

Notes for the Visitor

McNabs and Lawlor Islands Provincial Park has limited services. Enjoy your visit, keeping the following in mind:

As at many exposed coastal sites, the weather tends to be variable and cooler than on the nearby mainland.

Drinking water is not available on the island.

Composting toilets are situated at several locations on the islands.

Keep the island clean by following the “**pack-in**” and “**pack-out**” motto. Please take your garbage off the island when you leave.

Beaches are NOT supervised.

Bicycles, including mountain bikes, are restricted to the main roads, Garrison and Old Military Roads; motorized vehicles are prohibited.

There is one camp site on the island. NS Department of Natural Resources in Waverley **must** be contacted (902-861-2560) for permission to camp on the island. Please use “no-trace” camping practices.

Campfires and alcohol consumption are prohibited.

Help protect the island’s **natural and cultural heritage**. Please do not damage or remove trees, shrubs or plants, or disturb any buildings or ruins on the island. Removal of any artifacts from the island is strictly prohibited.

Hunting is prohibited on McNabs and Lawlor Islands.

Visit the island **at your own risk**. There are **NO** emergency facilities or telephones. Remember that the old forts, wharves and other ruins may contain hazards.



McNabs Island Access

McNabs Island is accessible by commercial or private boat from Halifax, Dartmouth, Eastern Passage and Purcells Cove. The trip takes about 25 minutes from downtown Halifax, or 10 minutes from Eastern Passage. Several **ferry and charter boat companies** offer drop-off and pick-up service, as well as group charters to McNabs Island. Rates and times vary.

Lawlor and Devils Islands

Lawlor Island is 55 ha in size and located opposite MacCormicks Beach in Eastern Passage. The island is mainly forested and supports a colony of great blue heron and many osprey. Deer are often seen grazing in the fields on the island.

Lawlor Island was farmed for nearly 100 years until 1870 when it was acquired for use as a quarantine station and hospital. Lawlor Island is not open to visitors.

Devils Island is a small island at the mouth of Halifax Harbour. Once home to 19 families, the island is now uninhabited. Devils Island is privately owned and not part of the park.

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Maugers Beach Lighthouse,
McNabs Island



McNabs Island

Welcome to McNabs and Lawlor Islands Provincial Park

McNabs and Lawlor Islands Provincial Park, located at the mouth of Halifax Harbour, comprises all of Lawlor Island and most of McNabs Island. Fort McNab National Historic Site of Canada is operated by Parks Canada and is situated on McNabs Island.

McNabs Island is the larger and more diverse of the two islands. McNabs is about 5 km long and up to 1.5 km wide. Its 400 ha (1000 acres) present a combination of historical and natural features, and recreational and educational opportunities. The second island, Lawlor, is not open to the public.

McNabs Historical Perspective

A 5000 year-old shell midden (refuse heap) is evidence of pre-European contact Mi'kmaq use of McNabs Island.

In the 1690s, the French used the island as a fishing centre and planned to build a fortress similar to “Louisbourg” on McNabs. In 1713, mainland Nova Scotia was ceded to the British, and the French built Fortress Louisbourg on Cape Breton Island.

When Edward Cornwallis established a British settlement in Halifax in 1749, he granted most of McNabs Island to his nephews. Then in 1782, Peter McNab purchased the island for £1000 from the Cornwallis family. Under the McNab family, the island

was cleared and tenant farms were established. The McNabs remained a presence on the island for over 150 years.

Beginning in the 1860s, the British Admiralty bought large parcels of land from the McNab family and established Ives Point Battery, Fort McNab and Hugonin Battery to better defend Halifax. Most of the northern end of the island remained in private hands. Since the early days of Halifax, McNabs Island has been a popular recreational destination. During the 19th century, thousands would leave the city to attend picnics and socials at the island’s picnic grounds. This trend continued until the 1920s when Bill Lynch, who had bought one of the island’s fair grounds, took the fair off the island and created the Bill Lynch Shows.

During WWI and WWII, the island was largely under military control. The island played a key role in controlling access to Halifax Harbour. Searchlights on McNabs Island patrolled the Harbour and submarine nets were laid between the island and mainland.



Fort McNab National Historic Site of Canada

In the 1960s, the military transferred most of their holdings on McNabs to Parks Canada for use as parkland. Then in 1983, the Province assumed responsibility for assembling a park on the Halifax Harbour islands. In 2000, Parks Canada transferred all but Fort McNab National Historic Site of Canada to the province for park purposes. Today, less than 1% of McNabs Island is privately owned.

For a more detailed history on the island see **Discover McNabs Island** by the Friends of McNabs Island Society.

