

Troubled waters ahead, explore, 2006
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Here in the waters just north of the Bay of Fundy, the fog in June has been playing with us, teasing us, revealing islands and cliffs glowing with mustard lichen, and then hiding them in a cloak of pale mist. We've been watching the fog perform its ghostly dance for the past day and a half while paddling a double kayak. The fog drifts on the silvery water, coils around the herring weirs, lifts for a moment to reveal the evergreens atop 60 foot cliffs and then drops again, rendering the lobster boats motoring out to the Bay to collect their lobster traps all but invisible, until they're only a few feet away. But now, the sun is burning through the fog, the surface of the sea is turning blue. We can, for the first time, see where we want to go.

Bruce Smith, a lean 41-year-old kayaker with curly auburn hair and a weathered face, knows these waters and their rhythms well enough to be wary of attempting to paddle through thick fog in open water. We have a compass, of course, but lobster boats, bustling on one of the last days of the season, might not pick us up on their radars and could crash right into us. But now we can see, so it's just a question of timing. Everyone in these waters – kayakers, lobster fishermen, freighter pilots, ferry boat captains – lives by the timing of the tides, which are some of the greatest in the world, almost 30 feet. The tides can make the salty waters move like a river, up to six nautical miles an hour. The locals even call the waters where we're paddling a river, the Indian River, but it must be one of the only rivers in the world that switches direction every six hours.

So we wait until the tide turns, and we start paddling a couple of miles down the Indian River and across the open water to Head Harbour Passage, off the western coast of Campobello Island, where Franklin Delano Roosevelt once had a 38-room summer cottage. As we paddle I can hear the water rushing like a river back into the Bay of Fundy. A harbor porpoise slips in and out of the blue sea just ahead. With the tides propelling us, it doesn't take long for us to reach our destination, Casco Bay Island, a private island where herring fishermen once camped for the summer. We watch a bald eagle lift off the top one of its grand cliffs and pause for a moment to listen to the rushing water. Sometimes Bruce sees Minke whales here, or Finbacks, or one of 350 remaining Right Whales, the most endangered marine mammal in the world. Across the Head Harbour Channel, at the northern tip of Campobello, the lovely white and red 1829 lighthouse stands out in the sunshine. You can see why it lays a claim to being the most photographed lighthouse in Canada. Now just imagine, Bruce says, imagine seeing a giant LNG tanker coming around that lighthouse.

For people like Bruce, along with the local innkeepers, fishermen and cottage owners, the image is monstrous: a vast tanker, 1000 feet long and 12 storeys high, the size of the Queen Mary, rounding the lighthouse and steaming down the Head Harbour Channel just about every day, unless it's foggy. Each of these tankers would be accompanied by a gunboat to ward off intruders who might want access to its potentially hazardous cargo – liquid natural gas or LNG. We're talking about natural gas cooled to minus 260 degrees to shrink it 600 times to liquid form so that it is small enough and safe enough to

transport across oceans from places like Algeria or Trinidad. The typical LNG tanker carries enough natural gas to fuel New England's needs for a day, which is why entrepreneurs want LNG vessels to come through this passage and eventually dock at one of two proposed marine terminals on the Maine side of Passamaquoddy Bay.

LNG proponents will tell you that the cottagers on Campobello, kayakers and fishermen have nothing to worry about: LNG tankers have been crossing oceans for over 40 years and have never spilled their contents. But the consequences of a spill, however remote, are scary. The most likely worst case scenario, experts say, is that a terrorist would blast a hole in the LNG tanker and spill its liquid contents onto the sea. The liquid can't burn but as it evaporates, the gas certainly can. If it's ignited by the blast, it could create a vast pool of fire on the surface of the sea, a gigantic bonfire hundreds of metres wide that would incinerate or seriously burn anyone within 500 metres of the spill. That would include the western shores of Campobello, the island where we're paddling, the southern tip of Deer Island as well as the town of Eastport, Me. But even at one mile or 1,600 metres from the fire, you could suffer second degree burns after half a minute exposure, and according to one expert, you wouldn't be completely safe unless you were 3,200 metres or two miles away. An even more frightening possibility is that the natural gas pool on the surface of the sea does not catch fire right away, but rather evaporates to create a natural gas cloud, a low flat cloud like a band of fog. Depending on the wind, the vapour cloud could drift more than 2,600 metres away, with potentially disastrous consequences.

