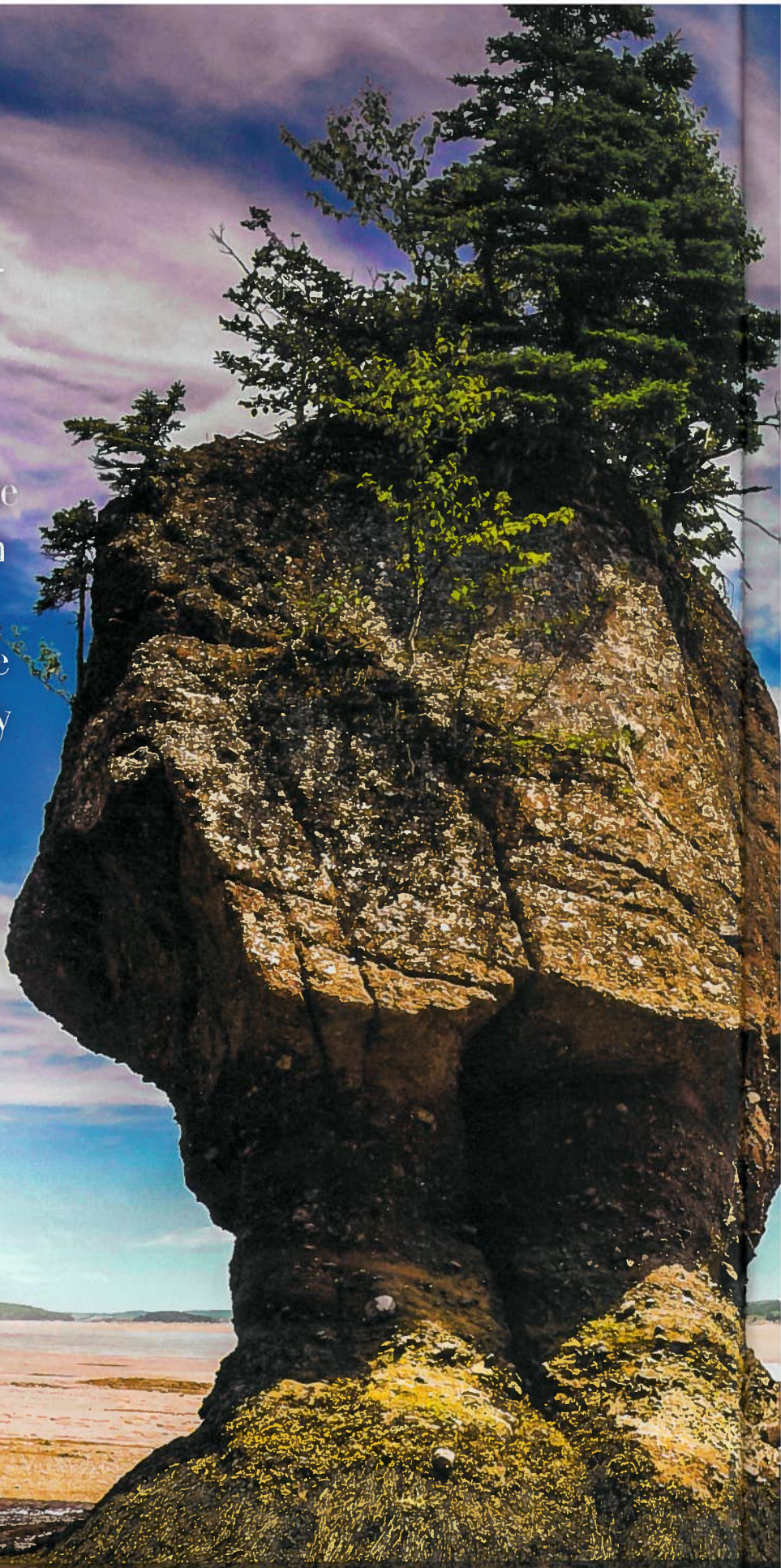


“The smell of great Canadian wilderness—that kind you only get deep in the woods, a sort of crisp, piney freedom—permeates the air. I am overcome with a powerful feeling of humility, of being at the mercy of nature and my own capabilities.”



