



Pennant Point/Crystal Crescent Beach

With Hurricane Bill expected to arrive the next day, our group set out on a coastal hike to Pennant Point.

We assembled at the parking lot at Crystal Crescent Beach, near Sambro, Halifax Co., and began our foggy trek shortly after 10AM. The first part of the trail includes the boardwalk that winds past the clothed and 'clothing-optional' sandy beaches; the beaches didn't have any sunbathers on them at this hour, considering the sun was completely obscured by the fog. The water along the beaches was surprisingly calm, but after walking past the nude beach, we reached the rocky coastline where the sea's mood was completely different. Angry surf collided with monolithic granite shoreline from this point on, in an apparent show of irresistible force meeting immovable object (although we all know that the coastline always bends to the will of the ocean, in time). We all paused at a number of scenic spots for frequent photo ops, and to

listen to the constant crashing of the waves against the contoured yet rugged shoreline. The trail was boggy in places, and not-yet-ripe cranberries were found along the way. One eerie but picturesque highlight of the Pennant Point hike is

the Enchanted Forest, five to ten minutes past the nude beach. A forest fire swept through here years ago, leaving behind acres of skeletal, still-standing deadwood trees that have been bleached and polished by the elements. A striking sight when set against a vivid blue-sky backdrop on a bright sunny day, the Enchanted Forest also makes for great photography when it's fog-enshrouded and mist drifts through the trees. Closer to the Point, we could faintly hear over the wind and surf the clang of a buoy bell; visibility was poor, which actually added to the mystique and sense of isolation of the place. There was a brackish pond on our right as we carefully crossed a section of shoreline covered in small, rounded boulders; it was as if this boulder field was the result of someone taking a gigantic hammer to a once-solid granite slab, shattering it into thousands of tiny rocks, each then smoothed by the tides. Boulderering and climbing enthusiasts already flock to Pennant Point for the obvious clean and stable climbing surfaces; I think those who practice parkour and free-running would also find this place ideal. After passing the boulder field, we were back on monolithic granite slabs and effectively at Pennant Point itself, with the rough sea on three sides. We sat and had lunch,



relaxing and listening to the ocean, eagerly anticipating the next big crashing wave. It is certainly addictive to watch dramatic surf; a massive breaker only makes you wait for the next, hopefully larger one. After a good while spent out on the point, we hiked the same route back - a total distance of approximately 12 kms. The beaches were well-populated by this time, and the skies were clearing nicely. If you're moving along at a steady pace with few breaks, the entire hike can be done in 2-3 hrs; our rather leisurely trek took the better part of 5 hours. To find it, go to the Armdale Rotary in Halifax, and take the Herring Cove Road exit. Follow this road (Route 349) through to Ketch Harbour then Sambro. Near Sambro, watch for signs indicating Crystal Crescent Beach. Turn into the parking lot for Crystal Crescent Beach, walk towards the beach and you'll find the boardwalk easily enough. Turn right and enjoy the hike. :)





Hurricane Bill & Hirtles Beach

When I learned that Hurricane Bill was going to skirt by Nova Scotia, I knew I didn't want to miss the spectacle. I also knew of one of the best vantage points on the South Shore to watch the stormy seas - Hirtles Beach, near Kingsburg, Lunenburg County. In the hours before Hurricane Juan hit us in September 2003, I dropped down to Hirtles Beach that afternoon and could not believe my eyes and ears - the constant roar of the ocean, and the size and fury of the surf were something I had never experienced before, and that was several hours before Juan even made landfall! To my surprise at the time, the parking lot at the beach was crowded with vehicles and people; other people would likely say we were all in the running for Darwin Awards, getting that close to hurricane surf. That's up for debate, how much risk we were taking then, but I'll address that issue a bit later in this newsletter. Fast



forward to August 2009, and Hurricane Bill was expected to pass by along the South Shore, not even making landfall. High tide was around noon that day, exactly when the storm was set to rage past us. I knew there would be very angry surf kicked up, so a few of us set off for Kingsburg to witness Nature's power. The radio was broadcasting shoreline

closures at Lawrencetown, Cow Bay and Peggy's Cove; thankfully, Hirtles wasn't mentioned. After an hour and a half of driving through hard rain, we reached the beach - and once again, the parking lot was full of cars and spectators lined the boardwalks leading out to the sand. The sand, however, was nowhere to be seen, as it was totally submerged by the awesome crashing breakers and roiling seas. Down the beach to the east, a barrier had been breached and seawater spilled over into a pond. Short sections of the boardwalk that were closest to the beach had been detached and swept inland by surges. A park bench with heavy concrete legs was resting on the rocks behind the beach - all of this had happened around high tide and prior to our arrival. Of course, much of this wasn't really noticed (or appreciated?) until AFTER the Picnic Table Ride. Shortly after arriving, our group walked out onto the boardwalk, amazed by the surf; I spied a picnic table off to the right which I felt would provide a better vantage point for still shots and video than jostling for position on a crowded boardwalk. I stood on the picnic table and was joined



