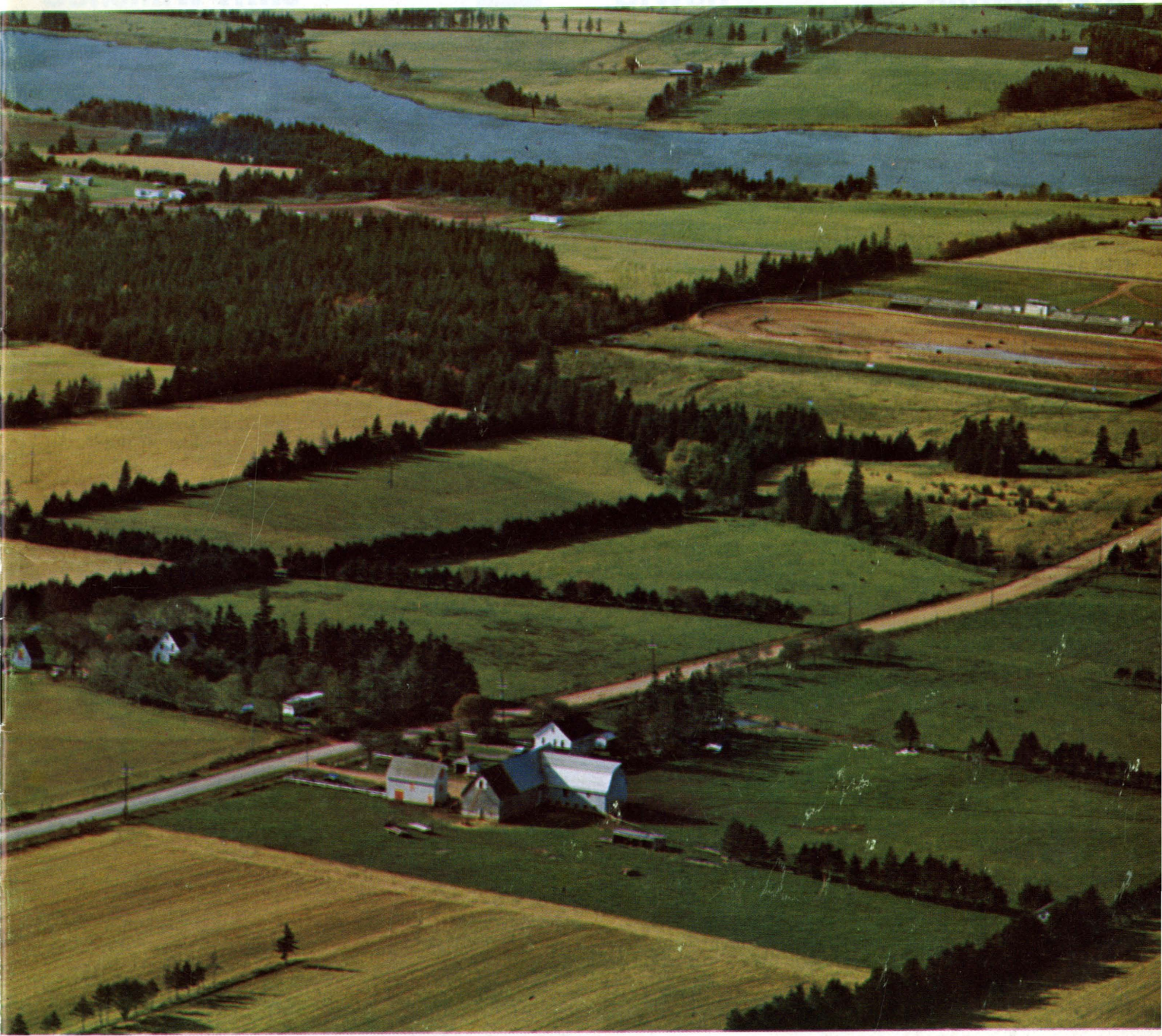
ECOTOUR©

of the Trans-Canada Highway

Prince Edward Island



Introduction

Prince Edward Island is a special place. Named "Abegweit" by the Micmac Indians, it was their "home cradled in the waves". Today, the Island is Canada's smallest province, but nonetheless, it is rich in cultural and natural history.

Geologically, the Island is young. The sediments which formed the sandstone bedrock were laid down in an ancient delta some 250-300 million years ago, and the characteristic red colour is due to the presence of iron oxide. More recently this region was covered several times with continental glaciers. When the last ice sheets melted some 14,000 years ago, the sea level rose and the Island of today was then actually three smaller islands. As the land, freed from its icy burden, slowly rebounded, the Island literally rose from the ocean. Subsequent changes in sea level relative to the land have resulted in a "drowned coastline", particularly evident in the eastern part of the Island. Such a coast is characterized by barrier islands and flooded, silt-filled valleys. The valleys and surrounding salt marshes provide nesting and feeding areas for shore-birds, stopovers for thousands of migratory waterfowl, and the basis for productive shell-fisheries.

Man's history in Prince Edward Island is quite brief. Shortly after the glaciers receded, nomadic tribes arrived about 11,000 years ago. Centuries later, other groups including aboriginal fishermen and the Micmac Indians also made the Island their home. European interest in "Ile St. Jean", as the early Acadian settlers knew it, began during the 17th and 18th centuries. These and later Scottish, Irish, and English immigrants were often threatened with the problems of adapting to a new land: unfamiliar climate, disease, crop failures, forest fires, plagues of field mice, and at worst, starvation.

