

# **New Brunswick – ‘Ours’ to Discover! We sought out some ‘R&R’ Not the ‘RCR’**

**By Brian McLaughlin**

Ah, the Labor Day weekend will soon be upon us. For K-12 school-aged kids, it spelled the death of summer’s unworried freedom. For adults – especially childless couples – it meant one last opportunity to travel not too-far- afield – a three-day respite from worry-a-day workloads, before the hint of Fall colors preludes Winter’s frigid, darkness and drudgery. I recall one such Labour Day vacation excursion five years ago when my spouse and I shook-off marital inertia with the urge to venture away on a three-day, romantic long weekend. For years our province often enticed American and elsewhere Canadian tourists to “discover New Brunswick” with the adage “it’s yours to discover.” It seemed an inviting and promising enough an offer at that time.

It was with a fresh spirit of adventure, my wife, Rose and I decided: Let’s be bold. Let’s be adventurous. Let’s be budget conscious. And let’s discover New Brunswick – after all (like Tourism NB touts): “It’s ‘Ours’ to Discover!”

So brimming with thrill, Rose spelled out the possibilities – they were endless: “We can go to the Evandale Inn in Evansdale. Or the Village of Gagetown. Or to St. Martin’s. Or to Sussex. Or to Fredericton. And stay in a Bed & Breakfast, or an Inn. What do you want to do, Brian?” And as all prudent married men cognize: “A happy wife; IS a happy life!” So I let her set the itinerary, and decide!

Well, late that Saturday afternoon, we finally got on the road. One spousal, shared large, overnight bag packed. Kayak strapped atop the Honda. Paddles and lifejackets tucked in the trunk. Destination now decided upon. We were travelling north-eastward at first, and eventually negotiating a north-westward drive along provincial highway Route 102 – on the Saint John River Valley scenic drive. We were living the New Brunswick Tourism’s website challenge of: “So what do you want to do?” We decided to let loose, one final carefree drive for summer’s sake, and do like that Ford Escort car commercial, and just drive onward, and forward – Point, Go, and Discover!

“Remember that nice little B&B we discovered when we detoured into the Village of Gagetown during our day-drive back from Fredericton in June,” my wife recollected. “That might be nice for an overnight stay.” I nodded in quasi-acknowledgement. But I wanted more time to mull it over. So we stopped in Evandale for a bite of dinner. Dinner finished, we had our leave-taking, final coffee on the front veranda of the Evandale Hotel. I had grabbed a copy of “The Village Voice” newsletter – “Serving the Village of Gagetown and Area.” After a quick peruse through the newsletter, and discovering it was quiet, and relatively, crime-free (the only unsolved crimes this summer were the “mosquito magnet stolen on July19-or-20 from Camp Medley; a bag of ‘maryjane’ found on July 30

on the road near Cambridge Narrows ('it has since been destroyed'); and two buckets of mixed fireworks stolen from the Country Store on August 1." My mind was made up! "Gagetown it is!" I said. Seems like a real restful, safe place.

Thinking back to June's day-trip home to Saint John, my mind's-eye pictured this quaint little – yet nearly undiscovered – best-kept, secret of a village (the birthplace of Sir Samuel Leonard Tilley, a Father of Canadian Confederation). Along an elbow's bend in the massive St. John River, the village sits amongst lush green landscape, within pristine cow pastures, and is secluded by sweeping leaves of towering elms and maple trees. Driving along sloping landscapes reminiscent of a scenic Scottish topography of hills and valleys, peace awaited us only a short drive away. I could almost feel the great night sleep. And envision the picturesque kayak paddle in undisturbed waters Sunday morning.

We arrived in Gagetown. Drove down historic Doctors Hill and Tilley Road to Front Street. This being a one Irving gas station town (my wife was pleased!); a one little tavern; and a one gray squirrel – or so it seemed – village, I was pleased.

First thing we checked out: a great little historic B&B. The hostess, a very gracious, grandmotherly type, explained the fees and what it included; showed us the rooms available; and detailed the few but local amenities to discover. Once our overnight bag were deposited into the bedroom, we decided to head downstairs for a quiet walk-about the village. At the base of the stairway, the B&B hostess engaged us in pleasant conversation. "We've only stayed at one other B&B before," I told her. "It was last summer on Grand Manan Island. We stayed in the old light housekeeper's house, converted into an idyllic B&B now, overlooking the sea." My wife adding: "Yes, and in the guest book people wrote they could see whales in the sea just off the rocky coastline."

"Yes, it was nice: what we thought was a delightful little touch to a great location," I attested. "Until at 1:00AM. And we were awoken to the 'baaaaaROOOM.....baaaaaROOOM....baaaaaROOOM ing' of the incessant and merciless foghorn, when the fog swept in with the warm sea air of the morning." It blasted most of that night. We all lightly chuckled at the probability of such an ironic discovery.

