



## A Gravel Odyssey: Riding Labrador

By Geoff Stevenson  
(Second of three instalments)

We'd left Natashquan on a Wednesday and the Bella docked in Blanc Sablon Friday morning. Container #4201, which held our bikes, was eventually unloaded, and we gingerly peered inside. Both bikes had been carefully tied down; we untied them and rode up the road to the office for another ferry that was leaving for St Barbe, Nfld., in about an hour.

This ferry was allegedly full, so we settled in for a wait (there were

supposed to be three sailings a day – 90 minutes across the Strait of Belle Isle). We were confident that our two little bikes could be tucked in somehow, but this was clearly a long way from BC Ferries, where you pay at the ticket wicket, ride to the head of the line, and are sure to get on.

It was our lucky day: We were soon summoned to the ticket counter, paid \$36 for each bike and rider, and rode aboard the Apollo, built in Sweden in 1970 and sporting a distinctive tricolor paint scheme of

## Island BMW in Victoria to Change Hands

The Island BMW motorcycle dealership in Victoria has been sold. The new owner, who has automotive dealerships in Edmonton, will be assuming the reins in January.

We all wish Augie success in whatever his new plans involve and thank him for his work towards providing the BMW riders and other motorcyclists on the Island top notch sales and service.

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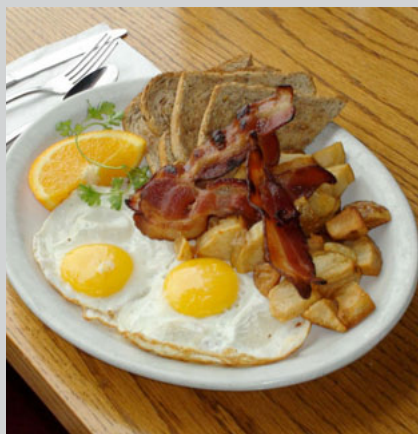
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## Next Breakfast/Brunch

### Sunday, December 3



### WHERE:

Fifteen Fifties Restaurant  
1550 Cedar Hill X Road  
Victoria, BC

### WHEN:

9:30 am at the restaurant



# Viking history recreated for tourists



***The lighthouse (now automated) at Lobster Cove Point is a popular walk from Rocky Harbour in Newfoundland.***

blue, white and rust (lots of rust, too).

From St. Barbe we rode north to St. Anthony, near the tip, of Newfoundland's Northern Peninsula, and not far from L'Anse aux Meadows, where the Vikings first landed in North America about a thousand years ago.

This site is now a national park, fortunately offering free admission for Canada's 150th birthday. We rode there next morning and walked around.

There's an excellent information centre with the usual videos and

wall exhibits, plus a model of a Viking ship.

A boardwalk of perhaps a kilometre leads to the re-creation of the Viking village (the Vikings left partly because they fell out with the natives and burned their original village in leaving. A grassy area contains information markers about where the original buildings were, but the sod huts tourists now find were generously built by the taxpayers of Canada.)

Back in St. Anthony, we spent an educational two hours in a museum honoring Sir Wilfred Grenfell,

a remarkable Brit who brought medical care to Labrador more than a hundred years ago.

He developed a series of medical ships and built hospitals ashore in the early years of the 20th century. He was also a prolific author, writing dozens of books. His American-born wife was key to raising funds for Grenfell's work over the years.

This museum is a curatorial tour de force. If you're in the neighborhood, don't miss it.

St Anthony also gave us some much-needed exercise. A hill at the north end of town has 476 wooden steps to its peak and we climbed every one of 'em. This got us 500 feet above the surrounding countryside and gave us a spectacular view of the town's enclosed safe harbor – and out over the North Atlantic toward the west coast of Greenland and Baffin Island (just over the horizon!)..

After a night to recover from our exertions, we headed south to Gros Morne Park. We found a room for two nights in Rocky Harbour; perfect weather allowed us to walk about 10km return to Lobster Cove Point Lighthouse at the entrance to Rocky Harbour and carve a few corners on the bikes on some wonderfully smooth pavement through the park.

Next stop was Western Brook Pond, a fiord that originally emptied into





## Waterproof gear a must for the trip



***Western Brook Pond, a freshwater fiord, is one of the jewels of Gros Morne National Park.***

the Strait of Belle Isle, but which is now fresh water.

There's an easy 4km trail to the dock at the western end of the pond; from there, we admired the view of steep cliffs rising on both sides of the pond. But we agreed that the \$58 (each) for the boat tour was a bit rich, so we remounted and rode to Port aux Choix for the night.

Next day we were back on the rusting Apollo, heading for Blanc Sablon. Finally, we were almost in Labrador and next morning we could ride in earnest.