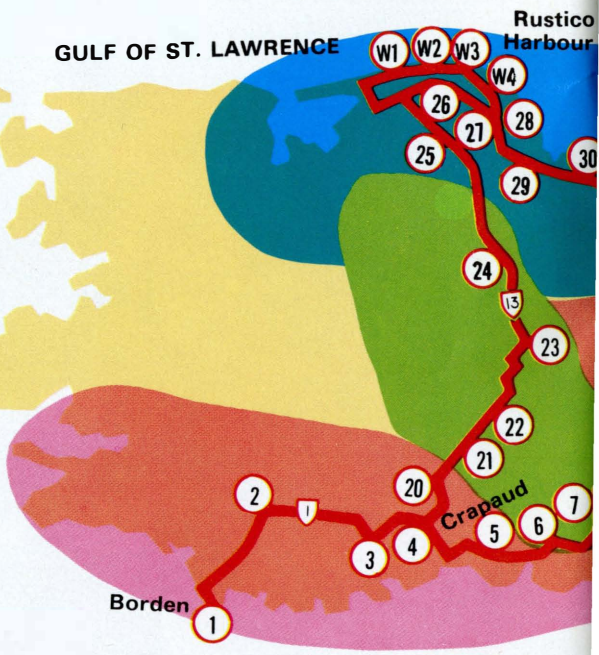
Despite these early hardships the Island has developed into an agricultural province with much of the landscape changed by human activity. What the early settlers knew as a dense forest of white pine, hemlock, maple, and beech is now acre upon acre of grain, pasture, and potatoes. Much of the larger timber welt to build ships, and with the loss of forest cover, the moose, caribou, and bear found by the early settlers disappeared. The days of ship-building have passed, but many Islanders still derive their livelihood from the sea through fishing. Cod, mackerel, lobster, and more recently, tuna are important species. In the present as in the past, Island people are intimately bound to the land and sea.

Ecologically, islands are often "curiosity shops" because of barriers to the migration of plants and animals. This insularity is also evident in human culture; the feeling of isolation coupled with the finite boundaries seem to evoke a sense of oneness. Island people feel at home as perhaps few others do; and because of its small size and independent ways, this island has managed to avoid many of modern society's ills.

But land has always been a precious commodity here. Islanders have had to struggle against both natural and human adversaries to retain a valuable heritage. Now, more than ever, the delicate interaction between man and the land has become a key factor in the continuance of an "Island way of life".

Northumberland Shore

This area is characterized by gently rolling topography and intense agricultural activity. The fine sandy loam soils form a favourable base for most crops, and the region is protected from the cold, north winds that blow off the Gulf of St. Lawrence.



Bonshaw Hills

These hills, rising some four hundred feet above sea level and extending diagonally across the Island, form its highest and most rugged landscape. Composed of sandstone and shale, the hills are dissected by numerous small streams. Although the soils are suitable for sustaining farming activity, the rolling topography and limited accessibility considerably reduce the agricultural capability. Hence the region has remained wooded.

Charlottetown

A growing urban area always exerts pressures on the surrounding land. Here, rapid growth has resulted in complex land use patterns with building concentrated along existing transportation routes. Construction has altered local climates, drainage patterns, and ground cover.

Orwell

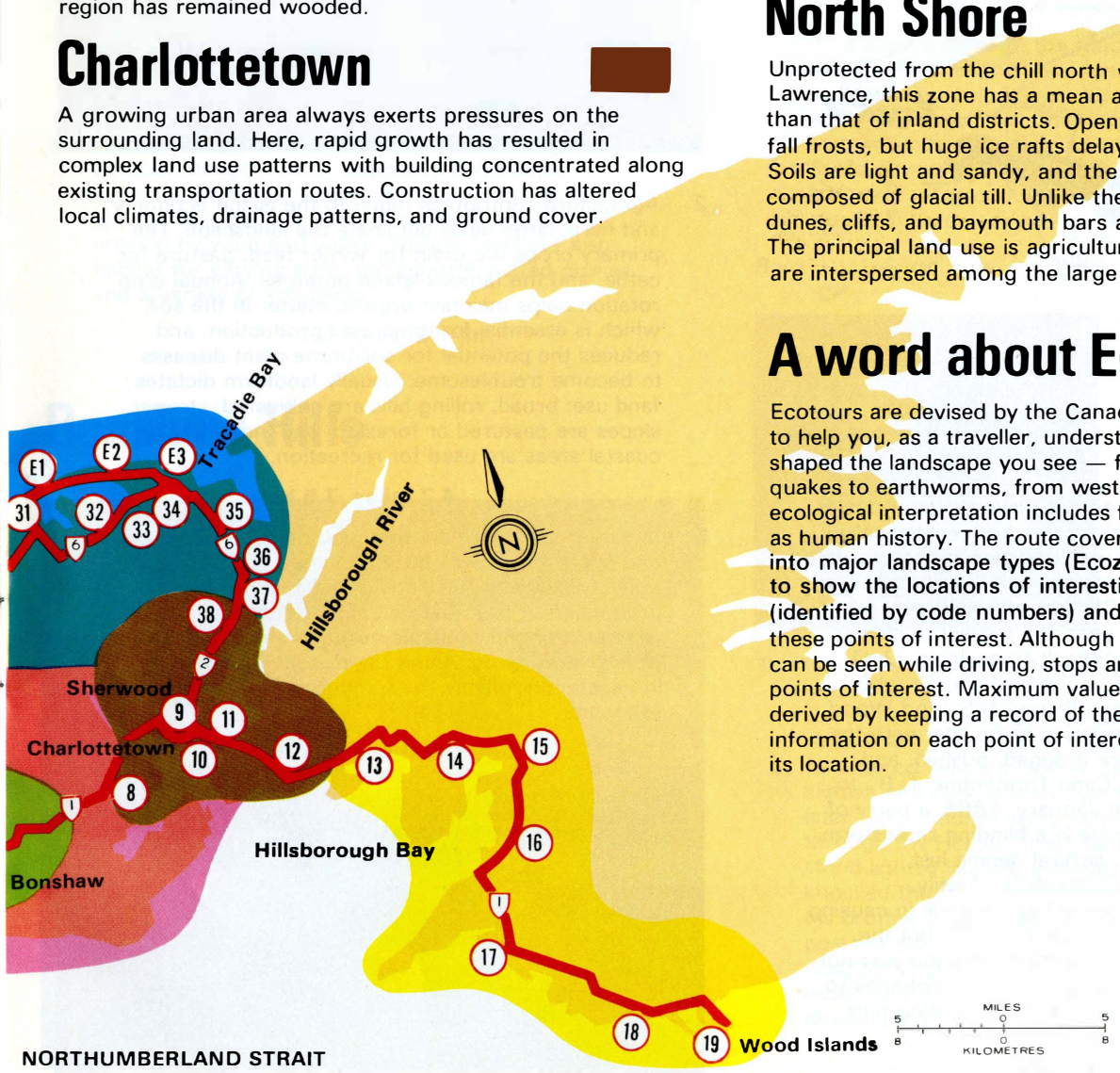
East of Charlottetown the landform is gently rolling, and large cultivated fields slope down to Northumberland Strait. The coastline is characterized by sediment-filled valleys and large bays indicating submergence of the land and/or rising sea level. Inland, large woodlots of beech and maple cover the land.