Anyhow, we bid a brief *adieu* to the hostess, she retorted: "Yes, you may want to take a quick walk about the village before the mosquito's come out in force!" In force? What exactly did she mean? I thought as the screen door shut behind our exit.

Hand-in-hand my wife and I strolled down Front Street. We detoured into a local novelty and gift shop momentarily. We made small talk with the owner, the one shop clerk, and a local gentleman. All were pleasant and friendly folks.

Eventually, we walked on further outside. Past the village's only watering hole, we came across a semi-energetic and excited patch of a few locals in pick-up trucks, and some tourists clad in leather-jackets and -chaps on Harley Davidson motorcycles gathered outside the pub. A curious observation I made: these locals sure keep nicely cropped haircuts. I said to my wife: "Boy, buzz-cuts sure are popular in this village."

We continued our saunter down past the few, small local artisan (pottery) shops. Sequentially, the evening dusk became thickened with a *Blitzkrieg of Mosquito's. And I mean MOSQUITOS!* So-many- so, it would've made even a blood-engorged vampire want to run- and-duck for crypt-cover. We passed a golden retriever in the tale gate of a pick up truck, barking to gain his owner's attention: "I think the mosquitos are disturbing him," Rose observed. The dog's bark becoming more agitated as his paw swatted down irritated on the ledge of the tale gate. Alas, I see why that mosquito magnet was on top of the village thief's' *just gotta-have-it* list.

"Man, these mosquitos are serial," I said to my wife. "Let's walk back to the B&B." They were attacking her like mad! It didn't help I suppose that she had showered earlier in the day with hand-made, naturally fragrant *patchouli passion* soap. *Patchouli* – probably some Polynesian phrase meaning mosquito attractant.

We eventually, made our encircled way back to the B&B and found a cool evening breeze – a prologue to a Fall coolness – sweeping up from the river's edge. We walked down to the old- and long-abandoned riverboat dock, converted now to a powerboat and sailboat wharf/marina, along the Gagetown Creek. The breeze was actually forceful enough to keep the mosquitos well at bay.

"Wow, this breeze feels great! We can come out here later and relax; and we can enjoy the quiet evening and night sky in comfort, sweetie," I said. She acknowledged with a smile, and nod. Rose turned to gain a hug. And suddenly, a *PIERCING* sound swooped down, ominously in upon our serenity.

"AnnnnnnnnnneeeeNNNNNN.....AnnnneeeeNNNNNN.....WeeeeeANNNNNNN," like the sound of someone killing a cat, *slllloooooowly-one-of-it's-nine-lives-at-a-time*. It was unmistakable! Bag pipes! Warming up at dusk? After the initial *bloowiiinnng* and *squeeeeeeezing* of the tartan sack, came a resounding BOOM, BOOM, BOOM-BOOM! It was the unmistakable sound of a BIG BASS round drum! We turned to face the Gagetown Marina to find a beach-front mob of locals and tourists, beers in hand sprawled maybe 50-100 yards away from riverboat wharf listening with eager excitement as an obvious band readied their instruments for a battle.

We just looked at each other in disbelief. Confused at first. Then completely puzzled. "Well, this is a something that needs to be inquired on," I thought. So

walking up into the B&B, it near dark now, I asked the proprietor: "Is there some form of festivities or activity going on tonight at the pub up the roadway?" She looked back at me with the same puzzled expression. "No, not that I know of," our hostess reported.

Sensing the tide of my comfort level receding slightly, she attempted to contact the local owner of the pub -- also the same owner of the local marina -- to inquire as to what the plan and timeline was going to be for this unexpected surprise. But it was to no avail. She was unable to get clear answers after talking with the pub staff. "Maybe you should walk up to the bar on the marina and discretely inquire as to what's going on," she suggested. To which I acknowledged with my own nod, and: "Yes, I'll try to find out how long they will be playing. Hopefully, not to long into the evening."

We drove over to the pub. No owner was to be found. So I walked down to the marina to the bar. Past a huge 6'3", 275 lb monster of a fellow, with biceps the size of the village's elm tree trunks, as he was squeezing the life out of the feline stored in that tartan sack. He was like some giant Scotsman out of the movie *Braveheart* – bearded, intimidating looking, ready to battle! He was sporting a large fake-retro, brown-afro – similar to the iconic Sports Illustrated image of a rainbow-colored wig sported by some shirtless and crazed football fan at a cold-January, Minnesota Vikings NFL football game. Next to him sat an equally large drummer, warming up on beer and drums. And around them sat, and stood a mob of similarly stout candidates for the WWF. Why Hulk Hogan would've felt right at home!

At the marina shed/make-shift bar, I spoke with the bartender, with a discreet, tongue-in-cheek inquiry of interest: "Oh, I see you've got some entertainment going on tonight, eh?" The bartender smiled, and reported agog and proudly: "Yes we do! It's the RCR!"

