

Trip 3 – Episode # 20: Cape Breton & The Cabot Trail: Part 1

After a long and uncomfortable journey from Argentia to Sydney, we drove Charles to a quiet spot by the water and did what we hadn't been able to do most of the night: We slept.



Then we searched for a spot to have a bite to eat. And found another spot by the water. With a big fiddle.



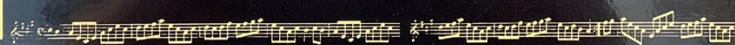
With this explanation about the significance of the fiddle in Cape Breton's history.



The Big Fiddle

The Big Fiddle celebrates the important role fiddlers and their music have played in the cultural heritage of Cape Breton Island. Fiddle music was first brought to Cape Breton by Scottish immigrants. Today's music also features Acadian, Irish and Mi'kmaq influences. Fiddle music flourishes all over Cape Breton Island.

The Big Fiddle stands 17 metres tall and weighs eight tons. It is made of painted steel and was built over an eight-month period by Cyril Hearn, a Sydney artist and welder. Visit the Cape Breton Island Tourism Exhibition inside the cruise pavilion to see how the big fiddle was made and learn more about Cape Breton fiddle music.



After a nice lunch ... we parked in another lot by the water and had another nap!



When we awoke, we had a chance to explore the park we'd been sleeping in. It turned out to be Mariner's Park, where there was a monument to the Merchant Marines, acknowledging the critical role they played during the Battle of the Atlantic. Which just happens to be the subject and title of my brother Ted's new book. The monument and the story surrounding it were quite moving.



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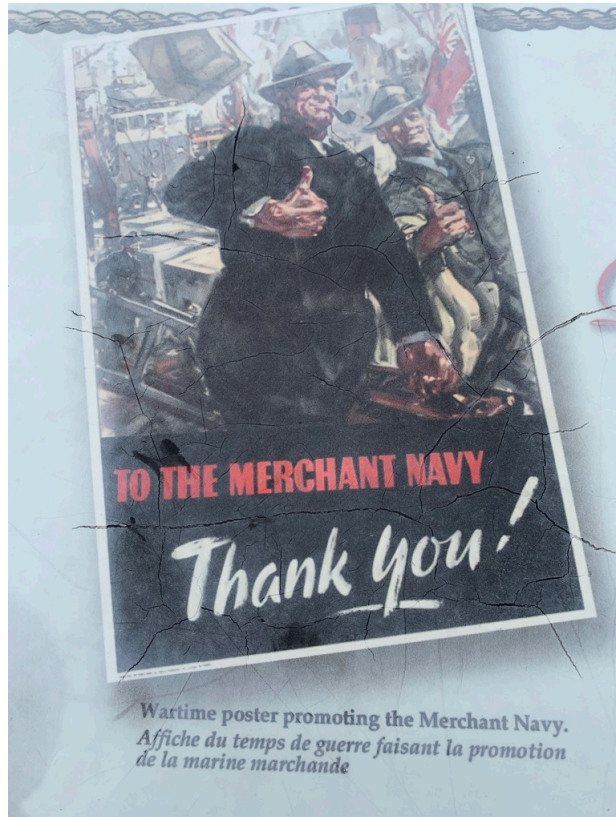
Joseph Schull, Merchant Seaman

During the Battle of the Atlantic (1939-1945) the danger of a merchant ship being torpedoed or bombed remained constant. Often without warning there was an explosion, followed by the cries of merchant sailors struggling to survive in the cold, oil-slicked and often burning waters of the North Atlantic. Ships loaded with fuel or ammunition were particularly dangerous. If torpedoed, there was the flash, then nothing. It was said there were no rats on a tanker, and that on every ship but a tanker, sailors wore a life preserver when they slept. On a tanker there was no point.

For those who survived, they faced hours, even days, on an open raft or in a small boat. Those left in the water did not survive long. A convoy could not stop to rescue survivors. For the fortunate few that were rescued, there were blankets, dry clothes, coffee, and rum. For thousands of others, there was only the eternal sea.