North Shore

Unprotected from the chill north winds of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, this zone has a mean annual temperature lower than that of inland districts. Open salt water delays the fall frosts, but huge ice rafts delay the advent of spring. Soils are light and sandy, and the hummocky landform is composed of glacial till. Unlike the south shore, coastal dunes, cliffs, and baymouth bars are well-developed here. The principal land use is agricultural, but fishing villages are interspersed among the large bays.

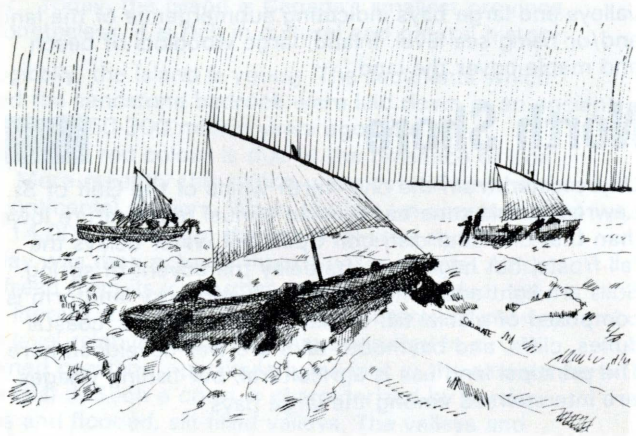
A word about Ecotours

Ecotours are devised by the Canadian Forestry Service to help you, as a traveller, understand the forces that have shaped the landscape you see — forces ranging from earthquakes to earthworms, from west winds to white pines. This ecological interpretation includes features of natural as well as human history. The route covered by Ecotours is divided into major landscape types (Ecozones), which are mapped to show the locations of interesting ecological features (identified by code numbers) and distances between these points of interest. Although most ecological features can be seen while driving, stops are suggested for some points of interest. Maximum value from this Ecotour will be derived by keeping a record of the mileage and by reading information on each point of interest before reaching its location.



Northumberland Shore

1



1. The Northumberland Strait has played a large role in Prince Edward Island's history — both ecologically and politically. A natural water barrier, it has prevented the free migration of plants, animals, and humans to and from the mainland. Choked with iceflows for nearly five months each year and subject to strong tides, the Strait is often difficult to navigate. Until 1827 the only water link was a mail courier who walked fortnightly between Pictou, N.S., and Wood Islands. Weekly communication came later with the use of ice boats that were dragged, pushed, and carried all the way from Cape Tormentine, N.B., to nearby Cape Traverse. In January, 1885, a party of 22 was stranded on the ice in a blinding snowstorm, and though no one died, several people lost extremities to frostbite. Guarantees of daily, continuous ferry service were instrumental in causing the Island to join Confederation in 1873, but the promised regular, year-round transportation was not realized until 1917. Crossing the Strait continues to be a traditional though sometimes frustrating part of Island living.

2

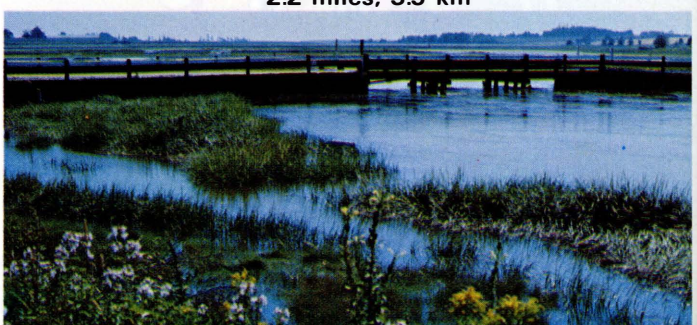
2. Agriculture contributes much to the Island economy, and here, large fields dominate the landscape. The primary crops are grain for winter feed, pasture for cattle, and the famous Island potatoes. Annual crop rotation helps maintain organic matter in the soil, which is essential for continued production, and reduces the potential for soil-borne plant diseases to become troublesome. Usually landform dictates land use: broad, rolling hills are cultivated; steeper slopes are pastured or forested; and increasingly, coastal areas are used for recreation.

4.7 miles, 7.5 km

3. In earlier days, farmers dredged these Tryon marshes and applied the black ooze ("mussel-mud") to their upland fields and Acadians dyked sections for the production of hay. The resulting potholes and dyke remnants provide suitable nesting habitat for a variety of migratory birds. Along the marsh edge, the variation in vegetation reflects the frequency of flooding from salt water.

3

2.2 miles, 3.5 km



4. The small village of Crapaud (pronounced Kra'-po) is so named from the French descriptive *rivière aux crapauds* or "river of toads". This term was applied to what is now known as the Westmoreland River which flows through the area. At Crapaud, the Trans-Canada and North Shore sections of the Ecotour join. Those who wish to follow the NORTH SHORE TOUR should take Highway 13 to Cavendish. It rejoins the Trans-Canada section at Charlottetown.

