



From the sea come the harvests that make Grand Manan prosperous — fat herring to be smoked for gourmets' breakfasts, lobsters for film stars' banquets.

The Island That's Too Good To Be True



Tourists' eyes pop when they discover they can stand on the docks at Seal Cove, stilted above Fundy's high tide, and catch cod weighing thirty pounds.

This tiny fragment of New Brunswick has no poverty, illiteracy, shacks or crime. Even the seaweed is edible. And when the school children needed a new textbook the fishermen wrote one themselves. No wonder that Grand Manan is a tourist's delight

By IAN SCLANDERS

AT THE mouth of the tide-churned Bay of Fundy, breakers boom endlessly against the towering cliffs of Grand Manan, an island which has three thousand stoutly independent people and is without poverty, illiteracy, shacks or crime.

This spray-swept Utopia, where everybody has a garden and a comfortable house equipped with the latest electrical appliances, and where almost everybody has a car, is a fragment of New Brunswick, eighteen miles south of the nearest point on New Brunswick's mainland. Surrounded by a score of tiny islands, like a duck out swimming with her brood, Grand Manan is seventeen miles long and seven miles across at its greatest width. The western half of its area of roughly fifty square miles is too rugged and rocky to be settled and is covered with forest.

Grand Manan's small neat villages—North Head, Castalia, Woodward's Cove, Grand Harbor, Ingall's Head, Seal Cove and Deep Cove—are on its eastern shore. Each snuggles beside a sheltered harbor. Each has its seaweed-festooned jetties, its fleet of fishing boats, its white school, its white churches, its big well-painted frame dwellings, its lanes shaded with wind-bent elms and maples and willows, its tidy rows of herring sheds. A paved road strings the villages together.

At this oddly enchanted place, storm-beaten yet peaceful, the sea is so bountiful that whales chase tremendous schools of herring into the fishermen's nets. The sandbars are full of succulent clams, lobsters swarm in the depths, giant tuna can be harpooned from launches, and cod, haddock, hake, pollock, flounder and mackerel can be caught from the wharves. The seagulls lay fresh eggs for breakfast and even the seaweed is good to eat.

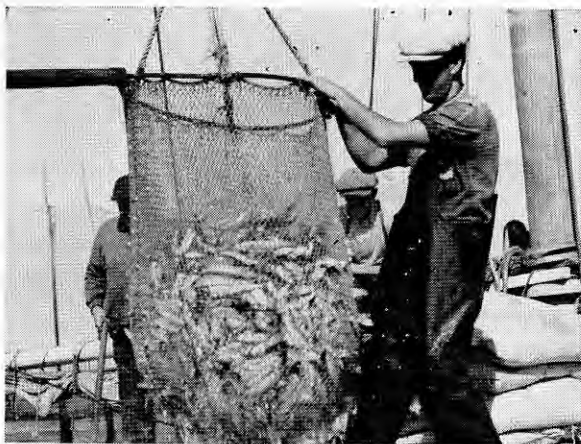
The profits reaped from the sea, plus those from a lucrative tourist trade, account for Grand Manan's freedom from poverty and its far-better-than-average housing. Its background helps explain its freedom from illiteracy and crime. It was founded in 1784 by a group of United Empire Loyalists who had lost their property in New England and were forced to seek new homes. They were led by Moses Gerrish, a scholar and a graduate of Harvard, and the accent of Grand Manan is still strikingly like that associated with Harvard—pronounced "Havahd." Gerrish, a benign autocrat who set himself up as the ruler of all he surveyed, insisted that his followers should know how to read and write, that they should improve their minds with classical literature, and that they should educate their children. Thus, while most isolated islands are plagued by illiteracy, that hasn't been the case with Grand Manan.

When a new vocational high school was built at Grand Harbor a few years ago for the whole island, it was decided that one of the subjects to be taught there should be fishing. There was no textbook on this which covered local conditions so a committee of fishermen promptly wrote one.

People who are literate enough to do this, and intelligent enough to realize that if they are to live together happily on an island they have to behave themselves, don't commit crimes. No resident of Grand Manan ever bothers to lock his front door or to remove the key from his car, for theft is unknown.

