



Happy Valley-Goose Bay to Port Hope Simpson	421km
Port Hope Simpson to Mary's Harbour	57km
Mary's Harbour to Red Bay	88km
TOTAL	<u>566km</u>

Chapter Six

Happy Valley-Goose Bay to Red Bay

After our wonderful trip to Nain and all our experiences, we were ready to continue exploring this huge and empty part of Labrador. Our friends Mike and Linda were also planning to travel to Red Bay, and we had earlier planned to travel in convoy just to have the extra security of two vehicles, especially since neither of us could acquire a satellite phone. Unfortunately, our friends were both suffering with a cold bug, so they decided to take a recovery day and leave the following morning. We were anxious to get going, so we said goodbye to them at the campsite and started the trip south to Red Bay.

As we made our way to Highway 510 we wondered what this road would really be like. Given our earlier experiences with the roads of Labrador, we were a little nervous about the drive. We drove west out of Happy Valley-Goose Bay, turned onto the highway, and were pleasantly surprised by the quality of this gravel surface. We began to relax as we headed south towards Red Bay. The road surface was very good for unpaved gravel, and we were able to maintain relatively normal highway speeds, encountering only brief areas of roughness. So, for about 200km we drove happily along enjoying the scenery and wondering what all the fuss was about.



A long vista from the cab of the RV

We skirted the Mealy Mountains, visible in the distance to the east and north, and passed through a variety of types of vegetation, from forested areas to scrubland with a great

many rocks. The road crossed many rivers, lakes and ponds which all appeared to be flowing north towards Lake Melville. We took a break at around noon, parked on the side of the road, and enjoyed our lunch while admiring the very rugged and empty scenery.



The sort of scene we encountered all day

Bob took over the driving in the afternoon and was enjoying his time at the wheel until we came close to the turnoff to Cartwright. We don't know why, but from here on the road deteriorated dramatically and the driving became unspeakable. We later learned that the section of the highway between Red Bay and Cartwright is the most frequently traveled, and thus the amount of traffic is detrimental to the road surface. Whatever the reason, the conditions were appalling and our speed and comfort deteriorated in tandem, and when we thought it couldn't get any worse, it did! Bob was finding his way around really nasty surfaces; washboard was the main culprit, but then we came across large rocks sticking up, potholes between the rocks, loose gravel and anything else you can imagine. The dust was also a never-ending presence and the nonstop vibration caused everything to shake! And all this when our top speed varied between 25 and 40kph, although for the most part it was

closer to the lower figure. The poor van gave new meaning to the expression ‘shake, rattle and roll’. It did all of that and more besides. As usual, the chesterfield cushions took their walk around the van and met their old friend the kitchen rug. The drawers and cupboards all had extra bungees to try and keep them shut (we were learning!) but they still tried to join the dance of the sugarplum cushions, but thankfully were not as successful this time! We did stop a couple of times to switch the driving responsibilities, and on one of these brief pauses we noticed a leak in the drainage system! The road had taken its toll! The good thing about this ‘incident’ was that the pipe was the grey water and not the black, so we were merely watering the road (which could only improve it) and not contaminating it! Initially, we thought it was merely a small leak due to the vibration, but on closer examination with an angled mirror, Bob found a good-sized hole in the drainpipe, no doubt due to the rocks on the road bouncing off it on a regular basis. We were very surprised that black ABS, a very tough material, could be damaged in such a way. It just demonstrated the issues we had met on this lovely highway. Later on, Bob was able to fix the hole on a temporary basis with duct tape (the handyman’s secret weapon) and a couple of zip-ties! But a full repair had to wait for a few days until we could find a store with the necessary hose clamps and waterproof tape for doing a better job.



