

McNabs Island Visitor Survey Final Report July-August 2001 Conducted for the Friends of McNabs Island Society

During the summer of 2001, the Friends of McNabs Island Society hired two summer students, Tanya Dill and Jaime Vickers. The students were partly funded under the Summer Student Works Program of Human Resources Development Canada. One of the job duties of the students was to conduct surveys of island visitors. The students randomly intercepted visitors on McNabs Island from July 24 to August 30. In total **(66)** visitors agreed to be interviewed. Those interviewed were either visiting the island on their own (2), with family (20), with a group (41), or with an organization (3).

Where are Island Visitors From?

When asked where they were from, the respondents replied: Halifax (24), Eastern Passage (14), Dartmouth (12), Bedford/Sackville (3) and Herring Cove (1). Visitors from outside Halifax Regional Municipality included: Enfield/Shubenacadie (2), Truro/Pictou (2), Amherst (1), Cape Breton (3). There were visitors from Ontario (2), British Columbia (1), Alberta (1), Newfoundland (1), United States (3), United Kingdom (1) and Ireland (1).

When asked if this was their first visit to McNabs Island **(24) answered YES** and **(39) answered NO**. Most of those who have visited the island before indicate that they visit the island between 1 and 5 times a year.

How often do you visit the island per year?

1-5 times per year	23
6-10 times per year	5
11-15 times per year	1
16-20 times per year	7
More than 21 times a year	3

For obvious reasons, most visit the island in the summer (48) with (8) visiting in the spring and (9) visiting in the fall. Only (2) visit the island in the winter.

Island Access

Most visitors to the island travel there by **charter boat (40)** with **Mike Tilley's McNabs Island Ferry** being the transportation of choice **(23)**. Others have their own transportation and travel to the island by **private boat (26)**.

How did you get to the island?

Charter boat?	40
Name of company	
Mike Tilley	23
Murphy's	10
Tax Sea	4
Sea Tiger	2

Private boat?	26
Type of Boat	
Motorboat	11
Sailboat	6
Paddle	6
Fishing Boat	2

According to the survey, **Range Pier** and **Back Cove** on the eastern side of the island are the **main access points**. The wharf at Range Pier is dilapidated and not suitable for landing. In spite of its condition, most landings occur here. This is not surprising since Mike Tilley lands the majority of his passengers at Range Pier or Back Cove. All those surveyed that travelled to the island with Mike landed at this side of the island.

It should be noted that large boats cannot land at Range Pier. Large groups that travel to the island with Murphy's on the Water, Four Winds, New Dawn Charters or Sea Tiger land at Garrison Pier.

Where did you land on the island?

Range Pier	36
Garrison Pier	17
Beach	8
Timmons Cove	2
Ives Cove	1

Length of Stay on the Island

According to the survey, most visitors to the island spend a **few hours to a whole day** on the island (**38**). The rest of the visitors spend the night on the island or in their boats. This number of overnight visitors could be problematic since the draft management plan does not allow for any camping except if it is program-related and in a group campground location. The group camping site is off the old military road and some distance from both Garrison and Range piers.

How long do you expect to stay on the island?

Few hours	13
Half a day	12
All day	13
Overnight	11
Few days	8

Visitor Activities on McNabs Island

Visitors were asked what activities they have done or will do and places that they have visited or will visit while they were on the island that day. The respondents answered unaided with **walking and hiking (57)** as their most common activity and **visiting Fort McNab (52)** as the most common place that they will visit. This is not surprising since most of the charter boat visitors landed at Range Pier, which is a short distance to Fort McNab National Historic Site of Canada.

What activities will you do or destinations you will visit while you are on the island today?

n=66

Activity on the Island

Walking/Hiking on trails	57
Nature Study	28
Camping	27
Picnicking	25
Bird watching	17
Photography	15
Play on beach	13
Berry picking	12
Social Gathering	10
Biking	8
Swimming	8
Kayak/Canoeing	7
Beach Sweeps	5
Picking wildflowers	3
Fishing	3
Play Music	2
Create Art	1
Drinking	1
Watching coastal ecology	1
Relaxing on boat	1
Campfire	1

Place to visit on Island

Fort McNab	52
Fort Ives	39
Visit lighthouse	15
Cultural Sites	7

When asked if they went anywhere or did anything that they hadn't expected to do **(13)** respondents replied that they had:

Visited forts	4
Picked berries	2
Visited teahouse	1
Visited houses	1
Collected driftwood	1
Bushwhacked through woods	1
Played a drum	1
Dislocated shoulder while biking	1
Watched birds	1

Awareness of McNabs Island

When asked how familiar they were with McNabs Island (**53**) respondents indicated that they **were familiar** with the island before their visit. (**11**) indicated that they were **not familiar** with the island at all.

