



The Rucksack

Newsletter of the Friends of McNabs Island Society

The Society is a Registered Charity

CCRA number 88847 4194 RR 0001

Volume 32 Issue 3

Fall 2023

Assessing Scenic Value of McNabs Island Beaches

by Camilo M. Botero

In the summer of 2023, a landscape quality assessment was conducted on most of Nova Scotia's beaches. McNab Island's Maugers Beach and Hangmans Beach were the first beaches visited on 25th June. The study aimed to identify each beach's key natural and human attributes in the province, which is particularly important for McNabs Island as these two beaches are among the most natural landscapes at the entrance to Halifax Harbour. Despite their proximity to Canada's primary Atlantic port, both beaches exhibit remarkable natural preservation. Both beaches were classified as Class 2 in a rating system where Class 1 is most scenic to Class 5, the least scenic.

The findings will enable the Friends of McNab Island Society to recognize the island's beach significance and serve as a foundation for future conservation or recreational initiatives. Efforts can be tailored accordingly by emphasizing the more fragile and essential natural attributes on each beach.

For Hangmans Beach, the main attribute involves the relationship between the beach's stones and the wetland behind it. In contrast, Maugers Beach's primary attribute relates to its well-developed dune line that protects the island's interior and interacts directly with the island's internal lagoon mouth. Complete details of the assessment can be accessed on the website:

<https://telegra.ph/Beaches-of-Nova-Scotia-06-28>

In conclusion, it is crucial for all Friends of McNab Island Society members to be aware of these results and consider their implications for future activities planned from summer 2024 and beyond. The lead researcher of this initiative is Camilo M. Botero, a visiting scholar at Dalhousie University and a member of Friends of McNabs Island Society.



Camilo Botero on Maugers Beach, McNabs Island June 2023

Photo credit: Cathy McCarthy

Friends of McNabs Island Society
The Rucksack

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**We welcome contributions,
ideas and feedback.**

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Volunteer Work Day - October 14, 2023

by Brian Phelan

A workday was planned to ensure that the English Gardens and grounds around the Teahouse were in tip top shape for the Fall Foliage Tour on October 15, 2023.

Work was focused on mowing & trimming some of the lawn areas and cutting back the always aggressive & invasive Japanese knotweed. The picture, taken from the front step of the Hugonin-Perrin house, shows the terraced lawn and some of the introduced trees & shrubs that Frederick Perrin planted within his English Gardens circa 1890. Over the past summer, volunteers maintained trails by trimming trees, shrubs and hedges. The battery- powered grass whip was used for lawn trimming within the Hugonin-Perrin estate area.

Unfortunately, adult Japanese Beetles were found on many of the introduced trees and shrubs within the English Gardens. The Japanese Beetle has been problematic in gardens all over Nova Scotia for the past couple of years. We have submitted a proposal to DNRR for the Friends to do a beetle trapping program within the English Gardens. The proposal is being reviewed by the Departments' Forest Health Specialists. We are hoping that it will be approved for implementation in the 2024 gardening season.



View from the front step of the Hugonin - Perrin house

Photo credit: Brian Phelan

Fall Foliage Tours Showcase 2023

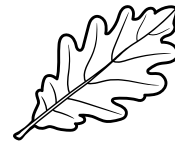
compiled by Jacqueline Halsey

109 people sailed over to the island on the Kawartha Spirit for this year's Fall Foliage Tours. The Fall colours may have disappointed, but the day certainly didn't. The mild sunny/cloudy weather was perfect for hiking.

Mi'kmaw drummers welcomed everyone to the island and sang the evocative Honour Song.



Mi'kmaw
Welcome
Photo credit: Ian
Smith



Adventure Tour: Nine intrepid adventurers went with Ian, Karen and Bethany on a challenging, sometimes soggy, hike along the Culliton farm trail to visit Rifle Butts and Searchlight locations on the southern tip of the island. Ending with a breath of Yoga Joy.

Fall Foliage
participants
doing yoga on
the beach.
Photo credit:
Ian Smith



Family tour: A fun story-filled day searching for I-spy clues around the Teahouse Outdoor Education Centre and along Maughers Beach.

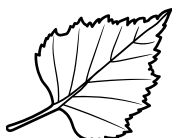
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South end Heritage Tour: A hike to Fort McNabs filled with stories of lighthouses, shipwrecks, ghosts and lot of laughs.

Hangman's Beach tour: Historical knowledge and McNab family genealogy featured in this interesting hike around the setting of Thomas Raddall's famous romantic novel Hangman's Beach.

Tour participants
at Fort McNab
National
Historic Site
Photo Credit: Ian
Smith



North End Heritage tour: On the way to Fort Ives, participants were treated to Faye Power's memories of growing up as the daughter of a lighthouse keeper on McNabs Island.



Nature Tour: Along with discovering the uniqueness of the island's flora participants learned that the dastardly invasive Japanese Knotweed while technically edible tastes disgusting stewed, jammed or pickled. Stops along the way included costumed military interpreters Mike Adams and Tom Tulloch at Fort McNab, the English gardens and a peek inside the picturesque, newly transformed Teahouse Outdoor Education Centre.

