



Heritage NL

***A Walk Back in Time:***  
**Hiking and Heritage with**  
**Barb Parsons–Sooley**

Living Heritage Economy

CASE STUDY 007 • HERITAGE NL • SEPTEMBER 2020

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## **A Walk Back in Time:**

# **Hiking and Heritage with Barb Parsons–Sooley**



**Barb Parsons–Sooley is an avid hiking enthusiast and owner of Wind at Your Back Guided Adventures. She has been a hiking guide for several years for Routes Adventures, touring people around the Bonavista region and sharing Newfoundland and Labrador’s history and stories. She is also the president of the Hike Baccalieu trail maintenance association.**

Hiking has been a therapeutic outlet for Barb for many years, so it was a natural transition to a business opportunity. She began hiking around 13 years ago, after working as a firefighter and paramedic in Northern Alberta.

*I was diagnosed with PTSD. Trying a lot of different medications and things really wasn't working for me. I was raising small children at the time and the grogginess and everything didn't work for me. So, my therapist asked me to start getting outside more. And I was like, "Oh, well, you know, I spend time out in the yard with the kids." And she said, "No. Go hike!" So, I started hiking in the mountains, and then I moved back to Newfoundland a couple years later and started hiking here. There's not a lot of places on this island that my feet haven't hit.*

Though she is licensed to give tours anywhere in the province, Barb focuses her guided adventures in the Baccalieu Trail region because it is an area

she knows very well. She grew up in Bay Roberts and currently lives in Heart's Delight–Islington.

*It's home, and it's an area that's so absolutely beautiful but kind of hidden away. A lot bigger areas people head to, St. John's, they head to CBS, and they head to Bonavista, and we're kind of this beautiful middle zone that gets forgotten a lot.*

She incorporates history and culture into her hikes because of a love of Newfoundland heritage that was instilled in her from an early age by her father. She says it just happens naturally. Between the questions hikers ask, and Barb's chatty nature, the conversation just flows.

*It's so full of history. That's mostly what it's all about. You go on hiking trails and it's most likely an old railway bed, or it was an old road to an abandoned village, or it was a coastal line that was a shortcut between towns, or it was a hunting path. It's mind blowing to get into it all. It's where*



*it came from for me, to get the Hike Baccalieu association and make sure that these trails and the history that goes along with them are preserved.*

Barb emphasizes the importance of listening and learning from local tradition bearers. Even in a place she is very familiar with, like the Baccalieu trail, she is always willing to ask questions and sit down and have a chat with someone who has traditional knowledge and skills living in the area.

*I'm not shy! So, I could be in New Perlican or Bay de Verde and be out on a wharf and there's an old fella sitting there, or whatever. I'll seriously pull over on the side of the road and say, "Hey guys, what's up?" and I'll sit down and have a chat. And just through going to all these other meetings and stuff, you meet people and you find out things. I'm constantly asking questions.*



## HIKE BACCALIEU & TRAIL REHABILITATION with Edwin Bishop

As the president of the Hike Baccalieu Association, Barb is involved with the maintenance of trails in the region. She has been a driving force behind the rehabilitation of the Northern Point trail in Heart's Delight-Islington. It was an old hunting path that had once been cleared out by Edwin Bishop from Heart's Delight-Islington but had since grown over. Barb connected with Edwin three years ago for help in maintaining the trail.

**I connected up with him. We were on FaceTime from out there because he can't get out and walk anymore to get out that kind of rough terrain, and he taught me a lot of the history. I asked him to help me make some signs and things for that trail, and I ended up getting artwork from him. He's a local artist here. He has Boar Point Art Studios, so it just ended up being all this beautiful artwork that told stories of the area. I ended up putting those out on the trail and learning so much in the process.**

Passionate about Newfoundland and Labrador heritage, and the local knowledge of growing up in Heart's Delight-Islington, Edwin decided artwork would be more appropriate for Barb's request.

**I painted approx 20 paintings that represent my memories of growing up in Heart's Delight and spreading weeks and more playing, exploring and chasing our parents, grandparents and brothers back and forth on that wonderful trail that used to be called Gunners path or some used to say Gunning path. Around 2009 I supervised a group of young people sponsored by the Local Enhancement Committee to open up the old path and build it into a hiking trail . Over the years after that it got neglected and grew over and that is when Barb found me and said she was interested in getting it opened up again and asked me if I would make her a few signs. Well I thought, why not a painting or two?**  
– EDWIN BISHOP

There are now 22 stops along the Northern Point trail that tell the story of Heart's Delight-Islington and Edwin's memories of growing up in the area. For a while, the originals were on display, but they have since been converted into sustainable material to withstand the outdoor conditions, as well as installing storyboards underneath that share Edwin's art and memories with hikers.



## THE GROWING POPULARITY OF HIKING

Trails that I've been on here for years that I have never met another soul, there's people coming at me everywhere. It's nice to see and I hope it continues. I hope it's something that has caught on and people continue doing. It's cool actually seeing families out being families again.

There has been a growing trend in getting out and rediscovering your own backyard. Since Barb started her guided adventures earlier this year, she has been busy showing locals how much there is to learn and love about their own region. She delights in sharing her knowledge and passion about Newfoundland heritage and nature. But picking her favourite aspect of operating a guiding company? That's hard.

*How do you pick? I get to be outside. I get to meet new people. I'm out in nature all the time. Seeing a whale breach never gets old! I'm just as excited as probably the first time I ever saw one as a kid. I just love it.*

Her advice for others thinking about starting their own tourism business?

*I think that when you are going into a business, especially if you're going to be in the tourism industry itself, you have to be genuine about it. You have to love what you're doing, you have to love where you're doing it, and that shows through to other people that are coming to you.*



How to find Barb's hiking company:

windatyourbacknl.ca



facebook.com/windatyourbacknl



twitter.com/hikeandkayaknl



instagram.com/windatyourbacknl



youtube.com/channel/UCZD9-Z1vJFN-0Kpc0JH5sXg



Prepared by Katie Crane of Heritage NL, as part of a series of case studies examining the links between living heritage, traditionality, entrepreneurship, and community economic development in Newfoundland and Labrador.

**For more information, email [ich@heritagenl.ca](mailto:ich@heritagenl.ca) or phone 1-888-739-1892.**

*All photos courtesy of Barb Parsons-Sooley except where noted. Cover photo from Art of Hoping.*

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