It sounds like a scene in a horror movie, which explains why so many coastal communities along the Maine shore have repelled efforts to install an LNG terminal. To guard against terrorist attack, and reassure the locals, the U.S. Coast Guard has insisted that these LNG tankers be protected by armed escort vessels. The safety zone varies according to the site, but it can be as big as two miles ahead of the ship, a mile back and a third of a mile on either side. That exclusion zone – to be imposed every time the LNG tanker takes its 90-minute trip from the lighthouse down to the closest potential site for an LNG terminal -- scares the fishermen even more than the potential for a gigantic bonfire on the sea. The LNG tankers would pass through prime spots for fishing scallops, haddock, cod and pollock. They would mow down lobster pots (in spring and fall seasons) and disturb the herring, which swim for cover at the first sign of light. They'd displace the controversial salmon farms, long criticized for overcrowding salmon in watery pens, causing pollution from salmon poop. Whale watchers are worried too: The LNG path would cut through some their favorite spots to see the North Atlantic Right Whale, along with the Fins, the Humpbacks, Minke. It would also sail through the nursery of the Head Harbour Porpoise, which raises its young at the top of the passage where the huge tides assure an abundance of feed. These waters – right where we are paddling -- would be out of bounds for fishermen and whale watchers and boaters every time an LNG tanker appears. There's just one problem, at least for the LNG proponents: These waters are Canadian.

If the LNG plans get approved, the big tankers, which might be accompanied by three tugboats with 4,000 horsepower motors, would sail down Head Harbour Passage, and

then make a sharp right turn, in sight of FDR's historic 38-room cottage on Campobello, to pass between the Maine town of Eastport and Deer Island. That 90-minute trip would end at an Indian Reserve just outside of Eastport at a place called Split Rock, where an Oklahoma company, named Quoddy Bay, proposes to build a 1300-foot terminal with room for two ships. It hopes that 180 ships will come here every year, which means a ship going up or down Head Harbour passage just about every day. On the other hand, the LNG tanker could continue sailing another hour northwest to Robbinston, a slightly run-down former seaside resort on the Maine side of Passamaquoddy Bay. That is where Dean Girdis, a 42-year-old former Peace Corps worker wants to build a pier three times as long as the one in Split Rock. He promised Robbinston 240 construction jobs plus 56 long term ones, so the town said yes. "This is part of the natural evolution of the area," said Girdis, who considers himself an environmentalist and belongs to the Sierra Club. "You had clipper ships, you had forestry, you had agriculture, brickyards, canneries. Now you have an LNG facility."

The day before I set out kayaking with Bruce Smith, I met Art MacKay, a 67-year-old marine biologist with graying hair and a goatee, on the porch of my parents' summer cottage in St. Andrew's, a quaint tourist town founded in 1783. MacKay used to work as a diver, picking up live specimens for researchers around the world, weird stuff like blind eels that shoot slime. Then he started an aquaculture farm, which ended badly in a dispute with his American business partner. Now he's an environmental watchdog, and the LNG threat is at the top of his list. We looked across the gritty red beach, where beachcombers hunt for pale green sea urchins, past the buoy swinging in the rushing current, to the other side of Passamaquoddy Bay, three miles away. "It's just over there," he said. The Robbinston pier would be hard to miss – 3,800 feet long, with room for a tanker taller than any structure in the Bay. Mackay thinks that would only be the beginning. The LNG pier would eventually attract a power plant and other smokestack heavy industry and jeopardize the bay's \$1 billion economy, heavily reliant on traditional fisheries, aquaculture, whale watching and tourism, he predicts: "It boils down to whether you want to turn Passamaquoddy Bay into an industrial port." If that happens, he couldn't bear to stay. "I'd just move to Newfoundland," he says. "I couldn't sit here and watch this place turn into an industrial port. There are too many ghosts here." He paused for a moment and looked out onto the bay. "Like I say, my soul lives here."

