

Handcock, W.G., Toponymic Tour of the Southern Avalon: The Irish Loop
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Communities of the Southern Avalon, the “Irish Loop” ...

The “Irish Loop” is the name recently adopted by the province (Tourism) to give cultural character to a touring route around the Southern Avalon. The tour begins at St. John’s and links together the settled places along the “Southern Shore” (the traditional name for the coast of the Avalon Peninsula between St. John’s and Trepassey), and the eastern side of St. Mary’s Bay.

The Southern Shore was one of the first areas of Newfoundland to be exploited by European migratory cod fishermen (Portuguese, English and French). Most of the oldest toponyms are Portuguese in origin. By the late 16th century the Southern Shore was dominated by migratory fishermen from the West of England and became part of the so-called “English Shore”. In the 17th century the English attempted a series of formal colonies, among them, St. John’s, Ferryland, Renews, Aquarforte, and Bay Bulls. When these schemes failed as economic ventures some were left behind and were joined subsequently by other settlers (known as planters) including after the 1720s increasing numbers from Ireland. By the 1750s the Southern Shore, Trepassey Bay and St. Mary’s, the whole Southern Avalon, was predominantly Irish, and had become, *de facto* the “Irish Shore”. It has remained predominantly Irish in culture and tradition ever since, hence the appropriate moniker the “Irish Loop”.

Traditionally and until recently all of the communities of this region depended on the cod fishery for their livelihood. Since the cod moratorium was declared in 1992, most communities have experienced massive outmigration. Those left *have sought alternative means of livelihood in new fisheries (crab, shrimp) or in tourism (cultural and adventure) in the land that to their ancestors long ago in Ireland was known as Talonvanish – “the far off island of fish” – Newfoundland.*

AVALON PENINSULA – a name applied to the region of southeastern Newfoundland, a peninsula defined by an isthmus between Trinity and Placentia Bays. It derives from Avalonia, the legendary court of King Arthur and the place where Christianity was believed to have been first introduced to England. Sir George Calvert (later Lord Baltimore), a devout Christian gentleman, chose the name Colony of Avalon for his settlement at Ferryland in the 1620s. It was later applied to the whole of a large peninsula on Mason’s map (1629) and Robinson’s map (1669).

1. **KILBRIDE** – From the Gaelic Cill- Bhrigde meaning Bridgid’s or Bride’s Church. Settled by Irish settlers in the 19th century.
2. **Goulds** – In oral usage, “The Goulds”. Also settled as a farming area in the 19th century. Said to be named for a yellow flower – the marsh marigold, or gool, which grows abundantly on the banks of streams. The Goulds-Kilbride areas were recently incorporated into the city of St. John’s. The area contains a number of dairy farms.
3. **Bay Bulls** – The earliest recording of Bay of Bulls (Hood 1592), Bay Bulls (1630). It is said to be the oldest name of English origin in Newfoundland. It is thought to be named

for the abundance of the “bull birds”- the Common Dovekie – a seabird that overwinters in Newfoundland and together with several other species of its kind are locally referred to as “Salt water ducks”. They were in great abundance at the time of original settlement on the area. Bay Bulls is one of the oldest communities on the island. It had a fiery history, having been attacked, sacked, and burned to the ground five times by the French in their century long war with the English fought for possession of Newfoundland between 1696 and 1796. During the Second World War it was an important naval base for the Canadian Navy, functioning as a major repair-dockyard. Presently, archaeologists are at work trying to salvage the remains of the British warship, *HMS Sapphire*, sunk in the harbour in 1696. Bay Bulls is the site of the Bell Canada *Telestat*, and receives the satellite signal for televisions, international radio and telephone communications in Newfoundland. Residentially, it is, like many surrounding “outports”, a suburb of St. John’s. [The term “outport” is applied to virtually all coastal (rural), formerly fishing settlements in Newfoundland].