If Grand Manan's honesty is hard to believe, so are other things. For Grand Manan has birds that are clowns, its porpoises and seals are as playful as puppies, and the waves have sculptured its rocks into weird shapes. Its scallop draggers dredge up antique china from the wreck of a windjammer. Stones from France—from another wreck—litter one of its beaches. Its youngsters learn to handle boats as soon as they can walk. And the ship that links it with St. Andrews and Saint John, on a schedule which divides daily sailings between these two ports on the New Brunswick mainland, is a nautical oddity.

This craft, now called the Grand Manan III, started out as the Arcadia, a steel-hulled sailing yacht of five hundred and seventy-eight tons owned by an immensely wealthy American woman. With a crew of thirty, it prowled majestically from one luxury resort to another until 1940, when it was acquired by the Royal Canadian Navy. Then, with



Herring are Grand Manan's biggest industry. The fish catch themselves in two-acre corrals—lucky men can earn seven hundred dollars a day.

The Hole in the Wall, drilled by milleniums of wind and weather, is typical of scenery on the wild west coast, too rugged even for fishermen.



its tall masts shorn off and powerful engines installed, it did convoy duty on the Atlantic. In 1946 it was bought by a shipping company and put on the Grand Manan run—an incongruous coaster with fine racing lines, a cruising speed of fifteen knots, equipped with radar, plus the mahogany paneling and fancy plumbing of its palmy prewar days, yet with the smudgy and cheerful informality of a ferry. By the Grand Manan III, the resort of St. Andrews is three-and-a-half hours from Grand Manan, and Saint John is seven hours.

Oscar Built an Airport Overnight

While the island is without regular air service, anyone who can afford it and is in a hurry can charter a flying taxi. This has been possible since 1948 when Oscar Small, a lean pleasant man who is one of Grand Manan's few farmers, reached the conclusion that what the island needed was an airport.

A flat-topped hill on his own property seemed to him the ideal site. He chopped down scores of evergreen trees and was trying to rent a bulldozer when aviation officials at Ottawa heard of his project and wrote to warn him that unless they approved of the location he might be wasting his time and his money.

"If I don't wind up with an airport, boys," he replied, "I'll at least have a new potato patch."

With the bulldozer he uprooted stumps and leveled off two fourteen-hundred-foot runways in two days of prodigious labor. Then he invited authorities to come and have a look. They licensed his landing field, but he never did convince them that he had built it entirely by himself for an outlay of a couple of hundred dollars. For five years light planes have been zooming in and out of it, paying a landing fee of a dollar each. Small has plowed his receipts back into improvements, for he looks on his airport as a contribution to the community, not a commercial enterprise.



Allan Moses (left) who died last year, was the founder of Grand Manan's museum. He once traded a bird for an expedition into Africa.

A dulse gatherer spreads the edible seaweed to dry. Dulse can be harvested only at the lowest tide, when islanders race Fundy's waters.



Based at it now are two little planes owned by fifty-eight-year-old Vernon Stuart. Stuart, who had several herring weirs, fished until he was past fifty, thereby accumulating a modest fortune. Then he retired and took flying lessons at Eastport, Me.

Stuart's flying, like Small's airport, is strictly non-commercial but he's always there if anybody has to be rushed to the mainland for medical aid of a kind not available in Grand Manan's own hospital. In a real emergency, neither storm nor fog holds him on the ground. Fishermen, drifting in the open sea with a dead engine, know that when they're reported overdue in port Stuart will manage to locate them and direct another boat to the rescue. So far, people whose lives he has saved have named three children after him.

Small's airport and the wharf at which the Grand Manan III docks are both at North Head, a tranquil village that perches on a green hillside and is protected from the full force of Atlantic gales by Swallow Tail, a jutting V-shaped promontory. Capping Swallow Tail is a red and white lighthouse that every visiting artist paints and every tourist photographs.

Another popular tourist activity is listening to the tales of George Russell, a grey-haired herring packer whose hobby is Grand Manan's history. Each of Grand Manan's villages has its stories and George Russell knows them all.

Sometimes as he spins his yarns Russell flips a bogus Mexican silver dollar. It was made in 1785 by a counterfeiter named

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of the equator. U. S. ornithologists were amazed that it had strayed to Grand Manan and pleaded with Moses to sell it to the American Museum of Natural History at New York.