News of the proposed pier has galvanized St. Andrews, where some of the great names of Canadian industry, finance spend summers in clapboard houses with lovely old-fashioned gardens, often with views of Passamaquoddy Bay. No one wants an LNG pier to spoil the picture postcard view, and they're clearly not reassured by the company's website comment that the pier will be "obscured or unremarkable" on foggy, drizzly days, or that an LNG tanker would only turn up at Robbinston once a week. So just about everybody in this town of 1,869 full-time residents turned up for the town's biggest rally in memory, held in the arena last September. It was an unusual display for a town that has traditionally enjoyed such amicable relations with the folks across the bay that they sat out the 1812 War and never fired the two black cannons that still aim in Robbinston's direction. To John Craig, the town's mayor, the LNG pier will inevitably lead to "the smokestack effect," which can't be too appealing for the golfers, the summer residents,

whale watchers or the other tourists. “They come here to get away from all that,” he said. “They don’t come here to see factories.”

The next day, I drive through the rain to catch a morning ferry to Deer Island. Bruce and his Mexican-born wife, Manella, live in a 135-year-old clapboard house on a small bay on the island’s eastern shore. They live simply – no CD, no cable, no IPOD, Internet for business only. Manella loves the solitude of the place, and even stays there in winter while Bruce is leading kayak tours in Costa Rica. Bruce, the son of a school principal and administrator in Point Claire, Que., canoed as a child but fell for kayaking because of the way it connects him with the ocean. He pulls on his green rubber boots, we pack our gear in waterproof bags and we set off. The fog lifts a little and reveals the herring weirs, with their wooden poles and grey nets, then it closes in. We stop paddling for a moment and listen to fog horns, the cries of the gulls and the howls of the seals who are somewhere behind the misty veil. Bruce listens for the Harbour porpoises: “When you hear them breathe and see them play, you know all’s well with the world,” he says.

We stop for the night on a deserted island beach and pitch tents on a sweet smelling meadow full of beach peas. Bruce sits cross legged under the tarp that’s protecting us from a gentle rain as he cooks dinner, pollack and rice. He speaks slowly, never raising his voice, even when he’s considering the visual assault of an LNG tanker. The whole point of kayaking, he says, is to slow down and use all your senses to connect with nature. “You need patience,” especially in these waters, he says: “The day depends on the tides, the currents and the fog drifting.” He keeps a journal to track everything he learns about the natural world on each trip. One night out here he saw swirling northern lights, crazy colors you don’t usually see this far south. Then there was that spectacular day when he took some Americans kayaking right through a pod of Harbour porpoises, totally unaware of the 9/11 disaster unfolding a world away. “What word would you use to describe today?” Bruce asks me. “What would you call it?” I reply. “Home,” he says.

The next morning we set off down the Indian River and by the time we made it to the southern tip of Deer Island, the sun was burning through the fog. We left the kayak on the beach and walked over to the lookout to see Old Sow, said to be the largest whirlpool in the western hemisphere. At its peak, when tidal currents from three directions converge, it is powerful enough to grab a 70-foot sardine carrier and spin it 180 degrees, which is why pilots avoid it at that time. It was still spinning slowly as we looked across the water. Bruce points to the waters to the east. That’s where the LNG tankers would turn 90 degrees westward and skirt the whirlpool as it heads for one of the proposed LNG piers. To him, it doesn’t look like an easy manouever. To the right, he says, is the place they might go – Split Rock, which belongs to the Passamaquoddy tribe.

