

MAINE TO THE ROCK WITH KITE

Jack and Zdenka Griswold

(Jack and Zdenka sail Kite, a Valiant 42, out of their home port of Portland, Maine. In 2016 they finished a seven-year westabout circumnavigation. They served as Roving Rear Commodores from 2014 to 2016, Port Officers from 2016 to 2018, and Zdenka joined the General Committee in April 2017. Since returning to Maine in 2016 they have explored the coasts of Maine, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and New Brunswick.)

It seems that Jack has developed an allergy to cold weather sailing. Zdenka, on the other hand, is firmly in the camp of 'if you're cold, put on another layer'. Not surprisingly, 2nd July 2017 saw Jack donning his long-johns as Kite approached Shelburne, Nova Scotia on a bright sunny day. The shore shimmered and shapes on land seemed to be floating in the air. These were not heat waves, however; these were cold waves from the 50°F water. Wait, it got worse. Leaving Shelburne we picked up a large ball of discarded lobster pot line on our prop which meant actually going into that water to cut it off. Zdenka helpfully suggested putting on a second wetsuit.



Jack dressed for cold weather

And so began our summer cruise to Newfoundland. For a few days we sailed in company with our friends, OCC members Roger Block and Amy Jordan on *Shango*, the first time since our passage from Réunion to South Africa. But we wanted to get to Newfoundland, so we parted ways and quickly skipped up the Nova Scotia coast



The Lunenburg waterfront



Welcoming St Peter's Marina in the Bras D'Or Lakes



Baddeck waterfront and lighthouse





Approaching Francois as the fog begins to lift

to the Bras d'Or Lakes and Cape Breton. The lakes are entered through a lock at the western end. Once in, we were treated to bucolic scenery, benign sailing conditions, and water actually warm enough to swim in which put a contented smile on Jack's face. The area is also known for its music, and every restaurant and café seemed to have live music going, which we really enjoyed.

We exited at the eastern end through the Great Bras d'Or Channel where the currents rip, sailed past Bird Island which was teeming with puffins, gannets, razorbill auks, bald eagles and seals, and stopped for a couple of days in Ingonish on Cape Breton. Our plan was to do a 160 mile overnighiter across the Cabot Strait to Francois, an outpost on the south coast of Newfoundland. Newfoundland's coastline was once dotted with outports, small fishing villages where the only access is by sea. It is hard to imagine how hard life must have been in these small communities. Isolated and remote, they had to be self-sufficient in a rough environment dominated by fog, gales, a rocky shoreline, and a cold, cold ocean. When the cod fishery collapsed, the outports started to decline and die. Now only a few are left.

True to form, our crossing was in a pea-soup fog and we didn't get our first glimpse of Newfoundland until we were only a hundred yards away. But as we made our way into the fjord where Francois is located the fog began to lift, revealing massive cliffs on either side rising hundreds of feet. It was spectacular and, as we were to find out, was the norm for the south coast. Francois – or Fransway as the locals call it – was perched along the shore under the cliffs. We were told that only about 80 year-round residents remained, with eight or so kids in the local school. Some have never driven a car. The government provides a ferry service several times a week to Burgeo, a town further west, that has a road. It also provides a diesel-fuelled generating plant for electricity, as well as helicopter evacuation for medical emergencies. So life is much better than



Francois swathed in fog

it was not so long ago, but making a living is difficult. Young people leave for jobs elsewhere, and the government actively encourages people in the outports to relocate because of the expense of providing services to keep them going.

This was an interesting phenomenon. In McCallum, another outport we visited, the village of some 40 people had recently voted on whether to resettle. We were told by a local resident that close to 80% wanted to move and take the government resettlement grant, something in the region of \$250,000. Apparently it takes a 90% vote to abandon the town and resettle, however. This makes for some interesting currents in such a small

Francois after the fog had cleared





Kite at the McCallum floating dock

place. We were invited for tea (and wifi) to the house of one lady who explained that, even though the ballot was secret, most people knew how everyone else had voted.

