

The Road Not (Yet) Traveled

Quebec 389 and Trans-Labrador Highway 2014

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- Day 22 – June 22 – Mary's Harbor to Red Bay and beyond
- Day 23 – June 23 – Quebec coast
- Day 24 – June 24 – L'Anse Amour and Quebec coast again
- Day 25 – June 25 – St. Barbe Ferry

Day 1. June 1 – Derby, Vermont

(Bert) It was in Winnie, Texas, when we last were in touch. Now here we are in northern Vermont, having diagonally sliced across the United States in 2517 mi. Never uneventful, our travels included a day at the Clinton Presidential Library in Little Rock, a night at Natchez State Park in Tennessee where we were the only campers who did not have two to six horses tied up at their site, an afternoon and evening camped on the grounds of the Kentucky Horse Ranch where the Preakness is run, a wet campground at Bald Eagle State Park in Pennsylvania where birds were bountiful, and an afternoon at the Ben & Jerry's ice cream factory in Vermont where the samples are delicious.

And, our travels were not without travail as we were stuck in a 3-hr. traffic jam on Interstate 30 that sandwiched us between, literally, thousands of semi-trailer trucks and then, amazingly, the next day a second traffic jam stretched nearly 20 mi. on another

Interstate where Shari shortened our stop to one hour by making a U-turn between traffic lanes. Then there was the generator that started in Texas but not in Tennessee and was repaired in West Virginia.

Now here we are in hilly Vermont enjoying wonderfully sunny and dry weather that we apparently brought with us since the locals tell us of their miserable winter and a very wet spring. The RVing troops have arrived, some weathered travelers from prior caravans, some fresh recruits, all set for adventure. And, given our itinerary, this tour is bound for adventure.

(Shari) Day 1 brings beautiful weather along with all my chicks; the whole caravan has arrived. Bert and I have been here for five days already, arriving after a leisurely two-week drive scouting the route of our 2017 Fall Colors caravan. We went to many of the venues on that trip. I especially enjoyed Shelbourne Farms, the Corning Glass museum and two New York wineries. Bert enjoyed the Baseball Hall of Fame which was not my cup of tea, and the paintings at the Shelborne. Marlene and Larry, our Tailgunners, arrived on Thursday and we just had to show them the rendezvous restaurant and its Thursday special on ribs. Friday, Russell and Stephen arrived and the party officially began. Can you believe they brought a propane-powered pizza oven with them? Let the party begin indeed. That night we began our first 5 PM social around a campfire Bert built but no sooner than the twelve early arrivals are seated, the rain started. The fire is doused and everyone scatters to their RV. When the rain stops, some of us return, restart the campfire and enjoy a fresh pizza cooked outdoors. Yum!

Saturday, Marlene and I started our in-rig visits, getting to know those here. Larry checked the rigs and who knows what Bert did. Eight of us just had to check out another restaurant on a nearby lake. It was extremely good, especially as we were seated on the outside deck at sunset, eating from the plentiful salad bar, followed by delicious entrees.

Today is more in-rig visits, more inspections and orientation. We have a few who have never been on a caravan and we try to prepare them for what lies ahead. This caravan is different than most and requires those with a spirit of adventure as we are in store for lots of dry camping, lots of wilderness and lots of travel on gravel roads.

As part of the mixer, I have each person draw a card with one word on it. They are to find the person who has a matching word that makes sense. All two word combinations spell something we will see on the trip: Orca whale, Labrador City, Atlantic Puffin, Black Guillemot, Montmorency Falls, etc. Then the paired couple has to introduce each other by name, say where they are from and why they chose this trip. I am heartened to see all have a spirit of adventure. After our meeting we carpool to the restaurant and eat and chatter in our private section overlooking the field of Elk. I feel guilty as I eat my Elk burger and think maybe I should have had the salad bar and onion soup. We are surprised when the restaurant throws in a brownie sundae for dessert. Needless to say, today is not a good Weight Watcher point day. It is still light enough outside that Bert and I walk a bit on a country road. Eat 51 points, walk -2 points, still too many WW points.



Cedar Waxwing



Elk – most ordered Elk burgers for dinner – above is order #402



Tailgunner Larry is showing us his best side



Part of the group at Rendezvous Dinner

Day 2. June 2 – Municipal de Piopolis, Quebec

(Bert) The hearty birders get separated from the sleep-late birders and the I'm-not-a-birder fellow caravaners when I lead a 7 AM bird walk along the country road near the campground. We have another perfect weather morning with cloudless blue skies, just right temperature and moist-but-not-wet gravel walking. In an hour we tally 31 species, highlighted by a calling loon that later flies directly overhead, a sight that Chris says she

has never seen so close. I like hearing a Veery again this morning—I heard and saw two yesterday—but the song is beyond the hearing range of most of our group and I cannot find the source now. The same story holds for the calling Alder Flycatcher. At times, Shari complains that my hearing has become poor. That certainly has not been the case for my hearing birds—I can hear from the low pitched rumble of a Ruffed Grouse drumming, to the high squeak of a Blackpoll Warbler—but I seem to be deaf to tone of Shari’s voice. We do better at finding other singing birds: Red-eyed Vireo, Song Sparrow, American Goldfinch and Pileated Woodpecker.

We are soon on the road headed to Quebec. Border crossings are always a bit of a nervous experience even if we are convinced we are not carrying contraband. We know the rules about alcohol, cigarettes and firearms, but regulations about fruits and vegetables seem to change at each crossing. This time the border agent simply asks, “What are you carrying with you?”

Is he trying to trap me? What a vague question! Since we are traveling in our house for seven months, we are loaded with everything you could imagine. Shari begins with a litany of fruits and vegetables, all of which have been peeled and are in containers in the refrigerator. The agent cuts her short, apparently uninterested, and asks “What else?”

I figure sooner or later he will get around to liquor, so I start to tell him about the two bottles of wine we are carrying when simultaneously he asks, “Alcohol?” He dutifully writes down “2 bottles wine” and when I add “2-3 cans of beer” he intones “3 cans of beer” and writes it down. Holding up her narrowly separated thumb and forefinger, Shari pipes in “And this much tequila,” which I forgot she still had left. He writes that down too and pauses, looking up again at us as if waiting for more to add to his penciled list. Silence. So he asks about firearms and as usual, since we are from Texas, he asks the same question three times, apparently convinced if he asks it several times us Texans will admit we are carrying. When I say no, he asks if we have guns at home, perhaps trying to get an admission that way. When I say I don’t have a gun at home either, he finally gives up and says we can go ahead.

We enter Canada, meander along country roads, many of them hilly and winding. En route we see Mont Mégantic and the observatory at its peak, which I will say more about tomorrow. Our campground tonight and tomorrow is full-service, under spreading White Spruce at the edge of pretty Lake Mégantic. A pair of Common Loons entertains us for hours, just a stone-throw away from where our lawn chairs stretch across the shaded grass.



American Goldfinch



Red-eyed Vireo in flight



Singing Song Sparrow



Observatory atop Mont Mégantic



Camping at Lake Mégantic



Common Loon

Day 3. June 3 – Parc National du Mont-Mégantic

(Bert) When I polled the group for those that wanted to search for Bicknell's Thrush I reminded them of the times as teenagers when they would stay out in the wee hours of the night and think nothing of being awake and active at 3 AM. As seasoned and retired adults it seems crazy to get up at 2 AM, don warm clothes, pack your birding gear, use a

flashlight to find our cars and, by 2:30 AM be on the road for a half-hour drive to the foot of a mountain, but that is exactly what eight of us do this early morning. At 3 PM I enter Monday's code to the locked draw gate. The code fails, so I use Tuesday's code. The gate lifts and we drive through. Chris is driving the car I ride in and she slowly winds up the mountain, sometimes climbing at 18°. We reach the observatory at the top of Mont Mégantic, then descend a hundred feet to the parking lot. Twinkling stars and bright planets light up a cloudless black sky, further darkened by the moon's absence. Except at the peak where a gentle breeze wafts, the night is so still we could hear a leaf falling.

We wait for first light, the silence broken only by our occasional whispers, some instigated by discussions of constellation identification. Kay M. points her iPhone to the sky and it identifies the broad multi-star configuration of Hercules lying close to red Mars. My ears are primed for the song of Bicknell's Thrush and at the first hint of morning light it sings and I point in the direction of the bird hidden by darkness. I record the time: 3:40 AM. Two minutes later a second Bicknell's sings from a different direction from the parking lot. At 3:48 we hear from a third thrush and for the next seven min. all three exchange infrequent greetings. Then it is silent until 3:58 when the first robin sings, and sings, and sings. A White-throated Sparrow sends out its greeting and once and a while a Bicknell's chimes in with the noisy robin.

We walk uphill to the observatory and the concrete deck overlooking the broad valley. We have nearly a 180° panoramic view of stunted trees and gently curved hills extending downhill to village lights miles away. Each distant hill is a brighter shade of blue until they meld with the lightest blue, the sky. We have no time to absorb this beautiful night scene before the chorus of singing Bicknell's Thrushes fills the air. At least three are singing at 4:05 AM, almost simultaneously, from left, right and center. Just 20 ft. from us a Dark-eyed Junco trills, close enough for us to see it perched atop a spruce.

At 4:12 a dark thrush-shaped shadow flies low from left to right. By deduction, it must be a Bicknell's. Can we count it as seen? For 16 min. we hear singing and calling Bicknell's Thrushes about one per min. I estimate there must be at least six Bicknell's below us. By 4:30 we hear a constant dawn chorus of robins, juncos, Fox Sparrows, White-throated Sparrows, a Blackpoll Warbler and the occasional Bicknell's Thrushes. The stars have dissolved in a pink sunrise. The last Bicknell's sings at 4:36 and then another calls at 4:39, without singing.

Returning to our cars, we drive downhill, stopping to watch and photograph a tree-bound porcupine and then climb the steep road to Mont St. Joseph. No sooner are we parked at the apex at 5:25 than I hear a singing Bicknell's Thrush. This one is close and now we have enough light to try to locate the bird. I walk in its direction, using my ears to navigate my path. Then I see it and quickly motion to the others behind to join me. We stand like a single file of dominoes aligned to a small opening in the spruce trees to a perched thrush behind the opening. I take a quick series of photos, then find another opening and take another series in better lighting. My photos of the Bicknell's Thrush are not publishable quality but they are clearly identifiable. We watch the singing bird for two minutes and everyone gets a good look, a life bird look. For me, a half-life-bird,

since I've heard Bicknell's Thrush before, but this is the first time I've seen one. Amazingly, we see more as fly-bys when they cross our path while we are hiking the mountain top trails. The last Bicknell's Thrush sings at 5:55 AM and the last fly-by thrush is at 6:52. Altogether I estimate we heard at least ten Bicknell's Thrushes, photographed one of these and saw five in flight which may have been some of the ones we heard singing, far exceeding my expectations.

(Shari) Oh s####** I think as I read the note Bert left me on the table. It says that there are no indicator lights on the gauges for the refrigerator. This is not something I want to deal with today. I go outside and rumble around in the basement compartment looking for an extension cord. I open the vent on the outside of the refrigerator and plug the unit directly into electricity from the extension. Still no lights.

