and civilians. It was a beautiful experience that we will remember for a long time to come.

My Mom is a huge Rita MacNeil fan. Before we left Ontario, she made me promise that we wouldn't leave Cape Breton Island without visiting Rita's Tea Room in Big Pond. Due to a variety of circumstances, we ended up there much later than we had planned. Because of the time, we were only going to take a few photos and carry on. The staff asked if we wanted to eat, and we took a few minutes to decide, but finally said yes. We were no sooner seated when Rita walked in and sat down. What a treat! She even signed a CD for my Mom, which she will treasure since the legendary singer passed on seven months to the day after our visit to her teahouse.

Our next stop was the Miner's Memorial Museum in Glace Bay. There, we donned hard hats and capes before we embarked on an underground mine tour. Abby, our tour guide, was a retired miner who had lived most of his life underground. With a strong sense of humour and a thick east-coast accent, he told stories of days gone by, and a life most of us can't imagine. His stories of life in the mines were very interesting, though our backs were quite sore after being hunched underground for two and a half hours.

Finally, the wait was over. That night, we graduated from a tent to a hybrid travel trailer. We were sold immediately. Suddenly, our travels became warmer, drier and much more convenient.

Our first night in the trailer was at Scotia Pine Campground (www.scotiapine.ca), near Truro. It was a clean and tidy campground, mostly set up for RVs with easy, drive-through sites.

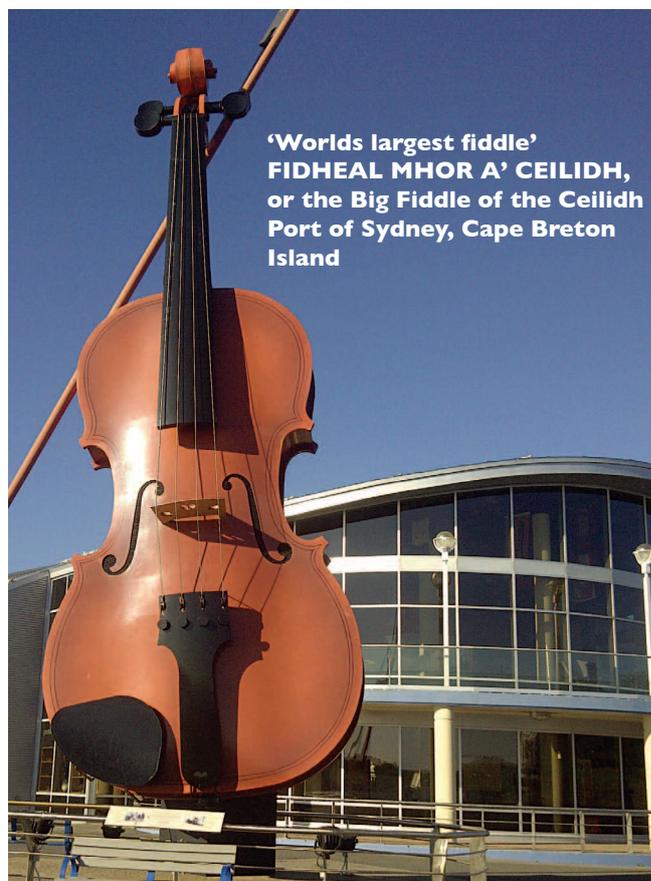
Generally, we try to stay away from the big cities and crowds, but we bent the rules this time in order to visit Pier 21 and the Museum of Immigration. We were looking for information about my grandmother who came to Canada as a war bride in the 1940's. I learned a lot about war brides that day, and came away with books on the subject, and dates and sailing logs from my grandma's

trip. Unfortunately, we thought we were travelling off-peak and didn't expect the crowds at the height of cruise season.

We also visited the Atlantic Maritime Museum. It was packed because they were commemorating the 100th anniversary of the sinking of the Titanic. The children were quite interested in the stories of the Titanic and the Halifax Explosion, but after a few hours of crowds, a lot of reading and boring adult conversation, they were ready to move on.

A walking tour of Halifax was much more interesting for them. We saw 3 immense cruise ships and an extremely colourful container ship. This was an unexpected treat for the kids, and they didn't stop using the word "huge" until long after we were home. We had hoped to ride the amphibian vehicle, The Harbour Hopper, but rain and fog were a deterrent.

Driving wasn't a lot of fun in Halifax. We were so glad that we had already parked the trailer at Shubie Campground (www.shubiecampground.com), across the river in Dartmouth. The city had way too many one-way streets, and no-left-turn signs were everywhere. We had trouble parking downtown, so we took the walk-on ferry from Dartmouth to Halifax and back. At Shubie, a fellow camper from Newfoundland was very helpful. He gave us some lessons on properly using some of our new





equipment, and we were grateful for his help.

Before we left Halifax, the weather cleared long enough for us to visit The Citadel. Again, the costumed staff were very pleasant and well-informed. The Citadel is a must-see for history buffs.

That night, we stayed at Five Islands Campground, (www.fiveislands.ca), south of Truro. We woke up to more than six inches of water all around our trailer. Somehow, we managed to get the only site in the campground that was completely under water. Had we still been in our tent, I'm pretty sure we would have floated away. I'm also pretty sure that the view from these beachfront sites would have been excellent, but it was far too foggy to say for sure.

Peggy's Cove is known for its famous lighthouse, view of the ocean, and puffin sightings. There the children enjoyed climbing on the huge coastal rocks, and my son still has the starfish he bought that day. We couldn't see beyond the lighthouse for the fog, but we could still feel the enchantment this tiny fishing village holds.

Ready to be away from the masses, we decided to drive the mini Cabot Trail next. It was hilly, and the views of Fundy were great, but unfortunately, most of our driving was in the rain. Since it seemed like a good driving day, we went out of our way to visit a small shipbuilding museum called Age of Sail Heritage Centre, at Port Grenville. The friendly and talkative staff shared a great deal of information about the history of lumber and shipbuilding in the area. Apparently, they built ships on-site even though the river was only a few feet deep. They were able to launch them when the tide came in

and the water level rose to about eight feet. There were some hands-on activities for the kids, and a turn-of-the-century schoolroom also caught their attention.

On our last night in Nova Scotia, we camped at Loch Lomond Park, (www.lochlomondrvpark.com), just outside of Amherst. Unfortunately, we didn't get a chance to use the heated in-ground pool, but the kids loved the wooden train playground equipment. Being new to parking a trailer, we appreciated the easy drive-thru RV sites. Shortly after we arrived, we met some people who were finishing up their trip, and generously passed along a couple of bags of food they would no longer need.

Of course, a trip to the Bay of Fundy region wouldn't be complete without visiting the Hopewell Rocks in New Brunswick. We timed our visit just right, when the 48-foot tide was out, and had the opportunity to walk on the ocean floor before heading back to Ontario.

We took a big risk buying a trailer in another province and hauling it home, especially since we were novices. Our new digs were definitely not perfect, but we finished our trip warm, dry, without worries about finding accommodations (or what we might find inside said accommodations), and ready to dive into the world of RV camping. Since that vacation, three years ago, we've bought and sold and rebuilt a trailer from the floor up. Along the way, we've learned a lot about what to look for when buying used RVs.

Currently, we're in the market for our next upgrade, and looking forward to 2-3 months on the road from Ontario to Alaska in 2016.

Happy travelling! **RV**