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Grazing sheep on hill side near Bird Rock at Cape St. Mary's

NEWFOUNDLAND – Land of Contradiction

Kurt Jensen

Newfoundland is a land of exaggerated weather where towering ice bergs float by the harbour capital of St. John's in the springtime. Mist and rolling fog shrouds much of the island in summer. Bitter winds and raging snow are typical of winter. Forbidding as the weather can be, there is little to compare with Newfoundland when the sun breaks through the clouds and burns off the lingering mist and fog. Home to some of the most unique scenery in North America, this is a land of contradictions where nature in the raw begins at the outskirts of the towns and cities.

Newfoundland is also where the New World began. Norse settlers first came at the end of the first millennium. Their Vinland settlement at L'Anse-aux-Meadows probably did not last many years. Cen-

turies later, in 1497, came John Cabot in the service of an English king. Since that time, Newfoundland has been home to intrepid visitors seeking unspoiled nature and untrammelled wilderness.

About 75 miles south of St. John's, at Cape St. Mary's, is found the second largest gannet colony in North America. A short walk from the light house at the Cape is Bird Rock. One approaches across flat grassy stretch of public grazing land punctuated by wandering sheep. The pastoral scene changes dramatically as a spectacular view of the bluffs unfold. Soaring on the thermal uplifts, huge golden-headed gannets with six-foot wing spans fill the air below the bluffs. Murres, razorbills and kittiwakes are also deafening as one gets nearer. And the smell is...well...overwhelming.

The bird sanctuary, including a nearby interpretation centre, is open year-round. Only the bird colony's isolation controls excessive intrusion by man.

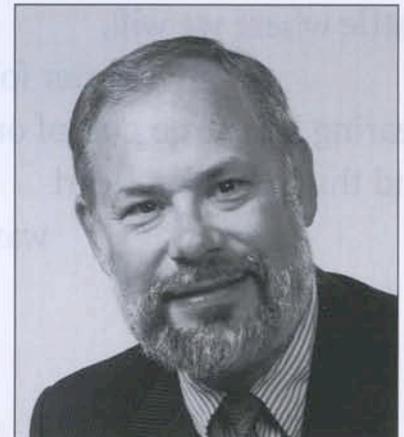
Across St. Mary's Bay but several hours by car through pristine scenery interspersed by beautiful, isolated coastal villages and points of land lies Avalon Wilderness Reserve, home to 5800 woodland caribou. Driving along the road past Peter's River one often encounters small wandering herds of caribou. Less traveled areas are more apt to guarantee sightings. In the spring, the females remain the isolated calving grounds while males and younger animals head south. There are no trees and the ground, mostly barren rock, is covered with lichen and caribou moss, among the staples of the inhabitants.



Kittiwakes on Bird Rock at Cape St. Mary's

Near the southernmost tip of Newfoundland is Cape Pine with its lighthouse built in 1851 to warn sailors of shoals and other dangers. Some 300 feet above water, one can hear below the haunting sound of a buoy anchored some distance offshore. A bellow system attached to the buoy's long anchor cable rises and falls, creating a plaintive wail which calls across the water.

Not far from the lighthouse is a colony of puffins nesting on the rugged bluffs. Walking along the cliffs in the late afternoon, one sees a wall of fog lazily approaching the coast. Within minutes, the landscape changes from sunshine to a misty light gray. Before long, the puffins on the rocky cliffs have faded and visibility shrinks to 10-15 yards. As the day draws to an end, the fog becomes all pervading and envelopes the path to the lighthouse. Only an intermittent flash of light from the towering lighthouse and the wail from the buoy provide a sense of direction.



Kurt F. Jensen

A member of Canada's Department of Foreign Affairs, Kurt Jensen was assigned to Canada's Consulate General in Boston from 1991-1995. While in Massachusetts, Mr. Jensen worked closely with the Canadian Studies program at Bridgewater State College. Since his reassignment to Ottawa, Mr. Jensen has worked as Deputy Director for U.S. General Relations at Foreign Affairs. An enthusiastic traveler and photographer, he has published many of his photos and essays from around the world. 