I walk to Marlene and Larry's RV and ask Marlene to wake Larry to come help. He and Marlene troubleshoot for a couple of hours before I decide we need more help. I ask the office lady to call an RV dealer 30 min. north of here and translate what is wrong. He tells us to come right over. Rhonda offers to take the stuff in my freezer and Marlene puts my frig stuff in a cooler. Off we go and en route we brainstorm about how to get through the next 2 mo. without a refrigerator. The mechanic looks at the same things Larry looked at and replaces the fuse again, something Larry had done twice already. The indicator lights come on and the propane ignites. I give him a big hug not caring that he is all greasy and dirty. We return to camp all smiles and join the ad hoc social already in progress.



4:22 AM Dark-eyed Junco



4:34 AM First light in the east



4:34 AM First light in the west



5:04 AM Sunrise in the east



5:11 AM Porcupine



5:30 AM Bicknell's Thrush singing



5:30 AM Bicknell's Thrush



6:54 AM Road to observatory atop Mont Mégantic as viewed from Mont St. Joseph

Day 4. June 4 – Quebec City

(Bert) After a leisurely morning beside Lake Mégantic, we head north to Quebec City. Although I have prepared and distributed a very clear road log, the congestion of downtown Quebec City can be bewildering, particularly when a detour sign blocks the route we intended to drive. Fortunately, we also had an alternate route that turns left just at the road blockage. I drive directly to the parking lot with Curt and Chris in the RV behind us, followed by Mike and Kay. Russell and Stephen are already in the lot, and within minutes Woody and Joey arrive. Rhonda and Susan arrive without mishap, but then we wait a long time before we hear from the others. Hereafter everyone else loses their bearings, makes wrong turns and eventually is guided in through radio contact with me. Larry and Marlene become seriously lost and wander the city for an hour or more, sometimes in radio contact, mostly not. Apparently their GPS is not functioning, they miss several turns, and the radios do not extend far enough or they did not call us. Finally, I spot them driving on the other side of the boat channel and radio them to turn right. They miss the turn so it takes them another 10 min. to loop around the city blocks. When I see them again, I give further instructions and finally they arrive. And, this is the easy route into the city. Imagine if I had chosen the more complicated route first suggested by Google Earth!

(Shari) We can hear Bob on the radio but do not know where he is located. The shortcut to the downtown camping spot that I so carefully discussed at travel meeting last night is blocked by a detour sign. Fortunately three rigs are following us and one follows a bus close behind. We reach the parking lot without a wrong turn. Now we are waiting for the others to arrive when we hear Bob. Bert recognizes their location and directs them in. Soon we see them pass us up, apparently missing the entrance. Bert has them turn around

and finally they are safe for the night. Now where is Ted? Although they had been traveling together, Bob says he lost them. Ted missed the turn and went under the bridge into the city congestion. Oh dear! About 30 min. later we hear him on the radio and Bert directs them in too.

We are still missing two. I don't worry about Doug and Kay because they are always last to arrive and good at finding their way. We hear our Tailgunners radio from the detour but then do not hear again from them in over an hour. I guess they missed the turn too. Finally they too arrive with radio directions from Bert. After that we separate, each going their separate ways to enjoy this beautiful city. Bert and I walk through the Farmers Market and then find a tiny Greek restaurant for dinner. When we return, we join a group of six for an extended social. The view and company is great and it is dark before we head indoors.

(Bert) Safely parked, we bring out the lawn chairs and enjoy the wide view of the city: the boat harbor, grain towers, old town, famous Fairmont Hotel, domed post office, premier's residence and hundreds of skyline apartments, commercial buildings and historical sites. Shari and I walk from the parking lot to the famous Farmer's Market where vendors from Île d'Orléans—an agricultural island in the St. Lawrence River—display their produce and cut flowers. We walk the city streets, stopping to check the posted menus in front of open-air restaurants, finally selecting a Greek restaurant beside Italian and Thai restaurants. We are the first to be seated, Shari orders leg of lamb and I order pork cutlets, both prepared in delicious sauces and a side dish of ratatouille. By the time the order arrives the small restaurant is filled with young people in joyous conversation. When we return to the parking lot, the city lights are showing and we again enjoy sitting on lawn chairs mesmerized by the light display.



Quebec City as viewed from our parking/camping sites



Enjoying the Quebec City scenery



RV parking/camping in view of Quebec City skyline



Farmer's Market, Quebec City



Le Mezze Restaurant, Rue St-Paul, Quebec City



Quebec skyline at night



Harbor grain silos hold 8 million bushels

Day 5. June 5 – Quebec City

(Shari) Every time we come to Quebec City, Bert and I say to each other someday we will rent a condo and stay a month. I just love this city: quaint, European, clean, safe, restaurants galore. Our guide meets us at 9 for our walking tour and we learn different things than on our tour last year. I lost my Fitbit step tracker but estimate I walked 4 mi.

in 3 hr. Lunch is at an open air cafe suggested by the guide and after all that walking we are all famished.

We travel a whopping 7.4 mi. to our next stop at the foot of Montmorency Falls. I am disappointed that the restaurant on top is closed as that place was to be a L.E.O. tonight. So instead, we have a nice social gathering while we watch the water cascade over the falls.

(Bert) We are delighted to have Roger again as our guide for a walking tour of Quebec City. He meets us at the RVs at 9 AM and for the next 3 hr. he entertains us with Quebec history, French-British conflicts, the social government of Quebec Province and current life in the city, all while pointing out sites, statues, buildings, industry and housing as we walk through the old city, ascend on the Funiculaire to the level of the statue of Champaign, the old railroad hotel Le Château Frontenac upgraded as the Fairmont, and many other historic buildings. I learn interesting facts, like how the St. Lawrence River got its name—searching for a route to China, explorer Jacque Cartier found the river on August 10, the Day of St. Lawrence, so he named the river after the saint—and how Quebec was named—it’s an Algonquin word for the narrowing of the river.

At Spag-Et-Tini the whole group eats lunch under canopied umbrellas on a main thoroughfare, Rue du March-Champlain, and then walks back to our RVs. From there it is only a short drive to Montmorency Falls and we arrange our RVs in the big parking lot below the falls. For the afternoon, evening and morning we have a perfect view of the tall waterfalls. It is hard to beat camping places like these.



Old Quebec City in light rain



Rain stopped. Group photo in front of Quebec City wall painting.



City square in Old Quebec City



Shari and friend



Fairmont Le Château Frontenac



Camping in front of Montmorency Falls



Montmorency Falls



Camping in front of Montmorency Falls

Day 6. June 6 – Cap Tourmente

(Bert) The Snow Geese should all have flown to the Arctic by now; two weeks ago they still would have been here by the thousands. So I am surprised when I see six of them feeding in low tide along the edge of the St. Lawrence River. As we enter Cap Tourmente, a broad marsh and lowland forest with convenient trails and boardwalks, I stop the truck when I spot a perched Bobolink at the side of the road. The other vehicles stop too and we all get to study and photograph the unusually patient bird. I am sure I've said it before, Bobolinks are one of my favorite birds. From the boardwalk, Yellow Warblers and golden Marsh Marigolds are plentiful. As many as a dozen Alder Flycatchers sing, but only thrice do we actually see one. Also in plentiful supply are Song Sparrows. Russell points out a bird that really surprises me. I did not expect to find an Olive-sided Flycatcher, yet the obvious white flank patches on this bird are distinctive. Unlike a few days ago, this time we get a good view of a singing Veery.

We finish up about 11:30 when the group splits up, some staying to bird longer, some visiting the spectacular Sainte Anne de Beupre Basilica and others going back for a topside view of Montmorency Falls. Shari and I continue eastward along the St. Lawrence River and reach our next campground in Baie-Saint-Paul.

The skies have been alternating between smiling blue patches and angry black clouds, with occasional sprinkles. At our 5 PM travel meeting and social, we push our lawn chairs close together under the canopy of Curt and Chris's RV. Fortunately, by 6:15, just in time for our potluck dinner the rain stops, Larry builds a warm campfire and we eat without interruption.



Bobolink



Location of Cap-Tourmente on St. Lawrence River



Migration path of Snow Geese
(lowest circle is where we are today)



Hairy Woodpecker



Eastern Chipmunk

Day 7. June 7 – Parc National des Grands Jardins

(Bert) Not far from our campground is a Quebec National Park called the Grand Gardens. Grand is an apt descriptor for the tall mountains, mostly clothed in dense forests, but sometimes so steep that rugged rock cliffs pierce through the green. In our string of cars and trucks, we repeatedly climb, curve and descend miles into the park on paved highway and then on gravel side roads, around pristine lakes and past denuded

forests taken by fires but now covered with short new growth. After several wrong turns, which only add to our sightseeing experience, we arrive at the start of the trail called Le Boréal. I question Woody if it was fire, disease or logging that cleared the land. Woody points out a few remnant, thin upright trunks that show traces of black burns, though the bark has long since been stripped away by time and weather, revealing only gray wind-polished dry wood. New life is everywhere in the form of 2-5-ft. White Spruce, lower bush-like Dwarf Birch, broad spreads of Labrador Tea, and at ground level, spongy white Reindeer Moss. Except for rocky surfaces, the land is completely clothed in new life. Few birds have adopted this part for breeding territories. I hear distant White-throated Sparrows and catch a receding sapsucker in flight that lands on a dead trunk a quarter-mile away. We follow the narrow dirt trail in the direction of higher trees and along the way see signs that a moose has also chosen this path, dropping brown egg-shaped scat.

A small heavily patterned butterfly flutters along the path and lands on my shoe. I recognize it as a fritillary, but not sure which species. Woody photographs the butterfly since my long lens will not focus so closely as my foot. Later I will consult my butterfly book.

We stand in front of a small lake where distantly I can hear Ruby-crowned Kinglet and Common Yellowthroat and see a Belted Kingfisher fly overhead. I head in the direction of the singing birds and we enter forests—mostly tamarack and aspen—untouched by the old fire. We are hiking single file, so I don't always see what others find. Shari comes up to me with a photo of a frog, which I identify as an American Toad.

I hear a high-pitched warbler singing and check if others can hear it too. Some can. I first think it is a Blackpoll Warbler, then switch to Cape May Warbler. That draws lots of attention since many have not seen the species. We search and search, even resorting to playing a recording briefly. The Cape May Warbler persistently sings from high in a cluster of tall spruce trees, perhaps 40-ft. above us. We cannot see it, even when it moves from one perch to another. We move on, through the forest, stopping briefly to hear the “Three Beers” call of a distant Olive-sided Flycatcher. The trail seems to continue forever, so we decide to turn around and retrace our steps. When we again reach the Cape May Warbler spot, the bird is still singing vigorously. This time Kay M. and I push our way through the understory to get a backside view of the tall spruce. Although we can narrow down our search to a single spruce from which the warbler sings and even find the female Cape May worming its way through the dense spruce branches, we cannot see the male singing above. I'll bet we spent at least 20 min. searching, with a dozen pairs of eyes scanning the trees, yet we cannot find it. Reluctantly, we continue our return to our parked vehicles.

We have a free afternoon to do as we choose. Shari and I go out for lunch, then visit the downtown area of Baie Saint Paul which is crowded with Saturday visitors, a surprisingly large number driving motorcycles, including the 3-wheeled variety; there must be hundreds. Even more of an eye-catcher are the convertibles: shiny highly-polished late models and exotic brands, all with tops down. Mercedes, Peugeot, Volkswagen,

Mustang, lots of BMWs and even a 600 hp Dodge Viper – a slowly moving parade rolls through the narrow streets on a bright sunny afternoon.