Bruce first heard about the proposed arrival of LNG tankers in 2004, when Quoddy Bay announced that it had made a deal with the Indian tribe that lives at Pleasant Point, a beautiful piece of coastline with water of both sides, just a few kilometers northwest of the town of Eastport. “I couldn’t believe it,” said Bruce. The company promised the tribe that it would get up to \$12 million a year, big money, while the pier would create 500 construction jobs plus 70 long-term ones. Whether any of those jobs would go to Indians

was not clear, but the tribe voted yes, 193-132. The deal split friends and families, but a 25-year lease was nonetheless signed, and Quoddy Bay hopes to win key regulatory approval from U.S. authorities by the end of next summer so it can start building the pier.

Bruce joined the Save Passamaquoddy Bay opposition to the LNG tankers -- an alliance of Canadian critics like MacKay, Americans and Passamaquoddy tribe members who opposed the deal. But the rush to build LNG piers in Passamaquoddy Bay only picked up steam. Last summer, Dean Girdis announced his plan to build a second LNG pier in Robbinston, while a third LNG terminal is being contemplated at Calais, across the St. Croix River from St. Stephen, N.B. They all want to feed the power industry's growing appetite for natural gas to generate electricity. And now the skyrocketing price fetched by natural gas makes it economically feasible to liquefy gas in a far-off port, transport it across an ocean in a huge tanker to a \$500 million North American terminal, heat it up and ship the gas via a pipeline to market.

The LNG entrepreneurs have to clear some significant regulatory and business hurdles, though. They need regulatory approval from FERC-- the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission -- which is chiefly concerned with the safety of the landing site but also reviews environmental concerns, plus the U.S. Coast Guard's evaluation of the safety of the water route. FERC's review, which will include public hearings, will take about a year, and a decision is expected in the fall of 2007. The entrepreneurs also have to secure supply and line up customers, which won't be easy. There are 40 proposals to build LNG terminals in North America, and industry analysts say the market can only support a dozen.

Bruce and I climb back into the kayak. The sun is shining. The tide has turned, and the Indian River is now flowing in the opposite direction, back into the Bay of Fundy. We paddle with the current and then turn eastward toward Campobello Island. We can see a fishing village on the island's west coast, some cottages and the lighthouse, which, for the first time in over 24 hours, has stopped blowing its foghorn. On this Canadian island are some of the biggest American names opposing the LNG project. Franklin Delano Roosevelt's grandson Christopher, a New York lawyer, heads up the Roosevelt Campobello International Park Commission, which supervises the 1,120 hectare international park on the south end of the island. The Commission says the heat alone from an LNG fire would turn everything from the lighthouse to the turn-of-the-century Roosevelt summer cottage to ashes. If there were an explosion, the pressure wave would be "the equal of 55 Hiroshima nuclear bombs," Roosevelt's commission warns in a statement. That's putting it mildly. "Every single child at Campobello Island School is in the danger zone," said Joyce Morrell, who runs historic Owen House with her partner Janice Meiners. The school has 172 kids. "They'd be incinerated, to be blunt. It's like having a floating bomb go right in front of your house." Another big name is Brian Flynn, former Rear Admiral/Assistant Surgeon General, who owns a cottage on the western shore. After working on the response to Oklahoma City bombing and other large-scale disasters, "I know first hand the terrible physical, psychological, and community pain and suffering that invariably results from natural accidental and intentional disasters," he wrote in a letter to FERC. Given the "non-existent" resources to treat burns

in the region, he urged FERC to rule out the project on account of the “potentially catastrophic impact on the public’s health.”

Yet the Sandia National Laboratories thinks the risk of an accidental spill is “small but manageable.” LNG tankers are solidly built, with a double steel hull, and LNG tankers have survived collisions and even fires without spilling their contents. While opponents say fog and swift currents make the Head Harbour Passage too risky, LNG backers disagree. It’s deep and plenty wide enough and sheltered from the ocean rollers. About 150 freighters cruise down the passage each year without any collisions anyone can remember. There aren’t even any government restrictions on what kind of cargo the freighters can carry. Just last year, for instance, a freighter bound for the Bayside port sailed down that channel with load of ammonium nitrate, the fertilizer used in the Oklahoma City bombing, along with diesel gas, and explosives. Even pilot Bob Peacock was taken aback when he saw the manifest. Compared with that kind of cargo, “I’ll take LNG any day,” he said.

