



Publishers' Diary: Tour of Manitoulin Island

By Gloria Hildebrandt Photos by Mike Davis

In June Mike and I were given a two-day group tour of Manitoulin Island by Manitoulin Tourism Association and Great Spirit Circle Trail. It was a fully packed schedule that took us from east to west and north to south on the island, seeing towns, tourist attractions, wonders of nature and meeting many people with a love and great knowledge of their island. Here are some personal highlights of the tour.

▲ The Heritage Swing Bridge that joins Little Current to the mainland gave us a display. The bridge will have its 100th anniversary in 2013.

Wikwemikong

Much of the eastern end of Manitoulin belongs to the First Nation of Wikwemikong, who never entered a treaty giving away rights to their land. They welcome tourists, and have a Historical Plaque Tour of 10 plaques at four sites. They have also recently completed Bebamikawe Memorial Trail, a 14-km walking trail without steep inclines, that leads to three lookout decks. They offer powwows, canoe trips, teepee camping and more, as a way to experience their cultural heritage.

Heritage Swing Bridge

Next year will be the 100th anniversary of Little Current's heritage swing bridge that connects the island to the mainland. And just for our group, the bridge made an unscheduled swing.

Great Spirit Circle Trail

In the palisaded yard behind the offices of Great Spirit Circle Trail, we were treated to fascinating First Nations culture. We were welcomed by men singing and drumming on hand drums, and sat around the turtle fire pit to learn about the "voice of the drum." Then we were invited to move among stations set up to display aspects of their culture. Most popular was the chance to taste Native food like bannock and berries, which was delicious, cedar tea, whose strong peaty taste was favoured by the men in our group, mint tea, more palatable to the ladies, and garden herb salad with an exceptional sweet onion sauce.

We also saw the crafting of dream catchers and medicine pouches, entered a birchbark wigwam, and inspected a large teepee set up for "glamping" or glamour camping. A quilt-covered double bed on a hardwood floor with a fur rug would not mean roughing it in the bush.





▲ Members of Great Spirit Circle Trail gave a traditional drumming welcome as our group entered their palisaded yard.



▲ Who knew that a teepee could be so luxurious? Great Spirit Circle Trail offers "glamping," or glamorous camping.



▲ Uncle Steve's Park & Cabins offers basic cottages and room for RVs on a sandy stretch of Lake Manitou.

Uncle Steve's Park & Cabins

For us, accommodation was in a lakefront cottage in family-friendly Uncle Steve's Park & Cabins.

Perivale Gallery

Located in a lovely woods north of Spring Bay on Lake Kagawong, Perivale Gallery displays works by artists in a variety of media. They are the exclusive gallery on

Manitoulin for landscape painter Ivan Wheale.

Gore Bay Farmers' Market

Fresh baking, early spring produce, bedding plants and crafts were for sale at the Farmers' Market in Gore Bay, in the pretty waterfront park.

Zhiibaahaasing First Nation

Mike and I had attended a powwow here last year, so we were familiar

with the community park, but we learned that the wooden drum, peace pipe and dream catcher on permanent outdoor display are the largest in the world.

Misery Bay

Misery Bay Nature Reserve on the south side of the island protects an alvar, a globally endangered habitat that is a flat landscape on limestone or dolostone bedrock. It is home

to the rare Blanding's Turtle. Mike left the tour group to hike to the shore and take photographs. A new Visitors Centre contains plenty of interpretive displays.

Hunger Satisfied

Delicious, generous meals on the tour were provided by the newly completed Rainbow Ridge Golf Course, Abby's





◀ Mike noticed this Blanding's Turtle, a rare and threatened species, on a driveway near the North Channel of Manitoulin Island. This is the 60th species that Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy counts as being protected on their properties.

Family Restaurant, where we saw a square dancing presentation, Meldrum Bay Inn at the sunny, breezy, beautiful west end of the island, and among gorgeous flowers, bird and bees, Garden's Gate Family Restaurant.

Blanding's Turtle

A memorable highlight was coming upon a large turtle on a driveway at the shore of the North Channel. About the size of a Painted Turtle, it had an oval instead of a round shell and didn't have the coloured lines circling the shell. Mike took photos and the turtle was watchful but unafraid as Mike got increasingly close. Back home, we were able to identify it as a Blanding's Turtle.

The turtle was on property protected by Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy (EBC) so we informed executive director Bob Barnett. EBC's environmental biologist confirmed that the photo was indeed of a Blanding's Turtle.

"Very exciting!" says Barnett. "Blanding's Turtle is now deemed a threatened species in the province, found on a very limited number of sites. Data on sightings is being tracked by the Ministry of Natural Resources."

EBC has much to be proud of, as this is the 60th rare or endangered species found on their 114 conservation properties. Mike did well, too, in spotting the turtle and getting good photos for identification. **EV**





◀ Shannon McMullan in Perivale Gallery



◀ Misery Bay at the south shore of Manitoulin Island protects very rare alvar habitat. This view is along Wolf Den Trail.

John Diebolt serving dinner in Garden's Gate Restaurant.
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