McNABS AND LAWLOR ISLANDS PROVINCIAL PARK

McNabs Natural History

McNabs comprises nine large drumlins overlaid on slate and granite bedrock. Drumlins are glacially-formed deposits of rocks and earth, and are often well drained and suited to farming.

The island was originally covered in forest, which the founders of Halifax were quick to exploit. Over the years, most of the island was cultivated and the wood lots harvested.

Today, the island’s forests are of various ages. Older forests date to the 1800s and comprise red maple, beech and red spruce with an understory of hay-scented fern. Old abandoned fields have become colonized by white spruce.

In the 1880s, Frederick Perrin, who was a keen gardener, introduced several hundred plant species to his Victorian estate on the island (near the site of the former teahouse). Many of the original trees and shrubs are still standing.

The island’s shoreline varies from cobbled stone to fine sand, with salt marshes in a few sheltered coves. McNabs Cove became McNabs Pond with the construction of the causeway to the Maugers Beach Lighthouse. When Hurricane Juan struck on September 29, 2003 the road to the Lighthouse was breached making the pond tidal again.



McNabs Pond

Deer, rabbits, coyotes and other animals inhabit the island. The island is known to birders, who have documented 206 species of birds on McNabs Island.



Conrad House on McNabs Island

McNABS AND LAWLOR ISLANDS PROVINCIAL PARK

Features of Interest (north to south)

Ives Point was once the gateway to McNabs Island and served as an anchor point for a WWI submarine net. It offers panoramic views of Halifax Harbour.

Construction at **Fort Ives** began in 1864. The fortification was updated in the 1890s and again during WW I. The fort features two rifled muzzle-loading guns in their original casements.

Indian Point, near Ives Cove, takes its name from the Mi'kmaq people, who were forced to relocate to McNabs Island in 1760 by British settlers.

Woolnough's Pleasure Grounds opened in 1873 with two large pavilions for dancing and dining. Thousands were entertained on these grounds, including the Governor-General of Canada. Today nothing remains of this once popular site.

The Conrad House was built as a summer home by A.J. Davis, who operated a soda pop factory on the island. The home was the residence of Gladys Conrad, sister to Bill Lynch, and the last full-time resident on the island.

The Matthew Lynch house was the childhood home of Bill Lynch, the midway king, who got his start in the fair ground business on the island.

Findlay's Picnic Grounds was a popular recreational grounds in the early 20th century. Today nothing remains of the site.

Hugonin Battery was constructed in 1899-1900. It was used until 1993 by the Department of National Defence as an acoustic monitoring station.

A.J. Davis Soda Pop Factory operated before and during Prohibition, producing soda pop as well as a special concoction called 'Pure McNab'.

The Teahouse, built in the 1980s by John and Glenna Jenkins, is now closed. The Teahouse was built on the site of the former **Hugonin-Perrin Estate**, which features many introduced plants and trees.

In 1752, Captain Joshua Mauger, a merchant, distiller, and ship's provisioner, acquired five acres on **Maugers Beach** for drying and processing fish.

Maugers Beach Lighthouse was built during WWII on the site of **Sherbrooke Tower**, a military "Martello" Tower completed in 1828 and later adapted as a lighthouse. In 1852 Dr. Abraham Gesner used his new kerosene fuel to operate the lighthouse for a trial period.

Around 1800, the British Admiralty used **Hangmans Beach** to hang deserters. The bodies were left hanging there as a warning to sailors considering deserting.