4. **Witless Bay** – Of English origin (c6130) it is thought to derive from an old dialect word meaning “crazy, or lunatic”, metaphorically used for the rolling of the sea. A local tradition is that it is after one of the first settlers in the bay, a Devonshire man, Captain Whittle. When the Captain died some years later, his family returned to England and one of the locals was later heard to comment that they now lived in a “Whittle-less” bay, and the moniker stuck, being later transformed into Witless Bay. It continues today with a limited inshore fishery and a diversified fish processing plant that serves as a collector plant for many of the fishing communities along the Shore.
5. **Mobile** – It is believed to be derived from “old English” dialect words such as mumble or mumble, meaning “turbulent seas”. Moveable B (c 1630), Mummable Bay (Robinson 1669). It may also be a transfer name from “The Mumbles”, a rugged peninsula found on the coast of Wales. A Newfoundland tradition has it that it originated from an association with the migratory habits of the early fishermen. It has been occupied off and on since 1705. Today it is generally a “bedroom town” with most of its residents commuting to St. John’s to work.
6. **Tors Cove** – Originally spelt “Toad’s Cove”. It may be from an old English word – tote, meaning fox. It was used by migratory fishermen in the 1600s but no permanent population occupied the cove until the mid-1800s. The fishermen produced dried salt fish for bulk sale to the markets of St. John’s, or direct shipment to the European Mediterranean and West Indies markets. Since 1992 and the cod moratorium, most working residents commute to St. John’s for employment.
7. **La Manche** – (Robinson 1669) – Named by the French after their own name for the “English Channel”, because the narrow inlet bounded in both sides by steep, towering cliffs was reminiscent of the Channel in their homeland. It was settled by English fishermen but its population never grew to more than 60 or 70 residents owing to the lack of shore and building space. The tiny community resisted efforts to resettle in the early 1960s but in 1966 a severe storm demolished the wharves and stages of the settlement forcing the remaining population to leave. Today the abandoned community is part of La Manche Provincial Park and there an ongoing effort to restore the original

suspended wooden foot bridge that over linked the two sides of the deep gorge. * (15 minutes walk from road in Park to village site. About 1 hour to see the whole thing).

- 8. **Cape Broyle** – Cape Broile (1610), C. Brolle (1630). Probably Portuguese in origin, from albrolho – meaning a broile or brolle caused by a disturbance or roaring in the sea as a result of shoals which caused the “white water” at the harbour’s entrance – thus Cape Broyle in English translation.
- 9. **Calvert** – The community was originally known as “Capelin Bay”, Caplen Bay (1597). Not because of the abundance of capelin, a small fish bait found in the deep bay each summer. It was renamed Calvert in 1922 in honour of Sir George Calvert who had established the colony at Ferryland in 1621. The area of Capelin Bay was part of Calvert’s original grant and he had plans to extend his colony there until he had a taste of Newfoundland winter and decided to abandon his attempts in Newfoundland altogether in favour of warmer climes in New England.
- 10. **Ferryland** – There is much debate about the origin of this name. It is generally believed that it comes from Portuguese – Farelhao, meaning a “foreland or island close to the mainland” or a “steep cape” or “headland”. The French transformed it to Forillon, and the English made it into Ferryland. It was the site chosen by Sir George Calvert, later Lord Baltimore, to attempt to set up his Colony of Avalon in 1621. After spending only one winter there in 1627, Calvert removed himself to the more hospitable climate of New England where he began the colony of Maryland. Today, the community still prospers and has become one of Newfoundland’s most treasured sites, both archaeologically and historically, and efforts are ongoing to make it one of the focal points of tourism in the province.
- 11. **Aquaforte** – The probable origin of this name is also Portuguese – from Aqua-forto – meaning “strong water”. The original was R. da Aqua, river of fresh water. One explanation for the original name is the presence of a waterfall that empties into the head of the harbour at the end of a narrow, deep fiord – about 6 kilometres long with steep, rocky sided cliffs. An attempted settlement was sponsored here in 1617 by the Welsh peer Sir William Vaughan. It was short lived.
- 12. **Fermeuse** – Another name of Portuguese origin, R. fermoso (1519, Rio fremoze (1547) – meaning “a place of fresh water”. French cartographer rendered it variously – fermous, frimouze. It was later Anglicized into today’s form. The settlement was part of Lord Falkland’s attempt to establish a colony of commerce in Newfoundland in 1623, but like the others of its time, it also failed as a business venture. Some of the original settlers stayed to build their own futures and the place became a very prosperous fishing center over the following 300 years.
- 13. **Renews** – (Cappahayden) – There are over a dozen spellings of this place name, beginning with Rougnouse (Cartier 1536). The modern spelling can be traced to 1813. From the French, regneux, meaning “rock, covered with reeds, slime, and shells”, it was transformed into the English Renews. It was first occupied as a summer station by English fishermen in the late 1500s and later became a part of Lord Falkland’s grant to establish a colony on the island in 1623. After he gave up on it some of the colonists who remained established an inshore fishery (and later a “bank fishery”) from the harbour which was a successful venture until the mid-1800s. Cappahayden, just a few