"The RCR?" I queried. "Yeh, the fellows from the Royal Canadian Regiment (Military) band. They are playing here tonight! It's gonna be some kinda party atmosphere! They are playing 'unsanctioned' tonight!" he announced. "Unsanctioned, huh?" I said, of which I took it to mean it was a military metaphor for like, Aerosmith *unplugged*, or something as loudly and raucously equivalent. Suddenly, I put the short, cropped haircuts together. "Ah-ha" I thought. "The Canadian Forces Base Gagetown. It's only 20 minutes or so yonder here."

"Oh, and how late will they be playing?" I asked amusingly. "Oh, for three-to-four hours at least," said the barkeep.

At that point a goatee'd, yet bald- and brawny-patron, who resembled a *hells-angel, wanna-be-biker*, excitedly exclaimed: "Oh no, once they get a few beers in their bellies and loosened up, they've been known to play until 3:00- or 4:00-

O'clock in the morn'n!" The bartender then nodded and said: "These guys have played for the Queen of England!"

I smiled and thanked them – appreciative for their eager candor. Then whilst walking away like a *wee-little-lamb* in a den of wolves that quiet voice was shouting in my mind's-ear: "*I DUNNA CARE if they've played for Mary Queen of Scots! I'M NOOT STAY'N in this village tonight – NOO!*" Now, don't take this wrong, even a person of Irish blood can appreciate the bag pipes – after all, true Scots have the invading tribes of Irish *Scotties* to thank for the giving them the kilt and pipes – "*bot noot tal four in the morn'n.*"

Walking up the hill to my wife waiting in our car, I could hear that crazed bagpiper – playing like a Sargent Major on wild mushrooms – winding out *thaaat waaay-toooo* familiar Scottish *tuuuune*:

*"Daaaaaaannn-Naaaaannnnn-Nannannna-Naannna;  
Daaaaaaannn-Naaaaannnnn-Nannannna-Naannna"*

I informed my wife of the news. She echoed my desire to pick-up and leave town.

Back at the little B-&-B, I had the unhappy task of informing our friendly hostess we had reconsidered our interest in remaining the night. "We just don't want to take the unpleasant chance of not getting any sleep tonight," I informed her. She was disappointed, of course, and tried to phone the tavern and marina owner one last time, all the while the *eeerrrrritatitng* echo of highland music *ooozing* through the windows and walls of her historic Victorian home. Through no fault of her own she succumbed to losing the night's revenue, and refunded our money. But not before offering: "The village probably won't allow them to play that late into the morning." But I think we both realized any Mountie on duty would probably want to be miles from here. "Perhaps another time," I suggested. "When it's quieter (and it's a mosquito- and military-free zone, I thought to myself)." Apologies exchanged, I made my leave – my wife repositioning the car and readying for a hasty exit out of the village.

"What should we do now?" she asked. "There are some cottages back down the road on Ferry Lane near here on the map." This time I took complete *veto*, exception to her suggestion. "No, we are heading to Fredericton to see if we can find some place to stay the night." A quick skirt past the only Irving gas station-convenience store we passed an intoxicated soldier staggering about, before dishonorably losing his ale. "Yup, we made the right choice to leave."

So now driving further northwestward on Route 102, we were headed on to discover NB's capital city. But it was now 9 PM and dark. And we were driving the dirge of provincial back highways on a Saturday night. A byway magnet for moose, porcupines, foul skunks or any other nocturnal critter that desires,

mayhap to cross the roadway unannounced around any turn. The drive was anxiety producing, with no sure hint we would find accommodations with quietude on a long weekend – especially now at such a late evening hour.

First stop, check the Delta Fredericton Hotel. It's one of the city's top hotel accommodations. We drove into the jam-packed parking lot. Not a good sign for two wearied, wayfarers. At the front-desk, we encountered the front-desk supervisor. She checked room-availability: we were in luck – they had lodging. But the rates had gone up significantly since the prior summer (basic lodging \$145/night plus 15% GST (Great 'Stalin' Tax) – there went the "Let's be budget conscious" idea).

In a somewhat enervated, yet chatty mood, my wife shared with our new host the tale of our Gagetown stupefaction, stirring a round of guffaws at our misadventure.

"Ah, I managed to find you a good room," the hotel supervisor offered up. "I have upgraded your room for the same rate as a regular room. It's Suite 445!"

What a nice gesture, my wife and I acknowledged while walking into the elevator for our short skip up to our room. Stepping off the elevator we entered a floor which seemed oddly familiar, like *deejay vu*. Walking down the long, narrow corridor to the very end of the wing we stopped at a corner *Executive Suite 445* – on the river view side of the hotel – and we just looked in amazed, amusement at each other. "Oh, my goodness!" Knowing what the other was just-at-that-instant recalling: Suite 445 is the same suite they upgraded us to on the New Brunswick Day long-weekend, misadventure in 1994 – when the Oromocto 'RCMP' impounded my late father-in-law's unregistered and uninsured, and borrowed, luxury Honda Accord. Ah, but that's a separate story!

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