

Trip 3 – Episode #11: Welcome to The Rock

After leaving Prince Edward Island, we headed toward another island – Newfoundland.

It was a bit of a drive, more than we wanted to do in one day, so it took no time for us to decide where we should overnight. We returned to Sunset Watch near Tatamagouche, where once again the campground lived up to its name.



In total, we spent three nights there, but there were others who obviously called it their summer home. In the morning, we were awakened by a familiar suburban sound.

That was a first!



We hit the road, heading toward North Sydney, where we'd board the ferry bound for Port Aux Basques. It was, of course, a beautiful drive.



We saw signs like this throughout Atlantic Canada, nice to see but a long time coming.



Crossing the Canso Causeway is a sure sign you're entering Cape Breton. We didn't stop there, because we plan to go there on our return from Newfoundland.



We boarded our ferry and tried to make ourselves comfortable for the nine-hour trip.

Unfortunately, we booked too late to get a cabin for the 9-hour crossing.



So this is where we spent most of the voyage. There were signs around saying sleeping is not permitted. But people slept and nobody seemed to mind.



At about 2:00 am we landed in Newfoundland and found a nearby parking lot where we were allowed to park overnight.

We were going to get a coffee at the Tim Horton's in the morning, but we'd still be in the line-up now.



We couldn't see much more than we had when we arrived at 2:00am!



We learned fairly quickly, though, that in Newfoundland there was a variation on that old expression, "If you don't like the weather, wait a few minutes." Here, it's "If you don't like the weather, drive a few minutes."

Soon, the clouds parted and revealed the blue sky.



Depending on how far you are from the coast or from some mountains, the weather can change dramatically. And you're constantly getting closer to or farther from a coast or mountains or both.





We would realize over the next three plus weeks that the weather always changed here. So, you couldn't really blame the weather apps for always being wrong. It was hard to keep up. But it didn't really matter because whatever the weather, it was always wonderful.



Our first destination, up the west coast, was Gros Morne National Park, another UNESCO World Heritage Site, because of its “internationally significant geological features and for its outstanding natural beauty.”

We had been there a few years earlier, but only for a couple of days, and both were so foggy that we literally only realized the morning we left that there was a mountain beside us. Still, we’d been able to explore some areas and hoped to see more of it by staying in two different areas.



We arrived at the park and headed for our first destination, a campground that promoted the fact that it was right on the water. Sounded like just the right spot for us. We booked two nights.



As we drove, things looked more and more familiar, and when I saw the sign for Birchy Head, I was even more sure we'd been there.



We arrived at the campground, which also had some rooms, and it turned we had indeed stayed there. The name had changed but it was the same spot.

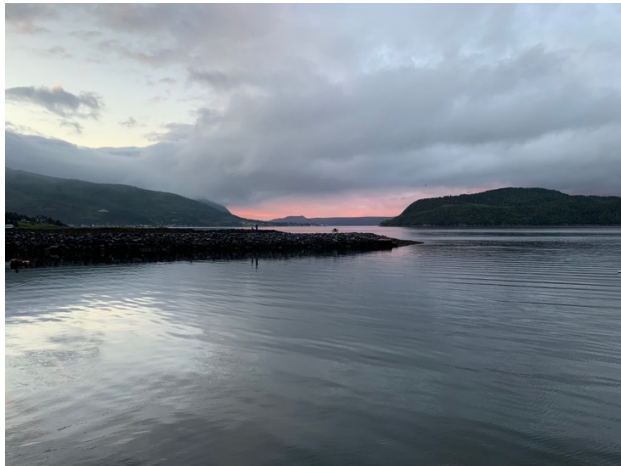
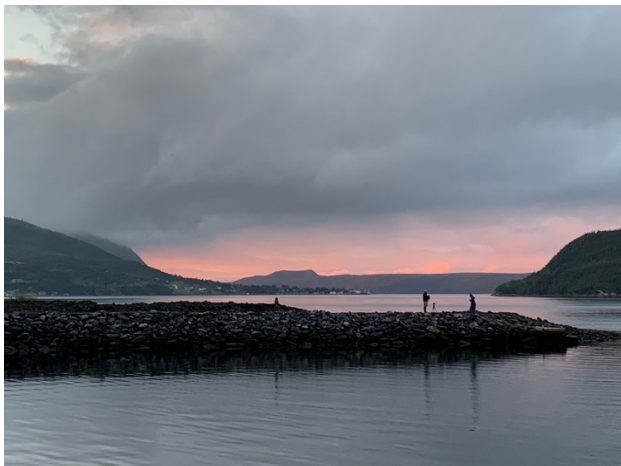
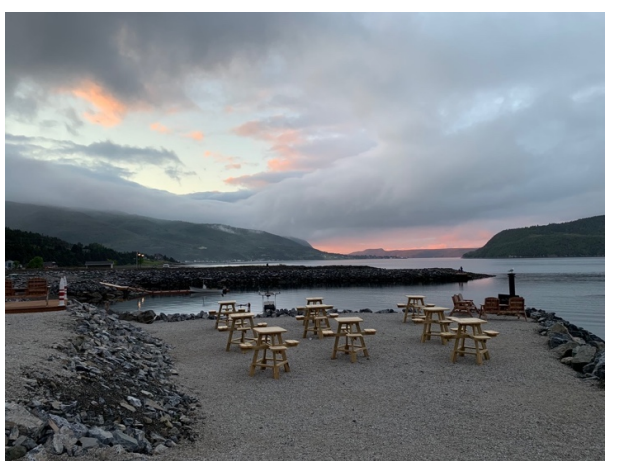


