

WEATHER

Bay St. Lawrence Weather Goes Online

Cape Breton Weather

BILL DANIELSON

One day a while back, Esther and I drove from tranquil Smelt Brook to wild and woolly Cheticamp. We went there for the sole purpose of experiencing Les Suêtes, those ferocious southeasterly winds that often develop along Cape Breton's western coastline in advance of a storm. Stopping at the shore, I wrestled the car door open against the gale, and held up my portable wind gauge, which consists of a plastic tube with a little ball that rises in the tube to indicate the wind speed. That type of gauge never works too well, and I ended up screaming to Esther, over the shrieking wind, "It says 8 kilometres per hour!"

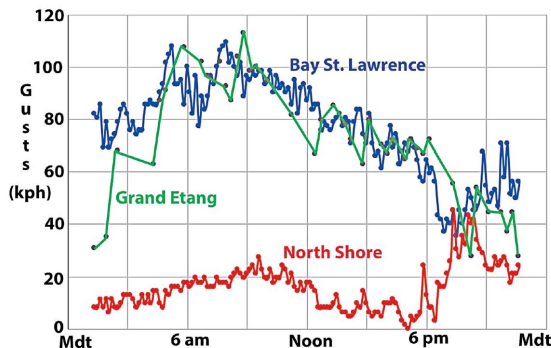
This story makes two important points about Cape Breton weather - it can be completely different just around the corner (or over the Highlands), and you need good equipment if you expect to collect useful measurements.

Sydney Mines resident and fellow weather fanatic Jonathan Buffet understands these two realities, and he acts on them. Jonathan has purchased and installed nearly a dozen weather stations around Cape Breton, which collect data and report online. And he doesn't cut corners on quality - the instruments he purchases are rugged

and accurate.

Recently, Jonathan and I bought a weather station for installation in Bay St. Lawrence or "the Bay." Why there? In part, because we wanted to know about the extent of Les Suêtes winds. Over the years, Environment Canada's weather station at Grand Étang has been the only site on Cape Breton's western shore to record and post wind speeds online. We wondered if Les Suêtes really do occur "from Margaree Harbour to Bay St. Lawrence," as the weather warnings always advise. Local folks in the Bay and elsewhere claim their southeasterlies are terribly strong, but we needed numbers. Also, we simply wanted to document conditions at the top of Cape Breton, at the northernmost settlement in Victoria County. So, why Bay St. Lawrence? Basically, because it is there.

On April 1st, Jonathan installed our new weather station in the Bay. It began measuring and dutifully reporting online, and we began dutifully studying the data stream. Like kids praying for a snow day, we hoped for Suêtes winds. We didn't have long to wait. The weather obliged just six days later on April 7. In Grand Étang, southeasterly winds gusted to 113 kph. And in the Bay? Our instrument clocked a peak gust of 109.4 kph! Through much of that day, gusts were actually stronger in the Bay. This



Wind gusts throughout the day of April 7, 2017.

was hard data, and quick verification that Les Suêtes winds, equivalent to those at Grand Étang, do indeed occur in far northern Victoria County. We were also relieved to see our equipment withstand punishing gusts, and continue to operate flawlessly.

The graph shows how wind gusts compared that day in Grand Étang, the Bay, and at another of Jonathan Buffet's weather stations, at the Clucking Hen in the North Shore. As you can see, gusts in Grand Étang and the Bay were very similar all day except early and late in the day, when they were stronger in the Bay. Meanwhile, North Shore conditions were in a totally different weather regime. Winds there remained very light all day, except for a spasm in the evening where they briefly matched

those at the other two sites.

Jonathan has created "Cape Breton Mesonet," which he calls "a cooperative network of privately owned weather stations across Cape Breton Island." You can reach the network online at www.capebretonweather.ca. Clicking on the map there takes you to current conditions at any one of Jonathan's weather stations or "partner stations."

Perhaps you are operating a personal weather station that posts (or could post) your data on the Internet. If you would like to be a partner, you can reach Jonathan through his website listed above. This is a wonderful way to become involved in "citizen science." The more people participate, the more we all can understand and appreciate the many miracles of Cape Breton weather!

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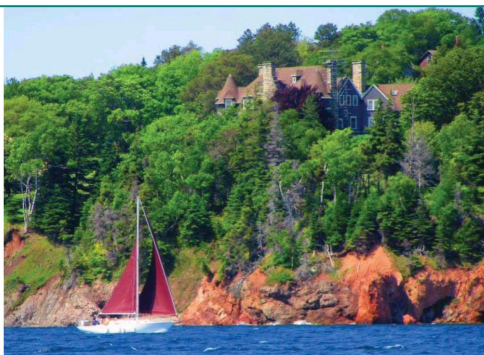
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