When asked how they heard about the island, (**54**) said that they learned of the island through **word of mouth**. This is not surprising since there is no advertising campaign to promote the island to visitors.

How did you hear about the island?

Word of mouth	54
Brochure	3
Internet	4
Signs	1
TV	1
Tourism office	1
Guide book	4
Which guidebook?	
Discover McNabs	3
Hiking Trails of NS	1
Bike NS	1
Doers & Dreamers guide	1
Other	
Cruise ship	1
Public works employee	1
Can see island from Halifax	2

When asked if they were familiar specifically with the history of the island (**39**) indicated that they were **familiar with the history**. The most common source of information about the history of the island was from their **parents (17)**. However, those who said that they knew about the island history were not tested on their knowledge. (**14**) respondents reported that they new nothing about the history of the island.

How did you learn about McNabs Island?

Parents	17
Friends of McNabs	6
Mike Tilley	5
School	4
Hangman's Beach	2
Guide book	2
Friend	2
Halifax Citadel	1

Impression of McNabs Island

Survey respondents were asked unaided what they enjoyed the most about McNabs Island. **(25)** respondents said that they enjoyed the **peace and quiet** of the island.

Nature came second with **(12)** respondents suggesting that this was the most enjoyable feature of the island. The island's undeveloped state and its closeness to the largest metropolitan region in the Maritimes was an added attraction for many respondents.

What do you enjoy most about McNabs Island?

Peace & quiet	25
Nature	12
Relaxing	6
No people	5
Forts	5
Close to city	5
Away from city	5
Untouched	3
Not an operational park	3
Unregulated	2
Houses	2
History	2

Freedom	2
Diverse, lots to do	2
Campfires	2
Bike trails	2
Tour guides	1
Squirrels	1
Picking flowers	1
Not commercial	1
No technology	1
Mysticism	1
Atmosphere	1
Picking Berries	1

Respondents were asked what they enjoyed the least about McNabs Island. **(18)** respondents identified that **pollution was the primary concern for visitors**.

Enforcement issues concerning drunkenness, vandalism and safety were a key concern for many respondents. Curiously, the smell of McNabs Pond seemed to annoy some people. This could be due to an unusually dry and hot summer.

What did you enjoy least about McNabs Island?

Pollution on island, litter, beer bottles	13
Pollution in water, broken glass, no swimming	5
Vandals, drunks	6
McNabs Pond smell	5
Bugs	4
Fort McNab not safe	4
No enforcement / no park wardens / no phone	3
Range Pier access	2
No signs	2
Crowded on weekends	1
City noise	1

Poor ferry service Murphy's	1
Hurshman's trailer	1
No picnic tables	1
No firewood	1
No washrooms	1
No shuttle for camping gear	1
DNR caretaker's noisy 4 -wheeler	1
Leaving the island	1
Idea that the island will change	1
Rough bike trails	1
Too hot	1

Respondents were asked to rate various features and facilities on the island. An overwhelming majority of respondents ranked the **natural setting** of the island as **excellent**. The **historical features** ranked **high**, but not as high as the natural features. Trails were general ranked high as were the island roads. **Directional signs** ranked **very low** mainly because vandals have destroyed all but a few of the signs.

On a scale of 1-5 how would you rate McNabs Island overall?

	Natural Setting	Historic Features	Facilities	Trails	Roads	Directional signs	Maps
1- very poor	0	0	2	0	0	30	0
2- poor	0	3	3	1	0	5	2
3- fair	4	14	7	3	3	3	0
4- good	8	15	8	27	27	6	9
5- excellent	53	30	28	31	31	1	16
Not able to rate		3	16				

When asked to rate how the island was being maintained, **most were satisfied (49)** with the **trails and outhouses** maintained by the Friends of McNabs Island Society. There was **less satisfaction with the forts and historic sites**. The beaches ranked high indicating a considerable opportunity for beach activities.

On a scale of 1-5 how would you rate McNabs Island maintenance?

	Trails	Forts/Historic Sites	Outhouses	Beach
1-very poor		3	1	3
2-poor	1	8	3	6
3-fair	8	16	3	8
4-good	20	15	10	17
5-excellent	29	18	26	24
Other-didn't use outhouse			18	

When asked what improvements were needed, most answered unaided to the **lack of signs (10)** on the island as an area for improvement. **Environmental issues like litter, broken glass on the beach and a polluted Halifax Harbour (13)** were also sited as areas for improvement.

