

McNabs fall fun

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If you want to get away from it all, step back in time and enjoy some spectacular fall colours, look no further than the annual McNabs Island annual fall foliage tour.

On Oct. 14 members of the public are invited to participate in guided history and nature tours on the island.

"Fall is a good time to come, especially for people who wanted to get to McNabs during the summer but didn't," said Cathy McCarthy, president of the Friends of McNabs Island Society.

The society has been hosting an annual fall foliage tour for about 20 years. Last year, the event sold out so extra tours have been added.

"I would consider it Halifax's best kept secret. The first thing all cruise ships coming into Halifax see us McNabs and the lighthouse there," McCarthy said. "It's in the harbour and a short distance, but requires a bit of planning to get there."

Since a boat is needed to access the island, the society charters Murphy's on the Water to bring passengers from Halifax and Eastern Passage over to McNabs Island.

"McNabs has a series of trails that meander through the island and go from one historical feature to another and travel through several natural elements," McCarthy said. "Biologists say there are seven terrestrial habitats on the island, including marshland, beach and woodland. There's also quite a bit of wildlife like deer, visiting songbirds and several nesting osprey."

The provincial park is about five kms long and 1.5 kms wide, with 400 hectares of historical and natural features.

"Because there are no signs on the island



Garrison Road, McNabs Island, in the fall. (SUBMITTED)

we have guided tours. One tour is specifically about the SS England (ship) that in 1866 was stricken with cholera and anchored off McNabs, so we have a tour of the area where victims are buried," McCarthy said. "We have another tour that goes into detail about Thomas Raddall's novel Hangman's Beach that was set on McNabs Island. You don't have to have read the book, although it may inspire people to do it."

Tours are also being offered in French for the first time this year, and a biologist will provide a tour exploring the park's animal and plant habitats.

Visitors should wear decent footwear and bring lunch and drinking water.

"It's a good day trip over there, with lots of opportunity for people to explore on their own if they want," said McCarthy.

Tickets for the Oct. 14 event are available through Ticket Atlantic. The rain date is Oct. 21. The tour takes place from 10 a.m. until 5 p.m. The cost for non-members is \$15, members pay \$12, and babies under age two can get in for free. Visit www.mcnabsisland.ca for more information.

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Hikers at Fort McNab (SUBMITTED)



Visitors tour the McNab Family Cemetery on McNabs Island. (SUBMITTED)

McNabs Island Quick Facts (from the Friends of McNabs Island Society):

- ▶ McNabs Island is about five kms long and up to 1.5 km wide.
- ▶ Its 400 ha (1000 acres) present a combination of historical, natural resources and outstanding recreational and educational opportunities. It is about 25 minutes by tour boat from downtown Halifax, or five minutes from Eastern Passage. Shell middens from about 1,600 years ago are evidence of pre-European Mi'kmaq use of the islands.
- ▶ Around 1700 the French were using the island as a fishing centre. They planned to build Louisbourg here, but in 1713 ceded mainland Nova Scotia to the British.
- ▶ With the founding of Halifax in 1749, the senior British officer granted most of Cornwallis' Island to his nephews.
- ▶ In 1782 it was purchased by Peter McNab for \$1,000, and parts stayed in the family for 150 years. Tenant farmers cleared the land and assisted in the raising of sheep. The land was divided among Peter's heirs, and over the years parcels

were sold.

- ▶ By 1860 the range of artillery had increased. To better defend Halifax, the Admiralty bought the southern end of the island and the Fort Ives site and began a series of fortifications, the remains of which are part of the attraction of McNabs.
- ▶ Most of the northern end remained in private hands. From about 1870 through 1930, the island was a popular recreational destination for the people of Halifax.
- ▶ The island was off limits during the Great War. After the war, as more people acquired automobiles and the province's roads improved, fewer people visited McNabs Island.
- ▶ The island was again under military control during WWII, and the period following saw a slow decline in full-time residents.
- ▶ The idea of the islands as a park resurfaced in the 1960s to compete with several industrial schemes. In the 1970s, a regional parks plan for metro emphasized the islands, and in 1983 the province assumed responsibility for assembling the park.
- ▶ Acquisitions of private lands by the province over the past 20 years have left less than three



A view of McNabs from Hugonin Hill. This is a scan of a watercolour painting by W. W. Lyttleton c.1862 held in the Public Archives of NS.

per cent in private hands. Most of the Department of National Defense's (DND) former land has been passed to Parks Canada for park purposes.

In 1985, and again in 1993, Parks Canada confirmed that its interest was limited to Fort McNab, with the rest to become a provincial park.