

# McNabs Island

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Welcome to your McNabs Island BioKit Circuit. Use the activities in this circuit, along with the HRM Urban BioKit, to explore the natural treasures and unique places in this park – utilizing your keen powers of observation. In addition to the material required for the BioKit, you will need the following:

- ☐ Plastic jar    ☐ Old pair of socks    ☐ Old pair of gloves    ☐ A snack and water

**Location:** There is no bridge to McNabs Island. It is located at the mouth of Halifax Harbour, 10 minutes by boat from Eastern Passage and about 25 minutes by boat from downtown Halifax and Dartmouth.

**Note:** 1) If you are landing at Wreck Cove, start with activity #1 at Fort McNab.  
2) If you are landing at Garrison Pier, start with activity #7 and work your way backwards to activity #1.



Photo: © Parks Canada, J. D'Entremont

## HISTORY

McNabs Island is an important historical and natural feature of Halifax Harbour. Beginning about 3000 BC, the island was used as a temporary hunting and fishing home by the Mi'kmaq First Nations people. After being purchased by the McNab family in 1782, the island was cleared of forest and converted to farmland, and would stay this way for the next 150 years. In the 19th century, the British military built many forts on the island to better defend Halifax. Over the centuries, the island has also been a popular place for recreational activity.

Today, the island retains many historical landmarks, including Fort McNab National Historic Site, Fort Ives and Hugonin Battery, as well as old homes, abandoned gardens, and many magnificent wildlife habitats. Explore the crumbling remains of the past, but be careful – not all of these sites are safe for play.

Good luck on your adventure!

## Wreck Cove Treasure Hunt

**1** GPS: N 44° 36.122' W 63° 30.560'

As you approach Wreck Cove, you will see the remains of shipwrecked boats that were scuttled here decades ago. Although this island may seem like a remote wilderness, you will find oddities and trash on this beach, which are a sign of its close proximity to urban HRM.

**What are some items you can see on the beach that are *not* normally found in a pristine wilderness?**

**Try to identify five items:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

**Warning! DO NOT touch or pick up any trash without wearing heavy gloves.**

Interested in improving the cleanliness of beaches on McNabs Island? You could participate in one of the many beach cleanups organized by the Friends of McNabs Island Society.



Photo: © S. Heffernan



Map: © HRM

## FALLEN TREES



**GPS: N 44° 36.217' W 63° 31.024'**

A fallen tree is a sign of change in the forest. Find a big fallen tree near you. Look at the size and roots of this tree. Can you imagine how much water this underground root system used?

When a large tree falls, it allows more sunlight and water to reach plants lower to the ground. Under most circumstances, fallen trees would have been replaced by native species.

**Look around you. Do you see the plant pictured here?**

This plant is called Japanese knotweed, an invasive species from Eastern Asia. It was introduced in North America as a garden plant and to control erosion. Japanese knotweed is actually everywhere on McNabs Island. This fast growing plant crowds out native species and is a threat to the island's biodiversity.



## Link Between Marshes



**Near Garrison Road between McNabs Pond and the marsh**

**GPS: N 44° 36.403' W 63° 31.312'**

As marshes are full of water, they are also full of life. Marsh animals include Great Blue Herons, frogs and dozens of species of aquatic insects. The rich waters of the marsh are best seen close-up, so lie on your stomach where the water flows under the path, look over the edge into the murky waters below, and play an "I-Spy" game with "marsh-ian" life forms!

One at a time, choose a characteristic from the I-Spy list below. The others in your group have to find an animal that you all can see that has this characteristic. Try to fill in as much of the list as possible.

### ***I-Spy Something That...***

- |                                       |                         |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Has four legs: _____                  | Has six legs: _____     |
| Flies: _____                          | Swims underwater: _____ |
| Jumps: _____                          | Is furry: _____         |
| Hangs out on plants: _____            | Is camouflaged: _____   |
| Travels on the water's surface: _____ | Sings: _____            |
| Makes noise: _____                    | Looks slimy: _____      |



Photo: © Environment Canada



## 4 In front of the lighthouse, on the beach

GPS: N 44° 36.298' W 63° 31.528'

This road leading to the lighthouse was cut in two by Hurricane Juan in 2003. Before this, it was possible to walk along the shore or the road to the lighthouse. You can imagine how powerful this hurricane must have been to create this large gap – literally tearing the beach and the road apart!

