

Rucksack Summer '96

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SUMMER OF 1996: STABILIZATION OF FORT IVES AND FORT McNAB, etc.

Summer visitors to McNabs Island may be surprised by the appearance of Fort Ives and, to a lesser extent, Fort McNab. The long-awaited stabilization of the two forts is proceeding at a furious pace. The Department of Canadian Heritage (Parks Canada) is spending some \$600 000 over two years on the project, which may in fact be completed this year. The work is being carried out by a contractor.

The Fort Ives portion of the project is further advanced. A number of small brick buildings in the "courtyard" are about to receive new roofs, vegetation has been trimmed, the loose muzzleloaders have been placed on wooden sleepers. One dangerous rusty staircase has been removed, while access to the two remaining mounted guns will be made safer. Crumbling masonry is being re-faced. The only negative aspect of the welcome and long-awaited project is that the iron perimeter fence, which at one time surrounded the whole fort, was to be removed. At Fort McNab the work will include improvements to the drainage system of the site in addition to stabilization ('interim protection') of six specific structures. They are Quartermaster's Store (at entrance to fort), Artificer's Shop, #3 Magazine, Gun Crew Shelters, and #1 Gun Emplacement. The dank and crumbling casemates will not be stabilized at this time, due to a lack of money. Remnants of the Fort McNab perimeter fence will neither be repaired nor removed at this time.

Parks Canada staff briefed a F.O.M.I.S. representative about the stabilization project on June 27. Our fears concerning potential large-scale vegetation clearing, "stabilization" of Fort Ives by burying it under a layer of soil or sand, removal of guns from Fort Ives, and bricking-in of possible bat roosts, were all allayed. F.O.M.I.S. strongly pleaded for preservation of the iron perimeter fence at Fort Ives, at least its highly visible portion between the fort itself and adjoining Garrison Road. It appears that a few yards of the fence will be left standing at the entrance to the fort, while the rest of the fence

material will be entombed in one of the newly stabilized buildings to eventually enable re-erection of the fence along Garrison Road.

It is encouraging to see Parks Canada finally paying attention to the two main McNabs Island forts. In particular, we welcome the stabilization of Fort Ives, the Cinderella of Halifax Harbour. Unwanted by its owner Parks Canada, its new and improved condition will make it more palatable to the N.S. Department of Natural Resources for the future provincial park on the two harbour islands.

While the fort stabilization project is highly visible, another important project is taking place on McNabs Island and Lawlor Island this summer. Parks Canada commissioned two Dalhousie biology professors, Drs. Martin Willison and Bill Freedman, to do a natural history survey of its holdings on the two harbour islands (except the Fort Ives property), focusing on plants and birds. The survey results, of great interest to outdoor educators and naturalists, are meant primarily for the environmental impact assessment process, necessary before Parks Canada can transfer its holdings on the two islands (except Fort McNab National Historic Site) to the province for a provincial park.

The Evelyne Meltzer Report, officially known as Summary of Public Consultation Process on the Future Use, Ownership and Management of McNabs and Lawlor Islands, dated December 1996, was released in late July. The federal and provincial governments were reportedly nudged into making it finally public by a Freedom of Information Act request. The report simply summarizes submissions, both written and oral, made during last autumn's public hearings on future uses of the two islands, and is named after the hearings' independent facilitator. According to an August 7 story (Public wants islands protected, says report) in the Chronicle-Herald, a spokesman for Natural Resources' parks and recreation division said that his department and Parks Canada are reviewing the report and that he expects the land-use strategy to be released in the fall.

And our society's efforts this summer? In early July the F.O.M.I.S. trails committee, namely Mike Tilley, Vic Dingle and Chuck Colter, erected a new pit toilet near Range Pier at Back (Wreck) Cove. They were bedeviled by major drainage problems. Most test pits in the impermeable fine clay filled with water as soon as they were dug, making them more useable as wells rather than toilets. The other toilet planned for the Rifle Range Pier site hasn't been erected yet. Moreover, the site still awaits signage and minor landscaping. Our two other toilets, near Fort Ives and near Garrison Pier, are functioning well. F.O.M.I.S. has re-painted some twenty oil drums. They

have been placed throughout McNabs Island and are used to collect garbage and recyclables during the "high" season.

F.O.M.I.S. now has a written agreement covering activities such as trail maintenance and beach sweeps with both the Department of Natural Resources and, for the first time in its history, with Parks Canada. We appreciate their support!