ONE OF THE INCREDIBLE HYDROGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF THE BAY OF FUNDY: TIDAL PULSES OVER THOUSANDS OF YEARS HAVE ERODED THE BASE OF THIS ENORMOUS ROCK. SOME LOCATIONS ALONG THE BAY EVEN EXPERIENCE TIDES THAT MEASURE UP TO 5 STORIES

PLAN, WHAT PLAN

Story and Photos by Daniel Puiatti

SOMETIMES—LIKE ON THE BAY OF FUNDY FOOTPATH OR THE CONFEDERATION TRAIL—YOUR DESTINATION DESERVES YOUR FULL ATTENTION. THAT’S WHEN YOU WANT TO LEAVE THE ORGANIZING TO EXPERTS

Intensely dislike planning. Logistics, budgets, accommodations. Planning before and organization during (a trip) has never been my thing. Don't get me wrong, if I have to I most certainly will; but more often than not I find myself the sort to pick a place, shove my gear in a sack and go. I tend to prefer focusing on the aesthetics, physical demands and social interactions of a trip, and when possible I like to forgo thinking about how many litres of water I should bring, or how much granola I will need in the bush.

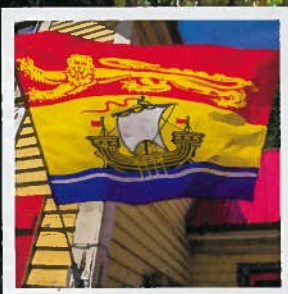
When word came down that I was off to trek New Brunswick's Fundy Footpath and cycle across Prince Edward Island and the Confederation Trail, my immediate reaction was one of concern. How many litres of water would I have to bring—how many varieties of granola? Who would I be travelling with? How will I navigate without my phone's GPS? Do any of these questions matter?! Fortunately, in regards to the planning aspect, no, as everything would be managed by World Expeditions as part of their Great Canadian Trail series trips. Bonus!

My journey begins in the seaside village of St. Martins, New Brunswick, a place that looks like it's straight out of a gift shop postcard. A small, sleepy coastal community with a front-row seat to the natural masterpiece that is the Bay of Fundy. Experiencing the Bay of Fundy is something every Canadian, and perhaps every human being, should consider doing at least once in their lifetime.

The Bay is an absolutely epic display of nature's raw power. Estimated to have more than 100 billion tons of water flow in and out of it each day (an amount thought equal to all the water that flows in all the rivers on the planet—with tides that famously shift about a mile both ways, twice a day)—every six hours the moored boats of St. Martins harbour transform from idle, bottom-dwelling wrecks to proudly bobbing fishing vessels, and back again. St. Martins has the tides in its soul, like much of the Maritimes, and it was the perfect place to begin my journey across New Brunswick and P.E.I.

Over the next several days my trip mates and I would be travelling the northern perimeter of the Bay, along a stunning near-coastal trail called the Fundy Footpath, and through a region steeped in Maritime—and Canadian—history. Our eclectic group is a whimsical combination of characters, the likes of which might only come together on a trip where your companions are chosen for you. There was Sabrina, a fiercely athletic girl from Ottawa whose appetite for challenge was nothing short of incredible. She is the only person aside from myself who asked for another lobster roll, after already having inhaled two enormous ones. Then there was Guy, an expat from England living in Australia who had literally travelled across the world to experience the Footpath and Confederation Trail. His love of movies—and his very impressive beard—made him an instant brother to me.

Our journey across the 41-kilometre Fundy Footpath begins in an excited frenzy as we arrive at the trailhead among overgrown thickets. The smell of great Canadian wilderness—that kind you only get deep in the woods, a sort of crisp, piney freedom—permeates the air. I am overcome with a powerful feeling of humility, of being at the mercy of nature and my own capabilities.



“And then, very suddenly, the chaos of branches gives way and I find myself standing face to face with a lush emerald paradise.”

THE FUNDY FOOTPATH MOVES THROUGH A BEAUTIFUL AND OFTEN MISSED AREA OF NEW BRUNSWICK

Within moments of arriving our welcome party is upon us; a mishmash of blackflies and mosquitoes begin their assault. Guy, who opted for shorts, seemed the favourite flavour for the swarm and is forced back into the transport and into a pair of pants. I manage to crush a few of our assailants with my right eye by blinking, and Sabrina, untouched by the swarm, disappears into the overgrowth following our guides Mike Carpenter and Nick Brennan of Red Rock Adventure. A smart move, and perhaps the only way to escape.

The bush swallows each of us in turn as we make our way deeper into the claustrophobic maze of branches and overgrowth. Room to move is minimal and I navigate through touch and sound, following the rustling of my group ahead and feeling the natural pathways in the mud. My anxiety skyrockets as I envision doing battle with the land every step along the path. There's no way I can manage if the whole trail is like this. Thoughts of quitting race through my mind: I'm not prepared for this.

