

# Falling in Love with Guysborough County



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## *Sample Pages*

### **Falling in Love with Guysborough County**

It *wasn't* love at first sight. My first visit to Guysborough County in 2010 was little more than a detour, a brief whistle-stop to satisfy my curiosity about a part of Nova Scotia that I had never seen and nobody ever talked about. My conclusion: ruggedly photogenic, yes, but as a place to live, utterly impossible. Now, a decade later, I am moving there. So, what happened? This book tells the story.

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# The Land



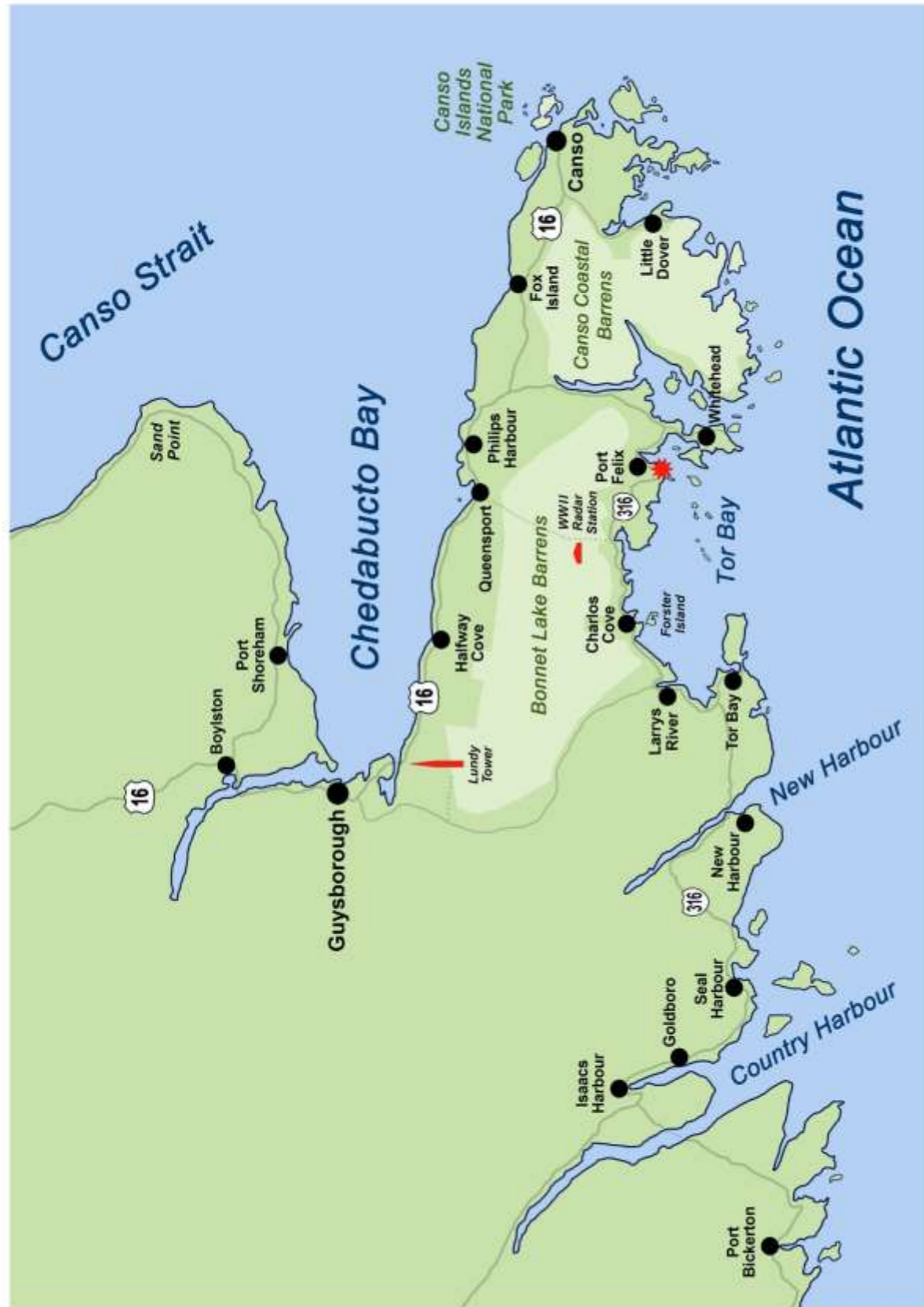
As the crow flies, Guysborough County is only a hundred kilometres from Halifax. But geography and history have conspired to make Nova Scotia's bustling capital seem a million miles away and Guysborough feel like the ends of the earth. Which is precisely why I fell in love with it.