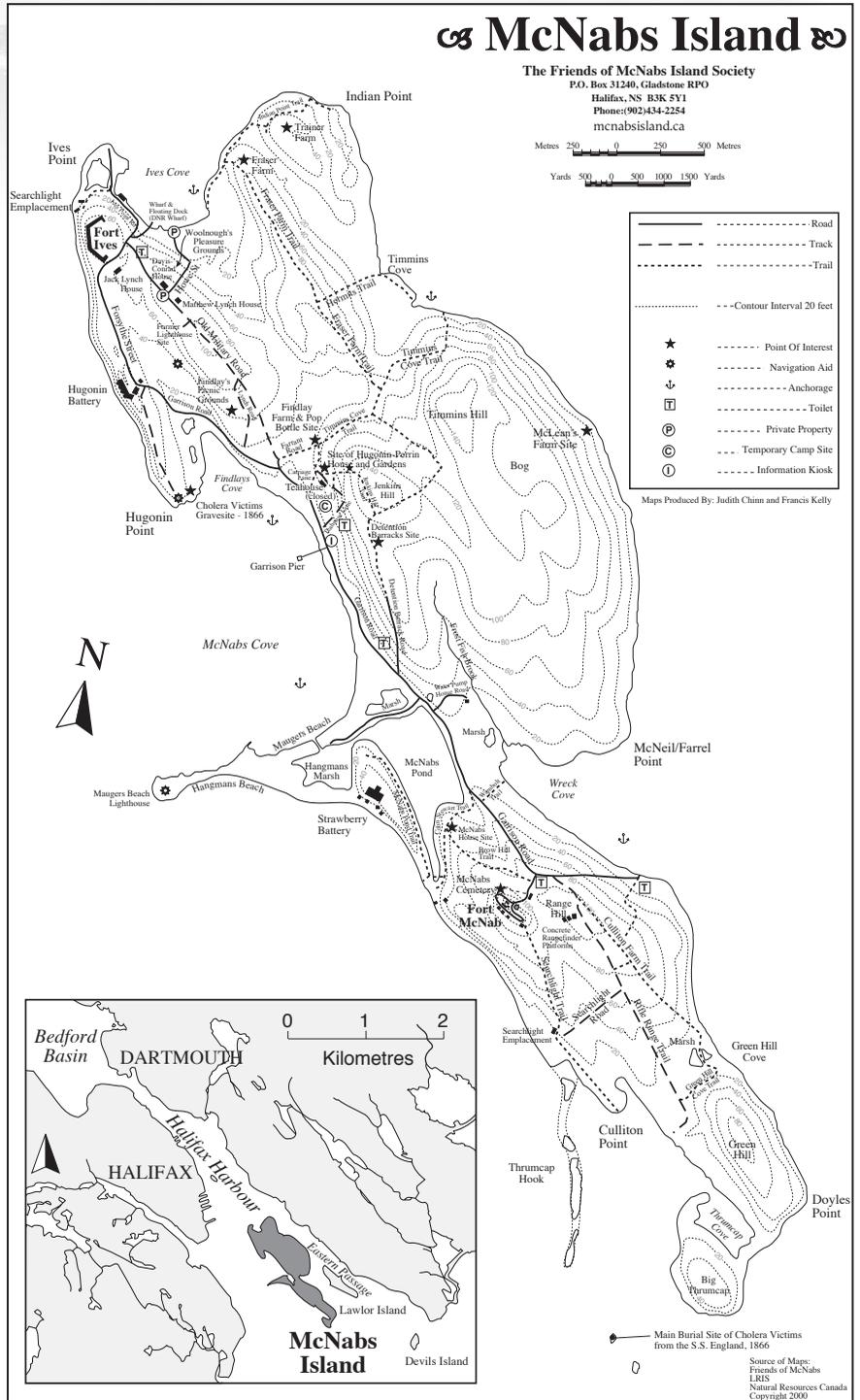
Strawberry Battery, near the site of the McNab homestead, was built in 1939. The battery guarded the submarine net between the lighthouse and York Redoubt during WWII. Today the site is overgrown and holds many hazards for visitors.

McNabs Pond is now a tidal lagoon and a stopover for migrating birds.

Wreck Cove opposite Lawlor Island, became the final resting place for several scuttled ships. The cove is a favourite picnic and recreation area for boaters.

The McNab Family home was built at the sheltered south-end of McNabs Pond, which was once open to the ocean. Today, nothing visible remains of the homestead.

Construction of **Fort McNab National Historic Site** began in 1889. It was the first fortification in Halifax to use breech-loading guns, making it the most powerful fort to guard Halifax. It served as an examination battery during WWI and WWII and was distinguished as the only fort in Halifax to fire "shots in anger" when a local boat tried to skip inspection. The fenced **McNabs Cemetery** is the McNab family graveyard. Fort McNab was built around the



graveyard, making it "the world's best guarded graveyard", according to Thomas Raddall in his book, *Halifax: Warden of the North*.

The overgrown **Rifle Range** was once used by the military stationed on the island.

Further information

The **Friends of McNabs Island Society** is a registered charity established in 1990 to protect and promote the islands for use as parkland. The Friends maintain the island trails, and organize island events and clean-ups and are a resource for island information. The Friends popular guidebook, *Discover McNabs Island*, is available from the Society, and from bookstores and gift shops.

The Friends can be reached at:

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E-mail: info@mcnabsisland.ca
Website: www.mcnabsisland.ca
Phone: (902) 434-2254 (evenings)

Additional information is available from:

Nova Scotia Natural Resources
Waverley Office
(902) 861-2560
Waverleyoffice@gov.ns.ca

and

Fort McNab National Historic Site
Parks Canada
(902) 426-5080
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