



Dark Harbour, on Grand Manan Island, is popular for seaweed harvesting (and weir fishing). Sarah Heckles of Brighton, left, and Judy Woolridge, who lives on the island, harvest dulse, a seaweed that is made into seasoning and exported worldwide. The coast is a hiker's dream — and a workout in watching your step.



GLOBE PHOTOS/KARI J. BODNARCHUK

Canadian island and its lives rest on seaweed

By Kari J. Bodnarchuk
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

GRAND MANAN ISLAND, New Brunswick — The eerie bel-
lowing of a nearby foghorn punc-
tuated the night air, cutting
through the mist and echoing off
an island less than a mile away. We
slipped on oversized rubber boots that
reached our knees, rolled up
our sleeves, and began digging our
hands into the thick purple sea-
weed, pulling it free from the slip-
pery rocks and dumping it into an
orange laundry basket.

If you go . . .

How to get there
Grand Manan is about 360 miles from
Boston, about a 6½-hour drive. From
Boston, take Interstate 93 north to
Interstate 95 north for about 230
miles. Pick up Route 395 east, follow-
ing signs for Route 9, and take Route 9
for about 90 miles to the Canadian
border at Calais, Maine. From Calais,
take Route 1 north to Route 776 to
Blacks Harbour.
Coastal Transport
506-662-3724
www.coastaltransport.ca
Runs numerous 90-minute car ferries
between Blacks Harbour on the
mainland and Grand Manan each day;
\$8 per person, \$24 per vehicle.

Where to stay
Shorecrest Lodge
100 Route 776
506-662-3216
www.shorecrestlodge.com
Run by two super-friendly, former Cape
Cod residents, Guenther Bogensperger
and Evelyn Paine. Ten rooms, \$60-
\$95.
Swallowtail Inn
50 Lighthouse Road
North Head
506-662-1100
www.swallowtailinn.com
On the tip of North Head Peninsula. Six
rooms with fabulous ocean views,
though sleeping can be a challenge if
the fog rolls in: Swallowtail Lighthouse
(and its very effective foghorn) sits just
several hundred feet away. Rooms
\$55-\$100.

Where to eat
**Inn at Whale Cove Lodge and
Cottages**
26 Whale Cove Cottage Road
506-662-3181
www.holidayjunction.com
A small and cozy inn near the north
end of the island. Seared scallops,
lamb curry, and chicken and fiddlehead
crepes are highlights. Daily 6-8 p.m..
Entrees \$11-\$20. Reservations
required.
McLaughlin's Wharf Inn
1863 Route 776
Seal Cove
506-662-8760
On the water and open for dinner daily
5:30-8 p.m. in summer. Extensive
selection of seafood dishes, plus a few
steak, chicken, and pasta meals. Try
the curried squash soup. Fantastic
bread made daily. Entrees \$9.50-
\$17.50. Reservations required.

What to do
Adventure High
83 Route 776
North Head
800-732-5492
www.adventurehigh.com
Three- to six-hour sea kayaking trips,
plus two-hour sunset tours and moon-
light paddles. Two-hour trip \$31 per
person, day trip \$79 per person.
Cycling, too.
Whales-n-Sails Adventures
888-994-4044
www.whales-n-sails.com
Whale-watching trips twice a day
(11:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m.) from
North Head aboard a 56-foot sailboat.
Adults \$52, children \$32.
Grand Manan Museum
1143 Route 776
506-662-3424
www.grandmananmuseum.ca
Houses the Grand Manan Visitors
Information Centre, and offers in-
formation on local birds, history, and
wildlife. Monday-Friday in September,
9 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Free; donations
accepted.
More information
Grand Manan Tourism Association
888-525-1655
www.grandmananmb.com

When the basket was full, we
dumped its slithery contents into
the back of Reid Ross's pickup
truck, which was angled so that its
headlights lit up the field of sea-
weed around us.
We were on an island we had
reached over a sandbar at low tide,
off the east coast of Grand Manan
Island in New Brunswick, and one
thing was certain: This was no or-
dinary Friday night for my friend
Sarah and me, Bostonians both.
“We come out here every day,”
said Ross, 39, a lifelong resident of
Grand Manan, who has been har-
vesting seaweed since he was 16.
“Or twice a day when the tides
are right,” said his friend Judy
Woolridge, who was showing us
how to identify and extract the
dulse, a local seaweed that is dark-
er, thicker, and more flavorful
than other varieties and, thus, bet-
ter quality. “This is one of the best
places to find dulse.”
Grand Manan considers itself
the “dulse capital of the world”
and residents earn their living by
hand-picking the edible seaweed
at low tide, drying it on fields of
beach rocks, then selling it to a lo-
cal cooperative, which ships it
around the world.