Located at the eastern tip of mainland Nova Scotia, Guysborough County straddles a geological boundary where two microcontinents, Meguma (to the southwest) and Avalonia (to the northeast), collided 400-360 million years ago. Meguma hailed from what is now Africa; Avalonia from northern Europe; and caught in between, a melange of small islands and sea floor sediments from the now extinct Rheic Ocean. By about 300 million years ago, all these fragments had become welded together in the centre of a new super-continent, Pangea. There they remained until

tectonic forces split Pangea apart 100 million years later and the Atlantic Ocean flooded in.

Meguma's crash into Avalonia was the most turbulent period ever in Nova Scotia's geological history. The converging rocks were subjected to extreme compression, which turned them into the metamorphic gneiss, slate and schist that are common throughout the region today. At the same time, magma bulged up into subterranean cavities and solidified there to form a hard granite backbone, part of which is now exposed on the Canso barrens and islands. Tectonic pressure also created immense folds and faults in the crustal rocks. Nova Scotia's largest fault lies along the original Meguma-Avalonia boundary where, in Guysborough County, it forms Chedabucto Bay. Other significant faults cut into the Guysborough coast at present-day Indian, Country and New Harbours.





The result of this geological choreography, at least from the perspective of today's residents, is that Guysborough County is relatively isolated from the rest of the province, thrust out into the sea, not on the way to anywhere else. Its deeply-indented coast is served by a twisty, potholey road that requires a cable-ferry crossing at Country Harbour and

several lengthy detours inland around other long inlets. From Guysborough's southwestern border at Ecum Secum to its northeastern border at the Canso causeway, this road stretches about 250 km, but it is a drive of more than four hours – five if you miss the ferry – much longer if you fall in love with the place en route.



**Bonnet Lake Barrens Wilderness Area**

To the east of Lundy Hill lies the vast wilderness of the Bonnet Lake Barrens. There are no roads here, just animal trails weaving through a network of rocks, bogs, small lakes and tangled shrubbery. (September 2019)



Autumn turns many of these shrubs to vibrant shades of red and gold, blanketing the highlands in a colourful tapestry. (October 2018)



**Fishing History**  
displayed at the Port Bickerton  
Lighthouse museum, 2019



**Hazel Hill  
Relay Station**

western terminus of the Commercial Cable Company's transatlantic telegraph cable that operated from 1884-1962; building demolished 2017; this photo 2010



**Goldboro Future Industrial Site**

Highway 316 cuts through 200 hectares of land cleared for construction of the Pieridae Energy Ltd. liquified natural gas plant, slated to begin production in the mid 2020's; this photo 2018

The first human settlers probably *didn't* fall in love with the place. Indeed, they may have hated it. It would have been a struggle to make a comfortable home in a landscape so bleak, with its straggly spruce forests, boggy highland tundra and rock-strewn shore, routinely blasted by harsh weather off the North Atlantic.

Guysborough County has been only sparsely populated at the best of times. The best of times were a few decades in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Sheltered inlets served then as ports for a lucrative fishery. Rivers brought bountiful timber harvests to mills and shipbuilding yards at Sherbrooke and (the town of) Guysborough. Rich seams of gold were mined around Goldboro. And the burgeoning communications industry made Canso a busy western terminus for several transatlantic telegraph cables.