miles distant, was always closely linked with Renews and as the fortunes of Renews went, so went Cappahayden's. This community was originally called Broad Cove until its name was changed by the parish priest about 1870, named for his birthplace in Kilkenny County, Ireland. It was officially changed by the Newfoundland Nomenclature Board in 1919.

14. **Portugal Cove South** – This fishing village was named because it was used by Portuguese migratory fishermen up to the early 1600s. It was then occupied and settled by the English and eventually the Irish who moved into the area in the early 1800s as the growth of population along the shore required that the prospective settlers find unoccupied coves and bays. The designation “South” was given to distinguish it from the Portugal Cove in the “north” in Conception Bay, itself an older and more established community.
15. **Cape Race** – From the Portuguese, Capo Raso (1504) is the oldest extant European toponym in Newfoundland and one of the oldest in North America. Seary suggests it may be transferred from Capo Raso at the mouth of the River Tagus, or descriptively mean “low, flat, or barren cape”.
16. **Biscay Bay** – This bay was fished by the French-Basque who named it for their homeland on the north coast of Spain. It grew into an English salmon fishing station in the mid-1700s and a permanent and prosperous inshore fishing settlement. By about 1960 many of the people of the community left the fish catching sector of the industry to join the fish processing sector with a large fish processing plant at Trepassey.
17. **Trepassey** – Today, Trepassey is a conglomerate of settlements which includes Trepassey proper, or center, as well as neighbourhoods called Lower Coast, Dock, Upper Coast, Northeast, Shoal Point, Daniel's Point, and Northwest. It was originally a seasonal fishing station of the French in the late 1500s and early 1600s. In the 17th century Trepassey was used concurrently by both the French and the English. The name comes from the French Tres-passe, which means loosely the “many passed”, or dead, a reference to lives lost in the many shipwrecks that occurred in the area around the nearby capes (Race, Pine, and the dreadful Mistaken Point).
18. **Peter's River** – Named Rivière du Pierre by the French from their occupation of the area before 1713. It was named for the river flowing into the harbour, “Rocky River” which the French literally named after their fashion, Peter meaning “Rock” in the religious context of the Catholic Church. It was a village that grew out of the offshore Bank Fishery of the late 1800s and early 1900s, along with nearby St. Vincent's and St. Stephen's. The headquarters of the Bank Fishery was in St. Mary's and the surrounding coves were needed to provide places where schooners and dories could be built and repaired.
19. **St. Stephen's** – This settlement grew along with the others centered near St. Mary's during the Bank Fishing era. It was originally called Middle Gut because of its position between (Holyrode) later St. Vincent's and Peter's River. When the Churches moved into the area it was thought that the quaint names of the fishing villages should have more appropriate names and so they were accordingly renamed for saints.
20. **St. Vincent's** – This village was originally known as “Holyrode” or “Holyrood” until 1910. There was a practical reason for this name change. It was made to distinguish it from Holyrood in Conception Bay, an older and more populous settlement.