According to Woolridge, this
“sea vegetable” can be eaten right
out of the bag as a crunchy snack,
ground into flakes and used as sea-
soning in soups, salads, or pasta,
or dry-roasted in a skillet and eat-
en. I am a fan of seaweed spa treat-
ments and enjoy a hint of the spice
in certain meals, but what piqued
my interest in this local industry
was the act of harvesting seaweed.
Last summer, Sarah and I took
a road trip from Boston to New
Brunswick and spent a week ex-
ploring the province's east coast:
biking coastal trails, kayaking
around barrier islands in a nation-
al park, visiting the Acadian Pen-
insula for an annual French Acadi-
an festival, and stopping on Grand
Manan to try our hands at dulsing.

Although Grand Manan be-
longs to New Brunswick, it's just 8
miles off the coast of Maine (and
about 21 miles from the Canada
mainland) and is accessible from
Eastport, Maine, by way of Deer
Island, Campobello Island, (home
of Franklin and Eleanor Roose-
velt's rustic 34-room summer cot-
tage), and Letete in southern New
Brunswick. Alternatively, it's just a
6-hour drive from Boston to
Blacks Harbour on the province's
south coast, where you can catch a
90-minute ferry ride to the island.
That's what we did.
Grand Manan is 15 miles long
by 6 miles wide. The rugged west
coast is dominated by cliffs that
rise to 400 feet, rocky beaches
with driftwood the size of tele-
phone poles, and a few small set-
tlements. The east coast has gen-



ter terrain and a majority of the
island's roads and settlements.
Here, the land is scalloped with
coves, harbors, and pebbly beach-
es protected by nearly two dozen
islands sprinkled off the coast.

Many of the 2,800 residents on
the island know each other either
by face or name, or at least know
one another's business.
“If you haven't heard a rumor
by 10 o'clock, start one,” quipped a
local man.

“It's a very simple life,” said
Guenther Bogensperger, who had
moved from Cape Cod five months
earlier to run the Shorecrest
Lodge, where we were staying
“People don't need or want a lot.”
True to island style, Bogen-
sperger set aside his daily errands
to show us some of the highlights:
Swallowtail Lighthouse on the
cliffs of North Head, a deer farm, a
lobster pound, herring weirs
(round fishing traps that poke out
of the water and are visible in
coves and inlets around the is-
land), the Sardine Museum in Seal
Cove (Grand Manan is also the
self-proclaimed “herring capital of
the world”), and, of course, the lo-
cal dulsing grounds.

Tourists usually come here for
reasons other than harvesting sea-
weed. Forty-three miles of marked
hiking trails wind along the cliffs,
cut through the island's forested
interior, and meander along the
flatter east coast. The sea kayak-
ing, too, is unbeatable, if challeng-
ing: The area has 27-to-30-foot
tides (some of the highest in the
world), water temperatures
around 47 degrees, and fog that
can roll in fast, so choosing a repu-
table guide or outfitter is essential.

Grand Manan is a top bird-
and whale-watching spot. More than
1,000 birds — as many as 230 spe-
cies — nest on the island, and you
have a good chance of seeing puff-
ins, razorbills, cormorants, eag-
les, ospreys, and peregrine fal-
cons. Whale-watching by sailboat
is popular, and minkes, finbacks,
humpbacks, and Northern right
whales are common.



The island, once the summer
home of novelist Willa Cather, is
also home to artists' galleries, sev-
eral small museums, and shops
that sell local crafts and trinkets.

The Grand Manan tourist of-
fice doesn't officially market “sea-
weed harvesting” for tourists, but
the dulsers we met seemed to wel-
come anyone who was interested
in helping or simply watching and
asking questions.

We met Ross and Woolridge at
the dulsing grounds, a large field
in the middle of the island blan-
ketted in beach rocks and covered
with netting to keep the dulse
from sticking. They showed us the
art of spreading out the dulse to
dry. Some people shake their
hands up and down to loosen the
seaweed and let it fall freely; oth-
ers toss clumps of it to the ground
as if dealing cards. Each dulsder de-
velops a personal style.

Sarah and I had little finesse at
first — our rows were clumpy —
but we eventually got the hang of
it. Later, once the dulse had dried,
Woolridge, Ross, and Wilbur In-
gersoll, another local dulsder,
showed us how to flip the long
rows of dried seaweed. This re-
quired a long pole with a piece of
rope attached to each end. We
rolled the dulse around the pole,
like dough around a rolling pin,
then flipped it over and unrolled
it. Once the other side was dry —
probably the next day, after we
had left — they would come back,
roll up the dulse, bundle it, and
drop it at the cooperative, which
pays them about \$2 per pound.

As a parting gift, Woolridge
and Ross gave us armloads of
dried dulse and Bogensperger
used his vacuum-packing machine
to hermetically seal it for us — a
good 40 baggies of seaweed.

Contact Kari Bodnarchuk, a
freelance writer who lives in
Somerville, at ekarib@yahoo.com.

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