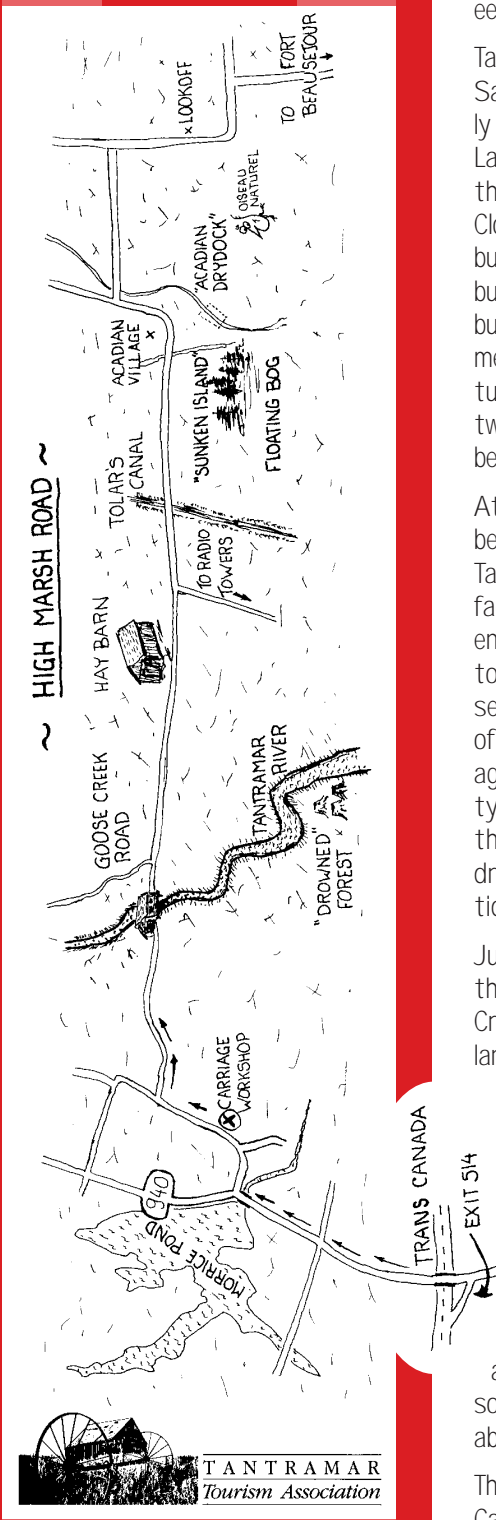




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no. 10

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## hans durstling's off-roading in tantramar

# High Marsh Road

Crossing the Tantramar Marsh via the High Marsh Road is among the most rewarding local drives both for history and natural beauty. Try it by moonlight on a summer night with the bay fog blowing across the marsh; it's downright eerie.

Take exit 514 off the TransCanada to Middle Sackville, go North 2.4 km to Silver Lake, formerly known as Morrice Mill Pond, turn right at the Lake, swing past the church, turn left. Just on the right you'll see the old carriage workshop. Closed in 1949, everything was just left in the building, tools and all, in full working condition but unused for over 40 years. The restored building will likely open to the public in the summer of 2001. Drive just under 1 km further and turn right onto the High Marsh Road. The yellow two-storey house immediately on your left is believed to be on the site of an Acadian church.

At the edge of the upland, to your left just before the covered bridge across the Tantramar River, 3,000 year old indian artifacts have been found, suggesting a likely encampment site. Downstream, about halfway to the TransCanada, thick tree trunks can be seen in the river bottom below about 25 feet of tidal mud. These grew about 2,500 years ago; the soil trapped between their roots is typical upland forest soil, indicating that the land here is gradually sinking. A similar drowned forest can be seen at maximum low tides just offshore of Fort Beausejour.

Just past the bridge, on the left (North) side, the narrow marsh road leading along Goose Creek to the village of Midgis is already shown in land grant maps dating back to 1790. The High Marsh Road dates back at least 250 years.

The Marsh is probably best known for its post-and-beam hay barns. From well before the turn of the century, and on to the Great Depression, marsh hay was exported internationally. Growing on salt marsh, it was particularly high in iodine, hence in demand by racing stables before the age of additives. A 1944 aerial photograph shows some 400 hay barns dotting the marsh; only about 30 remain today.

The road to the right leading to the Radio Canada International shortwave towers is shown on maps from the 1840s. About 1/2 km

past this road, you'll cross a small culvert over "Tolar's Canal". Many such "canals" were dug in the 1800's in the process of reclaiming the marsh. Back then, undyked areas were entirely tidal. Lakes and bogs lay inland beyond the tidal zone. The "canals" brought in salt water which killed the bog moss and floated it out to the bay; likewise the tidewater brought in its load of sediment to gradually raise the soil level.

As you near the pronounced left curve by the power lines, on your right (South side) look for the low stand of trees which marks "Sunken Island," a 1,000 acre floating bog of waterlogged moss growing like a living sponge. You can feel it quake as you walk on it, it feels like walking on jello. But be careful. Your feet can slip through the surface carpet of living moss and shoot you down into coffee colored watery mush below.

A little further on, where the road crosses the brook, and again on the South side, a curious box-like structure of raised earth was long known as the "Acadian drydock". More likely it's simply the remains of an old aboideau, a sluice structure with a one-way gate to keep out the tide. On the opposite side of the road an old Acadian village stood, probably a more or less temporary settlement to house the people displaced from other areas by the conflicts which led to the expulsion of 1755.

Just beyond the curve where the village stood, take the right turnoff crossing a depression where what is left of the Aulac River flows. Before dyking, this was a major tidal river. This road now takes you uphill onto the Aulac Ridge, which, like several other ridges in the area, is due to the presence of underground salt domes. These, being lighter than the surrounding rock, and also elastic, push slowly upward like gigantic underground balloons, bulging the rocks above.

From the lookoff point at the crest of the ridge you get a magnificent view westward across the marsh. Continue, and take either the first road to the right, which is the Etter Ridge Road, or the second, which is highway 16 coming from PEI. Both lead back to the TransCanada.

Tantramar is derived from the French "tintamarre" a din or hubbub, supposedly referring to the noise made by the many marsh birds. At circa 100,000 acres, the Tantramar marshes constitute the largest area of dyked marsh in North America.