

NMT's Cabot Trail Tour

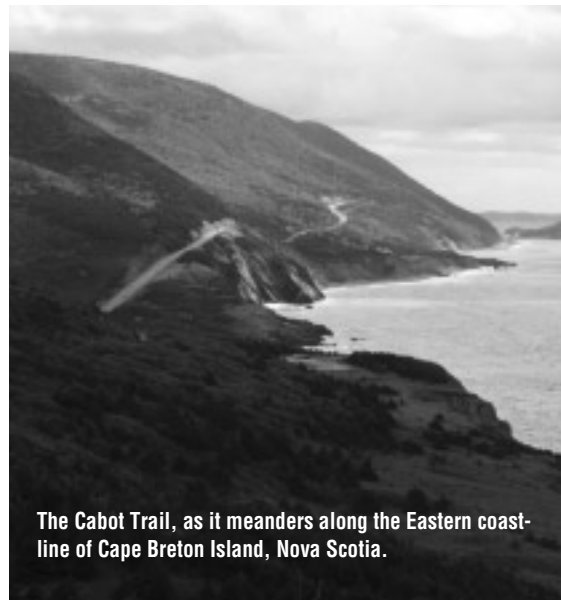
By Fred Rau

QUESTION: HOW CAN you ride your bike through England, Scotland and France, without having to bear the time and expense of traveling to Europe? Answer: Ride Nova Scotia!

Okay, maybe it's not quite the total experience of a European tour, but it comes darned close, and you do still have to cross a piece of ocean on a boat, pass through customs, and start using different money.

For years I had heard of the natural beauty, great roads, unbelievable seafood and friendly people of Nova Scotia. A virtual motorcycling paradise—or so everyone said. So, when Sean Reid began needling me again last year about taking his famous “Cabot Trail” tour, as he has every year for a decade now, I finally decided to take some time off work and give it a try. This was to be a pleasure trip for my wife and me—not a business trip on the magazine's expense account. But with the kind assistance of BMW, who loaned us a bike, and the use of some frequent flyer miles (not to mention Sean's consideration for allowing him to bill the tour as a “ride with Fred Rau”), we just managed to afford it.

Northeastern Motorcycle Tours has been in operation for over 10 years now, and has gained a well-earned reputation for staging



The Cabot Trail, as it meanders along the Eastern coastline of Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia.

some of the best-run motorcycle tours in the world. More specifically, owner Sean Reid (a native French Acadian/Scot) is known for his innate ability to search out only the very best places to eat and sleep. In addition, give him half a chance and he'll talk your ear off about the history and traditions of the area—something I really enjoy. I could rant for days about the pleasures of his tours, but I think the most telling evidence I could give you of the type of operation he runs is this: Four of the people

on our tour were “hold-overs” from a tour that ended two days before ours started. They had no reservations, and Sean couldn't even guarantee them rooms with the group every night, but they had enjoyed themselves so much the previous week that they refused to go home! And if that weren't enough, when our tour finished, four of our group stayed over for the next tour, including two who had stayed over from the previous tour. Sean says over 80% of his business these days comes from repeat customers, and after taking his tour, I can fully understand why that's so.

In a nutshell: We rode on “North America's fastest ferryboat,” a giant ship that carries 900 passengers and 200 vehicles over the waves at an astounding 57 mph. We stuffed ourselves every night with magnificent lobster, mussels, halibut and other gourmet seafood dinners. We rode the famous “Lighthouse Trail,” passing 15 scenic and historic lighthouses, by my count. We spent an evening at a traditional Scottish “Ceilidh” (pronounced Kay-Lee), enjoying some of the area's finest musicians and dancers. We toured a gigantic reconstructed 17th Century French fort and settlement at Louisbourg. We shopped at a crafts fair put on by the native Nova Scotian tribe, the Mi'kmaq (pronounced Mik-Mak). We spent our nights in historic, Victorian bed-and-breakfasts, all with four- or five-star ratings. We enjoyed the “living history exhibit” of Sherbrooke Village. We rode the legendary Cabot Trail—both ways. We watched bald eagles fish for salmon. We saw the world's highest tides (54 feet!). We stayed in villages where the ancient Scottish traditions are so carefully guarded that the local schools are even taught in Gaelic, and men in kilts are not an uncommon sight.

