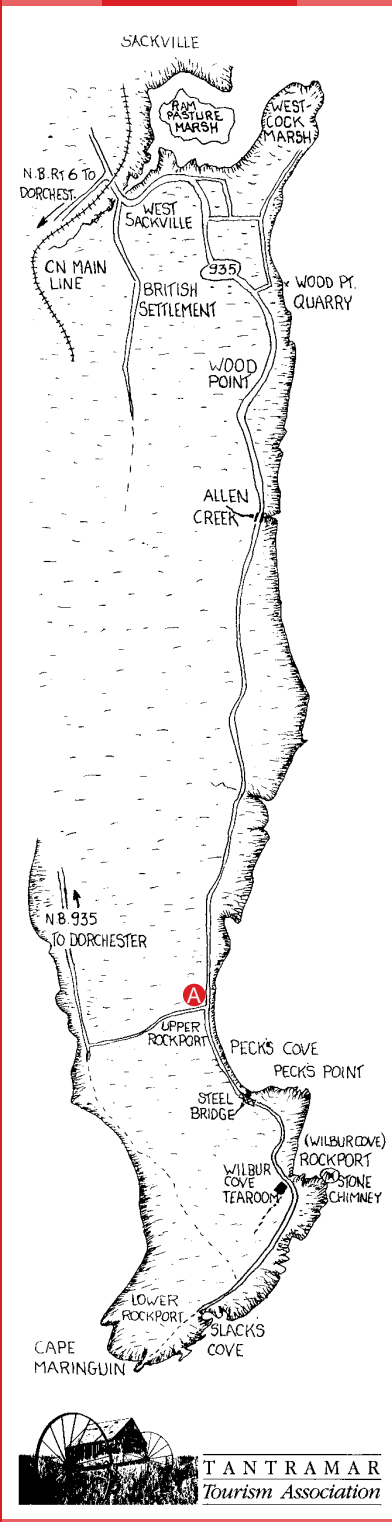




Touring Tantramar series no. 12

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hans durstling's off-roading in tantramar

Around the Cape part 2

Rockport to Sackville

Probably more bad poetry has been written about Rockport than any other location save the Parthenon. This is due to the proximity of a small (very) liberal (so they say) arts college and the expansion of the professorial soul that comes with tenure and seeks relief in art. Most often it's verse. Sometimes watercolour and photography. But don't let that dissuade you.

Rockport owes its existence to the grindstone trade. The Seaman and Read families who operated the quarries at Joggins, Nova Scotia began working the sandstone reefs at Rockport, directly across the Bay, sometime around 1815. Thus settled from Joggins, Rockport is indicated on old maps as "Joggins Post Office." Stones were quarried out of the sandstone reefs at low tide. Once cut free, the rough stone was lashed between two boats and floated as high up the shore as possible for finishing. Later, a cofferdam was built across the mouth of Slack's Cove. In the 1860's the Westmorland Olive Freestone company employed some 100 workers at Rockport, making this a self contained community of several hundred souls that communicated with the rest of the world by water. There was no road to Sackville; this came much later.

From the "T" junction in Route 935 at Upper Rockport ("A" on the map), it's about 6.5 km to Slack's Cove, where the road ends at a small meadow overlooking the Cove. A path through the woods leads to Cape Maringuin at the tip of the peninsula. Bears have been sighted here, so make loud noises as you walk. En route to Slack's Cove, spontaneous local improvers have put up signs pointing out noteworthy sights. Look for the one reading "Stone Chimney Look-Out." It doesn't mean 'be careful' but rather 'look for the chimney'. The chimney in question is the 130 stone boiler stack from the stone works. It still stands after all these years at the tip of Ward Point, the next point ahead. You can get to the chimney along the shore from Rockport. Check out also the Wilbur Cove Tea Room run by Mrs. Edna MacDonald in a 150 year old house which once was the local post office. Mrs. MacDonald is a wellspring of local history, and in much greater detail than space permits here. For information on tearoom hours, call 379-9190. A path through the

woods back of the tiny, boarded up, former school house across from the Tearoom also leads to the stone chimney.

Heading back toward Sackville, the pavement starts again at Allen Creek where Marvin Snowdon, the last "real" fisherman along this side of the bay, tethers his boat in a channel which at low tide is only a trickle in the mud.

About 3 km past Allen Creek, a road to the right at the Wood Point Baptist Church leads to the extensive ruins of the Wood Point quarry. Park where the road makes a sharp left turn. A path from here leads to the quarry concealed amid a grove of trees at the water's edge. Much stone was shipped from here to Boston to ornament the partician brownstone houses of Back Bay. This was one of the last Tantramar quarries to close; the chimney ruin of its steam-powered dressing mill, scrapped during World War II, is still impressively massive today.

If you continue past the sharp left turn where you parked to explore the quarry, the road takes you onto and across the Westcock Marsh. You'll be driving along the top of the dyke, but it's even enough that you can do it in the family car. This was one of the earliest areas around Sackville to be settled. The present town centre only developed much later, thanks to the Intercolonial Railway. The creeks on the Westcock Marsh were active shipyards where sailing ships were built; wooden plings and other relics can still be seen in the creek bank mud.

The first Marsh road that leads down off the dyke, to your left, then takes you back to the upland and onto the intriguingly named "Old Hospital Loop Road." Here, New England settler Amos Botsford built his palatial brownstone home in 1792 and settled down to a genteel existence as a country squire, even, it is said, going to church in a coach with a retinue of servants. The Botsford house in time became a mariners' hospital, hence the name of the road. It still stood during WW II but was lost to fire shortly after. The rise of land at this "loop" was previously the site of an Acadian village; contemporary drawings done by soldiers stationed at Fort Beausejour across the Bay show Westcock dotted with Acadian houses.