

Voices on the *wind*



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It's mid-morning on a sultry September day off the coast of Labrador. Stepping out of a skiff on to a small wooden dock in Matthew Cove on Great Caribou Island, the chap who motored me over from Battle Harbour hands me a walkie-talkie. “Call me when you get to the other side,” he says, “and I’ll fetch you back.” I sling my backpack over my shoulders and grin. “OK.”

My plan is to spend a couple of hours hiking this end of the island. But first, I need to find Emma Samson, and deliver some freshly-made donuts from “the girls” just across the tickle. Emma’s spending the last days of summer on her beloved Caribou Island.

A few hundred yards away, I see two men gutting codfish. Swiftly and silently their knives behead, slice and scrape; guts are thrown off the wharf; lurking gulls swoop in





for a frenzied feed. Each splayed fish will be salted then stored for winter. I get directions to Emma's place.

Her eyes twinkle when I hand over the goods. We spend a little time together. She—quiet and shy. Me—curious and inquisitive. I want to linger and learn more about this woman and her island.

After a while, I check my watch and note that it's almost 11am. I have time to walk over the hill to Trap Cove, an abandoned outpost before hiking to the rendezvous point. I bid farewell and follow a path uphill, downhill, then uphill again.

Stopping at the crest to catch my breath, I turn around and there's Trap Cove—in the distance. I had walked south instead of east. Below me, low-lying crackerberry bushes carpet the hillside in blazing red; a handful of buildings, broken by time, provide a testimony to lives lived. As I zig-zag my way into Trap Cove, I can't help myself from stopping, more than once, to gawk at the cobalt sea.

Once there, I peek in a window and see part of a crib. Snippets of conversations float like motes in the air.

'As children, after we went to bed, we'd listen to the men and women who gathered around our stove. They'd be talkin' by lamplight about the weather and the fish and the ice and the gear. I can still see mum baking buns and making bakeapple pies. Sometimes my grandfather washed the dishes in a pan on the table.'

Previous page: Abandoned homes and workstations at Trap Cove, a former outpost on Caribou Island, Labrador.

Above, left: Emma Samson spends as much time as possible on Caribou Island. Inset: Gulls having a feeding frenzy. Right: Freeman Samson (Emma's son) salting down codfish.



Clockwise from left: This home lies abandoned in Trap Harbour, tilting yet holding fast; Matthew Cove to the left and Trap Cove to the right; a lone headstone keeps watch over Trap Cove; There must have been countless meals and stories shared around this table, now decaying outside an empty dwelling in Trap Cove.



Approaching another abandoned structure, I can see through the non-existent front door, past three rooms and out the back window. I think, “If only this house could talk.”

Around 1:30pm I decide it’s time to head to my rendezvous point. Which footpath to take? I berate myself for having neither compass nor map. After trekking for two hours through peaks and gullies strewn with everything from moss-laden rocks to ferns and scraggy tuckamore, I see a lone headstone. Turning, I notice Trap Cove in the distance. I’ve made one giant two-hour circle.

‘My baby brother and my grandfather are buried there.’

Even though the temperature has dropped, I’m hot, sweaty—and scared. Where oh where is the right footpath?

‘Go left m’luv. When you rounds the cove, head up the hill and over. Just keeps to the left.’

Forty minutes later, standing at the foot of an abandoned fishing stage facing Battle Harbour, I bow my head, thank the voices, and pull out the walkie-talkie. 🐾