

A Sail up The Mira River. 1908

Leaving Mira Gut-Ghould's Cove-Relics of a French Ship Yard-A Paradise for the Kodaker-Money Point-Black Brook-Mira Brick Yard- Old French Burial Ground-Romance of Dragoon Island- Sangaree-Hills Bay-MacNeil's Bay-The Reach-Marion Bridge- Mineral Rock-Sandfield-Salmon River- Salt Spring of Glengarry-Victoria Bridge.

Mira River abounding as it does in picturesque views and in tales connected with the French regime, is a point of particular interest. During the season a small steamer, which connects with trains of the Sydney and Louisburg Railway, plies on the river. The water of the river is beautifully clear, and the bottom of the channel is definable for some distance. As the steamer leaves the Gut, great mussel beds will be seen in the river bottom. Their growth is so rapid that it is sometime necessary to drag them out with an improvised harrow in order to clear the channel.

A few hundred yards above the mussel beds Ghould's Cove is passed on the left, where the waters are cold and calm in all winds, affording a safe anchoring place for all vessels. This cove is also locally known as Three Echoes Cove, from the fact that it has acoustic properties producing on still nights a triple echo. On the shores may be seen relics of an old French ship yard, from which it is said that vessels as large as four hundred tons have been launched. Hand wrought nails and spikes have been found, and the remains of an old French forge may be traced, on the opposite shore the remains of the hulls of some thirty French shallops, sunk therefor some unknown reason, may be seen distinctly on a clear day. Nichols Point, on the right bank of the river, in the olden days a haven of refuge for fishermen, shows deep dipping sandstone. From this point to the railroad bridge the river is a low sided ravine, the water having worn away through the soft sandstone, and the years having clothed the its rugged sides with spruce and fir. As the sun only visits this portion of the river for a short time daily, it has flights of sun and shade o'er its wild and eerie coves and headlands that makes it a paradise of delight for the Kodaker.

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Before the bridge is reached a house is seen on a hill on the left bank. The point below this house is known as Money Point. The story goes that a cask of money was seen there in the early days by a passing boatman, who came back at night to procure it : but alas ! the swift change of the tide had covered it up and it has never been seen since. The sand flat between Money Point and the bridge , are at ebb tide the favorite resort for the angler in pursuit of the spring run of fish. The high railway bridge under which the steamer passes marks a epoch in the history of coal mining in Cape Breton, forming part of a highway over which coal from the old Reserve Mines was carried to the seaboard of Louisburg.

After passing the bridge the river widens out. The cleared field on the left is called Spenser's Point and directly ahead is Round Island. The Channel at this point is tortuous and confusing except for the initiated, winding and twisting between great banks of sand, and so difficult, even for the experienced helmsman, that it has been carefully bushed, as with the wind across the tide the true channel cannot be made out. The next opens to a bay, the entrance to Black Brook being on the right side , and big and little Oyster Cove on the left. Black Brook is famous for its trout and salmon fishing, and the coves, as their names imply are the resting place for oysters. On the left bank at the head of the bay the steamer passes Indian Point , an old camping ground of the Micmacs. The next deep cove on the left is MacLellan's Bay. The point jutting out into the waters is the site of a brick industry, the clay of the Mira River being well adapted for that purpose. This historic ground, as much of the brick used at Louisburg was made here by the French , as was also the brick used in the magazine on the bluff of the Burnt Mine Cove Near Bridgeport. The brick yard is about four miles from Mira Gut.

Two miles further up the river Albert Bridge is passed, at present a peaceful hamlet of two hundred souls, formerly in more stirring times a large French settlement, forming the most important point on the old French Road from Louisburg to Baie des Espagnols (now Sydney). It was at one time well fortified , the entire neck of land was entrenched. The foundations of the chapel and many houses can be seen.

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On the right bank of the river may be noticed the remains of an old French burying ground, and here valuable relics have been unearthed. A little distance from the shore on the southern side, upon the old French road are to be found many large millstones of several tons weight each. It is said that the mill was used principally to supply the troops at Louisburg.