Shari and I split up, she visiting the many colorful shops while I go to the Musée d'art Contemporain De Baie-Saint-Paul. It is a small art museum now featuring an exhibit by Jacques Payette (in a few weeks it will be an Andy Warhol exhibition). Payette's paintings are mostly of two young children—a boy and a girl shown separately and at different ages. They stand erect, facing forward, in front of vague backgrounds, sometimes scenic, but also of oversized pottery. There is something hauntingly beautiful about the paintings and I wish I had brought my camera to photograph them. Four other paintings are unusual. From a distance they look like the artist used charcoal to draw scenes of a church, a man sleeping, the inside of a theater ... but when I walk up close to the works, I see that the artist used black rubberstamps of one to three French words, heavily stamped to make black areas, lightly stamped for gray, a surprising illusion.

(Shari) Lobster number one! What a great way to end a great day. Everyone but Larry and Marlene join us on a walk this morning. It is a pretty walk but not much wildlife. Bert and I have lunch at a deli rated highly on Yelp and we love it. Then we try to find the Laundromat but the address listed on Yelp is now an abandoned building. Bert goes to an art museum and I “window lick” as the French say for window shop. Bert and I stop for a caramel chocolate praline ice cream before heading to the upscale IGA in town. We still have our laundry to wash when we get back to the campground. I see others have the same idea too. Later, we join six others for a social hour before heading inside to devour our lobster.



Parc National des Grands Jardins



Boreal Trail, Parc National des Grands Jardins



Shari and others on the Boreal Trail



Woody's photo of Bog Fritillary (*Boloria eunomia*) on my hiking shoe



American Toad (*Bufo americanus*)



Baie Saint Paul



At the campground Laundromat

Day 8. June 8 – Parc National du Fjord-Du-Saguenay

(Bert) We follow the northern coast of the St. Lawrence River. The river is sparkling white diamonds of reflected sunlight in a marine blue sea, a shade darker than the cloudless sky. As we thread eastward the river widens until the opposite shore shrinks to a dark pencil line. The highway sandwiches between vertical rock cliffs and tranquil small lakes surrounded by vibrantly green aspen and birch. Rounding a curve the road stops at the fjord of Saguenay. Steep cliffs edge the deep fjord, an estuary of divergent sea life best known for the Beluga whales that breed and feed here. While we wait in line for the ferry, I quickly exit our RV and scan the water. It only takes seconds to see the white beach balls that are actually the bulbous foreheads of Belugas. I see two individuals plus a pair swimming together. The beach balls submerge and bounce back to the surface and sometimes we see the elongated bodies white as snow. I take photos, but I am not sure much will show up, given the distance separating us from the small whales.

After parking our RVs at a campground in Tadoussac and eating lunch, we drive to the national park where we hike a trail along a river that feeds into the fjord. The trail follows upstream and then we cross high above the river on a swinging bridge and continue on the downstream side. Resting on a rock in the middle of the river is a male Common Merganser, one of nine we see during the hike. Other birds are more elusive. I hear many singing, but finding them atop the tall spruce and aspen is another matter. We search for a singing Northern Parula but cannot see it. Much easier is it to study the woodland flowers: Solomon's Seal, Star Flower, Blue Marsh Violet. There are many beds of a flower with broad shiny leaves that look like *Clintonia* which I usually recognize by its blue berry, though it is too early to find these. I photograph the delicate yellow flowers and later confirm my guess is correct. The name commemorates De Witt Clinton who was governor of New York in the early 1800s.

I spot an unusual dark mushroom hidden beneath shrouding undergrowth and ask Chris what it is. Excitedly, she tells me it is a morel. We search the area and see at least six of these most-sought-after mushrooms. The trail extends 3 km, but only Mike and Kay reach the end. Most of us turn around near the 2 km marker. On the way back five of us search again for the singing Northern Parula and this time four of us finally get a brief view of it moving high in a spruce tree.



North shore of St. Lawrence River



One of many lakes en route



Québec Highway 138



Fjord du Saguenay



Vehicle transport ferry across Fjord du Saguenay



Two Beluga whales swimming one behind the other



Swinging bridge at Parc National du Fjord-Du-Saguenay



Star Flower, Parc National du Fjord-Du-Saguenay



Morel mushroom

Day 9. June 9 – St. Lawrence River and Fjord-Du-Saguenay

(Shari) I notice the tree branches swaying in the wind when I get up this morning. Oh no, what a windy day for whale watching in a Zodiac! To add insult to injury, drizzly drops of rain adorn our windshield. I walk to the cliff lookout and am surprised to see the river is calm with no whitecaps. Maybe it will be alright. By our 9 AM departure, the sun is peeking through the clouds. However, many whitecaps appear on the water. Maybe it will be rough water and distinguishing a White Beluga whale from whitecaps will be difficult. For the first 90 min. all we see are whitecaps as we bounce east on the river. Our captain then heads south and across to the other side where I see a group of tour boats and other Zodiacs arranged in a semicircle. The captains communicate to each other, so there must be a whale. And there is. Our nimble Zodiac can always get within 100 meters and we get good looks at a Fin Whale and two humpbacks. Sometimes we are so close we can hear the whale blow air. Our way back to port is sunny and calm. It has been a perfect day after all. Following lunch and a nap, Bert and I drive to town and walk the trail around the point at the mouth of the fjord. No Belugas, but breathtaking views nonetheless.

(Bert) Awkwardly we climb into oversize yellow pants and bulky orange jackets made even thicker with floatation stuffing. We board the 36-passenger Zodiac, most of the group sitting along the periphery facing inward, though I straddle a padded center section and face forward. I am back far enough and in the center so I hope my camera will not get splashed. Yet, to be safe, I stow the camera inside my coat until we reach the action. For nearly two hours the boat heads east and circles about in search of whales, seeing none. I do notice a few birds: cormorants, gulls, a Common Tern, Black-legged

Kittiwakes and a few Common Murres. Earlier the winds pushed up whitecaps and then declined until the river is mostly smooth. Although the ride is pleasant enough, we are anxious to see whales and I am beginning to wonder if we will find any.

Then at 11 AM a Fin Whale is sighted and we head toward it for a better view. Strict guidelines limit how close we may approach, but for a whale this large it makes little difference. The captain tells us the Fin Whale (79-ft.) is the second largest whale in the world. In fact, it is so long that it fills my camera lens from end to end without magnification. I have seen and photographed many Fin Whales and these are my best photos ever.

We head in another direction in search of a Humpback Whale. Multiple times the whale blows, we approach and see it swimming on the surface. Then it begins its slow motion dive sequence, arching its back, slowly raising its tail, breaking surface with water streaming off the tail edges, and then diving with tail held vertically, exposing its white underside. This Humpback has tail markings that have given its name Tic-Tac-Toe.

We head back toward the dock. Near the fjord I see two Belugas too distant to photograph. The captain tells me he is not allowed to approach Belugas closer than 400 meters (over four football fields in length), a distance too great for good photos of this small 16-ft. whale. Instead, later on a hike near the mouth of the fjord I take photographs of Shari standing next to a scale model of Belugas.



Dressing for Zodiac boat ride



On board



Searching for whales



Fin Whale



Humpback Whale



Humped back of Humpback



Whale's tail



Shari with the Belugas

Day 10. June 10 – Route des Balienes to Baie Comeau

(Bert) We continue east on the route of the whales, still following the northern coast of the St. Lawrence River. I had hoped to stop at two parks that border the rocky shore but both are still closed for the season, not to open until June 23. The summer holiday season for most of Quebec seems to be only two months. Access to the parking lot of Cap-de-Bon-Désir is barricaded, so Russell and I park our RVs along the entrance road and Stephen and I hike into the park. A busload of school kids get access inside because the teacher has a key to unlock the gate, though not for our vehicles. The kids enjoy climbing the boulders. We scan the river and explore the forest. Later we hear from Mike and Kay who tell us they saw a small flock of Dovekies from the same spot we stood, an amazing sighting of this pelagic bird. Chris later tells me she found large numbers of Common Eiders where they stopped along the beach at low tide in Les Escoumins.

Only small villages are en route until we get to the city of Baie Comeau which stretches for miles, starting about where the Manic-1 dam blocks the Manicouagan River. We refuel at the Irving station, get groceries at IGA, fill with propane at Superior and get e-mail at Tim Horton's. Now we are all prepared to enter the wilderness.

We turn north, away from the St. Lawrence River, to the start of Quebec Highway 389. The first part is an excellent blacktop highway that winds through hills, curves marked at 75 kph, hills up to 12% grade. Surrounding us are dense forests of spruce and aspen, interrupted with small lakes. Twelve miles from the start of the highway we reach Manic-2 which we will explore tomorrow.

(Shari) I will be glad when we get out of French-speaking Quebec Province. The farther east we travel, the less English is spoken. Today was shades of our Mexican trips, encumbered with communication issues. The last straw is at the end of the day at the campground. The young man at the desk has no idea we were arriving, even after I show him the e-mail from "Monique". The hard part comes when he offers no suggestions as how to solve the problem but just stares at me. I show him the name on the e-mail and ask him to get her. He disappears for a while and comes back with someone else who also speaks no English. She calls someone else on the phone and then tells the young man something. Soon he is slowly filing out a reservation form and we are in business. Only when all the blanks are completed are we allowed to enter. Good thing the driveway is long enough to park our group while they wait, some impatiently. I find out that eight of our sites are brand new and just finished today. At the end of the day it all works out, we are all parked, no one gets lost, the sun is shining, and we grill hotdogs wrapped in crescent rolls over the fire.

(Bert) For now we continue a bit farther to our campground for tonight. We will be the first to use a new strip of campsites with full hook-ups and there is some confusion on whether we pull forward or back into the sites until the man who just finished grading the sandy sites comes up to explain the procedure. From our campsites we can see the sandy beach of a pretty lake. Skies are clear and the temperature is in the 70s.

Birds are singing everywhere and at some feeders are Pine Siskins and Purple Finches. During a bird walk we come upon four surprises. First it is a male Ruby-throated Hummingbird sitting on the sand. I do not ever recall seeing a hummingbird on the ground. I take photos and walk closer until finally it takes flight, proving to me that it was not dead. The second surprise is a brightly feathered male Purple Finch on the ground, spreading its wings vertically, raising its crest, leaping a few feet in the air, and continuing its wing-spreading chest-baring dance. With more difficulty we see the drab brown female finch watching the mating ritual, although less enthusiastically.

We come upon another bird sighting of note. Two American Black Ducks have found the grain seeds below a bird feeder to be of their liking. Semi-tame, they allow me to photograph them much closer than typically possible. The fourth surprise is the aerial attack of a Merlin relentlessly bombarding a Broad-winged Hawk. The attack persists until the hawk retreats.

In the evening we enjoy a staff-supplied dinner including giant hotdogs heated over an open fire with a tripod stand supporting a flat grill across the fire, all built by Larry. The hotdogs are wrapped in crescent rolls that crisp in the heat of the fire.