### Signs of Marine Life

What signs of animals can you see on the beach?  
(Examples: empty shells, bird droppings, tracks)

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Look out into the ocean: do you see any sea life  
(such as shorebirds)?

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Before Hurricane Juan



### Did You Know?

Barnacles are an important link in the food chain, providing a vital source of food for dogwinkles and starfish.

## Shoreline Habitat

### 5 In the rocky part of the beach

GPS: N 44° 36.361' W 63° 31.509'

#### Life Rocks!

At low tide, you will see carpets of barnacles covering every rock. These animals look like small white volcanoes made of bone.

#### Activity:

- 1) Put on your gloves.
- 2) Find a small rock covered in barnacles.
- 3) With a magnifying glass look closely at the barnacles.
- 4) Can you see the trap doors? Are they closed or open?

Place the rock in a plastic jar full of sea water. After a few minutes, the doors should open and the barnacles should start to feed. With a magnifying glass, look for the barnacles' tiny feathery legs, called cirri.

#### What are the cirri doing?

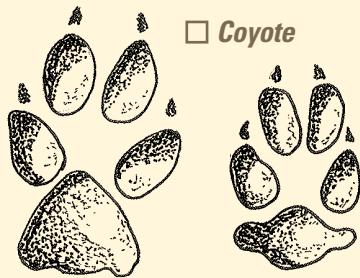
## ANIMAL TRACKS

### 6 On the sandy trail between the beach and Garrison Road

GPS: N 44° 36.497' W 63° 31.481'

This is a great spot to look for animal footprints, because of numerous sandy patches on the ground. Many animals use this trail as a path to the marsh and beach, both of which are desirable feeding and hunting grounds.

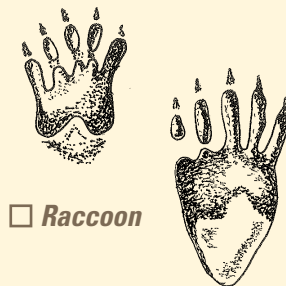
**Look around this area for animal footprints.** If you find any, see if you can match them to one of the images below (the actual footprints will be bigger than the images). Check off the ones that you find.



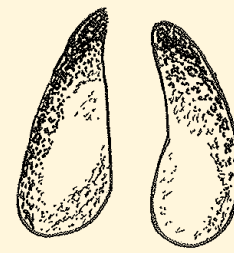
☐ Coyote



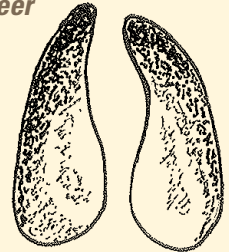
☐ Red fox



☐ Raccoon



☐ White-tailed deer



☐ Eastern cottontail

Illustrations: © I. Julian

## Tea House

### 7 GPS: N 44° 36.818' W 63° 31.664'

The Tea House, built in the 1980s as a tourist attraction, is one of the more recently constructed buildings on the island (it is now closed). The surrounding area features many introduced species of plants and trees.

In the Tea House yard, there's a large, rotting snag that died long ago and is now missing several top branches and its bark. Snags are places with a high level of wildlife activity, and often home to nesting birds such as woodpeckers, chickadees and small owls.

**Study the snag carefully.** Can you see woodpecker holes and insect marks? This tree will provide food and habitat for many organisms for years to come, before the tree eventually falls and feeds the earth and new life that will grow from it.



Photo: © Parks Canada, P. Lavers

### Resources:

- Friends of McNabs Island Society  
[www.mcnabsisland.ca](http://www.mcnabsisland.ca)
- Biosphere  
[ec.gc.ca/biosphere](http://ec.gc.ca/biosphere)