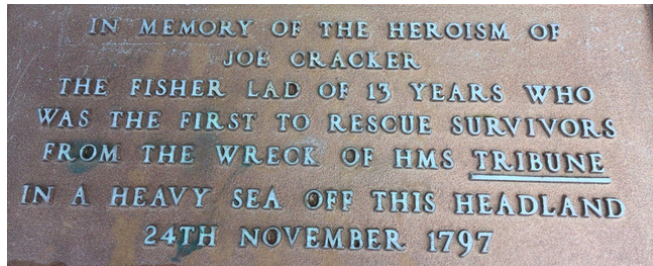
Faye Power at the
ruins of the old
lighthouse.
Photo credit:
Tricia Stewart



Joe Cracker and the Wreck of the Tribune

by Jacqueline Halsey

Many ships have foundered in the waters around McNabs Island. The most tragic of all happened in November 1797 when the British Frigate HMS Tribune was separated from the convoy it was escorting. Too impatient to wait for a local pilot, it sank taking 240 souls with it.



Plaque at Tribune Head, Herring Cove NS
Photo credit: NS History Digital Preservation Initiative

From Fort McNab it is possible to look down on the Thrumbcap shoals, where the Tribune ran aground. Convinced that by jettisoning the ship's 44 cannons, the vessel would float off at the next high tide, Captain Barker refused assistance and kept everyone on board. It was a dark night, and a fierce storm came in with the rising tide. The day's strong wave action against the grounded ship, damaged the rudder and holed the hull.

Rudderless and taking on water, the helpless vessel was blown across the harbour and onto the rocky shoreline of the Herring Cove cliffs. She sank in minutes leaving just a few remaining crew members clinging to the top rigging. Local villagers lit huge bonfires and although they were near enough to shout to the survivors, the heavy surf and jagged rocks prevented any attempt at a rescue.

The fatal string of decisions that caused this tragedy are well documented but the boy who rowed out through gale force winds and mountainous seas, when seasoned fishermen said the conditions were too rough, only warrants a sentence at the end of most accounts.

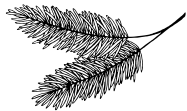
The first reference to him appears in Remarkable Shipwrecks published by Andrus and Starr in 1813. It states: "This youth with great labour and extreme risk to himself boldly approached the wreck and backed his little boat so near to the fore top as to take off two of the men."

All that is known about this youth is that he was a thirteen-year-old orphan fisher boy. For a long time, no one even knew his name, but he is believed to be the son of Joseph Shortt. However, he is known through history by his nickname Joe Cracker.

For his bravery, Joe Cracker was presented to Prince Edward, Duke of York, commander-in-chief of the garrison, and Sir John Wentworth, the Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia. He was offered a mid-shipman position on HMS Resolute but turned it down. Legend has it that he asked for a pair of corduroy trousers as his reward.

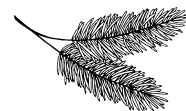
The site of the disaster is now known as Tribune Point. In 1929 a small stone monument was erected by the Nova Scotia Historical Society in memory of Joe Cracker and the many sailors who lost their lives in this tragic incident. It is situated in a small clearing that can only be reached along a footpath. In 1964, spearheaded by students of William King Elementary school in Herring Cove, a new plaque was installed dedicated solely to Joe Cracker. Gerry Larkin, the grandfather of one of the students did the engraving.

For more information there is a display about HMS Tribune in the Shipwrecks of Nova Scotia gallery of the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic in Halifax, NS.



McNabs Island Nature Tour - Species Highlights

by Don Flemming



On 15 October -- a beautiful, autumn Sunday -- a few dozen adventurous souls departed the Halifax Waterfront as participants in the Friends of McNabs Island Society Fall Foliage Tour.

Once we disembarked at the Garrison Pier near Maughers Beach on the west side of the island, we were greeted with a Mi'kmaw song and drum ceremony, acknowledging that McNabs Island is traditional, unceded Mi'kmaw territory, and that we are all treaty people.

After the ceremony, participants were assigned to various tour groups. I joined the Nature Tour led by Mike Crowell, a terrestrial ecologist and volunteer with the Friends of McNabs Island. The tour focused on the northeast portion of the island between Finlay Cove and Ives Cove.

The fall colours were less than their usual spectacular this year, the foliage having a predominant brown cast. Mike explained that this was caused by the arrival of Hurricane Lee in late September. In addition to the physical damage created by the strong winds, salty sea spray was carried inland causing osmotic stress that literally sucked water from the cells of the leaves, which quickly turned brown and shriveled.

The native flora on McNabs Island is comprised of species typical of an Acadian Forest. Over the years, most of the island was cultivated, the wood lots harvested, and several hundred non-native trees and shrubs were introduced. "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." (McNabs Natural History, The Friends of McNabs Island Society)

White spruce (*Picea glauca*) is abundant on McNabs Island. It has an ability to withstand salt spray and is therefore the dominant spruce found near the coast. White spruce tolerates competition with grasses, and so is quick to colonize old abandoned fields.

