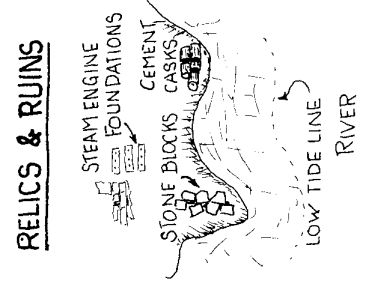
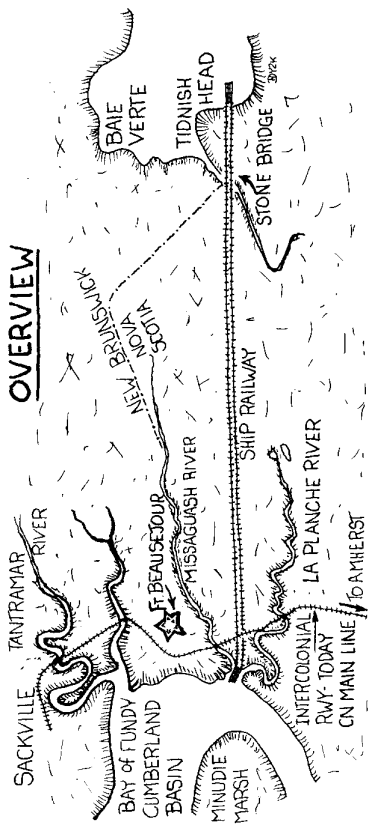




Touring Tantramar series no. 7

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Fort Beauséjour National Historic Site



hans durstling's off-roading in tantramar

Chignecto Ship Railway

Since many readers will be at least aware of that almost completed, late 19th century Maritime megaproject, the ship railway "canal" across the isthmus of Chignecto, I won't go into too many of the details here. For these, do check out Jay Underwood's book *Ketchum's Folly* — very well researched and a pleasure to read.

What people often don't realize, though, is that some impressive and intriguing ruins of this 100 year old engineering dream can still be seen. The dock at Tidnish Head is still prominently visible, as is the railway's graceful stone arch bridge across the Tidnish River. But to me the ruins at Fort Lawrence are the most intriguing, because they are more mysterious, less readily identifiable.

Here, at the mouth of the LaPlanche River, a massive holding basin more than 50 feet deep was gouged into Fundy mud, and lined with cut stone blocks from Wood Point, near Sackville. Five hundred feet long and 300 feet wide, this vast dock could hold six ships of 100 tons each. Banks of hydraulic hoists lined the basin, ten on each side, to lift the ships into a steel-wheeled cradle to be towed by locomotives along a double line of railway track running straight across the isthmus to Tidnish docks on the Northumberland Strait. The hydraulic hoist pumps were in turn driven by banks of steam engines whose stone foundations, with cusp shaped depressions cut into one end to accommodate the flywheel, rise incongruously out of the marsh.

How to get there: Take the TransCanada toward Amherst, Nova Scotia. Turn off at the Fort Lawrence, N.S. Tourist Information Centre (Exit 1A). Turn right (West) at the stop sign. Continue straight along the Fort Lawrence Road (the sign says "no exit") until you come to the one-lane railway bridge. Just past the bridge the pavement ends. At exactly 1 km after the railway bridge the marsh road makes a bend. On the West (Bay) side of the road you'll see a red metal gate into a pasture. This gate is exactly on what was once the

ship railway trackbed. A five minute walk along the trackbed into the pasture will take you to the ruins. But it is a private pasture so you should enquire. Leave room for farm vehicles when you park. You can also cross the fence at "X" on the map in a walk which takes you past numerous building foundations.

Look for the headland where the large stone blocks lie piled. Here, a muddy embankment constitutes the only trace of that immense stone lined raising basin. Look carefully and you'll see all sorts of industrial artifacts from galvanized square nails to remnants of coal stockpiles overgrown with grass. Note, in particular, the curiously stacked white stone "barrells." Once these were, indeed, cement in wooden casks. Over time, the cement set, and the barrells rotted away, leaving pyramided casts of casks still bearing the imprint of their wooden staves.

Two final notes: On your right, just before you get to the one-lane railway bridge (marked "FL" on the map below) is the site of Fort Lawrence from which the attack on Fort Beausejour was launched. Also, the museum at Fort Beausejour has an interesting display on the ship railway canal. You can get Jay Underwood's book there, too.