But perhaps most important of all, we met many wonderful people, and we made several new friends—probably for life. One of the great things about going on a motorcycle tour like this is that you meet so many people who are so much like yourself.

Okay, so it's a great tour, but let's get down to facts. My job at MCN is to be as analytical as possible. What do you get for your money—and is it worth it? Well, first of all, I'd be less than honest if I didn't point out up front that you could tour Nova Scotia, and see most, if not quite all, of what we saw, on your own, for considerably



Left: A piper plays in front of a re-creation of the ship Hector, which landed here in Pictou Harbor in 1773 with 200 Scots, beginning the wave of Scottish immigration to Nova Scotia. To this day, they jealously guard their ancient heritage and traditions. Right: Peggy's Cove Lighthouse, one of the more famous of over 30 such sights along the historic Lighthouse Trail.



Top: NMT's follow-van and trailer are equipped to handle almost any problem you might have along the way. Right: Prepare to gain about 10 lbs. on your NMT tour. Here, our group stuffs themselves on fresh lobster. The buckets on the table contained the appetizer—a “bottomless” supply of mussels. Yummmmm.



less money than NMT's price of \$2600 single, or \$5000 two-up for an eight-day tour. But, is that all there really is to it? I think not, because NMT's tours simply aren't designed for the budget-minded traveler. Let's face it—a lot of us, especially when on vacation, want to be pampered. We want to enjoy all the good things about a trip, and not have to deal with any of the mundane trivialities that can consume so much of our time and effort. That's where someone like Sean Reid comes in.

Still, just for the sake of comparison, I did my very best to keep track of all the expenses as if we were going on exactly the same tour, without the assistance of NMT. That's assuming, of course, that I could have gotten reservations at the exclusive B&Bs we stayed at, at the height of Nova Scotia's very short tourist season, or could have found the little out-of-the-way gourmet restaurants. What I came up with at the end, was that I would have saved a total of \$400 each for Cherrie and I, or almost exactly \$50 per day, per person. So, then, let's look at what we got for our \$50 a day: 1) We never had to look for a place to stay

or to eat, or make reservations. The very best available was always right there, waiting for us. A couple of times, we walked right past long waiting lines at restaurants, to our reserved table. 2) We never had to haul luggage to and from our room, or worry about carrying it on the bike. It was magically waiting for us in the room when we arrived, and we just left it there when we left. 3) We didn't have to wait in line for ferry boat tickets—which, by the way, totaled over \$315, and were included in the tour package. 4) We never had to worry about breakdowns. One of our number had a tire go bad on the trip, and Sean just loaded his bike into the trailer behind the luggage van and carried it to the next town where a new tire could be purchased. 5) We never had to look at the prices on the restaurant menus. NMT's tours, unlike many others, allow you to order right from the regular menu—anything, in any amount you want, is included. 6) Whenever we entered a show, museum, exhibit or park, we never had to worry about getting tickets or paying fees—they were all handled by advance arrangement with NMT. (Even a ranger at

a national park just asked, “You with Sean's group?” and waved us past the long line of tourists.) 7) Every day we were provided with detailed, full-color route maps, including alternate routes we could try if we wanted to go off on our own. 8) Every day at breakfast and dinner we had the companionship of like-minded motorcycle tourists to share our experiences with.

Add them all up, and I think we got much more than our \$50-a-day worth. I once spent almost exactly this same amount of money for a week's vacation in Hawaii, and didn't have nearly the fun I had riding the Cabot Trail. For gorgeous scenery, memorable lodgings, friendly camaraderie, great riding, and unbelievable meals, for my money, you just can't beat Northeastern Motorcycle Tours' Cabot Trail. 🍷



Just one of the elegant Victorian B&Bs where we lodged along the route.

Northeastern Motorcycle Tours

P.O. Box 574
Saxtons River, Vermont 05154
Phone/Fax: 802-463-9853
www.motorcyclertours.com