

Charles Summer 25 #4: It's a Grand Isle ... When You Can See It



Although Jim and I had been to New Brunswick a few times before, there was one place we'd never been – either together or separately: The Island of Grand Manan. When you mention it to people who have been there before, they get a faraway look and refer to it as magical. Obviously, we needed to go there.

So we headed south and aimed ourselves toward the ferry dock in Blacks Harbour.



When we got the harbour, we were taken by the beautiful eeriness of the fog that engulfed the bay...



... And the ghostly vision of the ferry approaching the dock. We could feel the magic already.



But as the ferry pulled away from shore, everything cleared up. And we could see the beauty of the islands.



We arrived on Grand Manan on the afternoon of June 30 and drove around a bit, to get a sense of the island. Right away, we could see the character of the homes and the beauty of the landscapes.



It was clear this was a fishing community.



On our way to our campground, we saw one of the three lighthouses on the island – a sign of things to come.



We looked forward to exploring the island more over the next few days. And especially to seeing how Grand Manan celebrated Canada Day.

So, we checked in at our campground and settled in.





We were pleased to see that, through our front windshield, we had a bit of a view of the harbour into which the ferry had just delivered us.



The lovely evening sky gave us an optimistic hint of what we'd see the next day:
Canada Day on Grand Manan!



Through the night, we heard the foghorn, which sounded every 20 seconds. All night long. And into the morning. And when we awoke, all we could see was ... fog.

But we weren't going to let a little fog deter us. We had discovered a notice of all the events that were planned for Canada Day and they sounded like fun. We set out to discover how Grand Manan celebrates Canada Day.



First on the list was the annual Canada Day Sand Sculpture Competition. With a \$150 prize for the winning sculpture, the competition promised to be pretty exciting.

We were able to find the beach. Just barely. And although we knew the ocean was there, we never actually saw it.



But the Grand Manan spirit was there. And we walked the beach checking out the competition. It was quite a range of talented sand sculptors and family fun.





There was a definite skew toward maritime themes.



But the Canadiana theme was also popular.



A few years ago, Jim and I celebrated Canada Day in Grand Falls Newfoundland. It was a cold rainy day and we wore as many layers as we had. This is what we looked like then. As you can see in the background, there were people in shorts.



Now on Grand Manan, Canada Day was almost as cold and just as wet, but once again, we were put to shame by locals who didn't let the weather dampen their enthusiasm.



And that same enthusiasm for Canada was evident everywhere on the island ... when we could see it.



The Canadian spirit was everywhere.



And so was the fog. We decided to drive all the way to the bottom of the island (about a 20 minute drive), where we knew there was another lighthouse.



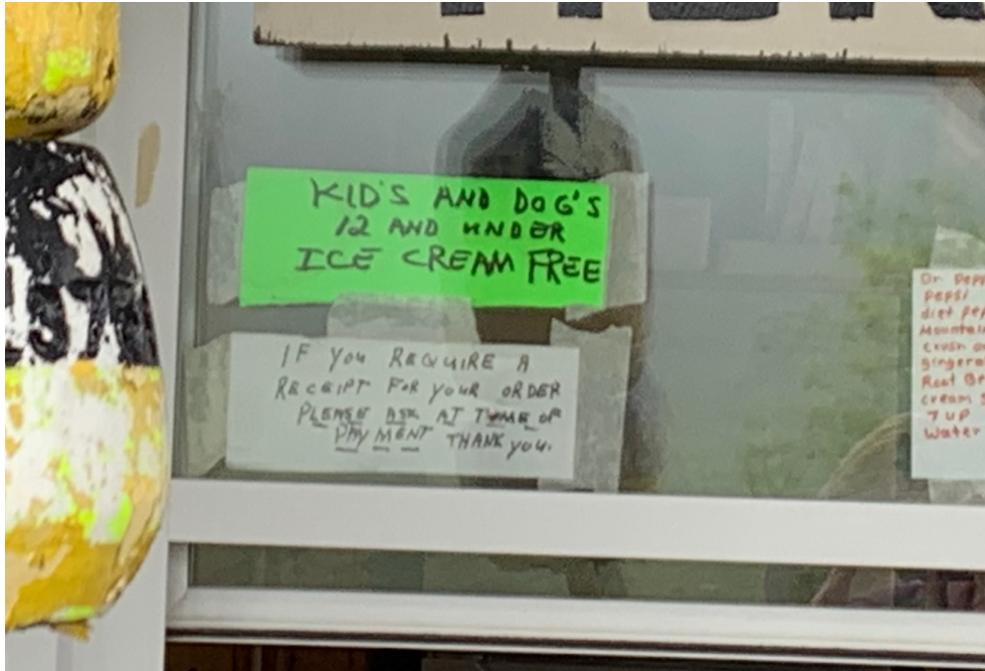
According to the sign, which we could barely read, there was indeed a lighthouse, and we assume, an ocean. But as my dad would have said, it was just a rumour.



We decided not to try to find other Canada Day activities, so we headed back toward our campground, stopping along the way to pick up a couple of lobster rolls for lunch. Apparently, everyone else on the island was celebrating.



Not only did they have lobster rolls, they had an extra deal for kids ... and dogs.



We went back to our campsite and enjoyed our Canada Day Lobster Roll.



But there wasn't much point in trying to see anything else. So, to conclude our Canada Day celebrations, we did laundry.



Through the night, the foghorn miraculously stopped sounding. And the next morning dawned brilliantly!



We decided to seize the moment and do something radical. We went on a hike!
The North Head Campground was also the site of a famous Grand Manan point of interest: The Hole in the Wall. And being the intrepid travellers we are, we decided to hike there.