Cap-de-Bon-Désir



Cap-de-Bon-Désir



Route des Baliènes



Manic-5 Dam from the bridge over Manicouagan River



Ruby-throated Hummingbird alighting from ground perch



Male Purple Finch displaying for female



American Black Duck



Hotdogs and shish kabobs over open fire



Hotdogs are wrapped in crescent rolls

Day 11. June 11 – Manic-2 to Manic-5

(Shari) I do not want to go. It will just be another boring tour of a boring place. Two of our women travelers must have the same idea as they do not go either. So after our delicious 7:30 AM breakfast at the restaurant we car pool to Manic-2, the second hydroelectric dam completed on the Manicouagan River. I am sure Bert will write about the tour in detail as he is busy taking notes in his little yellow notebook. I must say, however, the two hour tour was fascinating and we saw the inner workings of making electricity up close and personal from inside the mammoth dam. Russell, being Russell, sees a huge table of nuts and bolts and gears and screws and ad libs for the guide, saying, "... and we have no idea where these parts belong." He so often cracks me up into fits of laughter.

(Bert) Alex is our guide, a bright young college student who is quite fluent in English. He starts off with a slide presentation showing us how Manic-2 was built on the hard rock base over a narrow channel in the Manicouagan River. First the fast flowing river was diverted through two tunnels bored through solid rock, then coffer dams above and below the area blocked water from reentering. The former river bottom was dried and became the work area for building the dam. Alex's monologue is accompanied by historical photos and continues through the construction of the spillway, powerhouse and dam itself. The dam and facilities were built over a seven year period, 1961-67.

Eight massive turbines rotate from the falling water, each spinning past a set of 60 electromagnets. The magnetic poles of each electromagnet are diametrically opposed to the ones next to it. Thus one vertically positioned magnet has (+) up and (-) down and the magnets adjacent to it are (-) up and (+) down. Here is where some neat mathematics comes to play. In the U.S. and Canada we operate on alternating current at 60 Hertz

(cycles per sec), meaning the current alternates from (+) to (-) sixty times per second. With 30 magnets (+) side up and 30 magnets (-) side up, if the rotor spins twice per second, it will produce electricity at 60 cycles per second.

After the presentation we begin the tour, wearing hard hats for safety and headsets for hearing Alex's commentary spoken through his microphone. What is most impressive about the tour is the massive size of the dam and its components. There are 28 cavities within the dam, each large enough to hold a Boeing 747. The water flow through the hydroelectric plant is fast enough to fill an Olympic size swimming pool in 8 sec. The total output of the eight turbines of Manic-2 is 1145 kilowatts or the equivalent of the power utilized by a city of 250,000. It costs 6 cents per kilowatt hour to produce and sells for 7 cents in Quebec, yet half the profit comes from the United States by selling there at a higher price.

We are now officially traveling on Quebec 389, half of the twin highways for which our tour is named. This is a section we have not driven before. In fact, very few visitors have traveled this road or the next that reaches the Atlantic Ocean. Shari and I have spent many days researching the road and its stops, but little is written and what is recorded has wide discrepancies mostly because the road changes from year to year. More sections are newly paved; others are paved but broken from winter freezing and thawing; some is gravel that may or may not have been recently graded. The only trustworthy advice comes from people who have driven the road in the past few weeks and, even then, the opinion depends on the driver's experience and attitude regarding poor roads.

Shari drives while I write a detailed road log of the road, pull-outs, side roads, percent slope markings, lake names and other features. We may want to run this tour again or I might write a book about the route since so little information is available. Here is a summary of today: Slopes vary from 8-13%, curves are beyond counting in number, there are numerous pull-outs for a single vehicle and a good number that can handle a half dozen vehicles. We drive past mixed spruce-poplar forests and pass dozens of small lakes, smooth as ice and absent of ducks or loons.

Most of the route parallels high tension electrical transmission lines which carry power from the Manicouagan River dams. At the Vallant River we see a huge electrical substation, a small cluster of buildings and a fuel pump marked "Cash Only." For the first 35 mi. today, Residence Vallant is the only sign of human life alongside the road. The first hour of travel Shari averages 35 mph and endures broken blacktop most of the route. She does much better the next hour, sometimes reaching speeds of 50 mph on good to excellent blacktop that must have been paved in the last year or two. We stop for lunch, as does Woody and Joey who are following us, at Lac Guillard and it is the first time I have opportunity to check for birds other than the frequent fly-by robins and single raven en route. As I suspected, a lot of birdlife goes undetected from a vehicle. Now I hear a mixed chorus of Pine Siskins, American Goldfinch and Purple Finches.

After lunch we continue on good highway until we encounter a roadblock. The good highway stretched for almost 40 mi. Now we wait for a lead car to get us through single

lane construction. Meanwhile I again search for birds, hearing the omnipresent White-throated Sparrows and noticing the tannin-laced brown stream beside the highway. [Later I hear from Rhonda that she and Susan saw a young Black Bear while waiting at the road block]. Seven minutes later the lead car arrives and we trail past a blacktop paving crew and machines laying a fresh layer to the highway. Ninety-six miles into our day's travel we again endure broken blacktop, i.e., thin potholes, wide cracks and uneven levels. It soon gets better again and all-in-all it was a good travel day on a highway we would judge as better than most roads in the State of Veracruz or the minor roads in Vermont.

Nearing Manic-5 we stop for fuel at a motel and then drive the remaining couple of miles to the dam where we park in a gravel lot in full view of Manic-5. Today, I counted the total number of oncoming vehicles because a major concern is throwing stones and the right-of-way on a highway without shoulders. The day's total came to 79 vehicles or about two vehicles per three miles. Shari counted the number of semis, which were mostly laden log trucks. That number was 35, a little more than one per four miles. Either way you count it, it was light traffic.

(Shari) We were told today's section of road was horrendous and to be very careful. So Shari, being Shari, worried about it all night and decided to do the driving. There was no need to worry and the road is in super condition especially if you have driven in Mexico. Some pavement breaks and bumps for the first 50 mi. is all. At about 2:30 we arrive at Manic-5, our stop for the next two nights and realize the parking lot is too slanted for the big rigs to level off. Bert knows about another place up a gravel road so he and I go to check it out. It is too small and dusty. I ask at the office if we can use the parking lot across the street and am told we can as long as we do not block the parking by the residence barracks. So that is what we do, making sure generator people are separated from non-generator people.



Manic-2 in the background; unused turbine in foreground



Spillway and Manic-2 dam



Spillway and Manic-2 dam



Paved section of Quebec 389



High tension electrical transmission towers and lines



Repaving the highway



Quebec 389



5 PM social in front of Manic-5 dam

Day 12. June 12 – Manic-5

(Shari) What an exciting perfect day! The sun is shining, not a cloud in the sky. We first have a tour of Manic-5 with Alex again as our guide. The rest of the day is free for all to explore individually. Bert and I take the same gravel road we took yesterday, with the intention of going to Lac Louise and the seaplane terminal. It looks like everyone else has the same idea. Russell greets us with "How would you like to go on a seaplane ride over Manic-5?" He is renting the whole 6-passenger plane for \$320. I know Bert really wants to go and if I can overcome my fear of flying long enough, I would like to go too. With a little more encouragement from Russell, we say yes. Mike and Kay get the roomy back seat. Russell rides up front with the pilot and poor Stephan is forced to share the middle seat with Bert and with me in the middle. Take-offs from airplanes are always the most scary for me and I always hold Bert's hand. This time he is too busy taking pictures so I grab Stephan's hand and close my eyes and pray. The pilot prepares us for a bumpy ride but soon we are up and the ride is smooth. Nonetheless, I have a "barf bag" ready. The top down view of the dam on this sunny day is spectacular. We circle the dam and can see our RVs parked below. We notice many roads crisscrossing the hilly landscape. Our pilot, Oliver, makes a perfect landing on the lake and our stupendous ride is over. Later we finish the great day with a baked potato dinner, with various toppings from cheesy broccoli, mushroom cream, chicken, sausage and peppers, and chili cheese to the regular butter and sour cream. We enjoy dinner using the picnic area at the visitor's center.

(Bert) Alex is again our guide, although this time all of the explanations are inside the interpretation center where he uses a detailed set of black-and-white photographs depicting the construction of Manic-5. This dam is a much larger construction that began

before Manic-2 and finished after Manic-2, 1959-70. Because the width at 4311 ft. and the height of 702 ft. are so immense, it would have required too much concrete for a dam styled after Manic-2 and it was not feasible to build an earthen dam. So Manic-5 consists of 14 buttresses and 13 arches, the largest such dam in the world. The gentle curves of the reset archways add to the artistic allure of the dam. At peak construction 4700 people were employed at the site and crews worked 24x7 during summer months. They lived in a village at Lac Louise, specifically built from scratch in the wilderness. It was complete with stores, schools, churches and athletic teams. After the dam was completed the town was dismantled and nothing exists there anymore. Nowadays, crews work Monday to Thursday and leave for homes in Baie Comeau for a 3-day weekend.

I just read Shari's journal for today and her description of the airplane ride. Except for the scary part, I'd agree. I love flying, especially in small planes, and today with excellent weather and clear skies the view is fantastic. From high in the sky the dam doesn't look so big until I see the perspective of our tiny RVs parked next to the housing unit. Pilot Oliver makes three wide passes in view of the dam, coming from three different directions. I take lots of photos a few of which I'll show below.

At 9 PM I ride with Curt and Chris to view the dam at night when white lights shine on the buttresses. First we go to the top of the hill overlooking the full length of the dam. After photos, we talk briefly with three Quebecans who are sitting around a campfire. They are part of the team working on the highway. Then Curt drives to the base of the dam and around the right side, up a winding 18% grade. Stopping midway we watch in darkness as semis descend the steep hairpin curves with huge oversized trucks. When I photograph a few of them, they are just ribbons of blurred lights. We continue to the top of the dam and then down the hairpin curves, luckily without oncoming or trailing traffic. I've now seen the dam from every direction.



Manicouagan River in 1959 before dam construction



Manic-5 construction at night



Panoramic view for Manic-5 dam taken from atop hill on road to Lac Louise



Five of the six of us boarding the float plane



Spillway between reservoir and river, taken from the float plane



Manic-5 and Manicouagan Reservoir from the float plane



Manic-5 showing large central buttress



Panoramic view of Manic-5 lite up at 9:15 PM



Semi-truck and trailer descending hairpin curve at 9:38 PM



Manic-5 at 10 PM

Day 13. June 13 – Manicouagan Reservoir and Gagnon

(Bert) After many days of perfect weather, today it drizzles and skies are gray. Actually, the timing is perfect because today we travel on gravel roads and the light rain dampens the dust. The gravel road is wide and the start has recently been graded so it is smooth driving at 30 mph. Surrounding us are spruce-poplar mixed forests with many lakes. After 25 mi. the road is paved, but the blacktop is cracked and thinly potholed with broken edges against very narrow shoulders. That condition only continues for 5 mi. and then it converts to washboard gravel. At mile 32 we cross the 51st parallel and the forest has a greater mix of Tamarack with the Balsam Poplar and spruce. We alternate between smooth and rough gravel, round gentle curves and ascend and descend slopes of 10-11%.

At mile 43 we get our first view of Manicouagan Reservoir and see it occasionally until mile 61. The lake was originally a crater formed about 213-215 million years ago and is the oldest known impact crater as well as the largest visible impact crater stretching 40 mi. in diameter. The outer ring is 60 mi. across and it has a large central island surrounded by a lake that can be seen from space and is sometimes called the “eye of Quebec.”