And then, very suddenly, the chaos of branches gives way and I find myself standing face to face with a lush emerald paradise. Lichen sprawls forth, covering every inch of the ground and the trees clear to a natural pathway. I manage to distil the moment into the only word that seems fitting: wow.

The landscape shifts slowly and dramatically as we move further along the path, and each day offers new challenges and breathtaking scenery: from intense, 60-degree vertical inclines that push us up 300-metre switchbacks, to rocky seaweed-covered ocean floor (when the tide is out) and dirt paths that slice through the sprawling green carpets of lichen and moss. All of this, amid a landscape where the weather shifts almost as dramatically as the undulating topography. Every bit of progress along the path is hard-earned, but as we

continue a natural symbiosis begins to develop as our comfort with the terrain grows. And with comfort comes conversation.

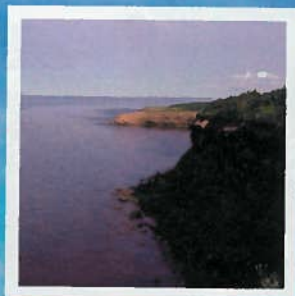
“What's your favourite movie?” Guy calls to me as we make our way down a nearly 90-degree switchback covered in soft mud.

“Tough question, but *Aliens*,” I reply.

“That's a good one, have you ever...”

And then, just as the last syllable leaves his mouth, my body begins to move in a very strange way. I feel the bit of ground which my right leg is resting on start to tremble, while the ground my left leg is on remains in place. This precarious footing causes me to instinctively fling myself on my arse, and as I begin sliding down the loose mud my pants fill with a combination of dirt and rocks (though they could have been filled with something worse). After coming to a rest I nod and smile at Guy in response to his question, which I was no longer sure he even remembered asking.

As night falls over us and we make camp along the Footpath, the sky fills with the blackest, inkiest sort of darkness. The view of the stars is unbelievable; Fundy National Park is actually a designated Dark Sky Preserve, meaning it's one of the best places to explore the night sky in Canada. Camp becomes at once a place to be completely enveloped in the celestial beauty of the Maritimes, and a place for each of us to come to know each other. We discuss our jobs, ideas and inspirations, and how difficult it would normally be to plan such a multi-day trek in this region. I can say without doubt that we all shared a feeling of gratitude toward our guides Mike and Nick, who had done all the planning and prep work. Mike and Nick are fully certified Red Cross Wilderness and Remote First Responders, as well as logistics wizards, fantastic field cooks and all around awesome people.



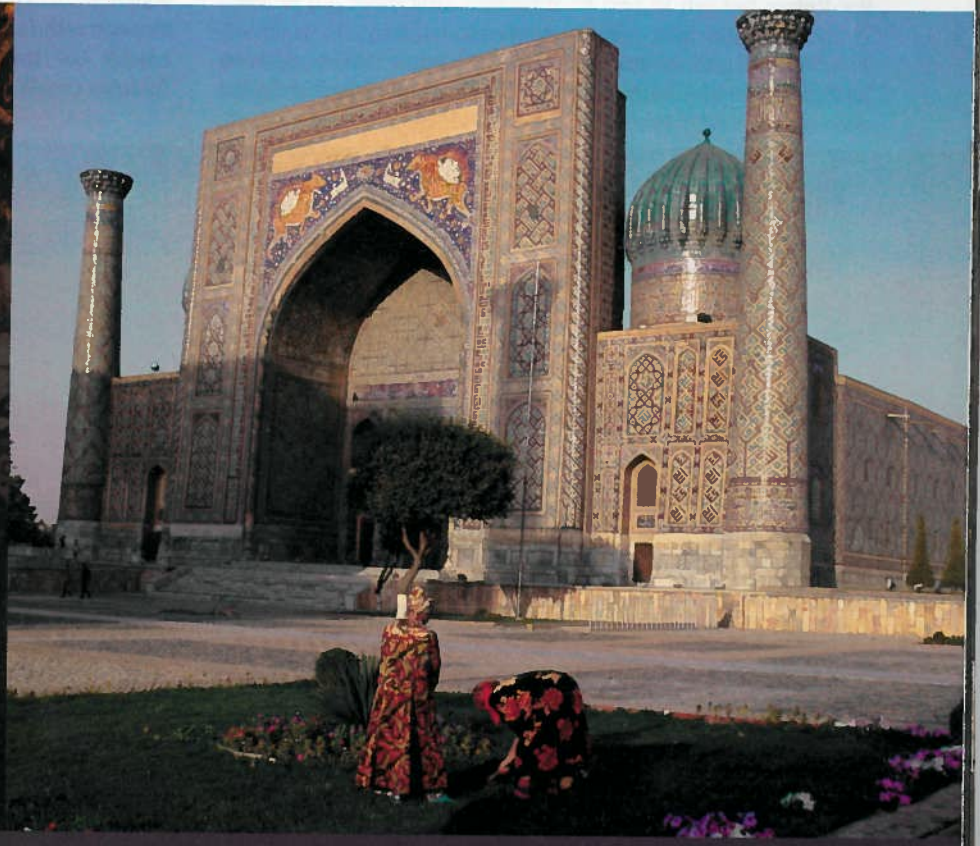
“The landscape begins to wash away all introspection and need for conversation, and replaces them with a silent sort of awe and appreciation.”