Despite the warning.



The trail was well maintained.



And we were lulled into feeling that the hike we would be a fun walk, with guidance from some helpful friends.



It was kind of like the Grand Manan version of Hobbiton.



But then things got a little more challenging.



The fact that they had guide ropes was at once reassuring and concerning.



But we managed it like
the intrepid pros we are.

And soon we arrived at
the famed Hole in the
Wall.
Which was pretty
impressive.



We met another family there – a couple and their son who were quite friendly and agreed to take our photo.



It really was a lovely spot, and we managed to make our way back to Charles without incident.



It was still clear, so we thought we'd seize the opportunity to see more of the island than we'd been able to the day before.

We stopped briefly at the lighthouse at the top of the island, which offered lovely views.



I stopped into the gift store but bravely left without spending any money.



We continued driving and found another lighthouse.



With another lovely view. But we saw the fog coming in, so we decided to drive south and see what else there was to discover.



We'd seen promotions about Bill's Beatles Collection, but the flyer said it was closed on Wednesdays, so we thought we wouldn't be able to check it out. But as we approached, it seemed to be open.

Jim is a big fan of the Fab Four, so it seemed to be a must-see place.



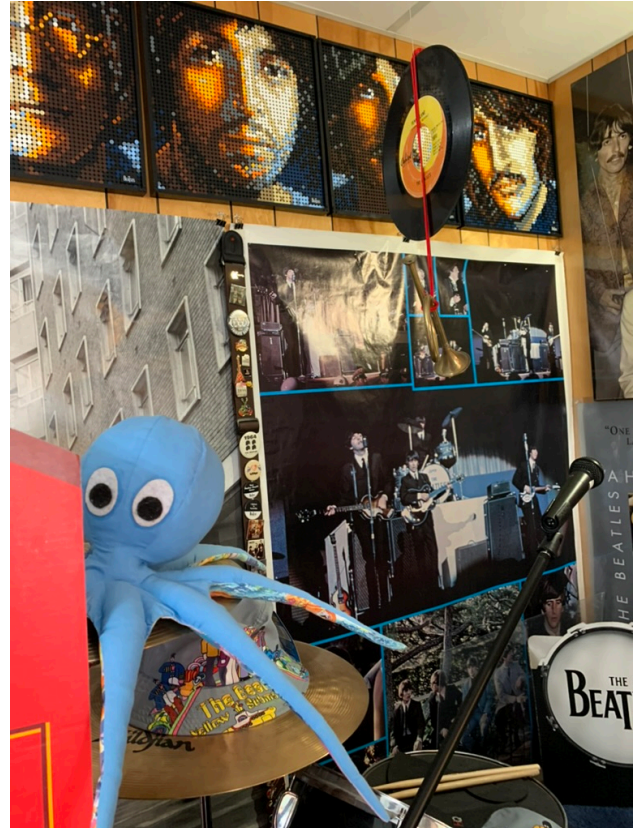
Bill greeted us enthusiastically and showed us around the portion of his home that had been taken over by his collection of Beatles memorabilia.



Bill, who admitted that John was his favourite Beatle, was totally dedicated.



We heard lots of his stories and enjoyed checking out the impressive – if a little unusual - collection that Bill had devoted his life to.



Of course, we couldn't leave without a little memento.

Since the fog had cleared and the skies were blue, we decided to drive back down to the bottom of the island to the third lighthouse – the one that had been obscured by fog on Canada Day.



But when we got there....



Moments later, as we drove away from that point, the skies were clear again.



We stopped at another beach, and ran into the same family we'd met at Hole In the Wall. We ran into them once again a little while later. It is a pretty small island. (Sadly, I didn't think to take a photo of them.)



Since we'd been up and down the east coast of the island a few times, we decided to drive over to the other coast, to a place called Dark Harbour.



It was a scenic drive, with some added colour.



And we made it to Dark Harbour, which didn't seem particularly dark. But at least we could say we'd been there.



We made it back to our campsite, feeling that we had made up for the day when we'd seen so little. And we were rewarded with some beautiful evening skies.



The next morning, we chatted with the couple in the campsite next to us. Annette had grown up in Grand Manan, but she'd left to go to university, and has lived in Ontario ever since. But she and her husband Brian come back every year and stay for the summer.

Brian tends the grounds and Annette visits with old friends and family. Weird coincidence: When Annette was going to university, one of the streets she lived on was Monarch Park Avenue – one street over from where we live.



We decided to spend our last day exploring one area of the island we hadn't been to – their provincial park called The Anchorage.



We found a place to park where we could be by the water ...



... Even if we couldn't always see it.



We walked around the grounds, and the first thing we noticed was that there were some interesting inhabitants who didn't seem to mind us getting up close!



Apparently, the bunnies are descendants of pets that had somehow gotten free. And given their freedom, the bunnies did what bunnies do best. Now, they pretty much own the place. Still somewhat domesticated, they're quite happy to receive treats.



The other attraction here, is migrating birds. There are, apparently, a variety of birds that call the park home for at least part of the year.



We mostly saw gulls, but not being avid bird watchers, we freely admit there may be other birds hidden in this flock.



It was a nice leisurely way to spend our last day on Grand Manan. And, as if to give us a fond farewell, the island provided us with one last reminder of our visit. The fog rolled in, and the foghorn sounded.



The next morning, we caught the ferry back to the mainland.



It was a beautiful, clear, sunny day. And we left, now enlightened as to why people are enchanted by Grand Manan.