Those of you who have been reading these blogs for a while know that Jim and I are not hikers. We enjoy a walk, especially with a view, but we don't fill our backpacks with trailmix and electrolytes, nor do we challenge each other on how high we can climb.

So although I know many of our friends will be eager to share with us their favourite Gros Morne hiking trail with the best views, there's really no need. First of all, as I write this, we're on the ferry back to Sydney. And even if you'd told us beforehand, we probably wouldn't have taken your advice anyway. Sorry.

When we settled in that lovely little spot on Bonne Bay, near Woody Point, we had the greatest urge to just sit and enjoy the view. In fact, without hiking anywhere, we had a whole kaleidoscope of different views.







We spent that day and much of the next enjoying the place, getting some writing done, and meeting up with our friends Ilana and Ted who always seem to go to the same places we're going at about the same time. (Forgot to take a photo! Again!)

The second day, we ventured into Woody Point for dinner. It's famous for the Writers' Festival they have each August. We were there too early for that. One of the featured events was a reading of a new play by Mary Walsh. We were sorry to have missed that.

We
wandered
around
town a bit.



Then we went to a restaurant with a patio overlooking the water. The fish and chips were great and the skies were exceptional!



As the evening went on, it looked like Lawren Harris had taken control of the clouds.





The Tablelands that surround the town are so unusual and striking.





The next morning, we awoke to this.



We would've been happy to stay longer, but we'd booked at another place in Gros Morne. And by the time we left, it looked like this.



We were glad it had been mostly sunny on the drive there, because on the way back, as my dad would've said, the mountains were a rumour.



Yet there was still much beauty. And we kept saying maybe it'll clear when we drive back this way.









In a while we got to our destination.



And one of the reasons we chose this place was this...



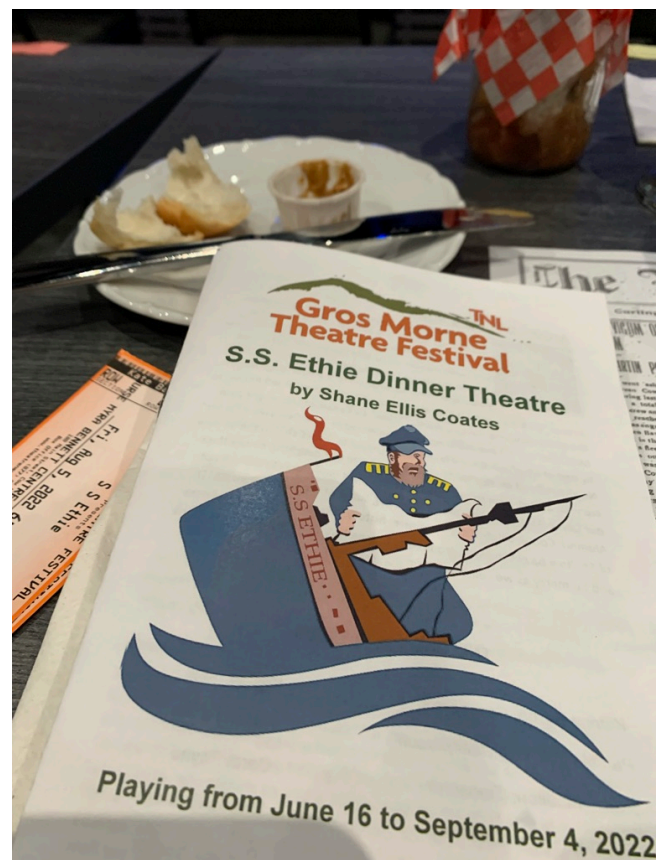
As unlikely as it seems, this little community has a large, modern complex with a dinner theatre and a second small theatre. So, we saw the dinner theatre show and one of their plays – in the same evening!