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OUR AUTHOR AND HIS TRAVELLING COMPANIONS GET READY TO HEAD OUT ACROSS CONFEDERATION TRAIL

Knowing they would be guiding us through the Footpath helped eliminate some of the anxiety that can come with a multiday trek over unfamiliar terrain. Nick can also manually disassemble a lobster with the finesse of a surgeon.

Travelling with a group of strangers on a trip that requires intense physical effort for a sustained period has an uncanny ability to melt away differences and bring people together very quickly. It's a wonderful addition to the experience to come away feeling as if you've made some incredibly deep connections in such a short time.

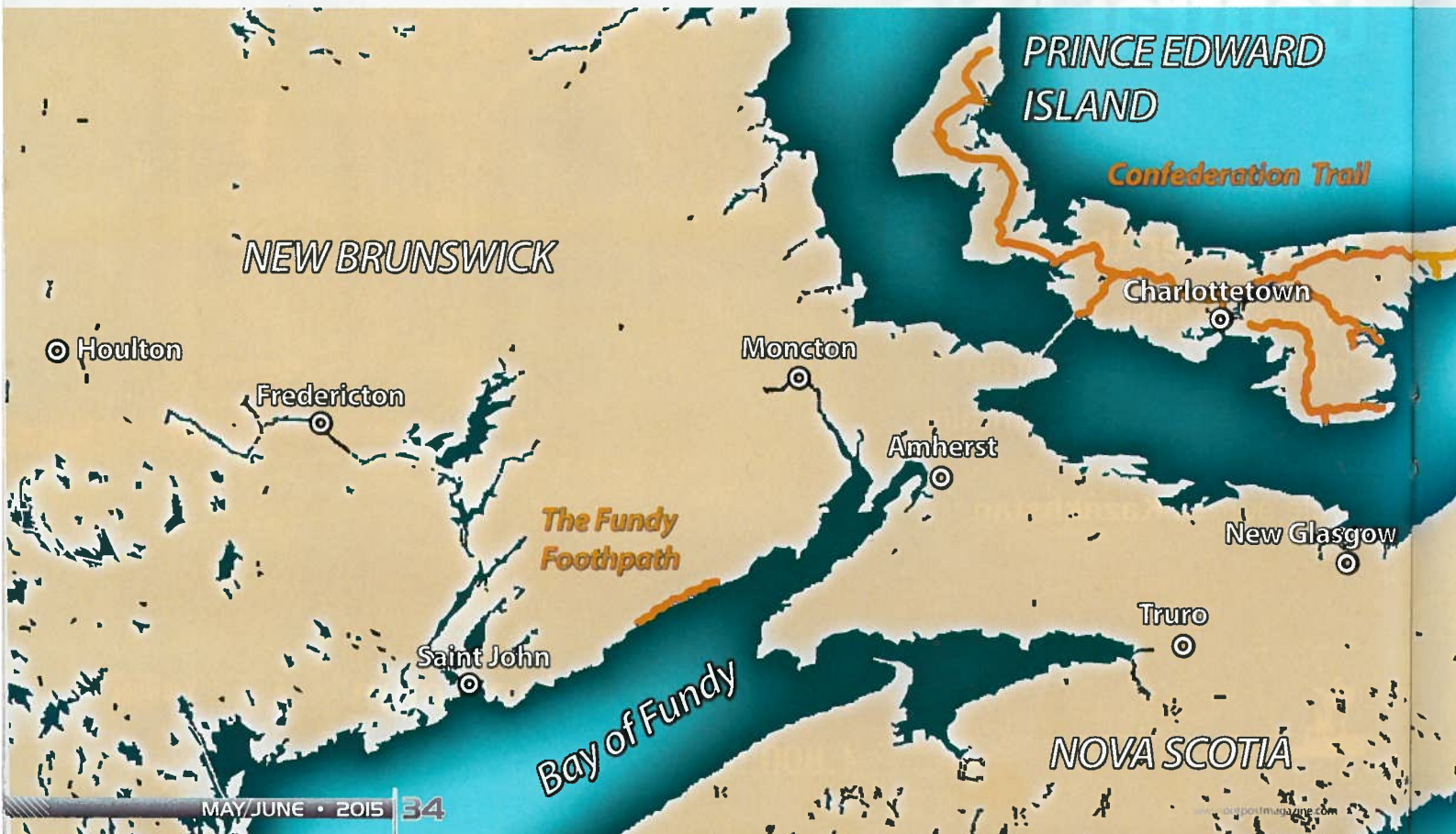
Our hike along the Fundy Footpath ends with aching legs and sore backs. We have, together, managed to complete the trek.