Dusan Soudek

ANIMAL BEHAVIOUR COURSE ON McNABS: A GREAT SUCCESS

The main problem with offering a course in animal behaviour in late April is that there aren't many animals around. The best and closest place to overcome this handicap is McNabs Island, where a class of 23 Dalhousie University students went this spring to find and plan their own projects. Their post-Dalhousie plans ranged from jobs with Natural Resources to vet school, and their choices of projects were equally diverse. As one might expect at that time of the year, the first trip to the island was miserably cold, rainy, and desolate, but the students found interesting projects anyway.

Some students had their hearts set on their favourite species, come hell or high water. One watched the osprey nest at Back (Wreck) Cove for nearly five days straight, testing the hypothesis that male osprey give their mates fish as a prelude to copulation. Not surprisingly, he found that this particular female ate the fish the male brought and called encouragingly, but was not otherwise inspired (Editor's note: By early August the nest sported two strapping youngsters about to fledge.). Another student had read in the class syllabus that a project on seals might be possible, then spent most of her time on Big Thrumcap looking at the empty sea. One seal did finally show up, so in the end she did an excellent project on the relationship between surface and dive times. Other students focused on species they could easily find in large numbers. One compared the skittishness of squirrels on McNabs Island and in Point Pleasant Park. He found that the island squirrels, less used to joggers and rampaging Pekingese, also gave more alarm calls and fled sooner to his approach. A pair of students recorded and played back songs to red-winged blackbirds around McNabs Pond, finding that a tape-recording was nearly as effective as a real bird in annoying territorial males.

The main point of all the projects was not the results, but the practice they provided in all the stages of research- asking an interesting and answerable

question, deciding what to measure and how to measure it, and finally interpreting and communicating the results. Hopefully the skills they learned will serve them well whatever they end up doing. Certainly the students appreciated the various pleasant associations they'll have with the course: The boat trip, the deer flushed out in the woods, and the odd bald eagle overhead. The course will be offered again next year, though perhaps later in the spring this time.

Andy Horn

SPRING BEACH SWEEP: A McNABS ISLAND TRADITION

The Friends of McNabs Island Society's 6th Annual Beach Sweep was held June 2nd. A glorious warm sunshiny day attracted 225 volunteers, more than we could accommodate on Murphy's Harbour Queen. Some volunteers including most of our beach sweep team leaders had to drive around to Eastern Passage for a ride over to the island with Captain Mike Tilley. Fortunately, I was able to draw on many familiar faces in the crowd to help distribute the garbage bags, gloves and data sheets to the volunteers at Garrison Pier. Again this year, thanks to Christina Raphaeles from the "Y", many volunteers from the YM-YWCA's New Canadian Program helped out as did our own F.O.M.I.S. members, other families and individuals. One family came from Chester to help clean up the island. Divers coordinated by David Chiasson from the N. S. Diving Association scooped the trash from the depths around Garrison Pier.

We collected 430 bags of trash and 20 bags of recyclables. In addition, 15 crates of debris were hauled up by divers. Among the more unusual items found was a tea kettle, a Halloween mask and vampire teeth, Christmas tree ornaments, an umbrella, marine flares, and plastic bottles from Norfolk, Virginia. (Coincidentally, a US nuclear-powered aircraft carrier from Norfolk was in port at the time.) However, the majority of the trash were plastics which included broken fish crates and other fishing gear, pop bottles and motor oil cans, and sewage related floatables such as plastic tampon applicators which were found by the thousands.

As beach sweep coordinator involved in the Friends of McNabs Island Society's eleven cleanups so far, I would like to see the Nova Scotia government ban plastic tampons from Nova Scotia stores. The small print on the box advising women not to flush them down the toilets seems to go unnoticed, judging from the thousands that end up on our beaches. I once wrote to the manufacturers of these products complaining about the litter they create. Their response was that it wasn't their fault that there was no

sewage treatment for the people of Halifax. If all coastal communities banned these products, it would eliminate such unsightly litter. Tourists may not have a good feeling for "Canada's Ocean Playground" after stumbling upon hundreds of "beach whistles" during a stroll along a beach close to most of our coastal communities.

Funding for this year's beach sweeps was provided by Shell Environmental Fund and Parks Canada. We were assisted on the island by Dave Seaboyer of Natural Resources. Bags were provided by Clean Nova Scotia Foundation. Gloves and the dumpster were donated by B.F.I. The barbecue was sponsored by Sparkling Spring, Farmer's Co-op, Chris Brothers, Ben's Bakeries, and Sobey's. Transportation to the island was provided at a discount by Murphy's on the Water.