He replied that he had his own museum—the Grand Manan Museum of Natural History. He suggested a compromise. He had been longing for years to accompany a scientific expedition as its taxidermist. The American Museum sponsored such expeditions. Why couldn't he exchange the albatross for a trip?

The deal was made. Moses went to Africa with a party headed by J. Sterling Rockefeller, a relative of John D., in search of a green broadtail, supposedly the rarest bird in the world. It was Moses who shot the only broadtail sighted. That night, as he stared moodily into the flames of a campfire, Rockefeller asked him why he looked unhappy. "Why the hell shouldn't I be unhappy?" said Moses. "Fellows like you spend a couple of hundred thousand dollars on a junket like this to get one little bird that will sit in a glass case for the rest of time. But you wouldn't do a damn thing to save the beautiful eider ducks of the Bay of Fundy from extinction."

"What could I do?"

"Well," Moses said, "you could buy their principal breeding ground, Kent Island, and protect them."

"Well," said Rockefeller, "I will."

Rockefeller bought Kent Island—one hundred and fifty acres of rock, sand and forest, four miles southeast of Grand Manan. Ernest Joy was offered the post of guardian, and accepted it—although he was fully aware of "the Kent Island Curse."

The Raven Drank the Rainfall

John Kent, the original settler of Kent Island, had a wife reputed to be a witch. She was said to have once lured a ship on the reefs, and later to have sworn that after her death nobody would ever live on Kent Island. Nobody did for a century and a half, until Joy arrived. Joy remained until he died in 1952, living by himself with fifty thousand herring gulls—the biggest colony in North America—ten thousand stormy petrels, a flock of eider ducks which increased in numbers from a few hundred to five thousand in a decade, and thousands of other birds.

Rockefeller later deeded Kent Island to Maine's Bowdoin College, which established a scientific station there for ornithologists, and Joy had trouble with his tame raven, "Croakie." The raven couldn't be cured of a habit of using an evaporation recorder for a drinking trough, thereby playing havoc with meteorological research.

Today, as in Audubon's day—he recorded this in his journal—Kent Island's gulls flatten the treetops with their massed weight. In the nesting season it's difficult to walk over the beach without trampling on their sand-colored eggs.

These eggs, not unlike hen eggs in flavor and larger in size, are Grand Manan's favorite breakfast, served hardboiled. They have deep orange-red yolks which tinge cake with pink and are prized for baking. Grand Manan's egg consumption doesn't reduce the gull population. A gull lays three eggs and if these are stolen she lays three more. If the second three are stolen she lays another three. These are the last. In any case when an egg hunter finds three eggs in a nest they are not touched, because they are likely to be old. If a nest has one or two eggs they are taken because the gull has just begun laying and the eggs are sure to be fresh.

Gull-egging leads the islanders to isolated reefs and ledges where they meet the clowns of the bird world, puffins and small auks. Puffins, or sea parrots, have short wings and gaudy-hued grotesque beaks. They fly erratically and utter funny sounds, obviously doing their best to show off. The auks, half-pint cousins of penguins, waddle around looking like fat midgets in dress suits.

The nesting grounds of the gulls can only be reached by water and the boats are often trailed by coarse-haired seals and porpoises which continually surface, dive and surface again. They look as though they are having fun and would like to join the party.

Bobbing all around in the rolling sea are thousands of brightly-painted buoys each tethered to a lobster pot and gull-egggers haul up enough lobsters for lunch. They cook them with gull eggs in a bucket over a bonfire, in salt water. Garnished with chopped gull eggs and butter, they taste better than any lobsters ever tasted at a staggering price per plate in any city restaurant.

The consumption of crustaceans on Grand Manan is enormous, yet there are still a million or more left over to ship to other parts of Canada and the United States. Alive, packed with ice and seaweed, they go as far away as Hollywood. Grand Manan has nine pounds—shallow salt water enclosures—where lobsters fresh from the depths are kept a couple of weeks to condition themselves to the change in pressure before they travel to distant destinations.

Lobsters are the island's second industry. The first is herring. On Grand Manan and on the islets of Long, Nantucket, High Duck, Big Duck, Ross, Cheney, White Head, Wood, Outer Wood, Hay and Kent, there are at least a hundred weirs. Like ships, these have names—such curious names as Joejam, Oatmeal, Prescription, Mystery, Teaser, Gold King.