Leaving Albert the river further widens out, presenting a grand panorama of headlands, beautiful bays and deep coves. The first headland on the right is Belverene Point, and the small bay winding inland from it is known as Cupid's Cove. The origin of this romantic name is unknown. The long Hilly island on the left is Dragoon Island. Legend has it that in early days when Sydney was a garrison town two dragoons deserted with their horses. Coming to the Mira they swam their beasts from the point above Cupid's Cove to the Island. In the coves back of Dragoon Island fine fall duck shooting can be had. The next island is Sangaree. It runs lengthwise with the river and affords a perfect camping ground for the sportsman in search of wild fowl. For a mile above Sangaree the steamer passes a cluster of small islands, each having a beautiful individuality of its own.

Passing the last small island, the steamer enters Hill's Bay, into which trout brook flows. The brook, which is about ten miles from Mira Gut, flows down to the river through a narrow picturesque valley, its banks fringed with Indian pears and hazelnuts. The adjacent barrens produce the wild strawberries and blueberries in great profusion. A lodge is shortly to be erected on this ideal spot for the accommodation of fishermen and duck-shooting parties. At the head of Hill's Bay another small island is passed before entering the Burying Ground Narrows. Here, beside the beautiful banks of the river, the early settlers chose a spot where their tired bodies, after a life's fitful fever was forever done, might rest in peace.

MacNeill's Bay is next entered. It contains one charming island. Here the French had cultivated fields and many homes, much of their cleared land still remaining. The view from the shores of MacNeill's bay is superb.

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Here stands the ancient weather beaten home of Lieutenant MacNeil, from whom the bay took its title, and whose name is connected with a story of the deepest romantic interest. From MacNeil's Bay the steamer passes through MacKeigan's Narrows, a deep channel about thirteen miles from Mira Gut. The channel here winds round to the right into Long Reach, a term handed down from the days when sailing craft made the Mira their haven after deep sea fishing.

The Reach Water is bold, with plenty of sailing room. At the head of the reach the first sight of the village of Marion Bridge is gained. It has a fine church and hall, a schoolhouse, two stores, and a population of two hundred. The channel winds wildly above the bridge and the aspect becomes more mountainous. The first peak-like hill which rises grey and almost barren on the right bank, forms part of Mineral Hill of old French story. The river winds along for two miles until McOdrum's Narrows is reached, where the channel is extremely intricate. Rounding out of the narrows the steamer enters Bass Cove, where the bold sea bass play in the shoal waters on sunshiny days in the season. The Mineral Rock is plainly seen when rounding the this cove. The people of the neighborhood still point to the grading of a crude railway said to have been used for shipping what they believe to have been gold, mined somewhere on the ridge. However the only two pits so far discovered, that seem to be early origin, do not indicate anything but excavation of gypsum. Descendants of the old French settlers relate that somewhere on the Mira River gold was mined by their forefathers, but they know naught of its location except that it was a big hill and that tracks were laid to the river over a great low marsh, a description which fits the surroundings of this cove.

At the end of Bass Cove Marsh a tree clad point stands out prominently, known as Burying Ground Bluff. Here the Presbyterian inhabitants of to-day lay their dead to rest. The small settlement two miles above this point is called Sandfield, the soil forming a part of a great dune.

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Here the river, which has been pursuing a course lying fairly east and west, abruptly changes its trend and runs north and south, passing through the Little Narrows about a mile west of Sandfield into the great waters of Lewis Bay, where there is a depth in most places of ten to sixteen fathoms, increasing in some parts to thirty fathoms.

About three miles above Little Narrows is Salmon River, a famous fishing spot. Here are to be found many points of interest, including the remains of a French settlement, and a peculiar well or spring probably used by the French. Although a number of interesting French relics have been unearthed in this neighborhood, Salmon River is the nearest point from which to make a side trip the far famed mineral spring of Glengarry Valley. The water, which is beautifully clear, is saline to the taste, but not unpleasant. Numerous sufferers from rheumatic affections have been wonderfully benefited by using it. A leafy mountain walk leads the traveler to this noted spring. The steamer now winds on through Lewis Bay to Victoria Bridge, the head of river navigation. On the left bank is seen Grand Mira Chapel, on the right Mac Dougall's Point. From Victoria Bridge the quaint fishing villages of Gabarus and Framboise and Fourche, can be reached by team, or if so disposed one may take the return trip on the boat.