After Relais-Gabriel—a restaurant, motel, fuel station and equipment depot—we are again on paved highway in excellent condition. By the way, diesel at Relais-Gabriel is 1.860/liter, about US\$6.81/gal, but I don’t need fuel yet and hope it will be cheaper down the road. We stop briefly at Nomade camp and I would like to hike a trail, but the drizzle and Shari’s impatience shortens the visit to 15 min. We are at the base of the Groulx Mountains and our elevation here is 1238 ft.

We stop again at a large gravel pit. Joey and I see and hear a Tennessee Warbler, our first for the trip. This time Shari waits for Woody, Joey and me to explore something I saw on one of the tall and distance gravel piles. Like dark cave entrances in an Egyptian pyramid, I see clusters of rounded holes. I suspect they are Bank Swallow nests and the proof comes when we see several circling above us, followed by a few coming out of the holes. We hope the province doesn't need the gravel until the nesting season is over.

We reach our camping spot for this evening, an abandoned ghost town. Some of us go for a short nature hike. We find a few short stalks of Fireweed, frilly tufts of Yarrow still holding spent seed pods from last fall, singing Veery and Yellow Warbler, as well as calling Alder Flycatcher and White-throated Sparrow.

Larry has built a campfire at the edge of his outstretched awning for protection from light rains. Appropriately, Shari has prepared a large kettle of ghost soup for the group and each of them brings delicious toppings that we can add to the soup. As Shari ladles out the soup for each person, she tops it with a hardened taco shell in the shape of a ghost.



Uphill curves around Manic-5 dam



Gravel highway in rain and overcast skies



Great graded gravel!



Manicouagan Crater, now a lake and an island, as seen from space



Excellent paved highway



Bank Swallow nest holes in gravel pile



Camping in a ghost town

Day 14. June 14 – Fermont

(Bert) We are only a few miles into today's travels—on broken pavement—when the surrounding habitat changes rather dramatically. Gone are the tall White Spruce and poplar, as well as the steep hills. Instead, we drive past lowland taiga, wetlands of Black Spruce and Tamarack. In slightly higher areas, scattered Black Spruce grow from a blanket of yellow-green Reindeer Moss. We pass many lakes and rivers that I scan for

birds; only once do I see a Common Loon. From mile 35 to 47 we pass large sections and then smaller patches that endured a forest fire long ago, some of it cleared of charred tree trunks, but all of it showing new growth with 2-ft. trees. We stop for a break at an S.O.S. phone—there are five of these isolated emergency phones on today’s route—and I notice that many of the new growth trees are Jack Pines. Atop one tall spruce that escaped the fire is my first Gray Jay of the trip.

We reach Fire Lake, once an iron mining site, but most of the active open-pit mines are now farther east. Here is the terminus of the railroad, though. Unprocessed iron ore obtained here is shipped to Mount Wright to be ground up into small nuggets that are then shipped farther east. The Quebec 389 highway parallels the railroad tracks and we cross the tracks nine times.

Just a mile before the KM 482 sign post the road turns to gravel and the speed limit reduces to 70 kph. Speed limits have little effect on the speed that Shari drives, as road condition is the limiting factor. Here it has not recently been graded, so she drives slowly, but after KM 490 that recent grading allows here to travel about 35 mph.

A sign at KM 494 announces Champion Iron Mines Ltd. Later, the mining operations at Mont Wright become visible. We cross Rivière aux Pékans on a one lane bridge and Shari pulls off to the shoulder. Woody and I go back to the bridge to look for birds and we watch a singing Blackpoll Warbler, a cruising Herring Gull and listen to a Yellow Warbler. Had it not been raining, I might search for more. I wait in the rain long enough to photograph Doug crossing the one lane bridge in their EarthRomer.

At KM 548 we are back on blacktop again and this time it is in good to excellent condition, allowing Shari to drive 60+ mph. A surprise sign near KM 560 advertises a MacDonal’d’s at Labrador City 28 km ahead. A couple of miles farther, we make the turn into Fermont and park at Hotel Fermont in front of “The Wall.”

(Shari) Yesterday was on and off drizzle. Today is light rain all day long. I again drive while Bert logs the road. The first half is gravel, alternating between smooth and washboard just rough enough to hinder any sustained speed over 30 mph. At least the rain keeps the dust down. I stop at every S.O.S. phone for a rest break. The phones are placed every 30 to 50 km for roadside emergencies. We arrive in Fermont about 11 AM and find a note pasted on the window of the tourist bureau. "Notice to our friends from the U.S.A., please note that we will be at the office Saturday at 1 p.m. to provide information and begin your tour of the town." How nice!

On the tour, we walk inside the 0.8 mile screen wall built as a shelter for the town. Inside are apartments, a restaurant, stores, post office, grocery store, swimming pool, police department and a K-12 school for 400 students. Fermont is a company town and the mine provides this building and housing for the workers. As soon as they leave employment from the mine they must vacate their house and move. I find it strange that sections of town are divided by occupation. The teachers live in the wall, police and fire have nice duplex housing surrounding the walk. The nurses have older housing. A few

private house sections are pointed out by our guide Pascale. All in all, it is an interesting tour. We then drive to our campsite and wait for the owner to return from a wedding. He shows us where to park but we need to dump and take on water first since our previous three nights were without services. This seems to take forever. Bert handles that part of the ordeal and I try to get our impatient group parked, remembering to separate generator from non-generator people to no avail since the local campers run loud generators. I cancel the grill meat potluck due to the continuing drizzle.



Spruce-tamarack wetlands along QC-389



Jack Pine replacing spruce after forest fire



One lane bridge over Rivière aux Pékans



A small portion of "The Wall"



Panoramic view of most of “The Wall” stretching the complete length of photo



Swimming pool inside “The Wall”



Group photo in front of one of the mining trucks

Day 15. June 15 – Fermont and Labrador City

(Bert) It is a free day to do as we please. Shari and I sleep late, huddled under our feather-billow blanket. Outside the temperature is 42° and it doesn't feel much warmer inside. With several days of dry camping without electricity our batteries have worn down and we have not been running the generator to boost the charge. Now we do not have enough power to start the generator. We dress quickly and soon are heading back to Fermont for breakfast at Moose Lodge 419, which we learned about on yesterday's tour.

We are learning a lot of things on this tour that we could incorporate should we run the tour again in two or three years, including other places to visit, special tours, and even different campgrounds. Breakfast at the lodge is fantastic! While few things here are at bargain prices, a \$7 or \$8 all-you-can-eat breakfast that includes bacon, sausages, eggs, pancakes, French toast, coffee, tea, grapefruit juice and something delicious make out of head cheese is a great deal. Many of our fellow caravaners join us and soon we fill a whole table. After breakfast Shari heads to the grocery store and I fill up on diesel. At \$5.481 per gallon, it seems like a bargain since the \$6.028 I paid at Les Motels de L'Energie. Shari buys a couple of bananas at \$1.04/lb. but passes on a quart of milk for \$4.99 or the cheapest bread at \$4.09. She might have purchased the live lobster at \$6.99/lb. that we saw yesterday, but they were all purchased by today.

We drive to Labrador City, first crossing the Quebec-Labrador border and then another 10 mi. We are now on the start of the Trans-Labrador Highway. Our main goal is to find a station selling propane. The first does not have a filler hose long enough to reach our RV and the second and third places are closed on Sunday. Although we do not stop, we find that almost everything you would normally want to buy is at the Labrador City Mall.

We drive to the place where we can pick up satellite phones that we can use on the Trans-Labrador Highway for emergencies. We will be driving long stretches without facilities of any kind.

We return to our campground. It is unusual in that it is almost completely filled with Labradoreans and Quebecers that spend summer weekends at trailers they have parked haphazardly in sand dunes and the woods surrounding a small lake, each site without water, sewer or electricity. All seem to run noisy generators, build big campfires, and party late into the night. They are incredibly friendly, especially the English-speaking Labradoreans. Anyone of our campers that still had their RV lights on at 10 PM is invited to a campfire party, as we hear from joiners Chris and Curt the next morning. But we miss the party because we are to bed by 9 PM, again without heat or electricity.



Labrador City



Walsh River, Labrador



Male catkins on American Green Alder



5 PM social, near start of Trans-Labrador Highway

Day 16. June 16 – Churchill Falls

(Bert) I am out of bed at 6:20 AM and check the thermometer before quickly putting on warm clothes. The inside temperature is 47°. We leave our campsite near Fermont, pass around Labrador City and skirt Wabush, while staying on the Trans-Labrador Highway. The paved highway between Labrador City and Churchill Falls is straight, wide and in excellent condition. From the highway we are rarely out of sight of the railroad and a very long train just about keeps up with our highway pace. Each open train car is laden with nuggets of iron ore and many cars throw off a fine vapor mist, wisps of smoke or a thin cloud of dust, I do not know which.

We stop at a couple of pull-outs for rest breaks. As always, I grab my binoculars. At KM marker 105 I hear sparrows—Fox, White-crowned, White-throated—but only see the White-crowned even after much effort. The Fox Sparrow has a very pretty song, although not melodic, nor easy to imitate. I just know it when I hear it, but cannot describe it others.

En route from the RV, I see a few other birds: American Robin, Wilson's Snipe, Common Loon, Common/Arctic Tern, Northern Harrier, Gray Jay, Common Goldeneye and American Crow. We travel under blue skies and scattered white clouds in warm, light-coat weather. Yet, at another rest stop along a rushing river, I photograph ice not yet melted and sometimes we can see a few snow drifts in the shadows of the hills.

High tension electrical transmission lines parallel the highway and on at least a half dozen crossbars we see large nests. At first I am not sure which species built the nests: Bald Eagle, Osprey, or even raven. Joey says she sees a head protruding from one nest

and thinks it is an Osprey. Then I find another nest that I think is occupied by an Osprey. The best evidence comes when Chris tells me she and Curt saw an Osprey carrying a fish.

The highlight of today's drive is our stop at the Churchill River and a hike along the Bowdoin Canyon Nature Trail. Here the river is not much more than a trickle before it drops over the 245-ft. falls. When it was discovered by white man in 1839 the falls rivaled any in the world but now it has been diverted for hydroelectric power, a subject we will hear more about tomorrow. The trail, though, has other attractions now in the form of blooming serviceberry bushes, magical lichen with curled green leaves when wet that hibernate as dead looking brown leaves until the next rainfall, a pile of grouse scat, the jewel-like purple cones starting to appear on the spruce, the remnant shells of seeds that are piled on a rock where a Red Squirrel prefers to dine. The surprise is a few White Spruce of impressive height and width. Woody offers to stand next to one for comparison and estimates the tree is 24 in. in diameter. After we reach our camping spot in Churchill Falls, Mike tells me that he and Kay also hiked the trail. I'm envious of the bird they saw there: an American Three-toed Woodpecker.



Labrador City from a distance



Train cars carrying iron ore to the Atlantic coast



Excellent paved section of Trans-Labrador Highway



Ice still at river's edge on June 16



Churchill River just above the falls



Woody examining the big White Spruce



Woody's photo of immature Black Spruce cones

Day 17. June 17 – Churchill Falls to Happy Valley-Goose Bay

(Bert) At the Churchill Falls Hydroelectric Plant, our guide Karen is terrific and will be sorely missed when she retires in a year or two. She knows the answer to every question, and we have many. As is required by the company, when she and her husband retire they must vacate their house. But they have that covered, since long ago they purchased a house in St. John's, Newfoundland.

