



LOUIS DECARLO

Fiddler Sierra Noble played at the Celtic Colours festival on Thanksgiving weekend.

Celtic Colours

NICK KHATTER
STAFF CONTRIBUTOR

Thanksgiving. What a wonderful holiday. A nice little break from school to see family, gorge yourself with turkey and celebrate the pilgrims' savage treatment of the natives.

This Thanksgiving, instead of making the pilgrimage home to see family, I persuaded my brother to accompany me on a road trip to Cape Breton.

For some time now, I've wanted to drive the Cabot Trail and shoot the magnificent landscape as the trees change colors.

The fact that Celtic Colours – the biggest Celtic festival in North America – was going on during that week sealed the deal. It would be the biggest party, taking place all over Cape Breton.

On Friday afternoon, we loaded armfuls of film, camera gear and hot pepperoni into the car. The escapade began.

The place we stayed in on the first night was my brother's best friend's 200-year-old mansion in a place called Pirate Harbor.

Legend has it that here, the notorious Captain Kidd first landed. The house we stayed in is locally known as the Steep Creek Mansion.

Friday night was the kick-off to the Celtic Colours Festival, which took place in the Port Hawkesbury Civic Center. On the bill, among other notables, was the famed and leg-

endary band The Chieftains, Britain's own five-decades-old Celtic band.

Also on the bill was Cape Breton native and King of Controversy Ashley MacIsaac. The show was indeed set.

To start the show off right, my brother and I had some drinks, continuing throughout the show and well into the night. The show itself, perhaps due to the pre-drinking, was wonderful.

However, the whole floor section was occupied by the retired generation. There was hardly a 20-something person to be found in the place.

The two remaining Chieftains – well into their 70s – were somewhat subdued, but ol' Ashley kicked 'er up a notch.

He managed to put on a performance so spirited that Premier Rodney MacDonald himself came out to cut the carpet.

That night ended with a Celtic jig conga line, and I woke up the next morning, Keith's in hand, facedown on the lawn.

The next day we drove the Cabot Trail, ate far too much pepperoni and pickled eggs, shot about ten rolls of film and indulged in some of the most beautiful landscape in Canada.

We decided to stay in the small town of Mabou that night for two reasons: to party at the renowned Red Shoe Pub, a 150-year-old general store converted into a bar and now owned by the Rankin family, and to

visit the residence my dad lived in when he was in junior high.

Turns out, there wasn't a vacancy to be had in Mabou. Fortunately, my brother is an excellent con artist and we managed to swindle someone's reservation at the inn, which was once our father's residence. Sorry, Guy Lajeneuse.

The entertainment that night at the Red Shoe was none other than Halifax's own Charlie A'Court. It was kind of strange having a blues musician playing an acoustic set at a Celtic bar in the heart of Celtic country (the road signs are in English and Gaelic) during the Celtic festival, but whatever.

A'Court is a great musician who writes heel-bruising tunes and has a voice that has yet to feel the wear and tear of cigarettes and whiskey familiar to other blues musicians.

The place wasn't packed, but it was wonderful for mingling and making quirky observations about the visitors from New England and Florida and their taste for Caesars and rum.

The night ended with the owner of the inn tracking us down out front of the hotel and screaming at us. We dared him to call the police. Then I puked in the dresser in our room.

Do yourself a favour: next Thanksgiving, forget the turkey. Instead, go enjoy some Celtic music, Cape Breton Scotch and amazing scenery. And stop in and say hello to Dave at the Mabou Inn. Avoid the dresser in room nine.