

Teachers learn more about natural, cultural heritage of region

By DULCIE HOUSE / STAFF WRITER

PORT AU CHOIX — According to Paul Parker, a teacher's quest for knowledge never ends.

"A teacher is always a student," says Mr. Parker, a teacher at Rocky Harbour Elementary.

He says that explains why 28 teachers from this province took a week from their summer vacation to become participants in a professional development program offered at Parks Canada's protected heritage areas in Western Newfoundland and Southern Labrador this summer.

"The program, which gives teachers an opportunity to enhance their understanding of the natural and cultural heritage that is commemorated in places like Gros Morne National Park and the national historic sites at Port au Choix, F. Anse aux Meadows and Red Bay, took place last week.

"You can't help but appreciate what Parks Canada is doing when you visit the sites — their public education and preservation," Mr. Parker comments.

He points out that there is so much on this peninsula to educate students, including glaciers, archeological finds, and the rare plants of the limestone barrens.

"When we study in high school you're looking at textbooks and slide shows of other parts of the country or world," he explains. "We could be using slides of our own peninsula. You are going to have an attentive audience

when it's something that's on the coast and on the island."

Mr. Parker told the *Pen* that through this program, teachers are learning how to present information about their own province in the classroom.

"If it wasn't so stimulating we'd be sitting at home with a cup of tea and a great book," he adds.

Another teacher who says she is gathering information and insight from the program to take back to her students is Kathy Farrell from St. Mary's All-Grade School in Mary's Harbour.

Ms. Farrell says she would like to see more information about the province added to the school curriculum.

"I want my students to get not just the Canadian example, but examples from Newfoundland and Labrador," she explains.

"Most of the textbooks use the Americanized version. Why not use your own province — your own backyard?"

Ms. Farrell notes that teachers have been taken way beyond the mandate of what the course was designed to entail.

"We do have a social studies program for Newfoundland, but even in the higher levels we can pull specific examples from our own province instead of elsewhere," she says.

She notes that another benefit of the program is that it allows teachers to share ideas.

Most importantly, she says, teachers are being taught how to portray the information they have gathered to their



Michael Burzynski (right), vegetation biologist with Parks Canada, takes teachers on a guided tour of the limestone community and rare plants interpretative walk. He is seen here explaining lichen growth within the limestone barren habitat.

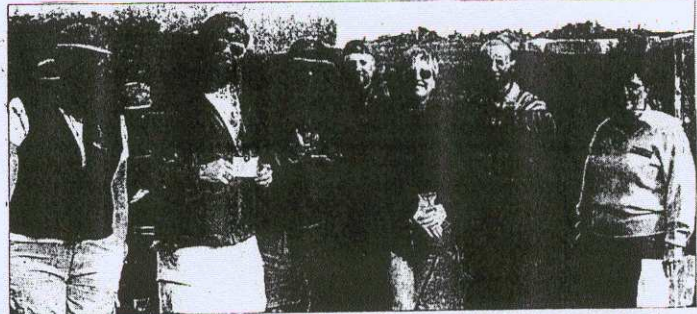
students. "I'm really amazed and thrilled at the program," she remarks. "It's well-organized, well-planned, and well-executed."

Dorothy Parsons, outreach education specialist with Parks Canada, notes that many of the environmental and cultural themes that are being presented are relevant to the curriculum for Newfoundland and Labrador students.

"The institute will give teachers and Parks Canada staff an opportunity to work together to lay the groundwork for developing lesson plans on subject matter that both share in common," Ms. Parsons explains.

She says that teachers will attend a follow-up session, which will be held sometime during the fall.

At that time teachers, along with Parks Canada staff, will develop lesson plans based on specific courses in the elementary to high school



Eileen Rumbolt, interpreter at the Port au Choix National Historic Site, stands beside the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada in Philip's Garden as she explains to teachers the significance of the monument there. They include: (l-r) — Patricia Callahan, Mount Pearl Senior; Robert Kelsey, Holy Spirit High; Jed Butt, Mount Pearl Intermediate; Dave Smith, Matthew Elementary; Kathy and Todd Farrell, St. Mary's All-Grade, Mary's Harbour, and Ms. Rumbolt.

curricula for use in classrooms throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

"The idea is to bring the wonder of the rich heritage that exists in our own backyard into classrooms and to bring history and science to life in

new and meaningful ways for students," she adds.

She notes that the province's educational communities are very supportive of the initiative.

A working group made up of members from the Department of Education, the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association, School Districts #2 and #3, the RED Ochre Regional Economic Development Board and Parks Canada have collaborated to prepare this program. Other partners include the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and the Gros Morne Co-operating Association.

Dr. Smita Joshi, social studies curriculum development consultant with the Department of Education, says, "We are pleased to be a part of this project since we believe that educational partnerships are a key to providing dynamic learning in our classrooms."

She adds that she is especially impressed with the dedication and enthusiasm of the 28 teachers who are participating in the institute during their summer holidays.

"Their first-hand experiences gained during the week-long program will help to enrich and enhance the teaching of both social studies and science education in our classrooms," explains Dr. Joshi.

Chip Bird, superintendent for Parks Canada in Western Newfoundland and Labrador, says that initiatives like the Teachers' Institute illustrate Parks Canada's focus on working in partnership with educators to help strengthen students' knowledge of our shared heritage.

"This is a unique opportunity; one that takes advantage of our extensive knowledge base and makes linkages to the school curriculum," Mr. Bird explains.



Archeologist Dr. Priscilla Renouf interprets the habitation site of the Dorset Eskimos in Philip's Garden at the Port au Choix National Historic Site.