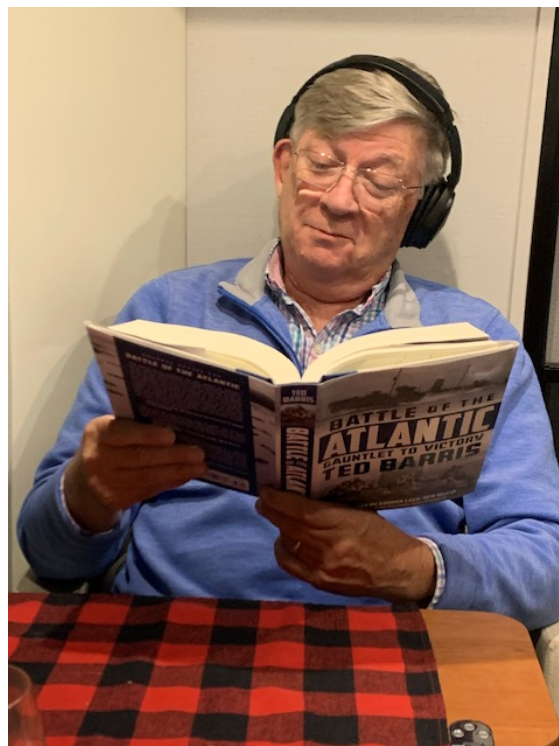
A total of 177 convoys sailed from Sydney during the Battle of the Atlantic, often averaging more than 14 ships per convoy. In one example alone, in October 1940, convoy SC-7 from Sydney lost 20 ships, totaling nearly 80,000 GRT (Gross Register Tonnage). During the Second World War, 48 Sydney convoys were successfully attacked by German U-Boats, resulting in the sinking of 226 ships for a total loss of 995,795 GRT.

While larger ports such as New York and Halifax were well-known assembly points for convoys, the numbers demonstrate that Sydney played an equally significant and important role in securing victory in Europe.



Wartime poster promoting the Merchant Navy.
*Affiche du temps de guerre faisant la promotion
de la marine marchande*

If you're intrigued by this story Jim and I know an excellent book you can read to get more information.



Nicely refreshed after our two naps, we went to the Highland Arts Theatre, run by our friend Wesley Colford.



There, we saw the most delightful production of Leslie Arden's lovely show, *The Happy Prince*.



It really was terrific, and after meeting and congratulating the cast and the director, we spent the rest of the evening dining and commending Wesley on the great work they're doing at HAT.



The next morning, we set out, driving past some of the stately houses of Sydney...





And we set our course for the Cabot Trail.



From this point on, there won't be too much for me to say except "Will you look at those views??!!" And a few comments about some surprises and fun along the way. But mostly it's this...





There are lots of twists and turns and ups and downs.



And lots of interesting names of towns and institutions that make you wonder if you're in a different country.



And there are some fun names of shops and places to eat.



We stopped at this one, Arts North, and I was astounded at the quality of the work they presented. I wished I'd taken some photos – and also that I had the funds to buy up many of their pieces of art. It was exquisite. I lifted these shots, but if you happen to be driving the Cabot Trail and come across Arts North, do yourself a favour and check it out.



Then there was this place, Salty Rose and the Periwinkle Cafe. Since it was lunch time we had to stop. We were so glad we did.



Not only did they have an inviting menu with very tasty offerings, they also created a fun, crafty, comfy place to shop and eat.





I loved these stained glass strings, and bought one for Charles. We now look out our kitchen window through it every day.



And to make it even more memorable, we got to chatting with this couple from Sydney at the next table and it turned out that they were very good friends of Wesley Colford, whose show we'd just seen the night before!



Then it was back to admiring the views.





We found this spot to camp overnight, at Broad Cove Campground, which gave us some more great ocean views. And we even caught a shot of a bald eagle.





We didn't have the best sunset, but it was still lovely and peaceful.



We set out the next morning and found ... more spectacular sights.







The map had told us there was a waterfall at this beach, but unless you were intrepid and really looked for it, you wouldn't know. Fortunately, we had put on our intrepid hats that day. We walked to the far end of the beach and there it was.





It was nice, but
we wanted to
get closer.
Which would
require more
intrepidity.



We found a
path the led up
to the top of the
falls.



And it seemed they were waiting for us.



It was pretty cool to stand at the rim of the falls looking down.





We were quite thrilled with our intrepidity. But we weren't done for the day.

We had driven the Cabot Trail before, but not in Charles, and not with the luxury of being able to stop and really explore it. So, whereas on our last trip, we'd had to pass by the sign that pointed to Meat Cove, this time ...



We knew the trip would be a little more challenging, and we also knew that the campground at the end of the road would likely not have a space for us. It was first come first served and there weren't many spots that could accommodate a rig like Charles. But we decided to take our chances, assuming, rightly, that it would be a memorable drive.







We also knew that a good chunk of the road was unpaved, which is always a bit of a challenge with Charles. But we were pretty sure it would be worth it.





After a beautiful but somewhat nerve-wracking drive, we spotted the campground.





But it was still a bit of a journey to get there.





When we finally arrived, we discovered a campground like none we'd ever seen. People just camped wherever they could find spots. However, for rigs the size of ours, there were only a few spots available and, as we'd anticipated, there was nothing available for us. But they told us we were welcome to stay and enjoy the place for a while, and have a meal. All of which we did.









We were envious of those who had managed to get there and claim a spot before us. But we were intrepid. So don't you worry about us.

As you'll see in Cabot Trail Part 2.