



Gowan Brae Golf and Country Club in Bathurst, N.B., is situated on an extraordinarily scenic property overlooking the Bay of Chaleur. GOWAN BRAE AERIAL SHOTS

## Hidden gem

Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia dominate the discussion when it comes to East Coast golf. But New Brunswick is worth a visit, too, **Jeff Brooke** writes

The clerk at the rental-car agency near Moncton's airport gave us the keys to a black SUV so large and high off the ground that it should have come with a step-ladder. It was far more vehicle than the three of us needed for our road trip around New Brunswick, but that's what was available.

We joked that we'd be mistaken for celebrities but we were just there to play golf, three colleagues and friends who've each travelled the country (and even the world) in pursuit of our passion but had less experience playing in New Brunswick. It was time to fix that.

We were more familiar in Eastern Canada with Prince Edward Island, which calls itself "Canada's No. 1 golf destination," and Nova Scotia, which has exploded in popularity over the past decade with the establishment and growth of upscale Cabot Cape Breton, and the mainland golf course of the rich and famous at Fox Harb'r Resort.

New Brunswick was more of a mystery to us. We were determined to see what it had to offer by visiting all corners of the province to sample its best golf offerings. After all, if you're driving to PEI or Nova Scotia, you have to go through New Brunswick anyway. Why not stay and play?

Our first stop was in Bathurst in the northeast of the province. Once a mining and paper-mill hub, it's more a city for government services now. Of all the places we visited, it felt like the one with the richest blend of French and English cultures.

Gowan Brae Golf and Country Club has been part of the community since the late 1950s and has matured into one of those tree-lined, parkland courses that traditionalists adore. The course has design chops – C.E. (Robbie) Robinson, a protégé of Canadian golf architect Stanley Thompson, drafted the layout – and it's situated on an extraordinarily scenic property overlooking the Bay of Chaleur.

For some reason, our group decided it was a good idea to begin our round at Gowan Brae in a torrential downpour. Common sense eventually prevailed by the eighth hole and we stopped for an early lunch, finishing our round later under clear blue skies. Upon our return to the fairways, we encountered two rare and spectacular birds.

The first was metaphorical – an albatross, a score of two on a par-five, struck by our skilled playing partner and host, Gowan Brae's director of golf Adam Chamberlain. How's that for entertaining your guests? The second was literal – a bald eagle soaring over the

back nine. It's moments like those that make any round of golf memorable, and they foreshadowed more golf delights as we continued our road trip.

Our travels also took us to West Hills, a Darrell and Warren Huxham design in Fredericton with a modern architectural flair. Just over a decade old, the newest course in the capital city is a public facility with some of the niceties of private golf – well-manicured turf, well-appointed clubhouse, that sort of thing.

But the distinction of being my favourite stop on the trip goes to the final course we played, the Algonquin, in St. Andrews-by-the-Sea. I had been there before a few years ago, just as it was about to undergo a massive renovation. I was eager to see the end result.

The Algonquin is New Brunswick's golf jewel, hands down, and its related Algonquin Resort in the centre of the picturesque town is the province's pre-eminent lodging. The town of St. Andrews-by-the-Sea, with its boutique-lined main street, whale-watching trips and horticultural showpiece Kingsbrae Garden, also has to rate as one of Eastern Canada's most charming seaside towns. It's a formidable package.

The golf course, as we discovered, has come through its renovation with flying colours. Renowned Canadian architect Rod Whitman led the overhaul, making a good course great. He created a couple of new holes, reoriented others and opened up playing corridors and created more views of the stunning Passamaquoddy Bay by removing trees. The course breathes now, creating an expansiveness common to many links courses, including Whitman's original Cabot Links at Cabot Cape Breton.

The Algonquin has become so good that it's tempting to make a beeline to St. Andrews-by-the-Sea and not go anywhere else in New Brunswick (or the rest of the East Coast for that matter). But that would be a mistake. New Brunswick has good golf at great prices (almost all green fees are well below \$100). And with a total of about 45 courses, it has plenty to offer, too.

The writer was a guest of the golf courses and Tourism New Brunswick. They did not review or approve this story before publication.

## New additions

Nova Scotia's Fox Harb'r reworks its golf into a 'refined' links course, writes **Catherine Dawson March**

Two of Canada's top golf architects – Thomas McBroom and Doug Carrick – looked a little shell-shocked when they heard the news. The two men had already spent weeks this summer carving out nine holes (many oceanside) at the golf course of Nova Scotia's Fox Harb'r Resort when owner Steven Joyce told them he had changed his mind – and asked for a second 18-hole course as well.

The project is Canadian to the core. McBroom and Carrick, who usually compete against each other for work like this, joined forces with an Ontario-based golf construction company to redesign the play at Fox Harb'r in Wallace, N.S. The resort was originally built by Tim Hortons co-founder Ron Joyce. Steven Joyce is Ron's son, and his recent decision will unexpectedly keep the teams busy for another two years at least.

Golfers can watch the progress of the front nine while playing Fox Harb'r's current parkland-style course. McBroom and Carrick's new holes take advantage of the eye-popping views along the Northumberland Strait. (Yes, that is PEI you can see on the other side.) "Everything revolves around the ocean," McBroom said of the plan. "It's a refined links course."

During a recent visit, red dust swirled around a conga line of golf carts careening over the ochre dunes and rocky swales of a course still in construction. McBroom and Carrick stopped often to point out features such as the "infinity tee" (it appears as if your ball is heading into the strait) or an interesting trout pond hazard. "The clever part of the course," McBroom said, "is that you will feel like you're on the ocean most of the time."

The oceanside holes should be playable by late summer 2024, and the rest of the links-style course will be open in 2025. The latest addition – a parkland course near the resort's vineyard – should be ready by 2026.

The writer was a guest of Fox Harb'r, which did not review or approve the story before publication.