The U.S. Coast Guard, which governs the safety of the waterway, will recommend safety procedures – like the size of the safety zone – when it reports to FERC this fall. The U.S. Coast Guard usually insists on boarding an LNG tanker before it comes into port. It also dispatches an armed escort vessel to bring it in, and even some tugs. In these waters, it may halt LNG tankers if it’s too foggy, even though they can navigate with radars and GPS positioners. The rules differ from site to site, depending on local circumstances, says Alan Moore, port security specialist for the Coast Guard’s northern New England Sector. But in this case, there’s a major hitch: The LNG tankers bound for U.S. ports have to come through Canadian waters. “We don’t have the authority to establish safety and security zones in Canadian waters,” said Moore.

Therein lies a potential diplomatic bombshell: Prime Minister Stephen Harper opposes it, and so does his Veteran Affairs Minister Greg Thompson, a New Brunswick M.P. and New Brunswick Premier Bernard Lord, who thinks the Irvings’ construction of an LNG terminal in St. John is a much better idea. Harper put it this way in April, 2006: “I will pursue every available diplomatic and legal option to protect Canadian waters from the passage of LNG tankers in Head Harbour.” Yet lawyers for the LNG proponents argue that the international Law of the Sea gives LNG the tankers the right to cruise through Canadian waters en route to a U.S. port, so this could be a big payday for the legal profession on both sides of the border as they argue over the legal status of those waters, and the extent to which the Canadian or provincial government can restrict LNG tankers – if at all.

We land on the beach at Casco and lug our tents and bags up to a soft meadow where we’ll camp for the night. My rubber shoes suddenly sink into a muck of fermenting seaweed . “You got smooged,” Bruce says with a laugh. After we pitch our tents we sit down on the beach with plastic glasses of wine and watch the eagle swoop toward the sea gulls. A whale watching boat steams by to see the cluster of seals lounging around the point. Ten years ago, Bruce says, he used to set off on a kayak from this very spot and within a few minutes see lots of Harbour porpoises and Finback whales. Now it’s rare to

see a Fin around here. You have to paddle out to the Bay of Fundy, on the other side of Campobello's lighthouse. Did the whale watchers drive them away? Maybe, says Bruce. This is a "fragile and pretty tapped out marine eco system" that is already loaded down with herring weirs, salmon farms, lobster boats, fishing of all kinds, along with the whale watchers. Still, they all fit into the maritime world, he said. LNG tankers, along with gunboats, certainly don't.

"What will it do to the feeding patterns of whales and seals?" he asks. "I don't know." About 350 Right Whales spend summers basking in the Bay of Fundy not far from where we're sitting. But even now, it's not a safe place. Fifteen Right whales were born in 2006, and two were hit by ships and killed. If LNGs are approved, MacKay predicts that ship traffic will more than double – and endanger not only the Right Whales, but Finbacks, Minkes, and the Harbour Porpoise. Even if they don't strike the mammals, the sound from the vessels could confuse them, or drive them out of the area. If lights are used, it could scare off light-sensitive herring, which could affect not only whales but the entire marine ecosystem.

The next day, the fog horns are booming and the islands are disappearing back into the mist. Bruce makes the call: We're paddling home. He turns his radio onto Channel 69, the channel used by lobster fishermen, and gets his compass out. We paddle out on the still water, and pretty soon we're surrounded by fog. We can hear a motor in the distance, which may be headed for us.

"All vessels, all vessels," Bruce says into his radio. "This is Seascape Kayak. We're headed from Casco Island to Bar Island on 350."

The motor still sounds like it's coming in our direction. Bruce repeats his call, we keep paddling silently. The island emerges from the mist – Bruce's directions were perfect – and the water suddenly turns a choppy grey-green as a cool southwesterly breeze picks up. We paddle into the Bay where Manella is waiting, and the temperature rises instantly. He's home.