



explore

My excursion around the Bay


>> **Lin Crosbie-Marshall chronicles
her sightseeing trip in the Bay of Islands.**

**Now in their 10th year of business, the crew of the
Crystal Waters Boat Tours and Charters knows what it
takes to run a successful boat tour on the West Coast.**

“We don’t have icebergs and whales (in large numbers) like they do on the East Coast and other places, so we focus on the history of the area and local entertainment,” says owner and skipper Randy Hunt.

As well as offering private charters for catered events like family reunions and office parties, Crystal Waters hosts a regular Friday night Kitchen Party at the Bay of Islands Yacht Club and Marina in Corner Brook, where the mellifluous sounds of live traditional Newfoundland music can be heard wafting across the bay.

Photos by Lin Crosbie-Marshall



Left top: The view of the harbour from a vantage point on Woods Island

Left Bottom: The beach on the East End

Right: Tour guide Kris Reid towing the last group of hikers to the safety of the East End of the island



Their tours of the outer Bay of Islands featuring historical commentary, and of the inner harbour which includes both history and live music, have been attracting people by the droves. But it is their hiking tour of Woods Island, the largest of the dozen or so islands in the bay, that has drawn me out on one of their excursions.

Enticed by the prospect of exploring on foot the once thriving fishing community of Woods Island, which fell victim to the Smallwood government's resettlement program of the 1960s, I arrive at the marina on a pleasant September morning to join other like-minded souls.

On board the vessel are 20 hikers eager for adventure; Skipper Randy; his daughter, Tracey Reid, who is responsible for bookings and marketing; and Randy's son-in-law and tour guide, Kris Reid. We are also joined by tour guide and self-professed "old salt," Eric Dormody, and hiking guide Pat (Hackett) Dormody, whose ancestors from English Harbour East followed the herring fishery to Woods Island in the 1800s.

The plan is to follow by sea Captain Cook's Trail along the many south shore communities that Cook charted in 1767, until we reach the East End

of Woods Island. There we will be transferred to the island by dory, six at a time, while Randy circles around to collect us at Woods Island Harbour. The return trip will follow part of Admiral Palliser's Trail on the north shore of the Bay of Islands.

Our history lesson begins as soon as we leave port. Kris informs us that Bartlett's Point, the land adjacent to the marina, was once owned by Isaac Bartlett, inspector of police in what is now known as the Curling area of Corner Brook. During the First World War, Inspector Bartlett's sad duty was to take as prisoners of war innocent German citizens living in the area. He took them into his home and, to earn their keep, they built a 700-foot rock wall, much of which still stands today. (Bartlett's Point, now property of the City of Corner Brook, is being developed into a public park complete with coastal walking trails.)

As we calmly cruise past Benoit's Cove, our eyes are directed to the priest's house, which was relocated from Woods Island, and Allen's Fisheries, a major employer that continues its longstanding tradition of fish processing in the Bay of Islands. At John's Beach, Kris and Eric point out the site of the first Anglican Church in



Beginning the hike at the East End

the Bay of Islands. As we pass each charming waterfront community, they offer more local lore and historical tidbits to a spellbound audience.

Just as we approach stunningly beautiful Woods Island, the wind suddenly and inconveniently picks up. The sight of the tiny orange dory plunging into the wind-churned waves, saucily spraying the first six passengers, engenders a twinge of fear in those whose turn is yet to come. But eventually, all 20 hikers are safely deposited on the sandy beach at the East End of the island.

Here our roughly five-kilometre hike begins along the shoreline road still used on a seasonal basis by descendants of Woods Island families, who have built cabins on the site of old family homesteads. Although nature, fire or the ravages of time have obliterated all signs of the churches, schools, hotel, fish plants, general store, customs office (before Confederation), lobster canning factories and post office, our guide Pat Dormody, who left the island at the age of 16, is able to verbally reconstruct a community that had been an economic hub of the Bay of Islands more than 100 years ago.

After a brief stop for lunch at the Hummock, a distinctive knoll with exquisite ocean vistas, our group continues on to Birchy Hill. Here Pat points out the former site of the Catholic church and the school with its attached parish hall used for social events, and the site of the annual blessing of the fleet. She also shares her memories of driving across the island with her family to the church at Birchy Hill, in a horse-drawn sleigh tinkling with little bells in the crisp winter air.

“We all brought blankets to keep us warm – including one for the horse while it waited outside for the service to end,” Pat remembers fondly.

The path to the Roman Catholic cemetery at Birchy Hill is too marshy for easy access, but there are plans to reconstruct the road and a visit to this historic cemetery will be incorporated into future hikes, Pat advises.

Our next stop is at Thibault Cove Hill, where young people on the island would meet in the evening to socialize or indulge in courting rituals. “I know, because I was one of them,” Pat says with a grin.

With the Blomidon Mountains as a magnificent backdrop and spectacular views of neighbouring Tweed, Pearl and Guernsey (locally called Wee Ball or Wee Bauld) islands, our group hikes along a path of almost intoxicating beauty. Always the straggler, I pause to admire wild rose bushes, glistening partridgeberries, well-kept cottages with eye-popping views, happy-go-lucky wildflowers and shamelessly vulgar wild mushrooms.

Almost without warning, we

descend upon our ultimate destination, the harbour. To Pat, a former resident of the harbour, this is the pot of gold at the end of our journey. As we explore the beautiful sheltered harbour once populated by industrious families like Pat's, we can appreciate her bias.

The two-hour return trip along the north shore communities of McIvers, Gillams and Meadows is a trifle more subdued as most are suffering from sensory overload. But eyes and ears perk up when Kris draws our attention to McIvers Island, home to Atlantic Canada's largest tern colony.

"They winter in South America and, attracted by the herring, return around Mother's Day every year to nest in the crevices of the little island. The males and females take turns feeding the chicks and teaching them how to fly, and by the end of July they're gone again," Kris explains.

To complete our history lesson, Eric points out two of the few remaining traditional saltbox homes at Meadows that have retained their vivid white hue through repeated applications of lime over the years.

With our group safely moored back at the marina, Randy prepares for his next group, junior high school students. Since its inception, Crystal Waters has been the chartered vessel for the Trading Books for Boats program, an initiative of the Humber Arm's Atlantic Coastal Action Program (ACAP). A hands-on environmental learning experience and an enhancement to the Western School Board's science program, the Trading Books for Boats program is very

popular with students.

"We take them out on the boat and they do five different tests, which include water temperature, salinity and oxygen levels. Then they return to the (yacht) club, which is set up as a mini-lab to compare data – and that data is then used by ACAP to give to Environment Canada," Randy says.

Although busy with preparations, Randy still has time to discuss with



The vessel (the red boat) awaiting our arrival at Woods Island Harbour

me his plans for the future. During the 2010 season, he intends to add a full day historical cruise of Middle Arm, Goose Arm and Penguin Arm to his itinerary. By 2011, he hopes to launch a new 90-passenger boat, which will cater to the motor coach trade and enable him to offer small dinner cruises to 30-40 people.

While my head processes this information, my heart is still on Woods Island. As I look longingly back at the bay, I experience a sudden communion with the lone member of the Parsons family who is the only year-round resident left on the island.

"He's the one who refused to go," Randy says with a smile.

Somehow I know how he feels. ☹