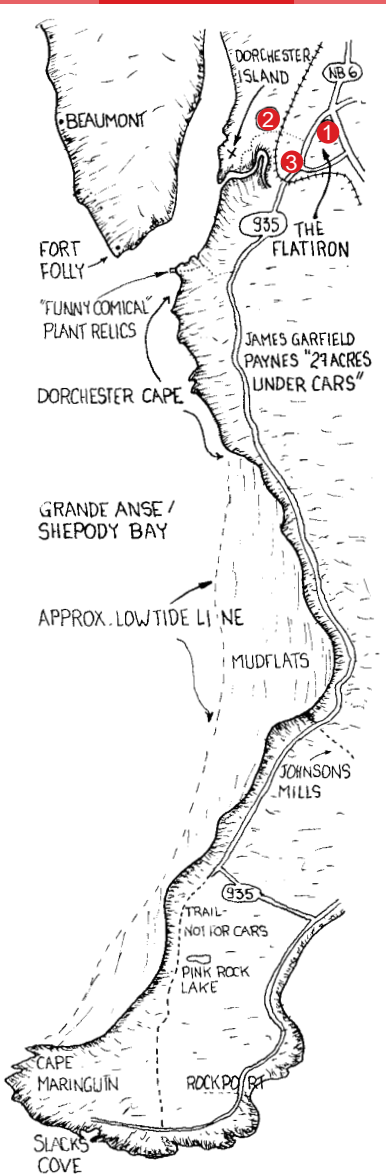




Touring Tantramar series no. 11

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Bucks Flats at Johnsons Mills



TANTRAMAR
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Around the Cape part 1

Dorchester Cape to Rockport

"History, history, history," my father used to say, in peevish moments, when the incessant Sackville winds made him edgy; "That's all they've got in the Maritimes, history." Well yes. And this jaunt takes you around Dorchester Cape, where that commodity lies densely packed.

Take N.B. route 6 either from Moncton or from Sackville; drive to the village of Dorchester and turn South at the Bell Inn (no. 1 on the map) in the centre of town. The Inn itself, built in 1811 of stone quarried in its own back yard, is the oldest stone building in the province. One km past the Inn, just before a low fire hydrant at the right curb, turn right onto a lane which leads downhill onto the Marsh. Just past the railway tracks, on your right, (no. 2 on the map) a jumble of huge quarried grindstones marks the site of a former dressing works where these grindstones were turned to their final shape 60 years ago. A line of trees on the left traces out the railway spur along which the stones were shipped to the wharf at Dorchester Island. The marsh road continues to the foot of Dorchester Island and the mouth of Palmer's Creek where a derelict lobster boat is beached. From here, you can drive quite a distance along the top of the dyke, a sport which should not be practised by the fainthearted.

Back up on the main road, go right 0.2 km to no. 3. Turn left onto Water Street to loop around "the flatiron" and see more of those immense old houses from the days of sail and prosperity when Westmorland and Albert were still one single county with Dorchester as its shiretown.

The right leg of the junction at 3 takes you now along the Cape road (NB 935). Four km past the junction, just after the Atlantic Industries plant on your left, a dirt road on the right leads to a comparatively recent industrial ruin — the celebrated "Fundy Chemical Plant," known locally as the "Funny Comical Plant." Here, an explosives and fertilizer complex was built with massive government aid in the mid 1960's, its specially designed floating wharf touted as a technological marvel until the day it broke loose and floated away with the tide. The industries

themselves drifted off soon after. Near the wharf, where locals fish mud shark (dogfish), one immense galvanized covered warehouse still stands, gaping, empty, its metal plates banging in the wind in testimony to governmental hubris. You used to be able to drive onto the wharf but recent winter tides have cut the road; be careful. It's undermined and dangerous.

Another 1.3 km past the road to the comical plant you may encounter another local legend, graduate mechanical engineer James Garfield "Gary" Payne in his auto salvage yard. During a recent stay in Germany I often gave slide shows on the Maritime Provinces. Nothing I showed got such astonished gasps as the sight of all those derelict cars on the hillside. This was completely beyond their imagining. I have no doubt that if any did come to the area, Gary was on their itinerary. Sadly, the era of political correctness and nature police does not favour characters like Gary. Local improvers consider him unsightly, unruly, unmanageable and through such pressure the yard may not be there much longer. Which is a shame. The world should be big enough to accommodate people like James Garfield Payne. That it isn't, diminishes it for all of us.

Just past Gary Payne's, Route 935 begins a long slope downhill off Dorchester Cape. Here, you'll see the extensive Grande Anse mudflats where, during low tides each August, millions of Semi-palmated Sandpipers congregate to feed, and hundreds of Tilley-hatted oiseauroyeurs congregate to watch them from the windows of their Volvos. Further on, a small bridge marks the approximate location of the former sawmilling village of Johnsons Mills, where a few remains of the Johnson sawmill can be seen upstream. Well holes and foundations in the woods mark the sites of houses now long gone.

At approximately 17 km from the Bell Inn, the starting point of this Around the Cape tour, Route 935 turns sharply left to cross the peninsula to Upper Rockport, and to the East side of the Bay which is the subject of Around the Cape Part 2.