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OF ICE & MEN

Follow the path of glaciers and Vikings toward the untamed beauty of Canada's remote Northern Peninsula.

standing atop an island cliff, Ed English looks out over the Strait of Belle Isle. "In March," he says, "this looks like peppered porridge—a sea of ice floes speckled with seals." Now, on a soft summer evening, it's a salty blue stew flecked with white froth from waves and breaching whales. In the distance float



Guests kayak among whales and icebergs. “Most of the bergs’ ice is underwater, as we paddle near a “bergy bit,” the term for a house-size formation

and they sometimes capsize or calve, so you have to be careful,” Ed cautions (that one day will melt down to a grand piano-size “growler”).



On 4-mile-long Quirpon Island, a working 1922 lighthouse and other support structures make up a romantic inn.

the glacial fragments that give this part of Newfoundland (newfun-LAND) its nickname: Iceberg Alley.

After the spring thaw, the Labrador Current (that’s Labrador, visible across the strait) carries these massive ice chunks from Greenland, 1,000 miles away. They glide past Newfoundland’s north and east coasts, shrinking as they melt. And Quirpon (kar-POON) Island, at the tip of the province’s Great Northern Peninsula, makes an ideal viewpoint for both the bergs and the whales that arrive

around the same time. Along with extravagantly long days and mild temperatures, they signal the sweet fullness of summer in this remote corner of North America.

A decade ago Ed bought the Quirpon Island lighthouse and its outbuildings, sight unseen. He turned them into a cozy inn, in a setting that, wrote one visitor, “Captain Ahab would give his other leg for.” Guests kayak among whales and icebergs. “Most of the bergs’ ice is underwater, and they sometimes capsize or calve, so

you have to be careful,” he cautions as we paddle near a “bergy bit,” the term for a house-size formation (that one day will melt down to a grand piano-size “growler”). Across the cove, seals speed through the water like sleek black shadows. Close encounters with dolphins and sea otters are not uncommon. Nearby, guests gather on the cliff-top helipad, watching for the plumes of breaching humpbacks feeding just offshore, so close we can hear them exhale in the evening calm.

Newfoundland has long been a world apart, a huge island surrounded by waters so abundant that for centuries European nations vied for fishing rights. Its people made a reliable, if hard, living from the sea, typically with small boats harbored in isolated “outports.” Sadly, the fishery has declined, and many have had to seek other work. But tidy fishing villages endure on the Great Northern Peninsula, among some of Canada’s most spectacular scenery.

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Sightseeing boats ply Western Brook Pond, a landlocked, 11-mile-long fjord edged by 2,000-foot cliffs.



The Green Gardens Trail leads to grassy bluffs as lush as an Irish meadow, complete with storybook sheep.



On the peninsula's west coast, Gros Morne National Park encompasses long, glacier-carved saltwater inlets and freshwater lakes (called ponds here, regardless of size); soaring, wooded slopes; and mountains that lay bare the earth's mantle. Known as the Tablelands, these high, barren outcrops seem transported from America's desert Southwest (in fact, they're the far-north end of the Appalachians). Yet only a short distance down the road, the Green Gardens Trail leads to grassy bluffs as lush as an Irish meadow, complete with storybook sheep.