Mileage to feature 5: 4.8 miles, 7.7 km

Mileage to feature 20: 1.2 miles, 1.9 km

5. At this point, as well as in many places along the Ecotour, hedgerows or vegetative boundaries separate the fields. Usualiy dominated by white spruce, they provide some protection against soil erosion by wind and water. Thicker ones are also habitat for varying hare, red squirrel, ruffed grouse, and a variety of songbirds.

1.3 miles, 2.1 km

Bonshaw Hills

6

6. Here the road winds through mixed woodland. This has regenerated from the early sugar maple/beech/birch community of European settlement days. Most of the hills are still forested in hardwoods, but the dark, cool, moist valleys favour the growth of balsam fir and hemlock. Although trees are still cut for lumber, pulp, or fuel, in general, these woodlands are now neglected.

4.6 miles, 7.4 km

7 As you pass through the road cut at the top of this ridge, take notice of the Island bedrock. This is sedimentary rock; it was deposited in layers from waterborne material. The porous sandstone contains vast groundwater reserves which supply nearly all domestic and municipal requirements on the Island. You may see groundwater-fed springs and seepages along exposed rock layers.

8

7.3 miles, 11.7 km

8. After re-entering the Northumberland Shore Ecozone you arrive at this legendary stream. Many years ago, a man named Jack Connaway emerged from the Noah's Ark, a local tavern and rode toward home. As he entered Kellow's Hollow, his horse became skittish and Jack was thrown to his death. Months later, on a moonlit night, as his brother Michael rode through the Hollow, there before him an old pine tree stood lighted like a Christmas tree. A crashing blow knocked the lights to the ground, and Michael heard his brother Jack speaking. Suddenly, the white fence posts at the side of the stream changed into creatures wearing skullcaps and Jack was leading them. Michael never saw them again and the pine has long since disappeared.

Charlottetown

9. This oasis of open space in a rapidly growing urban area is the Agricultural Research Station or "experimental farm". Here new varieties of crops are tested for suitability to Island growing conditions. It is interesting to note that when it came into being in 1909, the farm lay at the outskirts of Charlottetown.

1.0 miles, 1.6 km

10. Charlottetown has been the site of several major historical events important in Canada's past. Here, in 1864, in these buildings of Nova Scotia stone, twenty-three of Canada's leading statesmen outlined a proposal for the union of all the provinces of British North America. Canada did not achieve unified status until 1867, and although the Island did not join the Confederation until 1873, it has been called the birthplace of Canada or the "Cradle of Confederation".

0.7 miles, 1.1 km

10

Photo — P.E.I. Dept. of Tourism, Parks and Conservation

11

11. Built in 1961, the Hillsborough River causeway has resulted in changes to both the tidal flow of the river and the flora and fauna found here. The dykes at either end have caused stagnant backwaters to form while a tremendous current now ebbs and flows through the constricted opening. The old bridge piers serve as nesting sites for a colony of common terns. These birds are acrobatic flyers and can be quite aggressive if threatened.

2.4 miles, 3.8 km

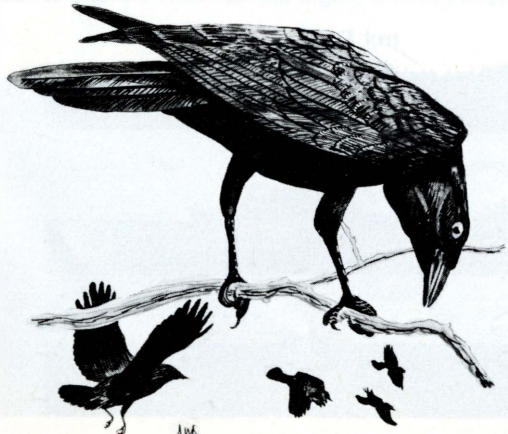
12. The suburbs of Charlottetown are rapidly expanding in this direction. The growth has resulted in abrupt changes in land use where housing subdivisions spring up in the midst of grazing cattle. Large acreages of productive agricultural land are being used to house a relatively small population.

12

Orwell

13. As you travel along Island Highways, you may wonder why so few roadkills are seen. This is due to the efficient "clean-up" activities of a common scavenger, the crow. This bird and his larger cousin, the raven, can be seen along roadsides throughout the year raucously fighting over bits of carrion. Another scavenger, often the victim of automobiles, is the skunk. This exotic species was introduced to the Island during the fur-farming boom of the 1920's. Since rabies, which elsewhere keeps skunk populations under control, is unknown on the Island, its numbers can be quite large. In the spring, these black-and-white striped animals become active after a period of winter sluggishness, and may be commonly seen along roadsides.

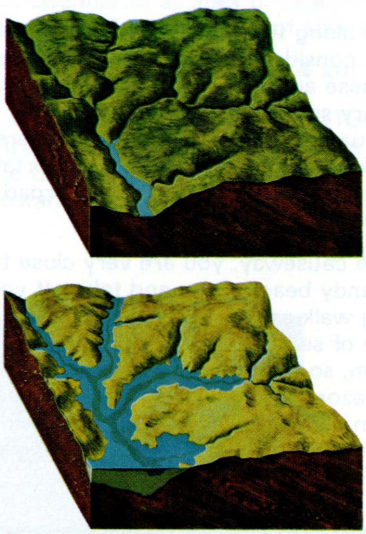
13



14. Seal River is one arm of a series of drowned river valleys flooded in post-glacial times by the rising sea level. This area with its well-developed salt marshes is a favorite for hunters as tens of thousands of Canada geese and other waterfowl migrate along the Atlantic Flyway. Shorebirds abound in late summer and early fall; you may see several species of plovers and sandpipers here as well as the great blue heron. Low tide exposes a vast expanse of mud flats, often covered with eelgrass. The adjoining salt marshes are highly productive ecosystems; the dominant plants are *Spartina* grasses which were once used extensively for pasture and hay. The estuary (where saltwater meets fresh) serves as habitat for many marine organisms such as clams, mussels, and oysters.