Of course, Murphy's Law meant

that next morning would dawn cool and wet. Our KLIM riding suits are Goretex and waterproof, but rain gloves were clearly called for as we headed across the border and north to Port Hope-Simpson.

The owners of the Alexis Hotel in Port H-S obviously knew all about motorcyclists who'd spent a day riding in the rain. They showed us their furnace room and invited us to hang our clothes there overnight. We reckoned the temperature there was close to 30°C; the clothes we pulled on next morning were dry AND warm.

In Red Bay, we visited another

excellent museum, this one dedicated to Basque fishermen who were in these waters in the 16th century.

There was pavement to Red Bay, but the next 310km would be on gravel – with more rain and even fog for an hour or two.

But there was good news too: The gravel was mostly easy riding, the fog went away and, finally, the sun came out.

We rode at a steady 70-75km/h. There were a few potholes and some washboard, but our little bikes have around 10 inches of suspension travel F&R and they



## Gravel roads not too challenging



***Lost in the fog? Not quite, but it WAS thick for a while on the Labrador Coastal Drive.***

handled the conditions easily. Both bikes ran perfectly; indeed our only mechanical challenge in our month away was the loss of an 8mm mounting bolt on my luggage rack, easily replaced at the Home Hardware store in Goose Bay.

Advance research showed that we'd both need extra gas for this trip. My Honda's tank holds just two American gallons (7.6litres) and we knew there were several areas with 300km or more between gas stations.

(Ernie's Suzuki had a gas tank about 50 per cent bigger. But, of course, his bigger motor burned gas faster, so we each carried flat Rotopax jerry cans (2 US gallons each) on

our luggage racks.

(We both had small soft saddlebags for tools and spare tubes – none needed. Everything else I took fit in a 30-litre kayak bag – fortunately waterproof. I managed to carry walking shoes, clothes for a month and a heavy, 12 by 9 inch Hewlett-Packard laptop, which didn't seem to mind either the washboard or the rain).

After about six hours, a side-of-the-road refuelling and a few stops for water and granola bars, the gravel morphed into pavement and we rode into Happy Valley-Goose Bay feeling very pleased with ourselves.

First order of business: A bowl of Tim Horton's chili - and a chance

to sit at a comfortable table instead of that plywood seat. (Ernie had an aftermarket seat on his Suzuki, but my Scottish heritage meant I rode the whole way on Mr. Honda's factory foam).

Goose Bay is the site of a big NATO air base, which dates back to the late 1940s. It covers a few hundred acres, but is surrounded by a serious chain-link fence that I'd guess was built soon after the attacks of 9/11.



***Bring extra gasoline if you're riding a small bike in rural Labrador.***

There was disappointingly little to do for tourists, but we spent a relaxing day riding about 30km to North West River, the site of a major Hudson's Bay Company trading post back in the day.





# A plethora of museums greet visitors



**The gravel highway in Labrador stretches to the horizon. This section was 310km long.**

One of the factors (managers) there was Donald Smith, one of Canada's greatest sons. You may know him better as Lord Strathcona, one of the money men who helped Sir John A. build the railroad across Canada.

The post's main building has been preserved and today serves as a museum. We felt sorry for the young lady manning the information desk; she allowed that

she usually had only 5 or 10 visitors a day.

North West River boasts only a couple of hundred people, but in addition to the HBC museum, it sported an excellent provincial museum. This was a new, multi-million-dollar building, with admission by donation. When we arrived, the number of visitors doubled from two to four.

A theatre offered several hundred

short films about Labrador (many made by the National Film Board); we watched a fascinating CBC film about Inuit hunting caribou .

A highlight in Goose Bay was discovering a handsome German sailboat at the government dock (a detour on the way to North West River). I paced it off at around 130 feet and thought it had a steel hull.

A little research into the Asgard (registered in Road Harbour, British Virgin Islands – presumably for tax reasons).and built in 1993 showed that her hull is wood, she's actually 140 feet long and was designed by American Bruce King (designer of a number of Ericson sailboats, several of which are moored in Greater Victoria).

The Asgard's two masts towered over the Goose Bay waterfront. There was varnished teak everywhere and we were told she'd just arrived from Greenland. (She was built by Abeking and Rasmussen, located near Hamburg and one of the world's premier yacht yards).

**(To be continued)**

## Club 2017 Event Schedule

Date	Event	Location
Sunday, December 3, 2017	Monthly Gathering	1550 Fifteen Fifty's Restaurant
Monday, January 1, 2018	TROC	Island View Beach & Bob's House
Saturday, January 6, 2018	Monthly Gathering	Cherries Breakfast Bistro
Sunday, February 4, 2018	Monthly Gathering	Beach House Restaurant