For many years engineers envisioned capturing the enormous power of remote Churchill Falls, but logistics forestalled the vision until 1967. Taking advantage of the railroad built for carrying iron ore, they transported heavy equipment to Esker Station train stop and from there used two back-to-back specially built trucks separated by a flatbed to haul the huge and heavy Westinghouse transformers that were specially built in Guelph, Ontario.

The last ice age receded 7000 years ago, leaving a large glacier-carved 72,000 sq.km. bowl. Workers added dikes to convert the wetland wilderness into several reservoirs that then would drain toward Churchill Falls and increase the power reserve. Rather than selecting 460-ft. Churchill Falls itself, the water was diverted 25 km to further enlarge the reservoir and create a 1060-ft water drop.

I had often heard that Newfoundland does not get much financial benefit from the electricity sold at Churchill Falls even though it is their provincial land, so I asked Karen about the deal. The main reason is that Newfoundland did not contribute funds for its construction. Premier Joey Smallwood was a prime mover for getting the hydroelectric plant, but it was Winston Churchill who got the Rothschild family to put up much of the capital and it was Quebec that did the rest.

There are no words I can use to describe the enormity of the Churchill Falls hydroelectric plant. It has to be seen to be believed. From ground level we descend in an elevator measured in feet above sea level rather than floors. Our first stop is 915 ft. below ground and we exit in a cave surrounded by solid granite, part of the 3 billion-year-old pre-Cambrian Canadian Shield. At its peak employment in 1970, 1600 people were working in the plant's construction. We view a line-up of eleven 250-ton transformers each connected with three thick cables in a shaft 87 stories high. Workers are in the process of replacing these oil-filled cables, each weighing 27-30,000 lbs. We talk to one of the workers and we hear they are working 12 hours per day, 7 days a week. After a long walk we have reached the end of the transformer room and come to the emergency evacuation facilities which include a bus, fueled, key in the ignition and pointed in the direction of the 1-mile drive through the tunnel to the surface at an 8% grade.

Next we enter the powerhouse, the length of three football fields, covered with a stainless steel ceiling and floored with color-coded removable panels for repair of components below. The walls are lined with gauges and instrumentation, but the real monitoring is a remote site equipped with computer monitors. We watch some of the workers decked out in safety jackets, hardhats, safety goggles, just as we are for the tour. Curt and Chris recognize one of them as the person at the late night campfire in Fermont this past weekend. Our tour finishes and we ascend the elevator 91 and half stories.

Today's travel will take us through some of the most unpopulated areas of central Labrador. I have spent so much time describing our tour, I'll reduce the report to animal life. My best find is a Gyrfalcon that swooped above the RV at KM 512. Ted, Bev, Bob and Kathy report a mother bear with cubs at KM 380. Mike and Kay saw two Moose

together just before the paved highway changed to gravel. And, Marlene photographed a porcupine on the gravel section of the road.



Old photograph of Churchill Falls before being diverted



Part of our group prepared for the tour



Granite tunnel from elevator to transformer room



Transformer room



One of 11 transformers



Exit tunnel and waiting evacuation bus



One-mile exit tunnel



Entering the control room



Control room

Day 18. June 18 – North West River and Happy Valley-Goose Bay

(Bert) Good weather has accompanied us most of the trip, so having a rainy day to explore museums is not bad. En route to North West River Shari and I see a wolf and we hear from Kathy that their carload saw it too on the forested side of the road. During WWII when many Labradoreans were employed in building the military airport at Goose Bay, those from North West River either took a boat across to mainland or a small cable car suspended across the river. We cross on a bridge.

Our first stop is the Labrador Interpretation Centre where we learn of the four heritages, starting with the aboriginal groups, the Innu and the Inuit. The two most impressive exhibits are the sealskin kayak, one of only two still intact, and a sculpture made of serpentine. The sculpture relates local history and was presented at the opening of the museum when Queen Elizabeth attended. On its top is sculpted a Square-flipper Seal which in real life is 10-12 ft. long and this seal is hard to catch and therefore prized. Smaller seals surround sides. Faces of people of the world emerge from cocoons. The backside of the sculpture shows fishing and hunting techniques through the ages, ranging from primitive weapons to modern guns.

We drive uphill to Sunday Hill Lookout and through the light rain I take foggy photos of Grand Lake on one side and Lake Melville on the other, the latter eventually connecting to the Atlantic Ocean. Before the Trans-Labrador Highway was completed, this was the ferry route from Goose Bay to southern Labrador and Newfoundland Island.

Our next stop is the Labrador Heritage Museum which is housed in an original trading post of the Hudson Bay Co. It was built in 1923 and is furnished with shelves of dry goods as it was then. Although I've often read about such trading posts, it is enlightening to actually see one in person.

We visit Lester Burry Memorial Park mostly because I see a flock of gulls resting on a narrow gravel bar. I easily pick off Ring-billed Gull, Herring Gull, and Great Black-backed Gull and then notice an all-white gull, the best of the lot. It is a first-year Iceland Gull.

(Shari) The day is perfect in spite of the rain until we hear from Doug and Kay. We have a leisurely breakfast before we drive to the community of North West River. This little hamlet has a new wonderful facility on Labrador history and culture. Lifelike exhibits show the various settlers. We have an instructive tour led by a lifelong resident of the area. I am especially fascinated by the shaking tent. This tent was put inside a living tent when the First Nation people needed to find animals to hunt. The shaman would go into the tent and talk to the spirits of the animals. When making contact, the tent would shake. We are told that the ceremony is no longer performed because people do not respect the animals. For example, they hunt caribou and just keep the antlers and throw the hide away. They do not use every bit of their kill and the now living shaman is afraid to conduct a ceremony for fear of what the spirits might do.

We travel to Happy Valley while Bert writes down GPS coordinates of grocery stores, laundry and propane for future use. We stop at Maxwells on the Churchill River for lunch and strike up a conversation with the only other couple in the dining room. When we ask for our bill we find it had been taken care of by them, the owners of the restaurant. How nice!

When we return home, I get on e-mail and hear that Doug and Kay have major mechanical problems. They stayed back in Churchill Falls yesterday and since the first

repair of the starter did not solve the problem, they now have to be towed back to Labrador City. Something about a broken manifold and power something. Later we hear that they may have to be put on a flatbed trailer and pulled to Quebec City or even back to the states because the repair might not be accomplished in remote Labrador. It's just awful news because everyone has taken to them, as we have over the years. They will be missed.



Map of Labrador with North West River near center



Original sealskin kayak



Close up of original sealskin kayak



"Our Shadows" by Inuit artist Gilbert Hay of Nain



Hudson Bay Company Trading Post, 1923



Hudson Bay Company Trading Post, circa 1923



Iceland Gulls with Herring Gull

Day 19. June 19 – Cartwright

(Bert) Perhaps this is the hardest driving day thus far, but Shari manages it well. At miles 17-21 we pass the turnoffs for Muskrat Falls Project, a new dam under construction by NuCor. The hydroelectric plant here will be of financial benefit to Newfoundland and currently is employing many construction workers. Except for that project, we encounter no towns, buildings or people other than highway maintenance and a handful of other

travelers for over 240 mi. All of it is gravel roads. A very few pull-outs give us rest breaks. At Crooks Lake we encounter a few very friendly Gray Jays, perhaps trained to expect handouts. Gray Jays are also the most plentiful bird in today's travels. A much better find is at the Paradise River rest stop where I see a Black-backed Woodpecker fly in front of me and land on a nearby spruce tree. While we are still on the Trans-Labrador Highway we see our first bear at mile 134 at 10:40 AM. Rhonda and Susan always seem to one-up us on bear sightings. They see two bears today, including one that grabs an orange highway construction cone in its jaws and drags it into the woods.

Most of the day the temperature has been in the mid-40s, but it drops considerably when we reach the coast at Cartwright. We camp for the evening at the harbor where stiff winds could chill us to the bone if we did not have on so many layers of clothes. Nonetheless, most of the group joins me in studying gulls on low tide rocks. I had seen another Iceland Gull earlier, but it is gone when I lead the group. For our 5 PM social, which starts late, we circle the RVs like wagons to reduce the wind chill factor.

(Shari) I feared our drive today for nothing. We have or had just enough rain to keep the dust down and the 279 mi. of gravel is extremely well graded. I average 40 mph with stops and often am traveling 55 mph. We have two mishaps as Woody and Joey shear off the spigot to their fresh water tank. Fortuitously, while taking a photo of a salmon trap, Bert notices the water pouring out and Woody shoves a stick in the opening tying it down with duct tape. They do lose two-thirds of their fresh water but two-thirds is better than three-thirds. Larry and Marlene have a flat tire on their tow car and an engine light warning. Larry put on his spare and added oil to the engine but missed our birthday celebration for Chris and him. It is windy and cold here and we have decided to cancel tomorrow's boat trip and shorten our stay to one night. I telephone our next stop to tell them we will be arriving a day early. We hear it is to be 37° tonight and generators are humming.



Gravel portion of Trans-Labrador Highway in the rain



Typical Black Spruce forest with unusually tall Tamarack



Juvenile Gray Jay



Route from Happy Valley Goose Bay to Cartwright



Paradise River



Salmon trap



Social gathering within circle of RVs at 37°

Day 20. June 20 – Cartwright to Port Hope Simpson and Mary's Harbour

(Bert) I awake at 5:30 AM and check the battery (12.5 v) and the inside temperature (43°). It is 36° outside, much lower with the wind chill, as winds are blowing off Mud Bay and shredding the blue and white Labrador flag. The large Woodward fuel tanker has left the harbor and a low ceiling of fog shrouds everything above 40 ft. Rhonda is out

early taking photos and she tells me she saw a flock of Great Cormorants. I scan the same area and still see one as it dissolves in the fog. I check the rocky beach and find the Iceland Gull again so I call over Woody and Joey so they can see the life bird too. I really wanted to take the boat trip to the Wonderstrands today, but it would be miserable on an open boat in rain and high winds at this temperature. Boat operator George told me yesterday that spring was unusually late in arriving and icebergs are still floating beyond our sight in the bay. Wonderstrands fascinates me because it was described a thousand years ago in The Saga of Erik the Red, "... the land where the wood was they called Markland (Forestland). Thence they sailed southward along the land for a long time, and they came to a cape: the land lay upon the starboard; there were long strands and sandy banks there. They ... called the strands Fudustrandir (Wonderstrands), because they were so long to sail by. Then the country became indented with bays, and they steered their ships into a bay."

We leave the harbor, passing the seafood processing plant where they are selling fresh Snow Crab for \$9/lb. and continue south on the Metis Trail highway. We are barely out of town when we spot a Black Bear near the side railing over Dykes River. Upon seeing us approach, the bear retreats a few feet and then sits on its haunches in good photographic view. Amazingly, only two miles farther we see two more Black Bears, these crossing the gravel road in front of us.

By 9:20 AM we have reached the T-intersection with the Trans-Labrador Highway and stop briefly for a break. An old Class C motorhome passes us as I take photos, still in light rain and under overcast dirty-gray skies. A few miles down the highway we again see the Class C stopped at the roadside. I pull in front of him and offer assistance, which is a bit silly of me if you know the vast extent of my mechanical ability (nada). The hood is propped open and one of the two men is pouring oil into the engine. I ask if he has run out of gas and he says, in his deep Newfoundland accent, he just added two gallons earlier this morning. Another vehicle stops, but continues when he recognizes we have everything under control (?). Fortunately, the engine now starts and the three Newfies are on their way again.

