

LEISURE & TRAVEL

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CATHY DONALDSON/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

An exquisite sand beach - open to visitors - stretches along the 12-kilometre dune system in Bouctouche.

Stay home and get away to the BEACH

■ New Brunswick offers a host of hidden gems for a quick beach getaway

BY CATHY DONALDSON
TIMES & TRANSCRIPT STAFF

It's a sultry summer day and the beach beckons. But which one to pick?

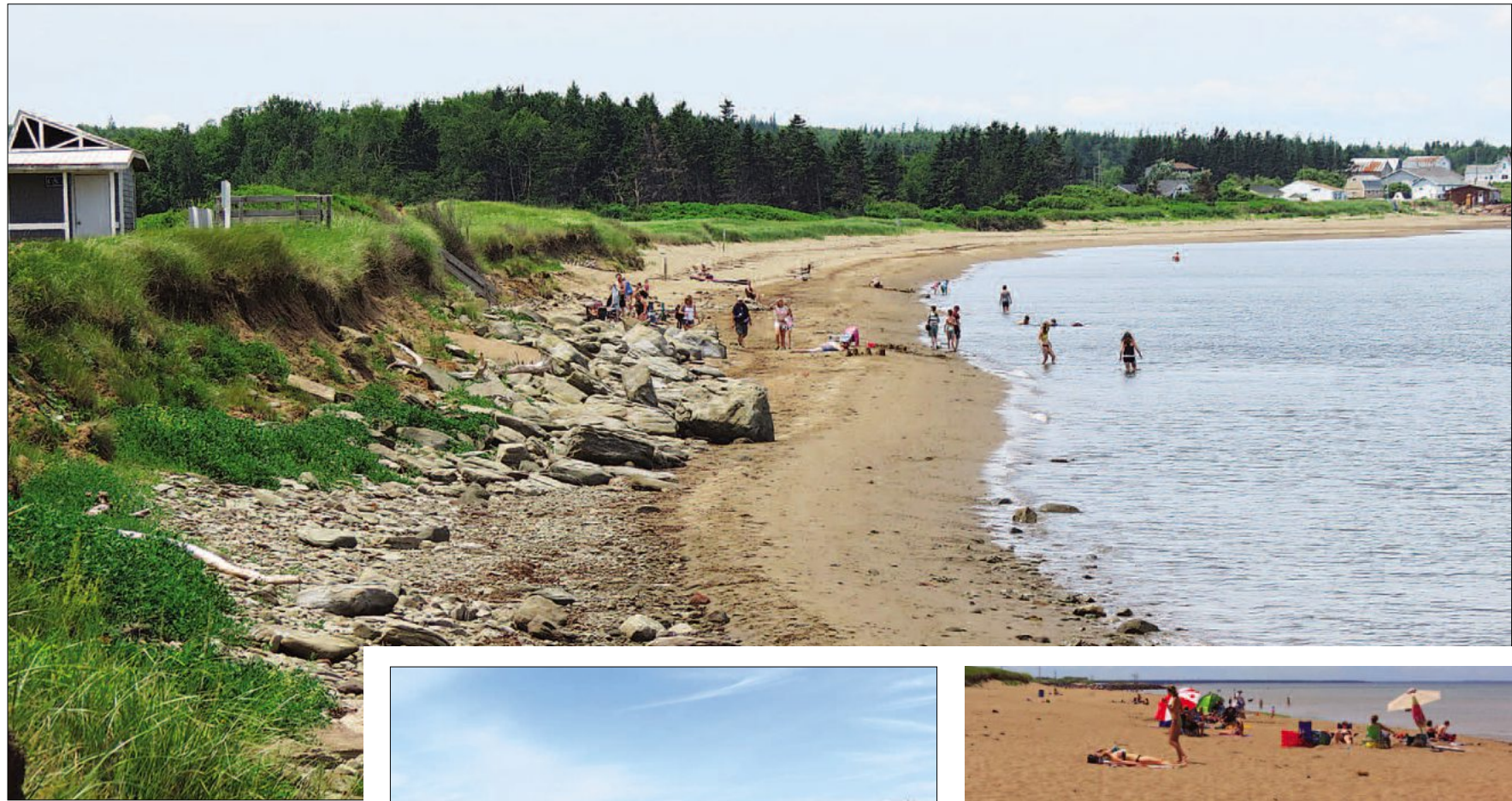
Atlantic Canada offers a wealth of sandy playgrounds and New Brunswickers are blessed with many outstanding choices.

If you're in southeastern New Brunswick and pondering beach destinations, take the Acadian Coastal Drive, denoted by signs featuring a white starfish on a red background. The route hugs the shoreline, connecting visitors to a plethora of great beaches.

