

Bras d'Or Lakes - Overview

Silver Donald Cameron, (yachtsman and author of "Wind, Whales and Whiskey", "Sniffing the Coast" and "Sailing Away from Winter"), describes Cape Breton's Bras d'Or Lakes as: "A basin ringed by indigo hills laced with marble. Islands within a sea inside an island."

There is no doubt that Cape Breton, Nova Scotia and the 425-square-mile Bras d'Or Lakes is the destination for cruising yachts in eastern Canada. With literally hundreds of anchorages, friendly people and deep, well-marked water, the Bras d'Or Lakes are an excellent choice to get away from it all.

There are two *[main]* points of entry to the Bras d'Or Lakes, from the south, the lock at St Peters Canal and from the north through the Great Bras d'Or Channel, passing beneath the Seal Island Bridge. There are height restrictions at both entrances, 90' of clearance under the high-voltage wires at Beaver Narrows‡, to the east of St. Peter's and 118' of clearance under the Seal Island Bridge. Once in the Bras d'Or Lakes, cruising vessels can explore a vast area of salt water with virtually no fog, little tide influence, many anchorages, and few navigational hazards. Those that do exist are well marked. Although the lakes freeze in the winter months, the water warms up quickly in the spring and is excellent for swimming. In many places the shoreline is bold and boats may put their bows on the beach with plenty of water beneath the keel.

The Lakes physically consist of two bodies of water, the "Big" lake and the "Little" lake, separated by the Barra Strait which lies between the villages of Grand Narrows and Iona. A bascule bridge here allows passage of cruising vessels between the lakes. The operators of the bridge are most friendly and will see you approaching from a distance. In multiple passages, we've seldom had to hail the operators for a bridge opening (VHF 10).

Ken Heaton

[A third point of entry to The Lakes is the Little Bras d'Or. This entrance is restricted to small power craft with a draft less than 10' and an air-draft less than 21'. There are also numerous public launch ramps for those who wish to trailer their boats here. —Ed.]

Updated: 2015-04-03

‡ In 2006 the minimum charted height was reduced from 30 m (100') to 24 m (80'), and in April 2015 was revised to 27 m (90'). Numerous boats still report the safe clearance to be closer to 30 m (100'). —Ed.