At mile 82 a sign announces a time zone change. We are now on Newfoundland time, a half-hour earlier than Atlantic Standard Time and an hour-and-a-half earlier than Eastern Standard Time. About 30 mi. farther we again see the dilapidated Class C on the side of the road. This time I roll down my window and ask if one of them would like a ride to Port Hope Simpson. They jump at the opportunity and one grabs an empty 3-gal. plastic gas can and climbs aboard. In his amusing Newfoundlanders' brogue he tells us the three of them are from Sablon Blanc and are returning from a visit to Labrador City, where they apparently left early this morning. We stop at P&K where he fills his gas can and gets a quick offer from another Newfoundlander to truck him back up the highway to his stranded friends. Hours later, the RV passes us on the highway and we do not see them again.

We stop for lunch at a wayside overlooking St. Lewis Inlet. I stand under an overhang to avoid light rain and to study a distant Arctic Tern but at this great distance it may also be

a Common Tern. A Common Loon is repeatedly diving nearby and two Common Mergansers fly by.

A light drizzle still falls from darkened skies when we reconnoiter our parking spot in Mary's Harbor. Shari spent many e-mails and phone calls trying to find a place for us to park our RVs, the main problem being that there is no flat ground large enough for our RVs. Ultimately, we split the group in two, with half parked in one spot and the other nearby in another. Conveniently, tonight's travel meeting, social and dinner is midway between us and in easy walking distance.



Cartwright on a near-freezing dreary morning



Black Bear at Dykes River



Black Bears in the mist



Trans-Labrador Highway 106 KM north of Port Hope Simpson
(automobile shown is one of only 18 oncoming vehicles encountered today)



Following the Labradorean RV with the fuel problem



Diesel \$6.16 per gallon in Port Hope Simpson

Day 21. June 21 – Battle Harbour

(Bert) The regular ferry to Battle Harbour is not yet ready for the season, so we are split into two groups for transport to the island in a small boat equipped for two sitting below deck, one passenger in the co-pilot seat, two behind these seats and four across the back seat. I am sitting behind Captain Tim and finding the chilly morning and stiff bay winds

quite pleasant. Then again, including the bulky life preserver, I am wearing seven layers of clothing above my belt. Chris, unfortunately, is sitting on the side of the back bench that catches spray from the boat as it splashes through the waves. Her face is taut and red from the chill, but she wears a smile as always.

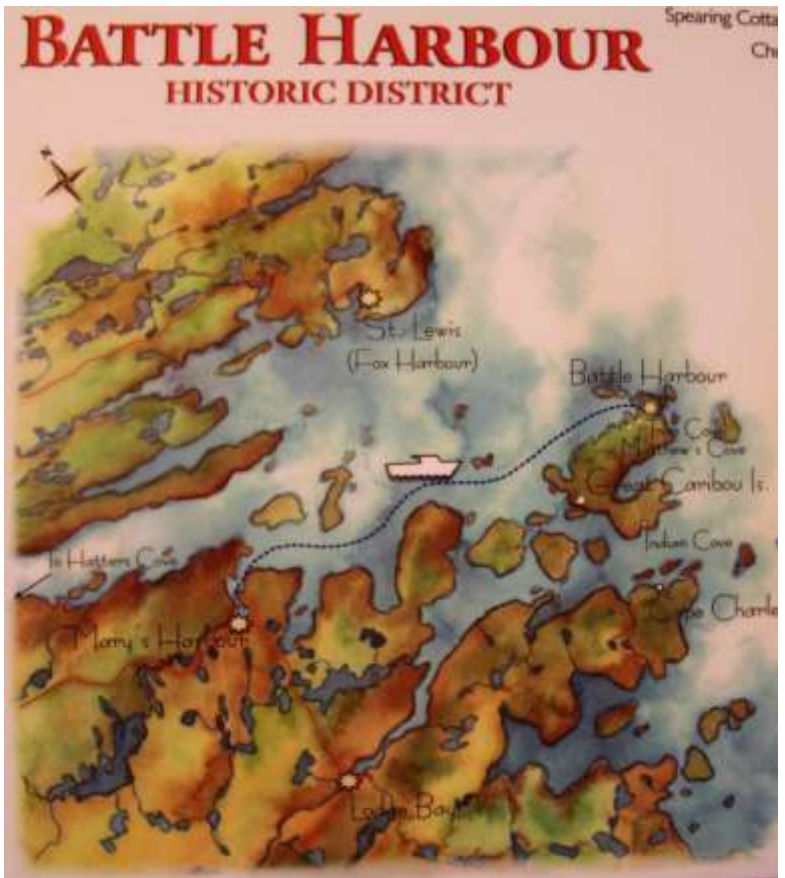
On the lookout for seabirds, we see a Great Cormorant, a large flock of Common Murres, a couple Black Guillemots, a flock of Common Eiders and the usual assortment of gulls. Later, when I examine my photos I see that the murre flock included two Atlantic Puffins. More thrilling than the birds, however, are the many icebergs we pass by, but more on that later.

Disembarking at the Battle Harbour dock is like stepping back in time to the heyday of cod fishing. Original buildings, the oldest dating to 1775, all carefully restored, surround the dock and dot the grassy uphill slope. Inside the buildings I start to read the many interpretative displays in text and antique photos, while examining the original fish processing equipment. When I notice none of our group is around, I go to the second story dining hall and find them gathered around the tables, drinking coffee and hot chocolate. A generously portioned meal soon follows and it reminds me of a Thanksgiving turkey dinner with all the fixings.

After lunch we gather outside for a tour led by a man who worked in the cod fisheries as did his ancestors. Although he seems never to smile, nor depart from his serious nature or add inflections to his almost droning voice, he is filled with intimate knowledge of the cod fishing operations. Long pauses separate his stories and just when I think he has run out of things to say, he starts another interesting story.

During the tour, Russell is the first to notice the nearby iceberg. We walk to the cliff and see the translucent blue iceberg bathed in bright sunlight. What a photo op! Couples stand on an enormous rock with the iceberg glistening in the background while I and others snap photos of them with their own cameras. We also take plenty of photos of a rather tame Arctic Fox whose current fur coat is a mixture of grays, browns and blacks.

The first of our group depart on the boat, leaving the rest of us here at the dock. Chris, Woody, Mike and I decide to hike up the hill to the other side of the island. Not a single tree graces this island. Instead, the rocky ground is clothed in subarctic flowers—Bakeapple, Bog Laurel, Bird's Eye Primrose and Purple Saxifrage—and Dwarf Birch. Small, crystal clear pools of rainwater fill gaps in the rocks. We hike to the opposite end of the island where lie the old remnants of an airplane that flew too low, killing all three on board. The boat ride back to Mary's Harbour is in smoother seas and brighter skies, so the icebergs are in better view, though we see almost no seabirds. This time I take the seat Chris occupied earlier and she sits on the opposite side of the rear bench. Chris loses again: I stay dry and she is sprinkled by waves tossed by the boat.



Boat route from Mary's Harbour to Battle Harbour



May, Curt & Chris en route to Battle Harbour



Battle Harbour



Our group joins cod fisherman from the 1800s



Use this as wallpaper; it's end to end logs used for sun drying cod



Stephen and Russell in front of nearby iceberg



Arctic Fox

Day 22. June 22 – Mary’s Harbor to Red Bay and beyond

(Bert) Road construction is the thoroughfare through which we drive today. Even though it is Sunday, construction workers are using giant machines that operate as sledge hammers breaking up hard rock. Others plant dynamite or operate loaders or drive dump trucks with rubber tires as high as a car, or operate lugged Caterpillars digging through softer ground, and some wear bright orange overcoats and red hats and turn signs from Stop to Slow to allow our passage. Overcast skies and 42° accompany the blessing of suspended water between a mist and a drizzle that dampens the roadway and suppresses dust.

Beyond the earth being reconfigured into a new highway lays a subarctic tundra landscape either devoid of trees in some stretches or offering up only miniature spruce, tamarack and poplar kept short by cold and wind over exposed red rock. Vast plains of bogs are pocked with still ponds and small lakes, interspersed with larger mile-long lakes surrounded by 3-5 ft. trees that stretch to the distant horizon. On some hillsides large patches of winter snow still lurk in the shadows. Shari patiently treads through the gravel in the rough spots and speeds to 25 mph or sometimes even to 30 mph on the good stretches.

By 10:22 AM the thermometer has crept to 51°. The road has been inland, a thousand feet above sea level. At 43 mi. on today’s log, we see the distant ocean, though the first sign announcing Red Bay does not come until mile 51 when we have dropped to 480 ft. Still no sign of the town though, we pass more lakes, one with a loon floating, and then

Shari spots a groundhog, our first and an indicator we have reached the southeastern coast of Labrador.

Upon visiting Labrador in 1534, Jacques Cartier wrote, "... it is not to be called the new Land, but rather stones and wilde craggges, and a place fit for wilde beastes ... I did not see a Cart-load of good earth; yet went I on shoare in many places ... There is nothing else but mosse and small thornes scattered here and there, withered and dry. To be short, I believe that this was the land God allotted to Caine."

At coastal Red Bay, in artifacts and stories at two museums we learn of the treasure more fitting of Abel's reward than Cain's. A bonanza of Right Whales is what the 16th Century Basques came to Red Bay for each year. Easily captured, then cut into pieces and thrown in boiling pots, the whales blubber was reduced to the lamp oil that kept the lights burning in Europe. Amazingly, underwater archeologists were able to resurrect a sunken 400-year-old chalupa. We view the whaling boat used by the Basques as well as artifacts from another sunken treasure, the wrecked San Juan, a sailing ship loaded with barrels of oil destined for transport to Basque, which ran aground during a storm in 1566. I've visited these museums before, so I try to find something I haven't seen there before. This time I am fascinated by the power of attorney dated June 8, 1566, the last will and testament of two harpooners who died in Red Bay. In it they allocate their belongings and their share of the whale oil to their descendants. It was through this document and other legal documents for insurance claims that archeologists were able to identify the sunken ship.

After a generous time visiting the museums, we continue south along the coast to West Saint Modeste where the campground offers an excellent view of icebergs floating in the bay. Unfortunately, the campground has little else to offer and does not match its advertisements. Sites too small for our larger rigs, 15-20 amp power for only six vehicles and those strung together on one circuit with the breaker in a locked room, a sewer dump blocked by an abandoned semitrailer, and only one shower and that in a cold room. Shari calls the campground farther south where we originally tried to make reservations a couple of months ago. Apparently they now have room for us, having had several permanent worker sites freed up. Shari puts the change in plans to a vote and all those not yet parked choose to continue the 24 mi. to the next campground, leaving Woody with the struggle to get out of the site he so arduously struggled into earlier.

We arrive at the alternate campsite and find the facilities in good order, but short of the number of promised sites. The office worker read the computer booking screen but now the manager tells her the computer is inaccurate and fewer sites are available. Nonetheless, with the manager's help we find parking and electricity for everyone, sometimes in the driveway. Best of all, we welcome the hot showers, sorely missed after three days of dry camping.