Photo by Brian Sutton-Quaid

by two friends - our combined weight probably approached 600 lbs. Right then, the water piled up on the beach and the next wave forced a surge over the grass. The water lifted the table - and us - and pushed it along easily, and wasn't even waist-deep! We slid/jumped off the tilting table into the water - surprisingly warm for the Atlantic - grabbed onto each other's jackets to keep together, and tried to stay upright until the surge abated. With a sudden, heightened respect for the power of water, we retreated to the boardwalk, which was littered with rocks swept in by the surge(s). We rode out several more surges on the boardwalk, getting lots of great shots and video and enjoying the best show in town. It's not often when you can witness 20-30 ft waves (which were less than a km out from shore), and despite the surges (which got weaker as the tide went out and more sand was exposed on the beach), the thrill of the experience far outweighed the risk involved. However, if Bill had come ashore, or had even been more powerful, that boardwalk might very well have been completely washed out, and I would not have even made the beach trip to get close to the angry seas in the first place, at least not at the height of the storm. For my views on thrill-seeking, **See Page 3...**





Scotian Hiker

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Things To Do

- Explore historic and ghostly Wolfville NS with tours on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays <http://www.wolfvillewalkingtours.com>
- Scotian Hiker group hikes: Roxbury, Saturday Sept 5th. Gaff Point, Sunday, Sept 13th. Keji Seaside Adjunct, Saturday Sept 19th. Full details to be posted at www.scotianhiker.com/events.htm

Outdoorosophy

"Birds sing after a storm; why shouldn't people feel as free to delight in whatever remains to them?" - Rose Kennedy

"God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform. He plants his footsteps in the sea, and rides upon the storm." - W. Cowper

"It is only in sorrow bad weather masters us; in joy we face the storm and defy it." - Amelia Barr

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THRILL-SEEKING, HURRICANES & GOVERNMENT INTERFERENCE (editorial)

There are extreme thrill-seekers who crave the adrenaline rush that action, adventure and even danger provide, and there are those who have zero desire to lay it on the line and prefer to play it safe. Then there is a third group, somewhere between "he who hesitates is lost" and "fools rush in where angels fear to tread". I consider myself a moderate thrill-seeker, in that third group. I love exploring, travel, and wild lightning storms; I've made the 60-ft jump at Three Pools (when I was younger, knew it all, and was immortal - I won't do it now). I also like to go to the seashore to watch hurricanes when they come to visit, and obviously many others engage in this, as well. BUT - I won't go on wet rocks such as the ones at Peggy's Cove to get close to the surf; never crossed my mind to do so. In light of the near tragedy there, and the actual tragedy at Acadia National Park in Maine, where people were swept from the rocks into the ocean by violent surf during Hurricane Bill, such vantage points are best avoided during hurricanes and gales. Fine - post explicit warning signs, and those thrill-seekers who ignore them and still get too close can either pay the bill for their rescue, or pay with their lives; if you gamble, you might actually lose - deal with it. HOWEVER - the government does not need to ruin it for the rest of us and close off public access to our own coastline during a hurricane; there is no need for legislation. In an age where insurance concerns dictate to us what we can and cannot do, where we can't feel the wind in our hair anymore while riding a bicycle, and our kids aren't allowed to eat dirt, fall down, or get bruised and scraped - we NEED to be able to connect with nature like this. Because life is so watered-down, bubble-wrapped and "protected" (more like buried) by technology, many of us in the moderate thrill-seeking category eagerly flock to the seashore in angry weather for the excitement it provides. This should not be prevented or outlawed. No more restriction of our free will by government. If people get hurt or worse, who is to blame? Not me. Not you. Not the landowners. Not the government. The fault lies entirely with the risk-taker; for every action, there is a consequence. On our visit to Hirtles Beach, we had some anxious moments during some surges but it was actually invigorating to be there, and like the vast majority of people, we played it moderately safe. We could actually tell when the surges were about to hit, we could make a run for it if we had to (might not be successful, but at least it was an option, unlike being on the rocks), and we had something to grab onto that would float. Also, the surges swept things inland, and the surge water drained into a pond behind the beach. The only way you could get dragged out to sea by those surges would be if you were playing in



the actual wild surf to begin with, and nobody was doing that (the extreme thrill-seekers were elsewhere, on wet rocks or out surfing). It was a great time, and I'd do it again in a second (*but not if Bill had been coming ashore there, or of a stronger Category!*). Without a doubt, it was moderate thrill-seeking, and a much-needed reacquaintance with the force of nature. If you take risks of any level, be prepared for things to go wrong, and don't blame anyone else if/when they do - take responsibility for your own actions. Government interference and restriction is not needed, and for those advocating it, it's obvious which group they belong to - no sense of adventure, no willingness to risk anything or even colour outside the lines, and generally fearful. Post your warning signs (I do agree with that), and close washed-out roads, sure - those are no-brainers. Just don't try to shelter us too much from the storm; it's good to feel alive. *To respond or comment on this, feel free to post on Scotian Hiker's Wall on Facebook.*