

NEWS

EXCLUSIVE: 'We've been lost and forgotten and no one cares'

Tuesday, July 17, 2018



It's the moment Frances Langerfeld dreads when she's taking a reservation: "Oh, you're from Canada? There's something I have to tell you...."

The ferry that connects Campobello Island to mainland Canada has been down for the entire summer, and there's no other direct link available.

Langerfeld's Campobello Whale Watch Motel has had close to 20 confirmed cancellations, an additional 14 cancellations mid-phone-call and a whole lot more who hung up after hearing the news.

Unless you have a passport and want to cross two borders via a two-hour trip through Maine, there's no way onto the island.

"It seems like we've been lost and forgotten and no one cares," said Langerfeld.

A bike race, bike tour and wedding have already been cancelled, she said. And a second wedding is likely soon to follow.

"People are furious."

Tourism industry taking a hit

Kristy Daye has lived on Campobello Island her entire life.

Her accent tells the story of an upbringing infused with Canadian and American cultures. The island, a stone's throw from neighbouring Maine, is the former summer retreat of wartime United States President Franklin Roosevelt.

It connects to the American shoreline by bridge and, until recently, was accessible through Deer Island by ferry.

For restaurants and businesses that survive from the summer rush, the detour through the American border has left a gaping hole in the number of tourists this season.

Daye, a worker at the Family Fisheries Restaurant, said there's been a noticeable difference.

"We're seeing a lot fewer people this year, for sure," said Daye. "And it's a lot harder to get our freight of food here."

The restaurant brings its supplies in from Saint John, which used to mean shipping it on the 30-minute ferry from Deer Island.

But now, the freights have to go through four border points for one return delivery. And because the food is crossing international borders, the trucks are held to different standards.

Before trucks can clear customs, "U.S. regulations require a bond for their value plus any duties," according to the Government of Canada website on exporting to the United States.

"It takes a long time and is pretty well a day-and-night process," said Daye. "If you don't have a bond, you can't get through at all."

The food also has to be in a sealed truck, which isn't required for shipments within New Brunswick.

"If we need fish, we could just jump in the truck and catch the first ferry and we're home within the hour."

Not anymore. Now it takes "the better part of a day" to get fresh fish.

Ferry run by private business

Save for a small, red text at the bottom of the East Coast Ferries Ltd. home page saying, "We are busy getting our new vessel finished," there is no indication on the website that the ferry is down. And this message does not specify it's the Deer Island-to-Campobello Island ferry that isn't running.

On the "Fares/Schedule" page, there is a clear indicator that the ferry to Eastport, Maine is not running. But no such notice is present for the Campobello Island ferry, which generally runs between the end of June and Sept. 31.

Langerfeld said there is no sign for the shutdown where the ferry takes off, so some hopeful passengers have been stuck waiting for hours for a ferry that won't come.

One was the photographer for New Brunswick Southwest MP Karen Ludwig, who was supposed to photograph an announcement she was making with minister of tourism, heritage and culture John Ames last week. Stephen Smart, the mayor of Campobello Island, said the ferry never came, and the photographer never made it.

And there's nothing Smart can do about it.

He said the island has no formal agreement with Stan Lord, the owner of the ferry service.

Lord runs a private business, lives on Deer Island, and is fully at his own discretion to choose whether he wants to continue running his business or not.

The Telegraph-Journal has been unable to contact Lord as of the Tuesday print deadline, but Langerfeld said the ferry is "supposed" to be back by August.

New Brunswick is out of money

Smart said it is no secret why the province is not fronting the cost for a ferry: "New Brunswick is broke."

He said in 10 years of conversations with the province, they've always held the position that the island has a bridge and that this should be enough. Federal government officials, he said, take the stance it is not their jurisdiction.

"[The province] said for a very long time that the bridge answers all of our problems and we shouldn't need to have boat access," said Smart. "But the reality is that there are things that can't go into the States ... and we do need that link to Canada."

The latest round of tariffs puts duties on things like yogurt, ketchup and chocolate, which only adds to the wait times at the border as locals and visitors declare their items.