21. **Gaskiers** – This settlement is an example of when the obvious is mundane, go to the romantic. Some claim it got its name from a French family who were the first to settle in the cove – The Gasquies, while others claim it originated from the French term “casse-coeur”, meaning “heart-breaker” or “lady-killer”. It began as a small inshore fishing village like the others in the St. Mary’s area and prospered along with them in the Bank Fishery.
22. **Point La Haye** – Another of the fishing villages that grew as a result of the Bank Fishery, it is believed to have been simply named after the first French family in the area or after the common place name of La Haye in France. Unlike many fishing villages in Newfoundland, along with the other communities of St. Mary’s Bay showed a little more diversity in seeking their livelihood, being some of the first settlers on the island to pursue agriculture as a supplement to their fishing. There was an abundance of natural pasture lands in the area and the residents made use of it by raising considerable livestock – cattle, sheep, and hogs, which they supplied to markets in nearby communities as well to markets as far away as St. John’s.
23. **St. Mary’s** – From the Cape, named by Portuguese Capo de Sancta Maria (1536). The settlement was a French fishing station in the late 1590s. The name stuck even after the English move in after 1713. The port quickly grew into the commercial center for the southwestern Avalon. Local merchant firms also did a brisk trade with American and Nova Scotian banker fleets, as well as the French Ships from St. Pierre, supplying them with their herring bait and other provisions for their deep sea banker fleets and went out each year for long stays on the Grand Banks. St. Mary’s was a regular port of call for the coastal steamers by the 1860s, had a “commercial school”, a school run by the Presentation Sisters, a courthouse, and a jail. The community prospered until the great bank crash of 1894 and the collapse of the bank fishery. Its fortunes declined into the 20th century and many of the business men moved to the U.S. where they had both family and business ties. By the 1980s most of the town’s workers were employed in the fish plants in other communities such as Trepassey and St. Joseph’s.
24. **Riverhead** – This settlement grew up as a “suburb” of St. Mary’s at the mouth of the Salmonier River which flows into the head of St. Mary’s Harbour. It was used as a fishing station for fishermen from St. Mary’s who went to the Bank River each summer to fish salmon. In the late 19th century it began to become a “summer residence” location and eventually grew into a “summer cottage” area for residents of St. John’s. It is considered to be one of Newfoundland’s more “quaint” sites of “lawn art”.
25. **St. Joseph’s** – Settled in the early 1800s by Irish immigrants, it was known first as “Black Duck Gullies” until the Church again figured in the nomenclature. Most of the residents were employed by merchants and ship owners from St. Mary’s Bay in the Bank Fishery. It was the site of several lobster canneries until the late 1800s but suffered the same decline as its fellow communities of the bay with the demise of the bank fishery in the 1940s. Many of its residents sought work in Argentia and St. John’s until the construction of a large fish plant there in the 1970s somewhat revitalized the community and still maintains it today.
26. **New Bridge** – The Irish settled here in the early 1800s and named their little cove “Little Harbour” which it was called for about 100 years along with the river that flowed past it

into the harbour. In the early 1900s the old wooden bridge which had served the village for its entire life was replaced by a new concrete one across the Little Harbour River and so the local priest exercising his romantic imaginings petitioned that the place change its name to “New Bridge”.

27. **Forest Field** – This small fishing outport was until 1935 known as “Cooling Pond”. It was always considered a “suburb” of the larger community of Salmonier until that year when it was recorded in the census as part of Salmonier, and had all its Government services, such as they were at the time, administered through the larger community.
28. **Salmonier and Salmonier Line** – [line is a distinctive Newfoundland generic term found only on the Avalon Peninsula for a road that links two principal settlements]. Salmonier is more properly an “area” rather than one particular settlement, although there is a Salmonier “proper” which was the focal point of the rest of the communities which sprang up around the Salmonier River from which the area gets its name. The river was a summer salmon fishing station in earlier days and eventually attracted people to settle in permanent communities around the head of St. Mary’s Bay. Today, the area is collectively made up of communities including St. Catherine’s, Mount Carmel, and Mitchell’s Brook. The center grew out of the building of a road to connect Conception Bay in the north and St. Mary’s Bay in the south. By 1935 people had begun to build along this road, or the “Line”, as it was called, and by the time of Confederation the “Salmonier Line” had become a popular summer cottage region for the people from both bays as well as St. John’s.