

A gezellig good time **Clare's hidden gems**

Story and photography by Sandra Phinney

It's 11pm on a balmy July evening. Five of us are standing on the shores of Baie Sainte-Marie gawking up at Ursa Major (Great Bear, also called the Big Dipper) when my sister, Carmen, happens to turn her head. She lets out an orgasmic "Oooooohh!" followed by, "I just saw the most spectacular falling star!"

Along with Carmen and me, our little group consisted of a couple visiting from the Netherlands, and Paul Lalonde, our guide for *La Nuit* Stella hike which started 90 minutes earlier at Église Sainte-Marie—the largest wooden church in North America.

A few minutes prior to stargazing, we were traipsing through Le Petit Bois—a unique series of trails in the forest behind the church. As we wandered out of the woods to the shore, we were treated to an extraordinary display of dancing green fireflies.

The other goose-bumpy part of the evening was Paul's talk. During the tour, he gave us insights about forest life at night, and why red lights (on flashlight or headlamps) are better at night than white lights. We discussed the effects of light pollution, our own

Point-a-Major





Left: A secluded swimming hole—a great spot for an *au naturel* dip. One of over 300 buoys on The Trail in Grosses Coques.

From far left: ; Église Sainte-Marie, the oldest wooden church in North America.. Bangor Sawmill.



The couple from the Netherlands summed up the night's experience in one word: “*Gezellig*,” which encompasses everything from cosy and wonderful to fun, special, heart-warming ... you get the picture. Carmen and I agreed: it was *gezellig*.

In fact, this word aptly describes how I feel every time I set foot in this region. Officially called the Municipality of Clare (also known as the “French Shore”), the area stretches 45-50 kilometres along Route 1 from Salmon River up to Saint-Bernard, and includes several Acadian villages situated along panoramic Baie Sainte-Marie.

If you are new to the region, the first place you'll want to visit is Rendezvous de la Baie in Church Point. The visitor's centre includes not

only an Acadian Interpretive Centre, but also a theatre, small art gallery, gift shop and café.

Bonus: get insider information from centre manager, Denis Comeau and his staff, such as where to get *râpure*—a weird yet wonderful Acadian dish, also called rappie pie, and *hareng fumé* (smoked herring). They'll even tell you where, and when, to dig for clams. Better yet, sign up for a clam dig with Andrew Weaver in Belliveau Cove!

Not all gems are on the coast. I often head inland and visit the old Bangor Sawmill, one of the last functioning water-powered turbine sawmills in North America. If the stars line up, you might be there when the old timers are giving a demonstration. **Tip:** This site is one of 14



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Ambroise Comeau outside his home-made smokehouse in Saulnierville

Hareng fumé

You can usually find smoked herring at Chez L'Amie Ice Cream stand across from Église Sainte-Marie in Church Point. Better yet, you might find Ambroise Comeau smoking fish in his backyard in Saulnierville. He buys filleted fish, hooks them on wooden bars, puts them inside a home-made smokehouse over a smouldering pile of sawdust for two days—and voila!



historic sites in Clare that are part of the Acadian Shores Interpretive Tour highlighting the region's colourful culture. Pick up a self-guided map at various locations—or look for the wayfaring signs!

Another inland gem is a set of waterfalls and secluded swimming holes. They are not easy to find as there are no signs; you can't even see the river from the winding dirt road. Hint: take the d'Entremont Road in Meteghan River. Travel the zigzagging road until you see a steel bridge. Veer right instead of taking the road with the bridge on it. Then start looking to your left for small yet well-worn footpaths. The first one will lead you to a lovely pool with a set of falls about three feet high that spans the width of the river. In less than 30 seconds Carmen and I had stripped, waded in and were blissfully floating around *au naturel*.

Further up the road, two different paths on the left lead to stunning vistas overlooking more falls. One—locally called "*la montagne*"—even has a rope that goes across the gorge where braver folks than I can latch onto then jump into the pool below.

If you are in the region on a Saturday, drop into the farmers market at

Klaus Heinze enjoys chatting with customers at the farmers market at Belliveau Cove.



Left: Hika Wagner sells driftwood folk art pieces at the farmers market at Belliveau Cove.

Below: Digging for clams in Clare.



Belliveau Cove, where you'll find Hika Wagner with her delightful pieces of folk art painted on driftwood (under \$10), and Klaus Heinze who sells drums, rattles and clay pipes. Klaus moved here a few years ago after falling in love with the Acadian *joie de vivre* (in general) and Mi'kmaq/native spirituality (in particular).

Close by, Major's Point Historic Site has a wee chapel but a big story. It's also a great place to picnic. To the right of the chapel facing the ocean you'll find Piau's Trail and a boardwalk that leads back to Belliveau Cove where the market is located.

Further up the coast, in Grosses Coques, look for # 2583 on Route 1. This is where John Browning and Marilyn Ouellette have created "The Trail," which is downright magical. It's full of winding paths with over 300 buoys of various shapes, sizes and colors, clustered in themed areas. Close to the entrance, a sign says, "Growing old is mandatory. Growing up is not."

I've run out of space and still haven't told you about four superb hiking trails, where to tap into *Musique de la Baie* (Acadian entertainment in different eating establishments) or even a place to surf! You can find these and more in the guide title "61 thing to do in Clare" here baiesaintemarie.ca. And if you ask the locals, they'll point you to a few more.

By the way, remember *Le Petit Bois* I mentioned earlier? As this issue comes off the press, workmen are installing a nature observatory and two yurts. I intend to spend a night or two there this summer. Won't you join me?


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