Barbara Day, a spokesperson for the province's tourism department, said that because "the ferry service is privately owned, we do not have means at this time to evaluate the fluctuation in tourism to Campobello Island."

Day said the ferry has been delayed because of a new barge construction being behind schedule

But the island's lack of attention has left a sour taste in Langerfeld's mouth with the tourism department.

"As far as I'm concerned, I've never heard of them. What is New Brunswick to us?"

ICE stopped me before border; they'll stop you, too

Monday, July 23, 2018



EDITOR'S NOTE: This is part of an ongoing series on Campobello Island and what impact the loss of the only ferry service to the island is having on residents.

I must have made a wrong turn.

That's the only thing going through my head as I approach what looks like a RIDE program about 200 metres in front of the Canadian border.

Two patrol cars, and two officers wearing bullet proof vests stand waiting for me.

"I think I made a mistake," I say to them as I slowly roll up. "Am I going the right way?"

I've already crossed three borders to get to Campobello Island and back that day. This will be my fourth, driving from Calais, Maine into St. Stephen. I've crossed this border before, and I know I have to drive past a booth to talk to the Canadian immigration officer.

Not this.

"You haven't made a mistake," the officer says. "Passport?"

It's a back and forth after that. Questions of where I was, how long I've been there, where I'm going.

"Oh, you're Canadian?" he says, finally looking at the passport.

I say that I am. He asks what I do. I tell him I'm a journalist. And he tells me to drive on.

He doesn't say who he is, he doesn't say what he's looking for, and I continue to drive slowly toward the border -- confused.

I get to the booth, there's no line, and the first question the Canadian border officer asks me is: "did you get stopped on your way over?"

I say I did. I then ask who it was as I hand over my passport for the fifth time of the day.

"American guys," he says. I ask if it's U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. He says "yup."

I ask what they're looking for.

"I have no idea," he says. "We don't know what they're up to."

He hands me back my passport.

"You're free to go."

The experience was a first for me, but it's not an uncommon situation, Campobello Island Mayor Stephen Smart told me just hours before.

The island holds the unique annoyance of being the only Canadian island that you need a passport to travel to.

Some residents in Campobello will cross the border five times a day to neighbouring Lubec, Maine during a regular work week. St. Stephen is the closest border crossing to enter into the Canadian mainland.

"It's one thing when they're looking for somebody. Of course we understand that," said Smart.

"But when it's happening over and over, and there's no information available for why they're there or what they're looking for, people feel violated. I think understandably they don't want to put themselves in that situation."

ICE was formed in 2003, has an operating budget of \$6 billion, and employs more than 20,000 people, according to its website.

They have become an international talking point with United States President Donald Trump's hard stance on borders and immigration.

And the heightened security is being felt by Americans as well. The Roosevelt Campobello International Park was down eight per cent in visitors through June this year.

That number wouldn't have been impacted by the recent ferry shutdown to Deer Island, as the ferry doesn't start running until the end of June.

About 85 per cent of visitors to the park come from the U.S.

"We think that there is probably political reasons that travel is down a little bit this year," said park superintendent Jamie Carr, also referencing the recent trade tariffs.

Terry Cunningham is a recent retiree of the New Brunswick tourism department, and spent close to 15 years working in different capacities with Campobello residents.

He's done the border crossings before, and said some people get themselves into trouble just by answering a question wrong.

"Not that I have any fear -- I haven't done anything wrong. But I've gone across that border, and felt as if I was very guilty of doing something," he said.

But tourism department communications officer Barbara Day points out that Statistics Canada numbers give a different view of the border landscape.

The number of residents from the U.S. entering New Brunswick by vehicle increased by 5.9 per cent in June of this year compared to 2017. That's just below the national average increase of 6.8 per cent.

The number of Canadian residents returning from the U.S. to Canada also increased in June of this year by 9.8 per cent at the New Brunswick border. That, too, was just below the national average of 12.7 per cent.

The department is trying to increase visitor spending from \$1.3 billion to \$2 billion by 2025, and a major focus is on the "95 per cent of tourists entering New Brunswick by road."

While they can control welcome sign construction at the border crossings, the actions of the officials are out of their purview.