But, as the 20th century wore on, the collapse of fish stocks, the depletion of easily accessible timber and gold reserves, and profound changes in transportation and communications technology brought the Guysborough County economy to its knees. Many people moved away in search of jobs. Those who stayed continued to eek a living mainly from the sea, fishing for lobster during the brief eight-week season in early summer. Others found employment in local industrial projects: scattered

gold mines in the western part of the county; the Maritimes & Northeast Pipeline and (currently under construction) a liquid natural gas plant at Goldboro; the Porcupine Mountain aggregate quarry at Aulds Cove; the Canso Wind Farm; and the recently approved Canso Spaceport satellite launch site on the neighbouring barrens.

Data from Statistics Canada's most recent (2016) census tells the story: Guysborough County has the lowest population density and the largest population decline of all Nova Scotia counties, with a relatively low employment rate, low earnings, and older demographic. The trend toward urbanization that has prevailed globally for more than a century, drew Guysborough's younger generations away to opportunities in neighbouring Antigonish, Halifax and cities farther afield.

Tourism became a major contributor to Nova Scotia's economy during the latter half of the 20th century, but Guysborough County's isolated location and limited infrastructure made most travellers bypass it in favour of more popular tourist regions. Today Canso attracts about 10,000 people annually to its Stan Rogers Folk Festival during the last weekend of July, and Sherbrooke Village draws history buffs to its large, open-air museum. But otherwise the highways are quiet, even on the busiest holiday weekends.

Statistics Canada 2016 Census Report	Guysborough County	Antigonish County	Lunenburg County	Halifax	Toronto	Canada
Land area (km <sup>2</sup> )	4,044	1,458	2,910	5,496	5,906	8,965,588
Total Population 2016	7,625	19,301	47,126	403,390	5,928,040	35,151,728
Total Population 2011	8,143	19,589	47,313	390,328	5,583,064	33,476,688
Population change	- 6.4%	- 1.5%	- 0.4%	+ 3.3	+ 6.2	+ 5.0
Density (people/km <sup>2</sup> )	1.9	13.2	16.2	73.4	1004	3.9
Median population age	55.5	45.2	52.0	41.0	39.4	41.2
Adult employment	55%	68%	60%	70%	67%	68%
Adult non-employment	45%	32%	40%	30%	33%	32%
Median household income	\$49,253	\$64,558	\$54,833	\$69,553	\$78,373	\$70,336