The rocks beside the road and the rocks in it. Often indistinguishable

After what seemed like eons, we finally made it into Port Hope Simpson, took our shattered nerves over to a lovely little café overlooking the shoreline, and enjoyed a resuscitative cup of tea. While we were chatting to the staff we were given directions to the town’s designated camping area, which offered free sites with water hook-ups. This sounded like a good option since we were tired and really didn’t feel like driving any

further. We found the place and pulled in. It looked really pleasant, the only downside being the lack of electrical hook-ups. Normally this wouldn't have worried us, and given the coolness of the weather we had experienced previously, we hardly thought ventilation would be needed. However, this day was uncharacteristically very hot and humid, and without either an external power supply or opening the windows, we thought it might get quite hot through the night. While we were debating this I stepped outside and became closely acquainted with the local blackfly population. The place was thick with them. That did it! A very brief discussion and perusal of all our tourist information found us heading to the local hotel with its air conditioning, and the happy abandonment of our blackfly friends. The hotel overlooked a coastal inlet, and after a nice relaxing supper we were able to connect with WiFi, and thus keep in touch with the outside world.

One of the joys of traveling in an RV is the people you meet and re-meet along the way. This night was no exception. As we went in for supper we met a Swiss family we had originally met on the ship from Nain. We had chatted to them briefly during that week, so it was nice to see them again and learn about their ongoing plans. Then, just as we were finishing supper, our friends Mike and Linda showed up. We were surprised to see them, knowing how miserable they had been in the morning, but now they were a walking advert for the power of both Tylenol and Advil to make a body feel better. We chatted with them briefly and they told us that once they had felt a little better, all they wanted to do was get moving.

After a good night's sleep and a wonderful breakfast in the hotel we were ready to face the road again. One of the destinations in our mound of tourist information was Battle Harbour, so we planned to drive to Mary's Harbour to find out more about it. If we liked what we heard, we would try to go over there for the day on the ferry service that was mentioned in the brochure. Mary's Harbour is about 50km from Port Hope Simpson, so we allowed an ample two hours to get there in order to catch the Battle Harbour ferry, which left at 11:00am. Our GPS suggested it would take less than an hour but, as we had discovered, while Madame GPS knew about the road, she had never actually seen it, let alone driven it. And so we started on what would become a very 'interesting' part of Highway 510.

We were advised by other travelers that the surface was ‘not that great’, which concerned us only a little. In view of the driving we had already experienced, how could it be any worse? It was, and the least said about it the better! We had allowed two hours to drive these 50km, and at one point we really didn’t think we would make it in time for the ferry! We left Port Hope Simpson before 9:00am, and with our average speed of probably around 20kph, the numbers weren’t working in our favour. One of Bob’s more amusing comments related to his time in sub-Saharan Africa, where the drivers would leave the road and drive along the side, since it was easier and safer. He wished we could repeat that experience here in Labrador. We were actually happy to see muddy sections because we could increase our speed to above 20kph, making it somewhat easier and more comfortable. We needed more mud and less of the rocks, potholes and washboard!

A welcome rest beside the road at midday

The concentration needed to drive this portion was intense. During my stints I weaved all over the road trying to find slightly smoother bits to drive on. If Bob spoke to me I



was not aware of it, as every part of my brain was focused on the road! At one point we were passed by two motorbikes, and as they wove their way around the worst areas we wondered what they thought of the conditions. As the clock continued ticking down, we were beginning to wonder if we would even make it to Mary’s Harbour, never mind being in time for the ferry, or even deciding whether to go over to Battle Harbour anyway.

Finally, just as we were resigned to missing the ferry and a possible visit to Battle Harbour, the surface improved as did my speed, and we

eventually made it to the small ferry terminal at 10:40am, a mere 20 minutes before the ferry was due to leave. By this time I was totally exhausted and just ready to stop and do nothing. After parking, or should I say, dumping the van we rushed down to the ferry office and checked with the staff about our choices. There were two ways of getting to Battle Harbour: the overnight trip at a total cost \$400.00 all inclusive, or a privately owned boat for a day trip at \$150.00 in cash. For this second choice we would need to get back in the RV, drive off to find the ATM somewhere in town, and then return to the ferry terminal. It seemed that the overnight stay was the best choice. The deal was sealed with the glad news that there was no blackfly on Battle Harbour Island, so within two minutes Bob was paying for the over-night trip, and I was back up to the RV to pack a bag for both of us. This was really diving into the unknown, and although having no real idea of what to expect we were ready for anything. The joy of not driving the RV any more that day was an incredible and very welcome bonus.