This sand seeker recently embarked on a two-day adventure by car along the roadway, with intermittent breaks to ask locals for input on decent beach locales.

One of those first stops was in Port Elgin to ask folks at the Timber River Country Market for their suggestions. One helpful customer mentioned his mother operated a campground with a nice beach on nearby Route 960.

Advice heeded, your intrepid beach bum turned down the quiet, country road lined with Queen Anne's Lace and meandered along the waters of Baie Verte towards Cape Tormentine, the easternmost point in the province. While no public beaches were spotted, a multitude of private lanes with waterfront access were spied, making one envious of cottage owners in the area.



CATHY DONALDSON/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

Located in a provincial park, Murray Beach - like many in the area - has some of the warmest ocean water temperatures in Canada.

At Cape Tormentine, the campground mentioned by the Port Elgin guide came into view but your shoreline detective opted to drive a bit further, taking a right at Old Ferry Road. Ferry terminals

► See EXPLORE, G2



CATHY DONALDSON/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

An inviting path welcomes visitors to a beach in Cape Tormentine.



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Visitors to Sandy Beach, located on a private campground, can pay \$5 per vehicle to enjoy its shoreline and facilities.



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SAINT JOHN

Explore New Brunswick and you'll find plenty of hidden gem beaches

► Continued From G1

at Cape Tormentine and Borden-Carleton, P.E.I., were completed in 1917 but once the Confederation Bridge opened in 1997, ferry service across the Northumberland Strait between the two communities was discontinued.

While ferry traffic is now non-existent, locals and those 'in the know' continue to enjoy a hidden gem of a beach tucked along the shores of the strait at the start of the once well-travelled road.

Former area resident Susan Wilson, visiting the beach from Sackville with family, explained that a fish factory once stood not far from the beach site, lending to the spot's nickname 'The Factory.'

Today, the cozy dune is a serene locale for a dip while providing views of the majestic 12.9-km Confederation Bridge.

"There are lots of great little beaches around here," Wilson noted with pride, looking out over the sun-dappled waves. "It's really a beautiful area."

Fortunately, Wilson agreed to share the co-ordinates of some of those "great little beaches" for my tour.

The first can be reached by passing the exit to Cape Jourimain and travelling west along Route 955, taking a right at Ann's Acres, a private road leading to a picturesque shoreline. While beach parking is limited for outsiders, one might fare better at the end of the cottage-lined Walton's Beach Road, the next right on Route 955.

Walton's Beach is a spectacular sandy beach with great swimming that also boasts the Confederation Bridge as its visual backdrop. Only a handful of locals populated the beach during my recent weekday visit, though Linda Trenholm of Sackville – who has owned a cottage just above the shore for 37 years – says it gets busier on weekends.

"A lot of the cottage owners here have grandkids and it's a really, really nice place for families," said Trenholm.

Next stop on my trek was 11 kilometres down the road at Murray Beach, a provincial park that fea-



This quiet beach known by locals as "The Factory" is near Old Ferry Road in Cape Tormentine.

tures not only a saltwater beach but a seaside campground with 111 sites and six cabins. Playground and picnic areas also dot the landscape.

Entry to the park is \$8 and while the beach is unsupervised and dogs not permitted, locals and tourists alike do not seem deterred.

On a Murray Beach visit during a tour of the Atlantic provinces, Jonas Borgen of New Haven, Connecticut, said he was thoroughly enjoying his stay, especially the beach's water temperatures.

Due to the Northumberland Strait's shallow depths, its waters have some of the warmest ocean temps in Canada and some of the top temps on the Atlantic coast north of Virginia – occasionally reaching 25 degrees Celsius.

"The water is definitely warmer than where I've been in Nova Scotia and Newfoundland," said Borgen.

Hermine Caissie of Petitcodiac learned about Murray Beach from her sister, who started tenting at the park 30 years ago and convinced her sibling to give it a try.

"It's a beautiful beach and a lot better this year," said Caissie, as she watched family members frolic in waves on a rubber raft. "Last year,

a storm brought in a lot of seaweed but that's gone. I just love it here because it's so quiet."

If you're looking for something closer to Moncton, consider Sandy Beach on Route 950 in Cap-Pelé.

The private campground features 350 campsites but its owners open the beach to visitors for a daily fee of \$5 per vehicle, which grants access to not only the beach but also washrooms, showers and a canteen. (Dogs are allowed on leash in certain areas.)

"I prefer this beach because there are fewer people than at other beaches, it's half the price (of some beach entry fees) and you can park closer," said Nicole Gauvin of Dieppe during a visit to Sandy Beach with friend Carol McLeod of Moncton.