We spent three weeks poking along the coast, anchoring in impossibly magnificent spots under the cliffs and in remote coves where it seemed we were at the end of the world. We took long walks across heather and gorse-covered hills. We began to understand just how interconnected people in the various outports are through marriage, work and family. We realised the intimacy of the area when we arrived in Burgeo and met an ex-lighthouse keeper from a long-abandoned outport called Pushthrough, who knew exactly who we were and where we had been.

The former outport of Pushthrough, supposedly named for a whale that got stuck and was pushed through the channel; the village is long gone





Great Jervis Harbour, near McCallum

One evening we were anchored in La Hune Bay when a pretty Pacific Seacraft named *Kelly Rae* came in and anchored near us. This was the first time we'd seen another cruising boat since our arrival in Newfoundland and it turned out that we had met the skipper (now a fellow OCC member), Rich Simpson, ten years previously in the Bahamas. The cruising world is indeed small.

Next morning we struggled to get our anchor up. The windlass lugged down, slowed, and finally died altogether. Looking down from the bow, about 15 feet below the surface we saw a truly massive ball of kelp the size of our bedroom that had been snagged by our anchor. It took about half an hour to cut it all away. After that, without a working windlass, we tried to avoid anchoring if possible. Fortunately, every harbour that had

Sharing La Hune Bay with Kelly Rae





*La Hune Bay,
where our
windlass
died*

a village or the remains of a village also had a government wharf that we could tie up to. This made life easy as we headed west along the coast all the way to our last stop in Newfoundland, the town of Port-aux-Basques. This is the terminal for the ferry from Nova Scotia which supplies much of Newfoundland with goods and tourists. Even so, the town is fairly modest. Exploring on our folding bikes, we ran into four guys playing Newfie music in a small shopping-centre parking lot. For the next few days we kept seeing them in different places and got to know them a little. We asked Rick, the lead singer, if they had any CDs and the following morning he came down to the boat to give us one, still one of our favourites from 'the Rock'.



Ramea



Rick and the boys

We eventually got a weather window to sail back to Cape Breton and Ingonish. And sail we did. Up to then we had pretty much motored everywhere. Unfortunately this was also our last good sail, and the rest of the way to Maine we again mostly motored. In Halifax we tied up at a pier right in the middle of downtown for a few days, a short walk from lots of restaurants, the farmers' market and most of the sights, and stumbled on a wonderful musical celebrating the music of Stan Rogers, a Nova Scotia icon.

A ferry entering Port-aux-Basques. Note the eponymous (and enormous!) dog





*Grand Bruit, recently abandoned, was having a ‘Come Home’
reunion of former residents*

A solar eclipse took place while we were in Halifax, and we went to St Mary’s University to see it. The astronomy department had hauled out telescopes onto the lawn and handed out special filters. Everyone had a chance to view the eclipse, and with gorgeous weather it was a festive, fun afternoon.

Observing the eclipse at St Mary’s University, Halifax





*In front of the Maritime
Museum at Halifax, a
super location*



Halifax Farmers' Market



Lunenburg, with its multi-coloured houses, was a favourite stop

Nova Scotia has many lovely harbours and bays. Mahone Bay, dotted with islands, is one of the prettiest, and we stopped there to visit our Portland neighbours and OCC members Gene Gardner and Jo-Ann Ramsay from *Eli Blue* at their waterfront cottage. Lunenburg, with its multi-coloured houses, was another picture-perfect, favourite stop. We spent our last night in Nova Scotia anchored off a crescent-shaped beach near Shelburne. The next day was sunny but totally windless with a sea like glass. We fired up the engine and made the overnight hop back to Maine.

Newfoundland, though at times cold and foggy, is a special, other-worldly place which feels very remote. It is rough but stunningly beautiful and remarkably welcoming. Sadly, the outports are rapidly disappearing and we are grateful for the brief glimpse that we had. If you have a chance, go.

Grand Bruit, one of Newfoundland's many abandoned outports, in the evening light