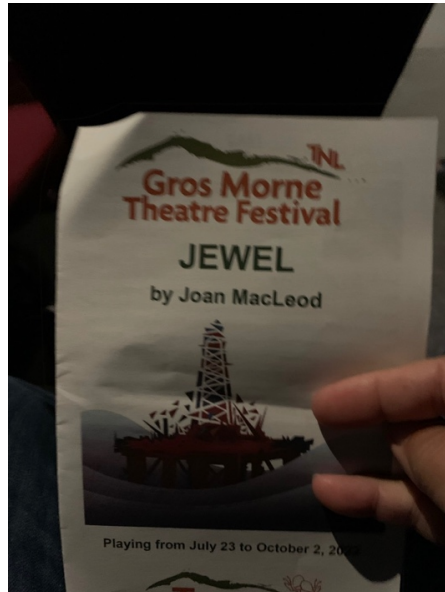


The actors began the show, and introduced the characters for a bit. Then they announced an intermission and took on new roles as servers of our meal. When dessert had been cleared, they went back to the stage to finish the show.

It was about the sinking of the S.S. Ethie in 1919, just off the coast near Cow Head. Although it had comedic moments, the story was quite moving. Remarkably nobody died, but the vessel was destroyed by the sea and the rocks.



The second play was a one-person show, starring Allison Crowe. It's about the Ocean Ranger, the oil-drilling rig that sank on Valentine's Day in 1982. Very compelling. And we were happy to finally experience the Gros Morne Theatre Festival.



Our campground during our stay near Cow Head was a provincial park called Shallow Bay, and it was a lovely, well-maintained campground.



On the first night, I inadvertently booked us an accessible camping spot, which was right next to the very nice facilities, which meant we got excellent Wifi! Oops.

What made the campground that much better was that everywhere you looked, in the campground and in the surrounding area, there were fireweeds. I couldn't get enough of them.





On our second day, we had a different spot. And Charles never looked so good!



We spent the day driving back down to Rocky Harbour. The weather was totally different and we got to actually see what we'd driven past the day before. Pretty impressive!





In search of a place to park by the water, we drove through a fun little community.







We found a beach where there was room for us to park and do what we love to do – sit and work overlooking the sea.





After working for a while, we drove into Rocky Harbour.



There seemed to be lots going on, so we looked for a place to eat.



We had suddenly realized that lobster season was nearing its end in the region, so I was happy to find a place that served it.

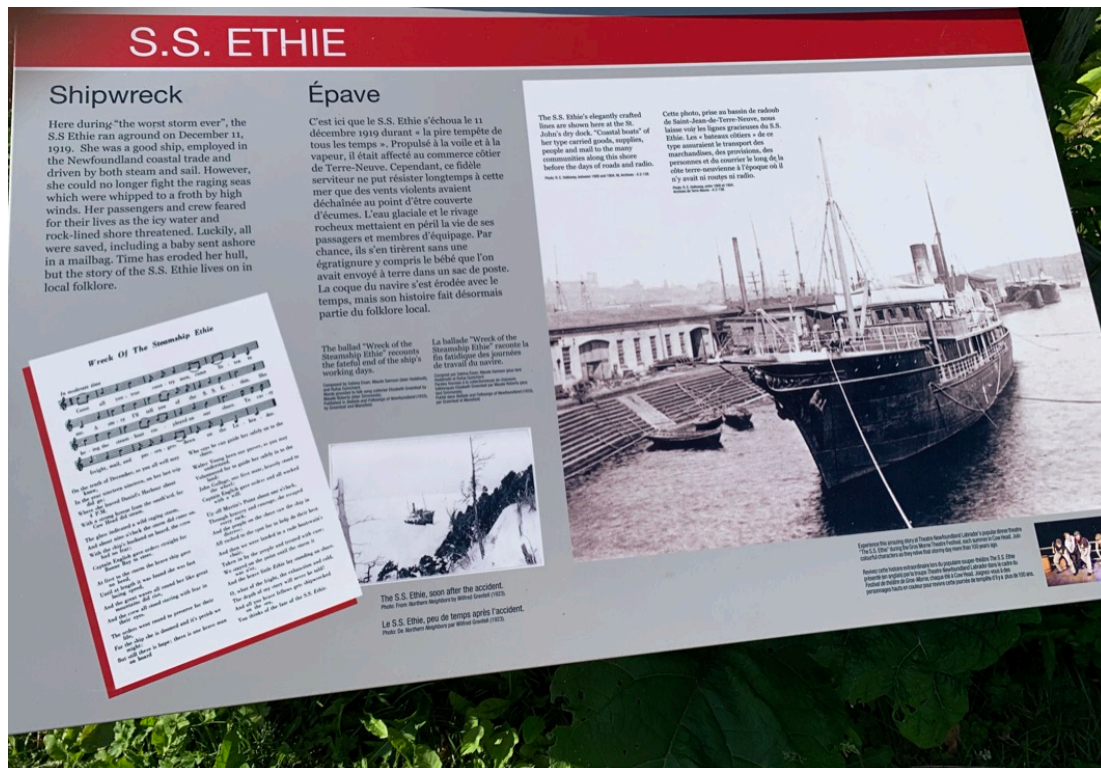


I admit, it wasn't the best lobster I've ever had, but since I thought it might be the only time I was likely to have it on this trip, I was happy.