Road rebuilding on Trans-Labrador Highway



Moving rocks from trench to roadbed



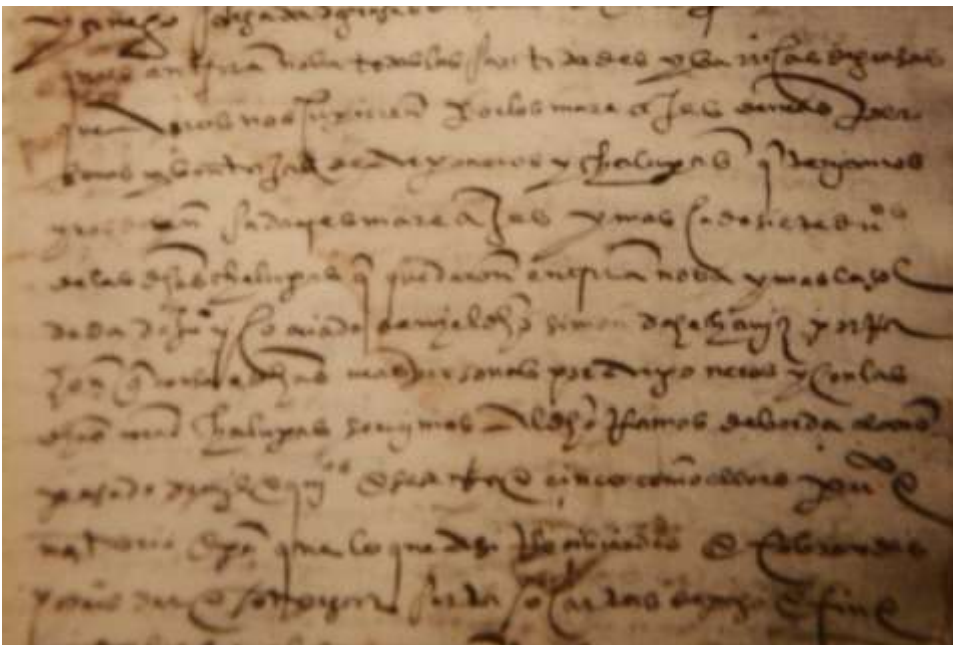
Red Bay



Iceberg in Red Bay



Original 400-year-old whaling boat in front with painting in background



Portion of Basque Power of Attorney dated June 8, 1566



Pinware River, south of Red Bay

Day 23. June 23 – Quebec coast

(Bert) The end of the road is not Labrador, but Quebec. Five miles southwest of our campground we round the curve of southern Labrador at the Strait of Belle Isle to the Quebec border at Blanc Sablon and then continue west along the sandy beaches of southeastern Quebec. While the weather is pleasantly dry and light-jacket, fog shrouds the Bay of Blanc Sablon. We walk on the beach, treading past gull tracks etched in the sand, probing at sea urchins and seashells, looking for early violet blooms of Beach Pea or the stalked yellow to pink blossoms of Roseroot and watching a Groundhog climbing between rocks at the shoreline. My main interest is seabirds, but we will have to wait until the fog lifts.

On the opposite side of the highway we can see tundra stretching for miles. Spongy to walk on, it is densely matted and only a few inches above the soil. Here and there are patches of tuckamore, the Newfoundland name for weather beaten spruce that grows in impenetrable proximity, spreading on lateral branches but not through terminal buds. Here the tuckamore does not reach knee-high yet contain thousands of branches in a small patch. I wonder how old these very short trees are.

When we reach Brador we see that Mike and Kay are on a dock with their spotting scope pointed to sea. The fog has cleared by now and we can see distant rafts of dark birds. I use Kay's scope and then get my own to identify the distant ducks. We see all three scoter species—White-winged, Surf and Black—plus Common Eiders and Common Mergansers. Later at two other viewpoints Woody, Joey and I can look toward Perroquet Island, past floating icebergs and we get thousands of Common Murres, a dozen Razorbills and a single Dovekie in the scope.



Sandy beach of Quebec's coast, in the fog



Tuckamore



Icebergs near Strait of Belle Isle



Small iceberg grounded near Blanc Sablon



Perroquet Island with thousands of Common Murres

Day 24. June 24 – L’Anse Amour and Quebec coast again

(Bert) For our drive along the Labrador coast we have baby blue skies, absent of clouds and we have a long view to the horizon of a tranquil sea. Cool winds blowing from the icebergs keep us in light jackets, though there is no need to bundle them tightly.

We stop first at the burial ground of a child, only a raised pile of rocks now but when it was investigated by archeologists it revealed information about life 7000 years ago as this is the earliest gravesite in North America. We round the point, passing a nearby iceberg, then iron pieces of the hull of the HMS Raleigh, a Royal Navy cruiser that ran aground August 8, 1922, and then drive uphill to the Point Amour Lighthouse. When we first visited this area in 2000 we stayed at a bed-and-breakfast and listened to stories told by Mr. Davis, whose family had resided at L’Anse Amour for 150 years. He told us about the day the ship was marooned on rocks and he and others in the Davis family rescued sailors. Later they salvaged articles from the ship, including an organ now in the dining room where Mr. Davis recounts the story. In 1922, in gratitude for rescuing the sailors, the land they lived on was granted to the family by King George V. We heard last year from his daughter that Mr. Davis was still alive, but when Shari inquires today she hears he died this past winter.

We continue northward along the coast to where we will have our Farewell Dinner. I have a long conversation with owner Agnes about the Trans-Labrador Highway. Parked outside are two semitrailer length bedroom units that will serve as motel rooms when properly placed and attached to utilities. They were built in Montreal and recently

transported overland by a single driver in each of the two trucks. We traveled the shorter distance from Quebec City to Agnes's location from June 5 to June 22, a total of 18 days. However, the truck drivers left at 4 AM on a Wednesday and arrived early afternoon on Friday, a two-and-a-half day drive. Politically connected and just returning from the capital at St. John's, Agnes expects all of the Trans-Labrador Highway will be paved by 2018 and they will repave the broken sections.

After our dinner—I had cod, Shari had pork chops, which we split 50-50—we head to the Quebec shore, again in the company of Woody and Joey. This time I want to go to the end of the road. We stop at a mussel farm that Curt and Chris told us about and talk to the owner as he repairs his boat. The mussels are growing on ropes suspended into the sea, but we cannot see them because they are around the bend of the bay and it is low tide, so all we see is the rocky bottom and pools of seawater. On shore is a huge anchor and I ask him about it. The anchor came from a grounded ship near Blanc Sablon where we watched scoters yesterday. It sank in the late 1800s. He and his father and grandfather fished that area and came upon the anchor. His brother is a diver and went below surface to attach inflated tanks to the anchor, raised it to the surface and eventually dragged it to where it rests on shore now. We examine the surface and see that it was made by wrapping many layers of sheet metal to form the contours. Shari buys mussels and two lobsters. We wait while the boatman's wife boils the lobsters. Meanwhile I watch a pair of ravens boisterously calling from the high cliffs.

Shari votes to turn around; I vote to continue to the end of the road. Judiciously, Woody and Joey abstain, but after discussion we decide that if we have come this far we should continue. So, we do. The scenery is worth the trip. Naked rock, sheer cliffs, countless bays and lakes and tundra surfaces offer variety at every turn. We reach the end of the road at the Marine Terminal in Vieux-Fort and turn around. On the way back we descend the 18% gravel road that we slowly ascended on the way west. When we get to the bottom we have to move into the left lane to avoid a tanker truck pointed uphill. At Brador Falls we pull off and look back to the steep hill. The tanker truck has made it most of the way uphill, but is now stopped. He doesn't have enough power to make it to the top and, I suspect, will have to back all the way downhill.



7000-year-old gravesite



Optimism!



Point Amour Lighthouse



Another iceberg



Resurrected 19th-century anchor



Bradford Falls



Tanker truck cannot make the long 18% grade

Day 25. June 25 – St. Barbe Ferry

(Bert) “Bring the clipboard lying on the sofa,” I hear Shari call on the radio. I grab the paperwork, zip up my raincoat and walk around water puddles over the wet gravel to the ferry terminal office. I am surprised at the two long lines of passengers waiting for boarding passes, but I should have guessed by the lengthy line of vehicles outside.

Shari is at the head of one line when she tells me the ferry is overbooked. Framing my exclamation into a question, I say, “But we have reservations?” Yes, the office made the reservations months ago, Shari confirmed them by phone a week ago and two days ago we came to this place to confirm they had all of the passenger names and RV lengths registered in their computer. Nonetheless, the clerk states that the government agency continues to take reservations even after the ship is full and that early reservations are not given priority. Our “but, but, buts ...” have not effect and we are told it is up to the Harbor Master to decide who will get onboard.

The ticket clerk issues passes one by one, stacking each ticket with a postcard-sized number that has nothing to do with boarding order. Walking up to each RV I pass out the tickets and numbers, and explain the situation that we have no guarantee of getting onboard in spite of our reservations. If we miss this ferry we will need to wait for the next, which will start boarding in four hours. Since none of us have specific schedules to keep for the rest of the day, it really doesn't make much difference when we depart and, in fact, our original scheduled departure was later in the day. Nonetheless, most in the group are anxious about getting on board now.

The boarding process starts and I notice the Harbor Master is taking the long semis first. I guess freight has priority, but I wish they came last as they occupy a substantial space on the ferry. Then he takes the small cars and trucks. It is not looking good for our RVs, but one by one he picks out RVs, not in the order we are parked and not in the order of our numbers. It becomes clear he is taking them by length, the smallest first.

We are onboard with many others when I go to the fifth deck and look back at the parking lot. A few smaller vehicles are boarded, leaving just two of our lengthy ones. They take one more of ours, leaving Rhonda and Susan on the lot, talking to agents. I see Rhonda walking toward the ferry, I see Larry go below, I hear the PA system announcement for a truck owner to go to the car deck, I see Rhonda walk back to her RV, I hear the PA announcement again, but still Rhonda and Susan have not moved. Time passes. Finally, Rhonda drives to the ferry. I am relieved, but only temporarily. Rhonda backs up her long rig, away from the ferry. What now? Then she drives forward again and this time disappears into the hold.

Later I hear from Larry that the Harbor Master was upset with his staff for the way they parked the vehicles, leaving too-large gaps between bumpers. And that the driver called below did not show up, so the workers rocked the truck back and forth until they could push it farther into the hold. Finally, Rhonda drove her RV inside with inches to spare.

The ferry passage is uneventful. The persistent heavy rain prevents seabirds from flying or at least me from seeing them. When we reach St. Barbe on Newfoundland island, we say hasty good-byes to the ones not continuing with us on the next tour. Some will take a few days to get to the opposite end of the island and take the ferry to Nova Scotia, some will wander around the island for a longer time, four couples will continue for the next tour. We still have no details on whether Doug and Kay got their truck fixed in Labrador City or what happened to Russell and Steven in Newfoundland. All four are scheduled for the next tour, but vehicle problems may prevent them from continuing. It is an unsettling ending to this tour, but I look forward to our adventures on the next tour, starting later today.

(Shari) Rain, rain and more rain! We head out of the campground at 6:30 AM to get in line for our ferry. When arriving at the Blanc Sablon terminal, I am told we all might not get on board as the ferry is overbooked. It does not matter that we have had reservations for months, and it is the Harbor Master who decides who does and does not get on. Theoretically, everyone but us might get on. Well, we would get the next ferry at 1 PM and we'd have to be flexible. We would not like it, but we'd have to live with it. As it turns out we do get on but it is iffy if Rhonda and Susan will make it. When all is said and done, they do get on but just by inches.



Lined up at the Blanc Sablon ferry dock



St. Barbe ferry



Only one RV left



Rhonda and Susan drive onboard