Many of the white spruce on McNabs Island have been parasitized by **dwarf mistletoe (*Arceuthobium pusillum*)**, a tiny shrub whose stems are buried in the host's cambium layer. Dwarf mistletoe may seriously injure its host evergreen, causing deformities that are sometimes called 'witches' brooms'. It slows the growth of the white spruce or other host but does not kill the tree.

Eastern hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*) is found as a native species in Nova Scotia. It is the densest softwood in the province and, due to its strength, was often used to make mine shaft beams and railroad ties. Its bark was used in tanning leather due to high tannin content. Mike explained that hemlocks exhibit allelopathy, a phenomenon where compounds are released into the environment. These compounds from the hemlock inhibit the germination or establishment of other nearby plants. We noted that no Japanese knotweed, or other plants, grew under the hemlocks.

For many decades, the invasive species **Japanese knotweed (*Reynoutria japonica*)** has been proliferating on many areas of the island. Until a few decades ago, **white tail deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*)** have been known to slow down the expansion of Japanese knotweed by eating the young shoots, but since the arrival of coyotes on the island the deer population has collapsed.

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The good news is that another invasive species, the **Japanese beetle (*Popilla japonica*)**, has been found to skeletonize the Japanese knotweed foliage by consuming only the material between the leaf's veins. It is yet to be seen if their appetite for Japanese knotweed will have a noticeable effect on its growth. That bad news is that the Japanese beetles, as all too well known by local gardeners, also attack a wide range of flowering and fruiting plants.

Many of the native **beech trees (*Fagus grandifolia*)** seen on McNabs Island had deformed trunks with cankers. Mike explained that this is a problem found in beech trees throughout North America and is brought about by a disease caused by the Nectria fungus. The spread of this disease is aided by an insect call 'beech scale'. The scale insects pierce the bark to suck on the tree's sap and then wind-borne fungus spores infest the damaged tissue.

The **common blackberry (*Rubus allegheniensis*)** proliferates on McNabs Island and I can remember coming to the island in the late 50s and early 60s for family blackberry-picking expeditions. Mike noted that in order to germinate, blackberry seeds have to pass through the gut of a bird. This process scores the outside of the seeds and, once eliminated and dropped, they can wait in the soil for many years for the right environmental conditions to germinate.

A **downy woodpecker (*Dryobates pubescens*)** and a **hairy woodpecker (*Dryobates villosus*)** were seen at different times on the nature tour. They are very similar in appearance and Mike advised that, if you see one at a distance and are not sure which type it is, a useful guideline is that if it appears that you could hold the bird in one hand, it is probably a Downy; two hands and it is probably a Hairy.

As the McNabs Island nature tour came to a close and we walked along the shoreline to return to the boat, a member of the group remarked on the amount of erosion that had occurred over the past couple of years. Mike pointed out two plants that help to mitigate that damage. One is the **northern bayberry (*Myrica pensylvanica*)**, which can grow in a variety of soil types and pH levels. It can tolerate infertile soil, strong winds and salt spray and so, although also naturally found in forests, northern bayberry can grow along marine shorelines and its roots are useful for controlling erosion. Likewise, **American beach grass (*Ammophila breviligulata*)** is able to grow in impoverished soil and helps to build sand dunes by its intricate weave of rhizomes, which can extend up to four feet beneath the sand. The more sand that collects around its stems, the more American beachgrass is stimulated to produce rhizomes and send up shoots. It is therefore also an important factor in dune stabilization.



Eastern Dwarf Mistletoe in the English Gardens
Photo credit: Iain Crowell

McNabs Island Resident Joan McGregor Passes away at 93

By Faye Power

My sister, Joan McGregor, 93, passed at 9 pm, Nov. 12th (2023). I was able to see her the afternoon before her passing. How Joan loved talking about McNabs Island! Her eyes would light up as soon as it was mentioned. Joan and Doug (the duty boat captain) were married on January 12th, 1952, in St. Paul's Anglican Church in Halifax, in a major snowstorm - one of the "big 300" boats transported all the wedding guests to McNabs that evening and they all had



to trudge through the snow to the lighthouse for the reception that was well attended. A good time was had by all. I was Joan's 4-year old flower girl. Apparently I was well behaved for the occasion, although I'm told this was not always the case.

Joan was cremated and buried in the St. George's cemetery, in Ostrea Lake (Musquodoboit Harbour), on November 21st 2023. She is at rest next to her husband, Doug. It is sad that St. George's Anglican Church has been torn down as Joan was very involved with that church, having served as treasurer, warden, etc. The funeral was held at St. Thomas Anglican Church in Musquodoboit Harbour with a gathering at the Ostrea Lake Firehall afterwards.

Renew Your Membership and/or Make a Donation Now!

Annual membership to the Friends of McNabs Island Society runs on the calendar year. Your membership includes a year's subscription to the Rucksack newsletter and discount fares to our island events. Members support the ongoing care and development of the Jewel in Halifax Harbour

The Friends advocate for funding to maintain the environment on the Island and participate in planning for the present and future wellbeing of the Island.

Thank you for your much needed continued support.

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As more people become aware of and support McNabs Island, the better we will be able to take care of it

This issue went to print in November 2023.