3.6 miles, 5.8 km

14



15. Take a short detour to Orwell Corner, a provincially-owned restoration project depicting life on Prince Edward Island some 100 years ago. A country general store and operating shingle mill highlight the sights. Nearby is Sir Andrew MacPhail Provincial Park named for a noted physician, teacher, and writer born at Orwell in 1864. Much of the park is forested with an even-aged stand of white spruce which invaded abandoned fields some thirty years ago

Mileage to feature 17: 9.2 miles, 14.7 km

15

16. As you travel along the hard-surface, all-weather roads of the Island, consider the peril that lies along the clay sideroads. These are dusty in summer, but for several weeks of every spring and fall, they become impassable quagmires. For centuries Islanders have had to endure this obstacle to efficient transportation, but now the Island has more miles of paved road per capita than any other province.

17. At the Pinette causeway, you are very close to an interesting sandy beach. Stop and take off your shoes for a relaxing walk and some beachcombing. You may find a variety of seashells here at low tide including the razor clam, so named for its obvious similarity to an old straight razor. Also here are mussel beds, and a marine brown alga called "rockweed", which has numerous air sacs to keep the plant floating upright.

17

4.4 miles, 7.0 km

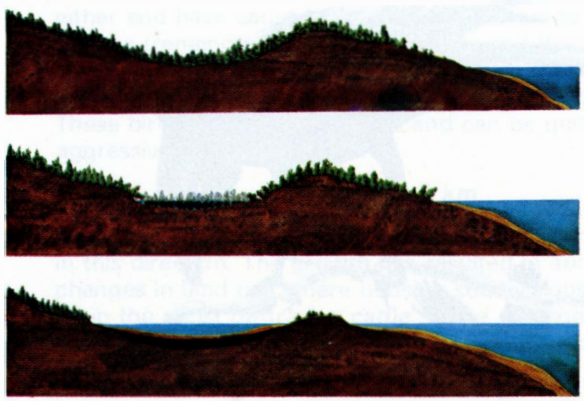
18. Poor, shallow soils which are subject to "droughtiness" or drying out are typical of this region. The proportion of forested land steadily increases and many agricultural fields have been abandoned to grow up in stunted white spruce, alder, bayberry, and wild rose. The fragrant bayberry is often found along road cuts and from its waxy berries and leaves comes the **familiar scent** of the bayberry candle.

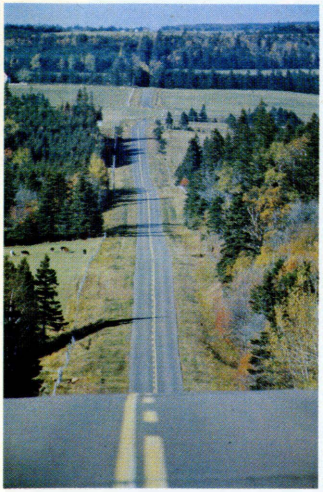
18

6.8 miles, 10.9 km

19. At the Wood Islands ferry terminal, stop to imagine how this area looked as little as 1000 years ago. The two small islands were actually low hills then, and the bay to the west was forested. Evidence of a drowned forest some eight feet below sea level indicates again that the coastline of Prince Edward Island is constantly changing.

19





Bonshaw Hills

North Shore Tour

20. Natural lakes and ponds are rare on Prince Edward Island. In early days, many streams were dammed to provide waterpower for sawmills and gristmills. More recently, the impoundments have proven of value for fishing and boating. This earthen dam with its picturesque spillway is one of many similar structures across the Island. They have created several problems. Fish migrations are effectively blocked by them, and the backwaters often are shallow and "overheat" during the summer. They are also concentration points for nutrient-rich run-off which accelerates the natural aging process (eutrophication). The ponds quickly become choked with weeds, algae, and sediment.

20

4.2 miles, 6.7 km

Bonshaw Hills

21. Because of the fine-textured soils and soft bedrock, erosion is a serious problem on the Island. In steep-sloped areas such as these, gullying is very noticeable, but even flat, plowed fields are subject to erosion. The eroded materials are transported to streams and estuaries smothering vegetation and reducing fish spawning areas. Attempts are now being made to seed bare roadsides, which are often the worst offenders, and to restore protective greenbelts along waterways.

1.5 miles, 2.4 km

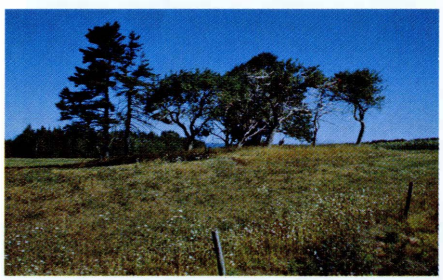
22. The dense growth of white spruce in this area is called "oldfield regeneration". As families leave the farm and thousands of acres of agricultural land go out of production, the sun-tolerant spruce seedlings invade the fields. Look closely and you may be able to see the old field boundaries as lines of taller, darker trees between the uniform blankets of smaller spruce.

3.4 miles, 5.4 km

23. Here, at an elevation of 420 feet (130 metres), you cross the "provincial divide". Streams to the north flow into the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and streams to the south flow toward the Northumberland Strait.

