

Exploring McNabs Island

This 372-hectare, forested island, alive
With osprey, demands cautious ambling. Open shafts, wells, and downed trees connive
To imperil the unperceiving. Nor should one tramp about ospreys' nesting
Quarters! Do heed their cries, and quit the site, lest Stuka-gulls stalk, dive, wresting
Free eggs, gobbling their yolked young. Berry-picking and birding are popular
Pursuits. Don monacle for one; for the next, dangle binocular.
Picnic in between. Then, eye beach, salt marsh, woods, fields, and the Teahouse lawn,
Fort Ives, Fort McNab, Maughers Beach, Wreck Cove, Ives Cove, Timmins Cove, Pier Garrison,
Old Military Road, Garrison Road, Detention Barracks Road, Forsythe
Street, Lynch Road, Findlay's (Woolnough's) Pleasure Grounds—although you might desire a scythe
To make hay (if visiting in June, July, or August). The Findlay Farm—
Out on Farrant Road past Findlays Brook Bridge—was where soda pop (cool for warm
Noons) got bottled by A.J. Davis a century back. Mr. Perrin's
Victorian botanical gardens are now wildflowers; a Teahouse (since
1983), all stone, rears from the Hugonin-Perrin household ruins,
And fields a spell-binding vista of Halifax Harbour. Breech-loading guns
Rendered Fort McNab's marine fortifications original, unique,
Circa 1892. Check it out. But do be careful where you peek:
The fort's abandoned; a park; but curiously injurious still. One must-see?
Not morbid, but haunting, aye, is the McNab Family Cemetery.
This mini-Stonehenge of bleached headstones makes McNabs a version of Easter
Island, save that one must imagine each long-vanished face, each lost feature....
But, then, countless are the dead; too many those who perished, caged in quarantine,
Due to cholera; or breathed their last on Hangmans Beach, a noose snapping the spine....
Try Wambolt Trail, the Rifle Range Trail, the Culliton Farm Trail, and stray by
World War II-vintage, anti-aircraft artillery (*not* distillery). The sky
Is strafed no more by searchlights. But do wander—patrol—Searchlight Road and Trail,
Or drift down the Cliff Trail or Colin Stewart Trail. Observe sand dunes, but don't fail
To travel well-trodden paths, to preserve the beach. Do veer through Japanese
Knotweed, where it appears, and perambulate Howe Street, Old House Lane.... The breeze
Is bracing at Ives Cove and the marsh shore. Best stroll solo Hermits Trail, eh?!!
But don't neglect Lighthouse Road! (Even landlubbers need an enlightened way!)
Marking but a few landmarks of McNabs, these 18-syllables-per-line
Still but skim and scratch the surface of what the Island presents—by design
Of Glooscap. There's too much to see! Not to mention *History* visible
Only in books—such as Thomas Raddall's romances (inevitable
For perusal). Nevertheless, the supreme, isle adventure, *mes amis*,
Is a park tour guided by the Friends of McNabs Island Society.

--George Elliott Clarke

7th Parliamentary Poet Laureate (2016-17)