

# Running with the bulls

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door I was greeted with grey sky but no threat of rain. Already we were a step up from the previous year. Anxious to begin our hike, we scarfed down breakfast, packed our rain gear (just in case), snacks and first aid kits and we were on our way.

Less than thirty minutes into the hike our adventure began. I came around a corner to be shushed and halted.

I couldn't see what had caused this sudden delay in our travels but as I neared the group a hint of brown hair glimmered through the trees. My heartbeat began to quicken as I anticipated my first confrontation with an actual moose. Once again Meat Cove would surprise me.

As I peered over the heads of the other hikers I couldn't believe my eyes. Standing in the trail was one of the strangest creatures I had ever seen. With its long brown fur hanging off its face like a goatee and long thin horns protruding towards the ground, I was amazed. The creature resembled a cross between a yak, an ox and a bull — it could only be found in Meat Cove.

I'm not sure what we would have done if it hadn't been for Esther and her rural Alberta upbringing. Chances are we would have turned around and headed back to camp. Instead we followed meekly behind the women of the cows as she "shooed" the beast

down the trail. However, the brute decided to reap his revenge on us as he lifted his tail and let loose before venturing back into the woods. Holding our breath and watching our step, we continued on our way.

Without warning we broke free of our wooded recluse and were greeted by one of the most beautiful coastlines I have ever seen. What a difference from the previous year! I stood in awe as I watched the clouds start to break and the sun peek through as if welcoming us to this site of splendour. Suddenly a whale was spotted off the coast by Julie, the marine biologist to-be of the trip. Everyone grabbed a piece of grass or rock and sat to surrender to the wonder of our surroundings.

No one spoke much during the hour we spent sitting on the coast. As I played a game of peek-a-boo with a friendly seal I could feel the healing begin. Perhaps one could enter Meat Cove and return with a heightened awareness of the beauty of Cape Breton — instead of scars and demons.

Before I had an opportunity to actually contemplate the thought, clouds began to move in, and we decided to continue on our way. With a sigh I waved goodbye to the seal and followed the group once more.

The remainder of the trek along the coast was breathtaking but uneventful. As we turned back towards the woods I felt my old apprehension returning. We were

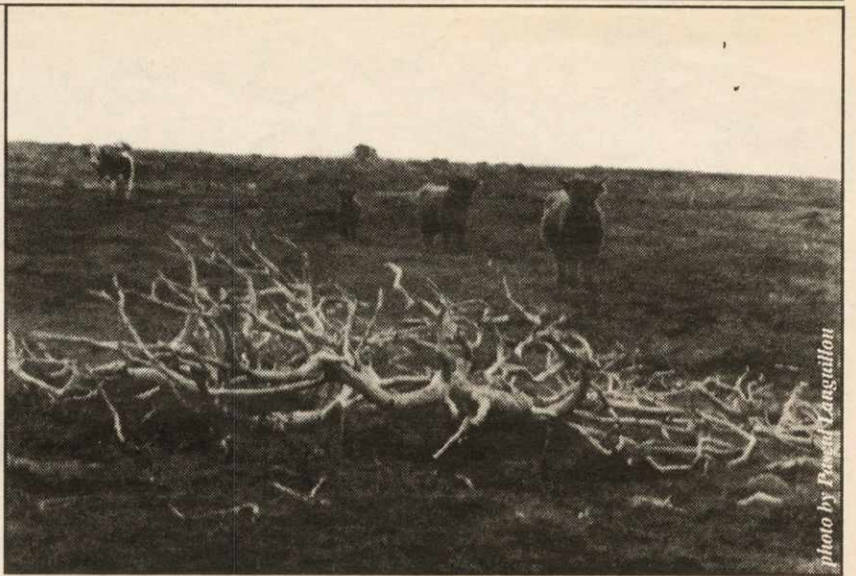
slowly approaching the "House that Stephen King built", a discovery we stumbled upon the previous year. Would the hatchet still be hanging on the wall? Were the cow skulls still marking the turn leading to the house? My stomach became noxious and I found myself shaking involuntarily.

As we came across the house I was once again surprised, not to mention relieved. Much work had been done since the previous year. Paintings now hung where the hatchet had been while plants filled the front windows. I was comforted and encouraged by this sight as we began the last stretch of our journey.

Aside from being delayed momentarily by a confused bat that kept flying back and forth chaotically along the trail, the last leg ran smoothly. We had the opportunity to converse with one of the locals who was out gathering firewood.

Grandpappy Joe was more than happy to offer us a ride to camp in the back of his blue pick up truck. He thought us crazy when we politely refused and shook his head as we continued on our way. To this man it seemed an odd thing we would want to walk when we could drive — but wasn't that our reason for being there?

Our last night at camp was relaxed and memorable. The nine of us sat around the fire eating



Wolly mammoth-type creatures scare the hell out of our humble camper.

grilled cheese and chili while drinking a communal bottle of chilled red wine. Comraderie was born as we believed ourselves to be blessed. The rain had stayed away, as had the wind and the hail. The colours had been vibrant and the scenery heavenly. Everyone retired early but not before numerous rounds of "Categories" and "Concentration-Concentration now begins" were played. The game plan was to get out by dawn and avoid the hunters at all costs.

I woke up once during the night, quivering and whimpering like a baby from the cold and rain, as the roar of ATVs echoed through my mind. Suddenly I realized it was all a dream. I was dry, warm and the night was silent. Cuddling back into my bag I felt I had finally overcome my fear and could appreciate Meat Cove for what it was.

We arose at sunrise, packed up camp in record time and made a beeline for the cars. There was no time for breakfast as we were still fearful of the hunters. It was decided that Baddeck would be our first stop. The waitress at the Yellow Cello restaurant did not seem overjoyed when nine smelly, dirty people entered her restaurant, but we must have looked pathetic enough as she did not refuse us service. We filled our bellies in a cozy, bright yellow atmosphere and then contentedly loaded into the two cars to head home to Halifax.

My shrink is now confident that I have overcome my fear of Meat Cove, but she worries about the nightmares where the Yak is chasing me down narrow hallways. I, on the other hand, know I can face that fear and overcome it. Without Meat Cove haunting my dreams, anything seems possible.





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