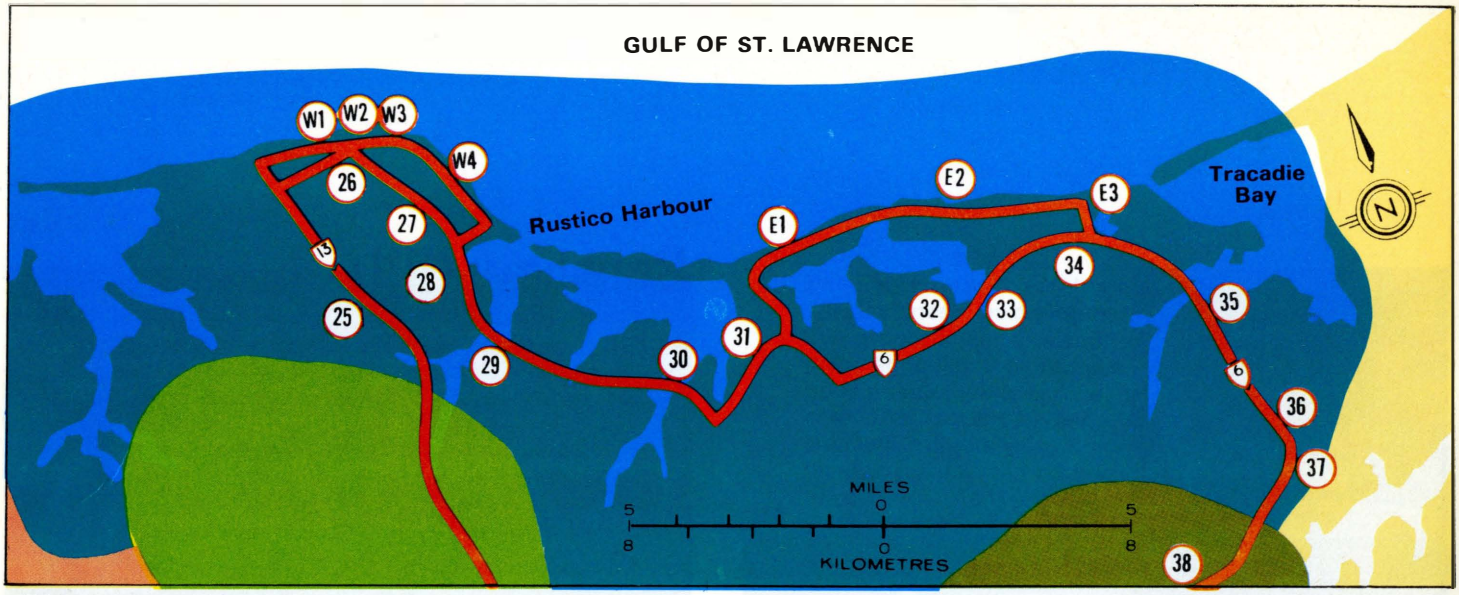
8.4 miles, 13.4 km

24



24. Near the homesite of Hon. David Laird, 19th century journalist and politician, note the cluster of old apple trees and hawthorn shrubs. Such small orchards, remnants of building foundations and wagon trails are some signs of earlier human habitation and are used by historians and archeologists to locate vanished settlements.

Mileages: to feature W3, 7.5 miles, 12.0 km
to feature 27, 10.3 miles, 16.5 km



North Shore

25. To the north, the famous Cavendish cliffs, unprotected from the bitter winds, erode at a rapid pace — up to 15 feet (5 metres) per year. Hugging the ground in stunted mats the vegetation, too, is affected by winds and salt spray. Behind the park boundary, much land is going out of production because of recreational pressures. Abandoned farms and small "hobby farms" are often seen.

* * * * * * *

National Park Loop — West

W1 This section of the tour takes you along some of the Island's most spectacular coastal scenery. Here the erosive forces that continually grind away the shoreline are much in evidence and the highway on which you travel has been relocated three times in the past fifty years. You may see old sections of pavement edging the high cliffs.

W1

W2 A curious blend of land and sea is demonstrated by the "mossers", people who rake the rugged beach for "Irish moss", often employing pitchforks and horse-drawn carts. Irish moss is really a marine red alga that contains substances called carrageenins. These are used as emulsifiers and thickeners in commercial preparations such as toothpaste, puddings, and ice cream.

W2

W3 The National Park is only several hundreds of yards wide in many places. Here, increasing recreational demands for land are hampered by the constantly eroding coastline: a classic "squeeze-play". Note the differences in vegetation and land use along the boundary fence, and consider the environmental hazards inherent in a totally uncontrolled, unprotected coastline.

3.6 miles, 5.8 km

W4

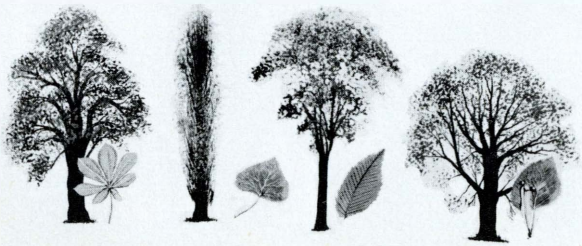
W4 The coastal environment is extremely harsh. Dessicating winds and salt spray cause all but the hardiest plants to perish. The environmental stress here is indicated by the stunted, tangled vegetation which usually grows in clumps. Often the leeward side of trees is "flagged" while the windward side is reduced to bare branches.

Mileage to feature 27: 1.4 miles, 2.2 km

* * * * * * *

26. Many early immigrants took pride in their new homes and planted trees native to their homelands. Eventually some of the hardier varieties escaped and became quite common. Look for these landscaping trees and try to identify the large deciduous trees of distinctive shape, such as horse-chestnut (a), Lombardy poplar (b), American elm (c) and linden (d).