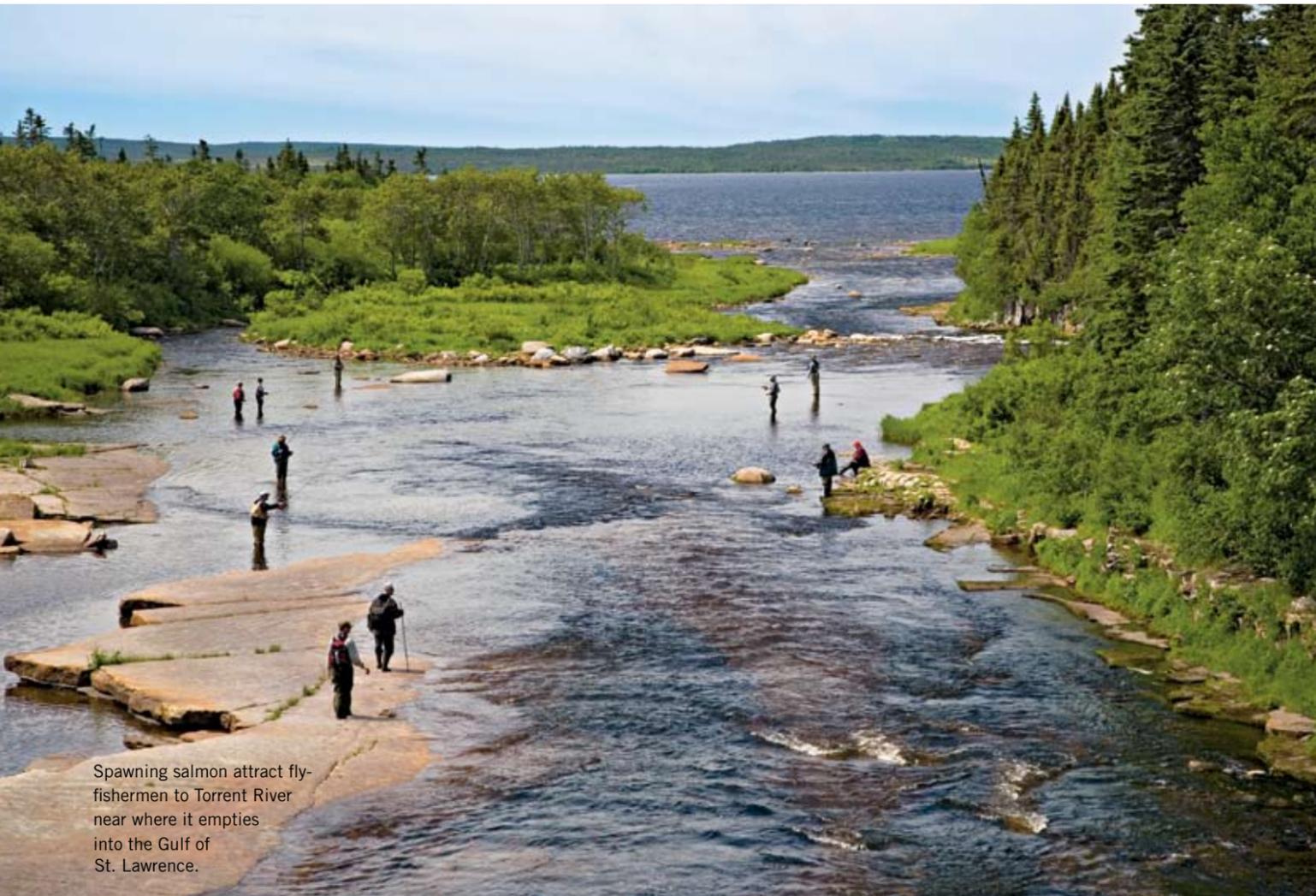
A mile or so farther stands the idyllic fishing village of Trout River and a grand, mountain-framed "pond."

A long, level path leads to the even-grander Western Brook Pond, in the park's northern section. Boarding a tour boat, I stare up at the granite cliffs and waterfalls. "This is just like the fjords we saw in Norway," a woman says. "Do they have moose in Norway?" her husband asks, pointing to a gangly youngster browsing the shoreline.

