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# Cape Breton Highlands National Park

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BY R. J. C. STEAD

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CANADA'S great chain of national playgrounds has recently been augmented by the addition of a remarkable sea-shore area—the Cape Breton Highlands National Park. Situated in the northern part of Cape Breton Island, one of the most picturesque of all the interesting sections of Nova Scotia, the Park contains an area of approximately 458 square miles. It includes sections of the counties of Inverness and Victoria, and lies between the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

One of the great attractions of Cape Breton Island is the diversified nature of its scenery, and the new Park exemplifies its wild and rugged coastline and its beautiful rolling interior. Along the western coast steep well-timbered hills rise sharply from the sea to a height of from 1,200 to 1,700 feet and bold headlands jut out to form delightful bays and sandy coves. In the interior of the park are beautiful green valleys, snuggling between rolling blue-green hills, that resemble greatly the Highlands of Scotland. On the great plateau which forms the central portion of the Park are numerous little lakes, which feed streams that flow both to the Atlantic and to the Gulf

of St. Lawrence. Along its eastern coast are the picturesque fishing ports and villages, out of which ply the sturdy individuals that gain their livelihood from the sea.

Another distinctive feature of the region is the retention of old customs and handicrafts by the inhabitants of the vicinity, many of whom are of Scotch descent. Their native songs and dances have also been handed down through generations and make public celebrations and festivals most interesting.

Access to the Park is provided by a motor highway called the Cabot Trail, which connects with the main provincial highway system. Entrance to the Park may be made over an eastern route leading through the famous Bras D'Or Lake region to Sydney and Ingonish, or by way of a western route via the well-known Margaree Valley to Cheticamp. The Cabot Trail practically girdles the Park on three sides in the form of a vast horseshoe, and traverses many delightful scenic regions.

One of the most popular approaches to the Park from the mainland of Nova Scotia is made via highway No. 5 from Port Hawkesbury to the Margaree Valley, connecting there with the Cabot Trail. From Margaree Forks the route is follow-

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EDITOR'S NOTE: R. J. C. Stead is Superintendent of Publicity and Information in the Department of Mines and Resources at Ottawa.

ed northward through the village of Cheticamp to the northern boundary of the Park. North of Cheticamp comes one of the most thrilling sections of the drive. The road rises as high as 1,200 feet above the water, particularly in the vicinity of Cape Rouge, where magnificent seascapes and remarkable views of the coastline may be obtained.

About two miles from Cap Rouge, the road turns inland, climbing gradually through wooded valleys to the top of French Mountain with an elevation of 1,260 feet, and from there to the top of Mackenzie Mountain, with an elevation of 1,200 feet. From these points wonderful views may be obtained of the surrounding country and the adjoining coastline.

The next point of interest to be reached is Pleasant Bay, located just outside the Park boundary. Pleasant Bay is a popular summer resort and a place of great beauty, and is noted for the excellent fishing in the vicinity. From Pleasant Bay the road turns eastward across the Park following the valley of the Grand Anse River across the height of land to the Aspy River Valley. Between Pleasant Bay and Cape North are several lookouts which furnish spectacular views of the great valley which runs inward from Aspy Bay on the Atlantic Ocean. Before reaching Big Intervale the motorist leaves the Park, and re-enters a few miles beyond the settlement of Cape North, near South Harbour.

Continuing southeastward, the highway emerges on the Atlantic coast at Neil Harbour, one of the most picturesque of all the fishing villages in the vicinity. Here the mighty Atlantic rolls in to break in clouds of spray on the rocky shore, while in the little sheltered harbour numerous fishing craft ride at anchor. From Neil Harbour the route turns southward, crossing a number of beautiful little streams. One of these, Mary Ann Brook, tumbles below the highway bridge in a series of falls into a quiet pool.

Farther on are the villages of North Ingonish and South Ingonish, lying in the shadow of Cape Smoky. This bold prominence towers more than 1,000 feet above the sea, overlooking the twin

bays separated by the long narrow headland known as Middle Head.

South Ingonish Harbour has many features of interest to the visitor. Entering the harbour boats pass through a narrow gap past a lighthouse, into a broad well-sheltered bay. Lying at anchor are large sword-fishing boats with their tall masts equipped with lookout stations, and their "pulpit" or spear throwing station located on the bow. From South Ingonish the Cabot Trail is followed out of the Park over Cape Smoky and south to Englishtown Ferry, where a turn westward may be made to Baddeck on Bras D'Or Lake, or eastward to Sydney, the metropolis of Cape Breton Island.

During 1936 an administrative centre for the Park was established at North Ingonish, where a resident superintendent is located. A park warden service, responsible for fire and game protection has also been established and development work has been commenced on a modest scale. Improvements to date have been confined for the most part to highway and trail construction. Portions of the Cabot Trail are being rebuilt to park standard, and revision made to provide easy grades. Other improvements which are planned for the future include the provision of additional facilities for recreation, and the extension of accommodation for park visitors.

Accommodation of a limited nature is available in nearly all the small villages and fishing ports in the vicinity of the Park, including Cheticamp, Pleasant Bay, Neil Harbour and Ingonish. It is anticipated that the gradual development of the Park will result in the erection of additional hotels and bungalow camps, as well as camping areas for visitors carrying their own camping equipment or travelling with motor trailers.

Opportunities for recreation in the Park as yet are limited mainly to fishing, bathing, boating and hiking, as well as motoring along the park highway. Many of the smaller streams and lakes of the Park abound in sporty trout, and salmon also ascend the larger streams, providing excellent sport for the angler. Deep

sea fishing enthusiasts may also gratify their ambitions, for one of the finest sword-fishing grounds in the North Atlantic lies off Ingonish and Neil Harbour.

Commercial fishermen use both the small "snapper boat" carrying a crew of about three men, and the large schooner, with its tall mast and lookout stations. Both types of boat are equipped with the picturesque "pulpit", or station on the bowsprit, from which the harpoon is thrown at the swordfish. Angling for swordfish, as well as other large species, including tuna, is becoming very popular in Nova Scotia, and recently new North American records were established for both tuna and swordfish caught by rod and line in Nova Scotian waters.

Cape Breton Highlands National Park is still in its early stages of development as a national recreational area and wild life sanctuary. However, as time goes on, orderly development along approved lines will be carried out, including the construction and improvement of highways and trails, the restoration of mammalian wild life indigenous to the area, and the provision of additional facilities for accommodation and recreation. Endowed by Nature with many natural advantages Cape Breton Highlands National Park for years to come will serve the aesthetic and recreational needs of the people of Canada and visitors within her gates.