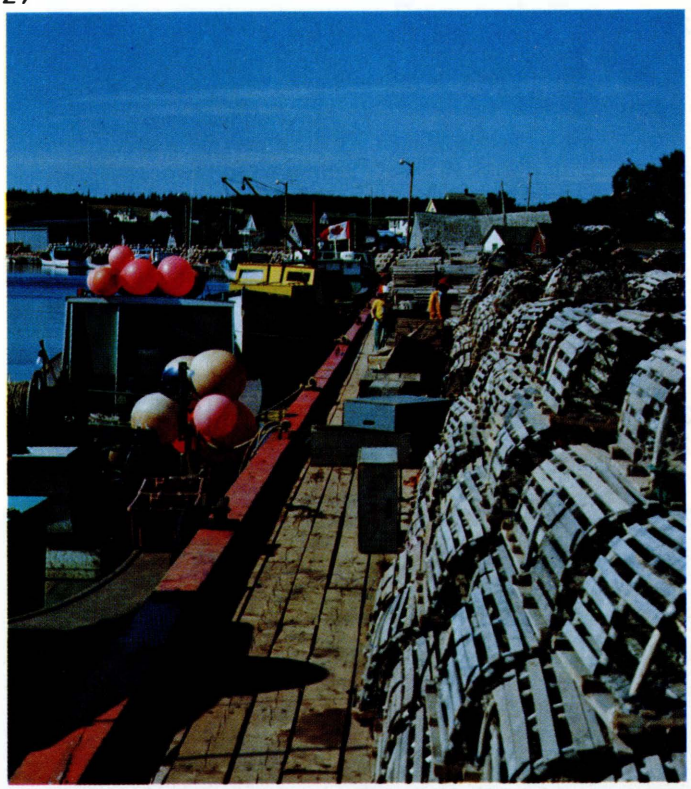
26



27. A short distance off the highway lies Rustico Harbour. From this colourful fishing port, boats ply the inshore waters to return laden with seafood delights — lobster, scallops, mackerel, tuna, cod, and hake. The fishing community is not without its problems, however, as large, deepwater ships are reducing the inshore take. Small ports such as this may become a thing of the past unless fishing regulations and economic conditions change.

Mileage to feature 30: 6.2 miles, 9.9 km

27



28. The landform along the north shore again determines the land use. Rivers and bays alternate with rolling hills and headlands. Correspondingly, fishing villages characterized by small, closely-spaced homes alternate with the larger, more expansive agricultural communities. Both types of settlements were originally structured around the church and school, but with school consolidation and increased mobility, many

29

cumulus

altocumulus

cirrus

cumulonimbus

29. Islanders have learned to watch the animals, the sea, and the sky to help them forecast the weather. Some of the most reliable indicators are the clouds. Clouds are formed of either water vapour or ice crystals and can be blown by the winds into a variety of shapes. *Cumulus* are fair weather clouds; *stratus* bring chill winds and rain or snow; *altocumulus* (or mackerel sky) foretell a change in the weather, probably within twelve hours. High, wispy *cirrus* (mare's tails) accompany fair weather, but are harbingers of a windshift and weather change within thirty-six hours. the foreboding *cumulonimbus* or anvil-shaped thundercloud brings gusty winds, heavy showers, and perhaps, hail.

30. Large expanses of mud flats are exposed here at low tide. These areas are excellent shorebird feeding sites and as such, are favorite areas for birdwatchers. Some of the more common sightings include the great blue heron, the spotted sandpiper, and the greater yellowlegs.

2.7 miles, 3.2 km

30

31. If you wish to stretch your legs on a short walk, we suggest visiting one of the pioneer cemeteries. While providing a peaceful moment to reflect on the past, the cemeteries also tell some interesting stories. Some are humorous; most are tragic. Family stones often contain the names of five or six young children; others tell of a mother and child laid to rest on the same day. Epidemics often resulted in a large number of deaths in one year. But for all, the stones are, in many cases, the only record remaining of the truly courageous men and women who settled a new land.

Mileages: to feature E1, 1.8 miles, 2.9 km

to feature 32, 3.5 miles, 5.6 km

* * * * * * *

31

National Park Loop — East

E1 A combination of ocean currents, wind, geology, and vegetation has given rise to the sand dunes of Prince Edward Island. Although they withstand many environmental extremes, they are simple communities ecologically and are quite fragile. The dominant vegetation is *marram grass* which has the botanical name *Ammophila* or "sand lover". Without this grass and its dense, binding root system, the dunes would soon disappear and leave the coast unprotected. The seas would then move inland until a new equilibrium was established.

Mileage to feature E3: 6.6 miles, 10.6 km

E1

E2 The National Park is but a narrow band along the coastline, yet it hosts over 1,500,000 visitors each year — over ten times the Island population. This visitation rate has caused some problems since the park is based on a fragile but constantly changing ecosystem. Human impact is creating "wear and tear" on the dunes system, and, of course, the continual shoreline erosion is unavoidable. Thus, park officials must simultaneously protect the natural environment and provide adequate recreational opportunities.

E3 The park administration area is dominated by an impressive structure known as Dalvay-by-the-Sea. Serenely regal in summer, majestically fortress-like in winter, this was the seasonal home of a Scotsman named Alexander MacDonald. A one-time president of Standard Oil Company, Mr. MacDonald built the house in 1896 and named it for his home of Dalvay in Scotland. It is now operated as the Park hotel.

Mileage to feature 35: 3.6 miles, 5.8 km

32. The church at West Covehead is the first established Presbyterian Church in Prince Edward Island. The structure, built in 1837, is an excellent example of early colonial architecture. The Covehead area was one of the first settled districts on the Island, dating back to about 1770.

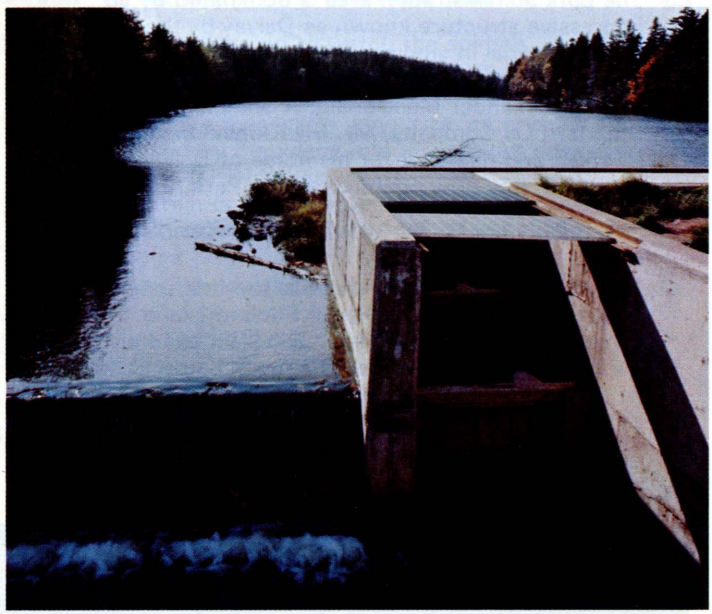
1.5 miles, 2.4 km

32

33. This fish ladder-dam complex is an attempt to create additional freshwater surface in the province. The dam impounds a small creek and prevents salt water from entering the pond. The fish ladder allows migration and spawning to take place. Note the difference in shore vegetation above the dam (fresh water) and below (salt water).