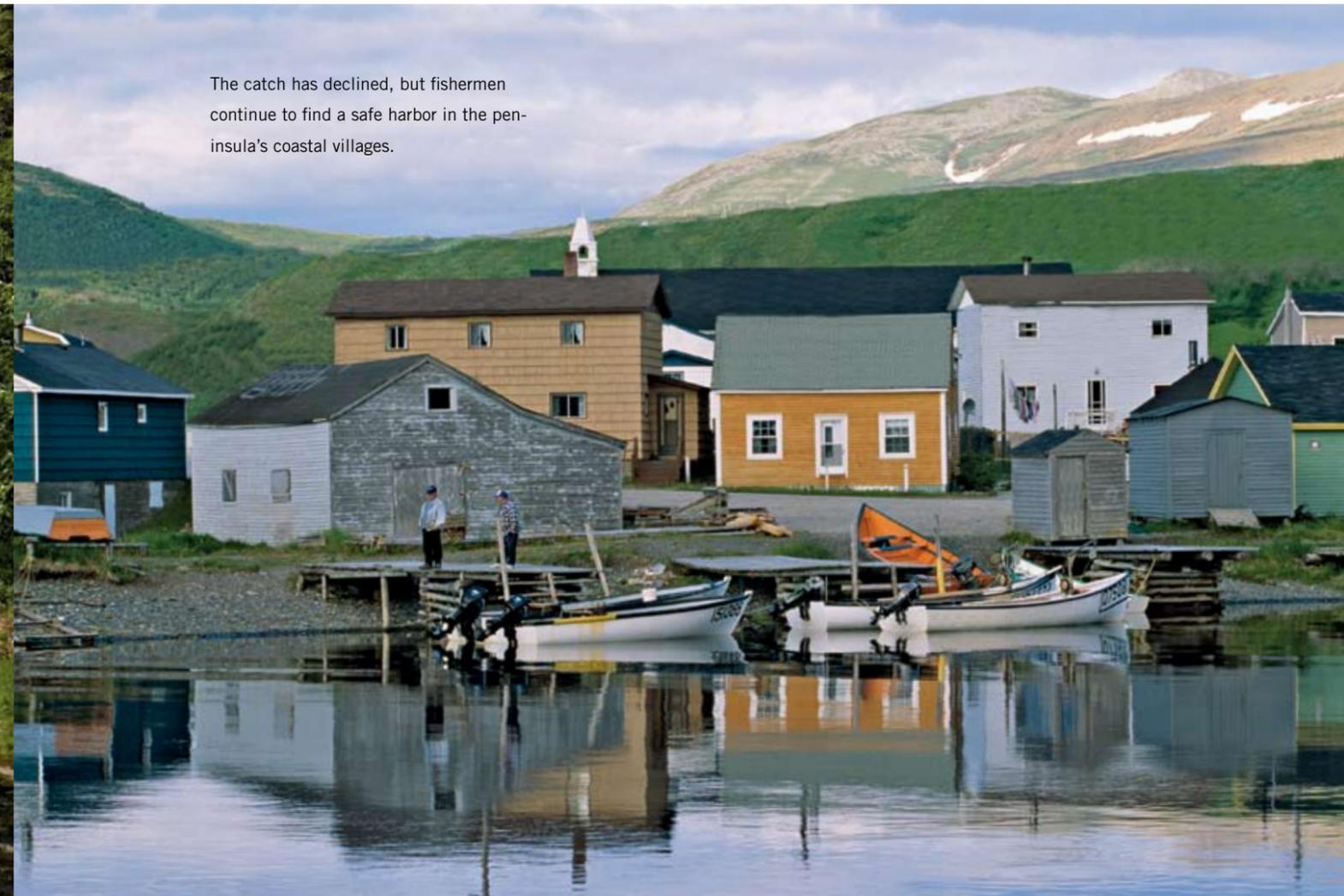
Moose like to graze along the roads after sunset. I avoid driving at night, and the only other moose I

The road north from Gros Morne mostly hugs the coast, passing rivers forest, stunted by wind and weather), sea-sculpted

where anglers cast for salmon, stretches of tuckamore (dwarf coastal stone arches, and coves that shelter boats and trim houses.



Spawning salmon attract fly-fishermen to Torrent River near where it empties into the Gulf of St. Lawrence.



The catch has declined, but fishermen continue to find a safe harbor in the peninsula's coastal villages.

encounter is in a savory pie at the Old Loft restaurant in Woody Point. At Java Jack's in Rocky Harbour I enjoy caribou from Labrador with a partridgeberry sauce. But the best bet on this coast remains local shellfish and seafood, usually simply prepared and very fresh.

Lodging, too, tends to be basic but comfortable. In park-adjacent towns, Neddies Harbour Inn and the Red Mantle Lodge offer newer, nicer accommodations. The road north from Gros Morne mostly hugs the coast, passing rivers where anglers cast for salmon, stretches of

tuckamore (dwarf coastal forest, stunted by wind and weather), sea-sculpted stone arches, and coves that shelter boats and trim houses. Light, peak-season traffic on the main roads only underscores Newfoundland's essential wildness, even though visitors have been coming for more than a millennium.

Up near Quirpon Island lies L'Anse aux Meadows, the peninsula's other UNESCO World Heritage Site (with Gros Morne). Here, around 1000 A.D., Norsemen led by Leif Eriksson arrived from Greenland.

Discovered in the 1960s, this National Historic Site yielded artifacts and the remains of sod houses, now carefully reconstructed. Interpreters in Viking garb shed light on the first known European settlement in the Americas, giving new meaning to "pre-Columbian." What's more, because the Vikings encountered local natives, this marks the closing of the so-called Great Circle, the first meeting of peoples from Europe and Asia whose ancestors migrated from Africa more than 100,000 years ago.

The Vikings returned home after a few years. Like them, later European settlers had to learn to survive in a challenging environment. Given their historic isolation, Newfoundlanders might be expected to be wary of outsiders. Yet I found them friendly and welcoming, given to addressing friends and strangers alike as "my lad" or "my darling." Travel around the Great Northern Peninsula and you'll find not only natural wonders, but also people whose warmth could melt an iceberg. 🍷

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