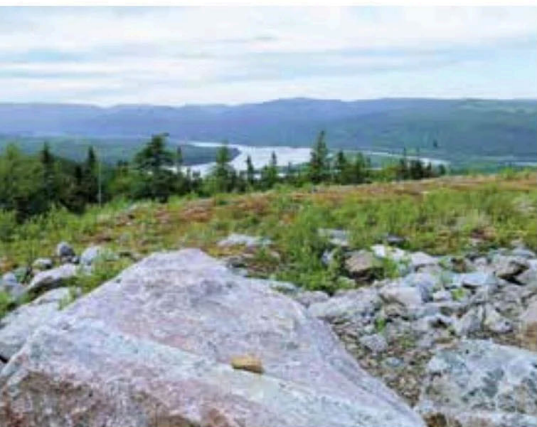




# Windswept & Wonderstruck: Tales from the Viking Trail

STORY AND IMAGES BY CATHY SENECA

**W**hen it's not about flavorful seafood, sweet berries and sweeping history, Newfoundland's Viking Trail up the Great Northern Peninsula is all about wild, wild nature. Whales breach and icebergs glisten just offshore a tuckermore laden coastline. Add in Labrador – a landscape with granite boulders strewn like a giant's marble game – and you have an incredible drive.



## Walk the mantle of the earth

Heading north up the Viking Trail (Route 430), the first detour for our careful of friends was Gros Morne National Park and UNESCO World Heritage Site to stroll the four km Tablelands Trail, which takes you through a Mars like terrain.

A half billion years ago, the Tablelands lay below sea level, until shifting plates forced ancient continents together and thrust up the ocean floor. Rising to 719 metres, the Tablelands steep slopes reveal a distinctive red landscape, the earth's exposed mantle. Plate tectonics theory was confirmed here, earning the park a UNESCO designation.

In the park's northern section, we walked an orchid dotted trail to reach a boat tour on Western Brook Pond, the most dramatic way to experience this inland fjord. Waterfalls descend

from lushly green 600-metre cliffs higher than Toronto's CN Tower.

## A Basque whaling station on Labrador

Continuing to St. Barbe, we crossed the Strait of Belle Isle to Labrador on the Blanc-Sablon Ferry, spotting our first distant berg.





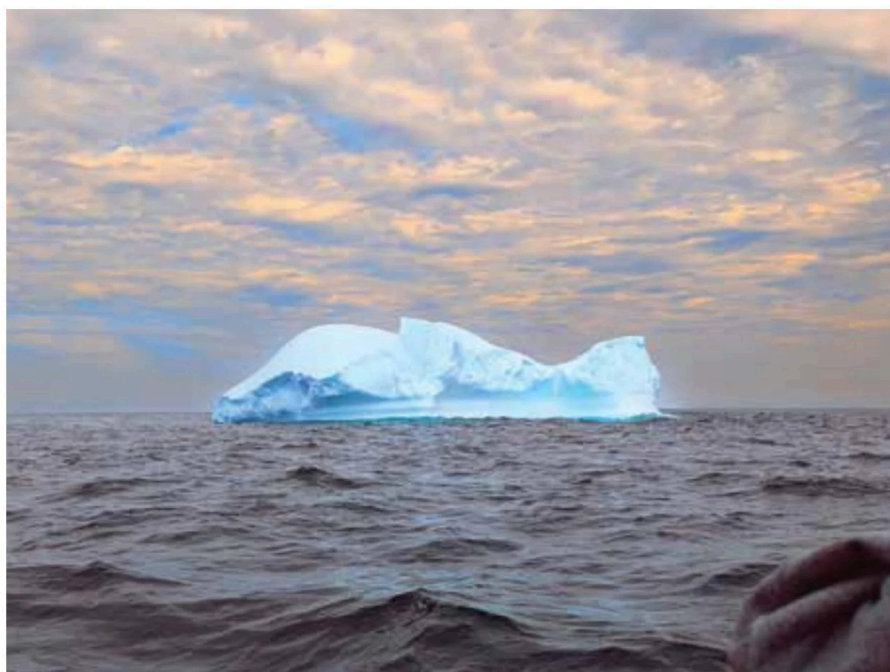
Rapt by the dramatic coastal bluffs, we drove an hour north along Labrador's Expedition 51 route past lighthouses to Red Bay Basque Whaling Station National Historic and UNESCO World Heritage Site, the best preserved example of early industrial scale whaling anywhere in the world.

Red Bay was built by Basque seafarers, who braved the Atlantic in the 1500s to come harvest whale oil, valuable then for soap, pharmaceuticals and fuel.

A massive 400 year old bowhead whale skeleton, as well as an original whaling boat are on display. For me, the most visceral experience was walking tiny, but striking, Saddle Island's boardwalk past fat rendering ovens, cooperages and a cemetery. On the site's west side, a couple of us climbed 689 steps up Tracey Hill for an expansive and very breezy view of the sheltered harbour.

### **A soul filling interlude**

Back on the rock that is Newfoundland, we continued north up the Viking



Trail to where the road meets the saltwater at St. Lunaire-Criquet.

Clad in flotation suits and looking like a waddle of orange penguins, we marched into Zodiacs with Dark

Tickle Expeditions and headed out into the heart of Iceberg Alley. Between late May and July, icebergs may float through. We circled a massive one glistening in the sunshine, revealing contoured blue and white striations.





While zooming out to another unique berg, guide Mo Hyduk, declared “I think we have whales, people!”

We motored up the coast and watched two humpbacks feeding in White Cape Harbour. It’s a thrill to see their flukes flip up on a deep dive, but we were all really wowed when one whale breached in front of us.

Giddy after our ocean interlude, it was hard to resist the striking blue iceberg cocktail at the music filled Daily Catch, followed by world famous fish, of course.

### **Viking outpost at the end of the world**

L’Anse aux Meadows National Historic Site and UNESCO World Heritage Site – remains of an 11th century basecamp – depict the Vikings earliest landing on North America about a thousand years ago.



The visitor centre leads you through the tales of exiled murderers and Viking explorers who came from Greenland to establish an outpost. While the centre is full of intriguing artifacts such as Icelandic fire starters and bronze cloak pins, the Viking encampment in the distance beckoned. This place at the tip of the Great Northern Peninsula felt like the end of the world.

Past the low berms – remains of what would have been sod dwellings – a large, reconstructed sod hall is filled with weapons and sheepskins. Viking interpreters sat around the fire, telling stories while crafters wove sailcloth and spun wool. Some of us donned Viking helmets and posed for pics with swords and shields.

History in Newfoundland and Labrador, whether cultural or geological, is captivating. Being outdoors at these sites, however – walking a windswept point, climbing ancient granite, or cruising a sheltered bay – was what entrenched me fully in the experience. And what made the Great Northern Peninsula memorable.

Follow Cathy on Instagram  
@WildTripsAwait or via her  
platform [www.wildtripsawait.com](http://www.wildtripsawait.com).

### **Viking Trail Stays**

Raleigh: Raleigh Rooms,  
Burnt Cape Cabins

L’Anse au Clair: Northern Light Inn, new

Norris Point: Sugar Hill Inn with  
highly rated Chanterelles restaurant

Rocky Harbour: Gros Morne Cabins