Are there areas that need improvement?

signs needed	10
clean up litter and broken glass	9
Range Pier wharf improvements	6
clean up Halifax Harbour	4
Park rangers needed enforcement & safety	4
education needed	3
picnic areas	3
Fort McNab repairs	3
potable water	2
canteen	1
lighthouse access	1
more toilets	1

Visitors were asked their opinion on whether they would use certain listed services if they were offered on the island. Most respondents supported an interpretive education centre, guided tours, serviced camping facilities, food service facilities, canoe and kayak rentals and more trails.

Would you use the following facilities or services if they were offered on the island?

Interpretive Education Centre	40
Serviced camping facilities with toilets & water	37
More trails	37
Guided interpretive tours	35
Canoe/Kayak rentals	34
Food service facility	33
Other (unaided)	
Potable water	5
Picnic tables	1
Bike rentals	1

Respondents were asked what the island needed to be a better park. This question is similar to an earlier question about what improvements were needed for the island. The most common unaided answer was that the park needs nothing and should be **kept natural (18)**.

What does McNabs Island need to be a better park?

Nothing-keep it natural	18
Better enforcement, safety, control vandals	8
Better education	8
Signs	8
Better ferry service	6
Cleaner beaches	6
Don't commercialize McNabs	4
Cleaner forts	4
Better docking facilities	3
Picnic tables	2
Better harbour water	2
Access to lighthouse	1
Open up the houses	1
Garbage removal	1
Better washrooms	1
Don't need a park	1
Don't want to pay for park	1
Guides	1
Respectful campers	1
Firewood	1

Although there were many areas that needed improvement the overwhelming majority of island visitors enjoyed their experience on McNabs Island. **The satisfaction level is extremely high with 54 respondents** indicating that they rated their experience at a 5 out of 5 rating. All respondents answered that they would return to the island for another visit.

On a scale of 1-5 how did you enjoy your experience on McNabs today?

1-very poor	0
2-poor	0
3-fair	1
4-good	9
5-excellent	54
Would you return to McNabs Island?	
Yes	63
No	0

Respondents were given the opportunity to comment further and were asked if they had any specific comments for the park planning committee. The most common remark was that the planning committee should **not change the island too much (12)**. A few did not want the island to become a park at all. Others commented on enforcement issues and environmental issues like litter and garbage. The lack of signs was also noted.

Do you have any comments for the Park Planning committee about the park?

Don't change island too much	12
Fix up forts and houses	5
Don't turn into park	5
Need signs	5
Potable water	3
Need enforcement & fines for leaving garbage	3
Better ferry service	3
Clean up beaches and garbage	2
Don't develop	2
Range Pier wharf	2
Don't commercialize	1
Don't let the government touch it	1
Shuttle for camping gear	1
No Bed & Breakfast	1
Need only basic facilities	1
Prohibit drinking and parties	1
Like Japanese knotweed	1
Planning committee doing a good job	1
Better bike trails	1
Cheaper ferry service	1

Summary of Survey Results

Generally, the survey, though not statistically reliable due to the small sample size of n=66, is a good indicator of what visitors to the island like and dislike. The survey also gives a good indication of what services visitors would like to see on the island.

The key message from visitors is that they appreciate the island for what it is, a near-wilderness destination right in the heart of the largest metropolitan area in the Maritimes. McNabs Island is a destination that needs little infrastructure to satisfy the majority of island visitors. **Basic facilities like signs** would go a long way to satisfying many visitors, especially the **first time visitor** which accounted for **24 of the 63** respondents to this question.

(54) Visitors to the island ranked their experience as excellent and (9) ranked it as good. Only one visitor ranked their experience as fair. This person was visiting the island for the first time from Alberta. They had rented bikes and travelled to the island with Murphy's on the Water. They were disappointed with the lack of directional and interpretive signs. They did not like the litter and garbage on the beach and were disappointed with the condition of the bike trails.

Based on the survey results, the challenges will be how to change behaviour of some individuals that view the island as a "party" island where they can party without supervision and enforcement officers that are present in other provincial parks. Other challenges will be how to prohibit camping since there are so many people that see this as a traditional activity on the island. This will present an obstacle for the park planning and management committee given the task of looking after the island with little resources for enforcement and park maintenance.