Another of the region's beaches that tends to be less congested is Aboiteau, a gorgeous stretch of sand located about 40 minutes from Moncton on Route 955. It features full facilities and 40 cottages.

Many other beaches – mostly private – can be found even closer to Moncton but none more popular than the provincially-run Parlee Beach in Pointe-du-Chêne, off Highway 15 at Exit 37.

The sign at Parlee's entrance describes it as "New Brunswick's favourite beach destination." And it's no wonder crowds flock every summer to this seaside mecca, about 20 minutes from Moncton.

With a large area supervised by lifeguards, Parlee Beach is known for its soft, white sand, warm waters, massive sand flats as well as a multitude of excellent facilities, including campsites, a restaurant, canteen, playground, picnic area, volleyball pits, change houses, washrooms and ample parking. (Dogs are not permitted on the beach.)

Parlee is a super spot for families, perhaps especially at low tide, allowing more space for all and providing the perfect conditions to hone sand castle skills or search for hermit crabs in the shallow tidal pools.

"I like Parlee because I can play in the water and the sand is warm," says five-year-old Carys Jelley of Moncton.

The entry fee to the park is \$11. Another fun day trip from Moncton can be found by taking Highway 15 towards Shediac, then exiting at Highway 11 north towards Miramichi. Take Exit 7 to Route 134 and watch for Route 530, a coastal jaunt with many great beaches.

Here you'll find one of the region's best-kept beach secrets – Caissie Cape, a vast area of sandy



Walton's Beach is a hidden gem of a beach featuring a beautiful shoreline and spectacular views of the Confederation Bridge.

shores overlooking the Northumberland Strait. Turn off Route 530 at Chemin de la Côte and when you see signs for beach entrances, park along the roadside and head for the water. Locals say there's rarely a crowd at the free-of-charge beaches along the cape.

On a recent sunny Sunday, the area was busy but there was plenty of space between groups of visitors, preventing any sardine-tin-like scenarios.

Further north on Route 530, veer onto Route 475 towards the Bouctouche Dune for a unique beach experience. (If travelling from Moncton, take Exit 32A off Highway 11 before connecting to Route 475).

When you reach the Irving Eco-Centre at the dune, leave your vehicle in the parking lot opposite the centre and walk to the entrance. The 12-kilometre dune system just beyond the buildings is an impressive jut of land that has been shaped by the wind, tides and sea currents since the last ice age.

Centre interpreter Sarah Ross says swimming is permitted on the sand beach that follows the length of the dune. She notes that the beach is not supervised and urges visitors not to walk in grassy areas, but otherwise welcomes all.

"The nice thing about swimming here is that if you find it a little busy in one area you can just walk a bit further since the beach goes on and on," says Ross.

Wooden boardwalks snake along the dune though, due to storms in recent years, only 800 metres of boardwalk is currently accessible to the public, she adds.

(If not everyone in your group is keen to play in the water, the boardwalk is an ideal vantage point

to watch for shorebirds and migratory birds.)

The final stop on my beach adventure was Kouchibouguac National Park, further north from Moncton off Highway 11 at Exit 75.

Kouchibouguac is a Mi'kmaq name meaning "river of long tides," which is fitting since the park – founded in 1969 – is comprised of bogs, salt marshes, tidal rivers, lagoons, forests and 25 kilometres of sand dunes that stretch along the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

Having made previous visits to Kouchibouguac, your enthusiastic researcher made a beeline for Kellys Beach, which includes full facilities and a stunning shoreline.

In addition to a supervised swimming area, located along a massive sand dune accessible by a boardwalk trail from the parking lot, a sheltered lagoon can also be reached via the trail, offering warmer water than the ocean side.

A first-timer to the beach, Charles Savoie of Atholville said he and his wife were completely awed by the tranquility and beauty of the well-maintained beach.

"I'll definitely be recommending this to my friends," he said during a boardwalk chat.

Callanders Beach is another excellent pick at Kouchibouguac. The unsupervised beach in a lagoon area has a large picnic area, nearby bike and walking trails, and dry toilets. (Dogs are not permitted on the boardwalk or on the barrier islands, including Kellys Beach, but are allowed on leash at Callanders Beach.)

Summer daily entrance fees to Kouchibouguac are \$7.80 for adults, \$19.60 for families.

■ *Cathy Donaldson is a writer and editor living in Moncton.*



Amelia Samson of Lawrencetown, N.S., plays in the waves at Cape Tormentine.

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A vast area of sandy shores await visitors at Caissie Cape.