• • •

The second part of my Maritime adventure takes us even further east—to Charlottetown, the heart of Prince Edward

Island. We arrived on the sesquicentennial of the 1864 Charlottetown Conference and the city is alive and crackling with a ferocious energy. The whole place pulses with life as people everywhere prepare for an epic celebration of the moment when Canada took those first steps from concept to nationhood. Everywhere was glorious, and the Maple Leaf was in no shortage of reverence.

But we were here to cycle. Celebration would have to wait. After spending the night in Charlottetown, we were off at the crack of noon to pick up our gear and start our journey along the Confederation Trail, a former railroad line that was abandoned in 1989 and is now a 410-kilometre shared-use walking-cycling trail that spans most of the province. Winding through lush farmland, backcountry roads and along rivers and creeks, the trail lets you experience some really incredible Atlantic Coast scenery.



Again we were off in an excited frenzy, pedalling in ever-shifting formations and chattering away about our favourite movies. Sabrina leads our group most of the time, her fitness and technique are no doubt the result of her varied long-distance cycling experiences. I'm by no means a professional cyclist or very fit (yet not unfit either), but cycling in tow behind someone who is really good has the interesting effect of pushing me to pedal harder and faster. I want, if even for a few moments, to be at the head of the group. I decide to try and push myself ahead of Sabrina, and muster everything in me to pedal with a fury the likes of which I had no idea I was capable of. With raw power and determination as my allies I narrow the gap between her and myself, and for a moment feel as if this is it, my time to pull ahead—until my near victory fades as Sabrina effortlessly glides past me into the distance. She is a machine.

As we continue to cycle I start to notice an interesting pattern among the group, as bouts of chatter give way to absolute silence. Then more chatter. Then more silence. The scenery is slowly overwhelming our senses, creating a sort of hypnotizing effect. The landscape begins to wash away all introspection and need for conversation, and replaces them with a silent sort of awe and appreciation.

Only the sudden click of shifting gears snaps me from my trance. Where was I? How long had I been cycling?

Turns out, you can easily lose track of your place (which I did), so much so that sometimes you also get lost (which we did). But this was a self-guided tour, and so I like to consider our getting lost as an added opportunity to explore the Confederation Trail for 20 kilometres in the wrong direction.

Regardless, there's something truly unique about the pace of travel by bike. At once, it allows you to go great distances without going so fast that you feel as if you've missed something. What's more, our route was researched by World Expeditions and so we had countless opportunities to explore

without truly feeling lost. Our cycling trip ended in a similar fashion to our Fundy trek: with a fierce-smelling car ride back to our accommodations for a quick shower and well deserved bottle of Schooner.

There is an undeniable beauty to Canada's Maritimes, and portions of it need you to go deep into its most remote and difficult-to-access regions, to travel long distances across very diverse terrain to find some of its hidden wonders that can be easily missed.

The thought of planning a physically demanding trip in a remote area can sometimes be an anxiety-inducing thought for beginners. Sometimes anxiety can be felt even by experienced adventure travellers! But there are ways to do it without having to worry about planning or organizing. And while some people relish the organizational aspects of travel, I am oft-times inclined to let those matters be in the hands of others so I might focus on enjoying the aesthetics, the physical demands and social interactions of travel, which is what really matters to me. 🌐

Daniel Puiatti is Outpost's Online Editor and a novice lobster aficionado who travels regularly (and gratefully) for his job.



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