Funding for the beach sweeps is always tenuous. Each fall we have to submit applications for funding to various funding agencies. This is the third and last year that Shell will fund our clean up efforts. Their environmental fund is supposed to be for new projects, not continuous projects that go on year after year.

We had hoped that we could go back to doing only one cleanup a year but unfortunately there is still tons of garbage to warrant a spring and a fall clean up. Our fall clean up is September 22nd, departing from Cable Wharf at 10 am. (Rain date is September 29th.) We will attempt to clean up McNabs and Lawlor Islands during the fall clean up. Those who wish to help organize the cleanup please call me at 434-2254 or Du an at 422-1045.

Catherine McCarthy

CLAN McNAB IN UPPER CANADA

The August/September 1995 issue of *The Beaver*, a magazine devoted to Canadian history, has an interesting article on Clan McNab in Upper Canada, entitled "Tyrant of the Ottawa Valley: The Highland Laird who Planted the Clan McNab in Colonial Canada".

The "last chief" of Clan McNab, Archibald McNab (?1778-1860), emigrated to Upper Canada in 1821 or 1822. He established McNab Township near Arnprior in the Ottawa valley, bringing hundreds of impoverished clansmen from the old country. He briefly managed to establish a quasifeudal empire in his settlement. His tenants rebelled, and his iron rule eventually collapsed. He left McNab Township for the last time in 1845, and thereafter moved frequently. There were no immediate male descendents after his death in

poverty in 1860, and the chieftaincy of the McNabs lapsed. Hence Archibald McNab was known as the Last Chief.

In 1954 an Archibald Corrie McNab, a retired British civil servant, re-established the McNab chieftaincy by proving direct descent from a McNab in the 1600s and becoming recognized as the 22nd Laird of the Clan McNab. It is not known how Peter McNab I (1735-1799) is related to the rest of the clan. The article does not mention the McNabs of McNabs Island.

Incidentally, the name McNab is an anglicized spelling of the Celtic name Mac-an-Abba, meaning "son of the abbot", referring to the eighth century founder of the clan, an abbot of St. Filian's monastery in Glen Dochart, Perthshire.

Dusan Soudek

BIRD LIST UPDATE FOR McNABS AND LAWLOR ISLANDS

An update of available information on the islands' birds showed that 206 species have been seen on the two islands, including 84 possible or confirmed breeders. Part of the update consisted of a breeding bird survey of both islands conducted this summer. Highlights included a pair of saw-whet owls on territory at the head of Searchlight Trail and a sora rail singing in cattails near McNabs Pond. Both are small, secretive species.

A pair of bald eagles were seen courting over Cliff Trail in late April, but, being pickier than ospreys, they didn't stay to breed. Nifty though non-breeding additions to existing lists included a little blue heron, a southern wanderer phoned in to the N.S. Bird Society's hotline, and woodcock, an otherwise secretive shorebird that can be found in late spring evenings performing elaborate courtship flights over Fort McNab.

The survey focused particularly on the islands' most valuable assets-- great blue herons, ospreys, and piping plovers. Lawlor Island had 14 heron nests, down from 24 in 1991. Such fluctuations aren't unusual, but we should continue to remind everyone that even one ill-timed visit to a heronry during breeding season (April-July) could result in its abandonment.

Although Timmins Hill on McNabs Island wasn't surveyed, osprey numbers elsewhere seemed healthy, with eight apparently productive nests on Lawlor Island. This number is lower than the 17 nests reported in the 1991 survey, but it isn't clear whether all those nests were truly active.

In 1991, piping plovers, which are an internationally endangered species, were found during the breeding season, but haven't been found since. Their numbers were generally low this year in Nova Scotia, so their absence might be temporary. If anyone sees any piping plovers on the two islands next spring, park personnel should be told immediately so those beaches can be protected. The biggest threat to the plover's survival is inadvertent human disturbance.

Not quite qualifying as birds but worth noting are the little brown bats and long-eared bats found roosting in Conrad House on McNabs Island. The latter species is a new addition to the mammal fauna of the island. A team of Dalhousie researchers located the colony with the help of "bat detectors", hand-held devices that make the bats' ultrasonic cries audible to human ears. Ironically, it was an eight-year old offspring of two of the researchers who actually found the roost (Editor's note: Well done, Laura Horn!!), proving once again the value of a university education!

Andy Horn