2.3 miles, 3.7 km

33



34. The tops of the taller trees have a distinctive shape that indicates the effects of salt spray blown inland nearly a mile. The salt is deposited on the windward surfaces and exerts a drying effect on the vegetation. Plants such as bayberry, bearberry, and to some extent, spruce have small waxy leaves and stems to protect them from drying out. Some species of plants called *halophytes* are very salt-tolerant and have adapted to near-desert conditions although they are surrounded by water.

4.0 miles, 6.4 km

34

35. The name "Corran Ban" is one of the few Gaelic descriptive terms used as a place name in Prince Edward Island. It means "white sickle" which probably refers to the line of white foam that forms along the shore as a result of gale winds. Nearby Tracadie Bay, however, has its roots in the Micmac language. Derived from "tulakadik", it means "the camping ground".

3.5 miles, 5.6 km

36

36. The tamarack is unusual among native conifers as it sheds its foliage each fall like the hardwoods. It grows best in upland soils, but since it tolerates no shade, it often is forced to grow in poor, boggy sites where other trees cannot grow. The wood is extremely strong and decay-resistant and was often used for ships' "knees", where the ribs join the deck timbers. Large trees are unusual now, but some grew to a diameter of two feet. Often called "juniper" locally, its principal use is as fence posts; it is said to last as long as fifteen years without preservatives.

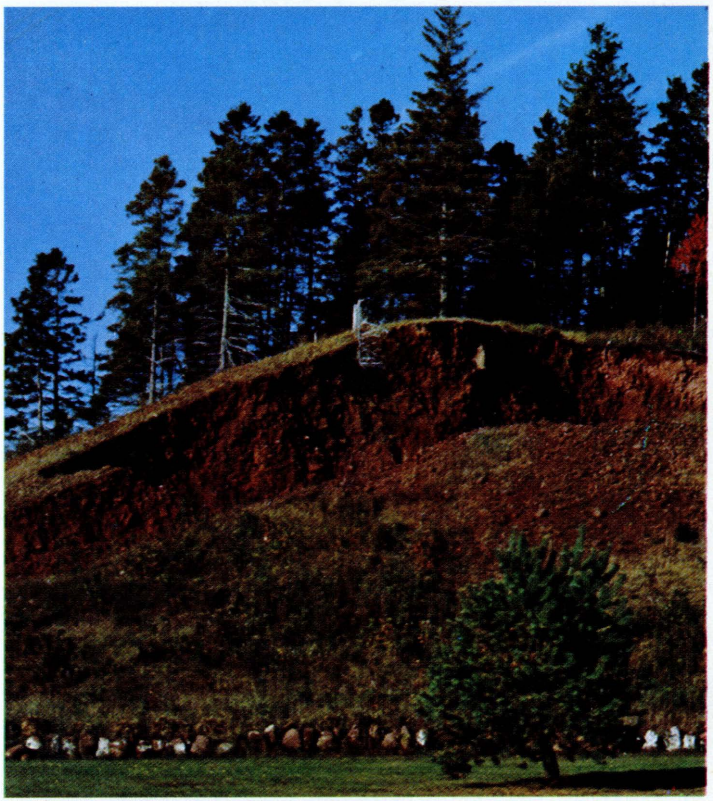
2.0 miles, 3.2 km

37. To the southeast is the Hillsborough River. Ebbing and flowing with the tides, it is more like a large bay than a river. The Hillsborough served as a major transportation route as did most Island waterways prior to the advent of all-weather roads. Nearly bisecting the Island, the river was used by the Micmac and early explorers to reach the north shore. This meant only a short, two-mile portage to Tracadie Bay along a path located not far from here.

0.7 miles, 1.1 km

37

38



Charlottetown

38. The large mound on the north side of the highway is the end of a glacial deposit known as an "esker". Eskers formed as sediments at the bottom of rivers that actually flowed in the glacial ice. As the ice melted, it left a hill winding snakelike across the land. As is the case here, eskers are often mined for their washed sand and gravel deposits.

The NORTH SHORE TOUR and the main TRANS-CANADA ECOTOUR join in Charlottetown. Travelers heading east to Wood Islands should go to feature 10, and those heading west to Borden should rejoin at feature 9.

Mileages: to feature 10, 6.8 miles, 10.9 km

Fisheries and Environment Canada
Forestry Service

Pêches et Environnement Canada
Service des forêts

MaB

Contribution to the Man and the Biosphere Program/Canada

Contribution au Programme l'homme et la biosphère/Canada

Suggested Reading:

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- *disseminating information and providing technical services to provincial governments, forest industries, and other agencies.*
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INTERPRETATION: *Environmental Associates (P.E.I.) Ltd.*
PHOTOGRAPHY: *D. Morgan, Environmental Associates (P.E.I.) Ltd.*
SKETCHES: *A. M. Schumate, Design Associates Ltd.*
TYPOGRAPHY: *McMillan Press Limited*
DESIGN: *Graphic Services, Ottawa*
PRODUCTION ART: *Fulton Graphics Ltd.*
PRODUCTION SUPERVISION: *F. G. Cuming, J. C. Boynton*

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Cette publication est disponible en français sous le titre
Ecotour de la route Transcanadienne — L'Ile-du-Prince-Edouard.

Cat. No. FO 25-31/1978
ISBN 0 - 662 - 10123 - 5