



With its 75-foot drop, Grand Falls is the largest waterfall east of Niagara Falls.



A big adventure

New Brunswick's Grand Falls/Grand-Sault

Story and photography by Janet Wallace



In Grand Falls/Grand-Sault, New Brunswick, the Saint John River cascades 75 feet into a tumultuous cataract, the largest waterfall east of Niagara Falls. Water gushes through a deep and winding gorge until it emerges as a wide, gently flowing river. The Malicete (aka Maliseets) called the Saint John *Wigoudi*, the beautiful river. Other native peoples named it *Chicanekapeag*, the great destroying giant. Now, standing at the zipline station on one side of the gorge, adventure seekers call the river 'awesome.'

A fascinating history

In the 1800s, the river transported logs downstream to mills and to Saint John, where many were shipped overseas. In Grand Falls, the log drives ended when the power of the waterfall was harnessed to generate electricity in the late 1920s. Two hundred feet below the town, water flows in a huge tunnel from the dam to the turbines. More than 1,000 workers dug the tunnel, 26 feet across and a half-mile long, which is still in use almost 100 years later.

Stories swirl around waterfall and gorge—myth and history flow together. Although Grand Falls/Grand-Sault is New Brunswick's only officially bilingual town, stories spring from several nations—Malecite, Acadian, British, Iroquois and American.

In the heart of the town, poised at the edge of the gorge, the Malabean Centre serves as interpretative centre, scenic lookout and tourist information site. The centre was named after Malobiannah (a.k.a. Malabean), a young Malecite woman credited with saving her people from an Iroquois war party. While on a hunting trip, Malobiannah was abducted by the Iroquois, enemy of the Malecite. She negotiated a deal—

she would lead her captors to her settlement if they would spare her life.

The fleet of 200 Iroquois paddled their large canoes way along the Saint John River during the night. When the warriors heard the roar of the falls, Malobiannah reassured them of their safety. What happens next is in dispute. Some say that the young woman leapt out of the canoe just in time to swim to shore. Others say she was a martyr. All agree the entire war party plummeted to their deaths.

Thrilling adventures

The power of the falls and the danger continue to fascinate people. In 1904, a tightrope walker from Maine—Van Morrell—crossed the falls and even performed a headstand on the cable. Now, thrill-seekers have safer options.

Ziplines criss-cross the air above the base of the falls. Zip Zag operates two ziplines running 500 feet to and from the Malabean Centre. Downstream, Open Sky Adventures offers several ways to appreciate the beauty of the gorge including travelling across a ravine on a series of twenty ziplines and 'deepelling'—or rappelling face-down a sheer cliff. Suspended from a harness, you jump off the rock and 'skydive' for a moment before bouncing back to the rock.

Lisa King and Darren McIntyre from Baie-Sainte-Anne, NB, decided to try all of the Open Sky Adventures—deepelling was the most challenging.

Lisa spent 15 minutes on the deepelling platform before backing off and letting Darren go. Soon after, her courage renewed, she descended the 135-foot rockwall. At the bottom, she 'high-fived' the attendant and said, "I can't wait to do it again." And she did. Three more times.



Ziplines criss-cross above the falls for thrill-seekers. Others try rappelling face-down a sheer cliff with Open Sky Adventures.



Other options

There are more peaceful ways to enjoy the falls and gorge. Take a few minutes to walk from the Malabean Centre to the Ron Turcotte Bridge. Turcotte is the jockey who rode Secretariat to victory. Just a few years after winning the Triple Crown, he moved back home to Grand Falls.

The bridge offers a magnificent view of the falls. On one end, you can visit the small shops and restaurants on Broadway Boulevard, the widest main street in Eastern Canada. At La Rochelle Visitors Centre, just around the corner, you can fully appreciate the depth of the gorge while descending 401 steps to the shores of the Saint John River.

An even simpler way to appreciate the gorge is to take a boat tour with Open Sky Adventures. While steering the pontoon boat, our guide Marcel pointed out interesting rock formations—Indian Head, Camel's Back, Dinosaur Paws.

Marcel told us when we entered the "Coffee Mill," the narrowest and deepest part of the entire Saint John River, that the pool was named in the "early days before the dam was built." During log drives, the logs booms were transformed into a tumultuous riot of wood when they cascaded into the Coffee Mill.

"The logs would keep turning around, hitting rocks and hitting each other," Marcel explained. "The bark would come off and float. The water would be completely brown. It looked like coffee grounds floating on the surface."

These days, the water is tranquil and peaceful, like the community. After a history of warring nations, the town now reflects cultural harmony and is as bilingual a town as you'll find in this country: 81.5 per cent of the population speak both French and English.

For visitors, Grand Falls/Grand-Sault offers a glimpse into New Brunswick culture where Acadian, English and First Nations cultures flow together. The result is cultural fusion with a spectacular scenic backdrop. 🍷

MIRAMICHI
ATLANTIC CANADA'S GREAT OUTDOORS

Experience the great outdoors in the Miramichi region.

- Take a boat tour • Try paddle boarding • Go on a walk with historical characters • Take in a festival
- Dine on a riverside patio • Sleep in a tree house • Go fishing for Atlantic salmon or striped bass

www.DiscoverMiramichi.com | 1.800.459.3131