## Towns & Communities



**Entrance to Port Felix**  
view from St. Peter's cemetery

**Port Felix**  
view of Chapel Hill and St. Peter's RC Church  
from Duncan & Connie's cottage in Port Felix East



**Baby & Scaredy Cat**  
mascots on Canso's waterfront trail, 2019



**Town of Canso** view from Canso Islands, 2018

**Town of Guysborough**  
main street (right)  
and wharf (below)  
October 2018



**Trans Canada Trail** on the old rail line  
through the Town of Guysborough, 2018



**Carlos Cove**, 2018

**Little Dover**, 2019





**Queensport Lighthouse** guards Chedabucto Bay from its perch on Rook Island, 2010

**Forster Island** is accessible on foot only for a few hours at low tide, 2018



**Storms at Tor Bay Beach** – Hurricane Dorian in September 2019 (above) and a nameless gale in October 2018 (below)





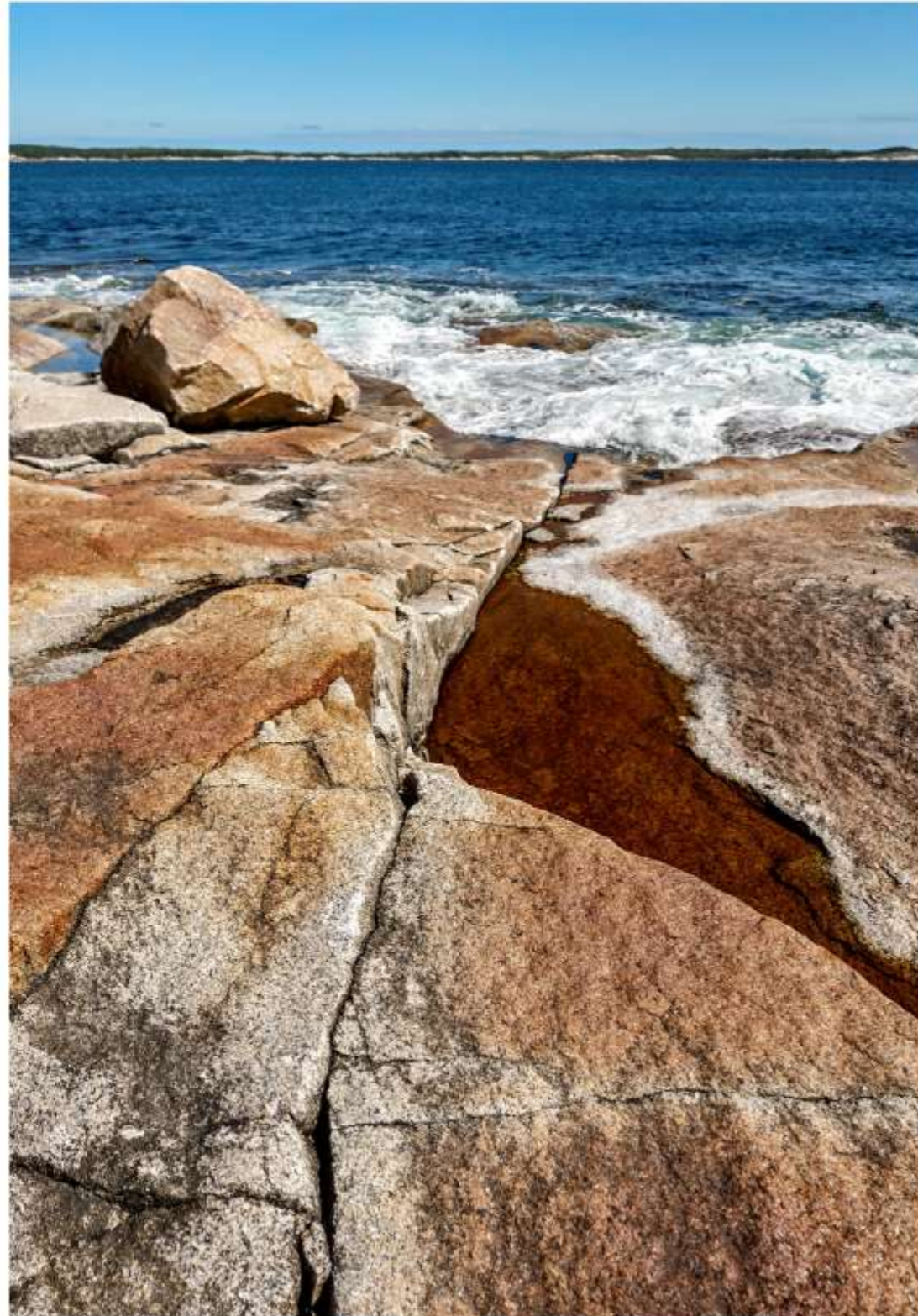
*Tor Bay Provincial Park, 2018*



*Miniature Oasis* (above) and *Tangled Forest* (below) along the Black Duck Cove Trail, 2018







Black Duck Cove Provincial Park rocks overlooking Dover Bay, 2019



Black Duck Cove Trail, 2018





*Canso Islands National Park* Hog Island (above) and Grassy Island (below), 2019



*Canso Islands National Park* Hart Island Lighthouse (above,) and Hog Island (below), 2018





**Port Shoreham Provincial Park** sedimentary landscape on Chedabucto Bay's north shore, 2018



**Sand Point**, where Chedabucto Bay meets the Canso Strait, large view (above) and rock detail (below), 2018





**Bonnet Lake Barrens** view south from the Lundy Firetower Hill, October 2018



**Bonnet Lake Barrens** view west from the Lundy Firetower Hill, September 2019



**R.C.A.F. WWII Radar Station #5** operated on the Bonnet Lake Barrrens, just off the rugged track between Cole Harbour and Queensport, from 1942 and 1945, providing an essential link in the defence chain across eastern North America. All that remains today are a few cement foundations and an interpretive panel; these photos 2018.



**The Barrrens in Winter**, February 2020