Each covers up to two acres of water and consists of stakes driven into the bed of the ocean to form a circle, to which a net is attached. The stakes are from twenty-five to sixty feet long, depending on the depth, and are pounded six or seven feet into the bottom by sturdy muscular characters like Vernon Johnson. Fishermen themselves can fasten the net to the head of the stakes but it takes a deep-sea diver like Sheldon Green, who knows the floor of this part of Fundy almost as well as he knows his right hand, to do the job at the base, as far as forty feet under the surface.

Green and his fellow divers have one fear—catfish. An Atlantic catfish, three or four feet from snout to tail, has jaws that will clip an airpipe as fast as a guillotine clips a neck. A severed airpipe means death so when the dark shape of a catfish passes the diver signals that he wants to come up—quickly.

A weir works on the same principle as a minnow trap. The fish tumble into a funnel and can't find their way out. While one weir represents an initial outlay of seven or eight thousand dollars and the annual cost of upkeep is two to four thousand dollars, it will catch eighty-four thousand herring, worth about seven hundred dollars, in a good average day when the fish are running. The rub is that they don't run too many days in the year.

In spite of this the luckier fishermen of Grand Manan have had fat incomes in recent times. Five men who pooled their resources to buy one weir split ninety thousand dollars in two years.

The best of Grand Manan's herring go to its three hundred smokehouses—there's one for every ten people in the entire population. When these are all



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operating the villages are wreathed in so much smoke that they look from the distance as though they are burning. Ashton Linton is one of the experts who work in dim sprawling sheds where millions of herring, dripping grease and turning golden brown, hang above smoldering fires of salt-water driftwood and upland hardwood—the combination that gives them the choicest flavor. A wiry man with a leathery complexion, who exudes a fragrant odor of smoke, Linton has been a smoke-tender for forty-four years. He can process a bony herring into an epicurean delight—or into a leathery piece of nourishment that won't rot in the tropics. He's governed by where the market is—whether a swank U. S. hotel wants a breakfast specialty or whether the market is in the West Indies, South America or Africa.

Herring too small to be smoked are tinned as sardines in one of Grand Manan's three canneries or in canneries on the mainland of New Brunswick and Maine. Herring which are of inferior quality because they have gorged themselves with a microscopic variety of shrimp until they are discolored go to a plant in Maine to be chopped up, mixed with other ingredients, and retailed as a perfectly balanced diet—for cats.

The third industry of the island—after herring and after lobsters—is tourists. For five or six dollars a day a dozen summer inns offer passable rooms and better-than-average meals. Guests can swim in Fundy's icy brine or in fresh-water ponds. On trails marked by blotches of paint on the trees they walk until their feet give out and see such sights as the Bishop, a pinnacle of rock that looks like a human figure in clerical robes and mitre; the Hole in the Wall, a wave-carved hole in a cliff, and the Seven Days'

Work, which is seven curious layers of volcanic lava, one piled on the other.

They fish from the wharves. From Swallow Tail they watch whales chase herrings.

The welcome tourists and the occasional naturalist are the only "foreigners" likely ever to invade Grand Manan. The natives have known for well over a hundred years that there was nothing on the island to attract acquisitive mainlanders. In 1839 Dr. Abraham Gessner, New Brunswick's government geologist—who afterward gained fortune and fame by developing and patenting kerosene—surveyed Grand Manan and reported "no valuable minerals."

Nobody on the island was unduly disappointed. The people knew that if the land held nothing, the sea around them held enough wealth for all. Today, the people still know this. Scores of Grand Manan youngsters who joined the armed forces and saw the world during the war, insisted on a few changes when they came back. They wanted the highway which connects the villages hard-surfaced. It was. They wanted the boats equipped with ship-to-shore telephones and with electronic sounding devices capable of locating schools of fish. This was done too.

But the important fact was that these youngsters, who had seen the world and had been given the opportunity to settle down "ashore," nearly all returned to their native island, many of them bringing brides. Talk with them now and they explain that they found the world big and exciting, but realized that there's no place like Grand Manan, the island with no poverty, no illiteracy, no shacks, no crime, where the sea is so bountiful and the scenery is so beautiful and the whippoorwills sing in the evening. ★