Driving back toward our campsite, we noticed a sign we hadn't really paid attention to before.



There had been some mention during the show we'd seen the night before, about remnants of the Ethie in a nearby bay, so we made the turn to see what was there. An information piece by the parking lot told the story of the ship running aground.



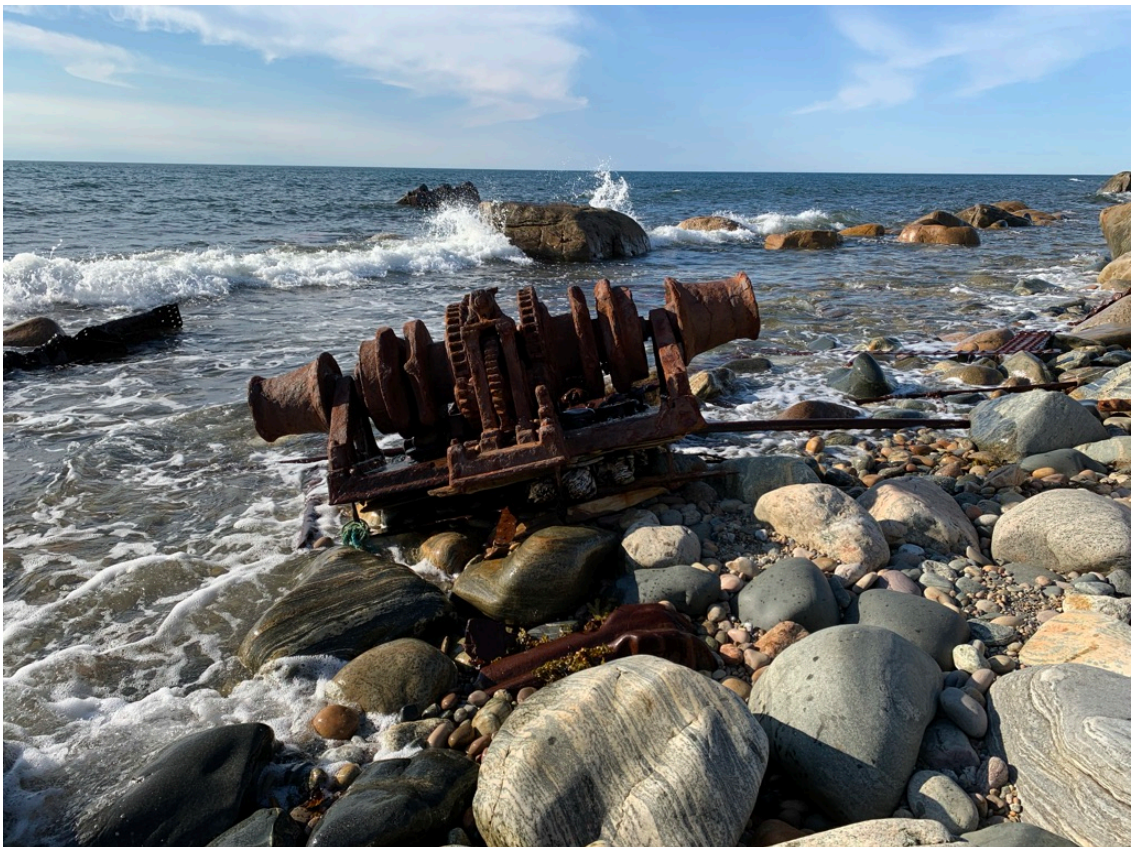
But it was only when we walked down to the shore that we discovered a fascinating and haunting site.





Strewn across the beach were pieces of the S.S. Ethie, from the wreckage that had happened over a hundred years ago.







It was a very real reminder of just how dangerous sea travel was (and still can be), but also surprising that marauders hadn't pillaged the remnants after all these years. In any other historic spot, the pieces would have been removed, either by scavengers taking souvenirs or by a museum. And there would have been signs everywhere warning people not to remove anything.

We both thought it was remarkable that people had respected the significance of the site for over a hundred years.

We spent one more night in Charles among the fireweeds.



And the next morning, we left Gros Morne and turned north, in search of Vikings!



P.S. Because I suspect that you can't get enough of them either, here's one more:

