

Royals pay tribute to Cupids 400th anniversary

Prince Charles struck by 'rugged and imposing landscape'

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An hourlong drive down the TCH and along the old Conception Bay Highway brought the Prince of Wales and Duchess of Cornwall to the community of Cupids last Tuesday morning, Nov. 3.

The Royals joined Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Premier Danny Williams in paying tribute to the upcoming 400th anniversary of the creation of John Guy's English settlement of Cuper's Cove now Cupids.

Before the Royals were greeted in front of the Cupids Cove Plantation Archaeological Site, they were driven past town businesses like Dana's Doggie Doos, as well as home after home where post-Halloween jack o'lanterns still remained, whole and unsmashed.

Near the arrival site, a novelty sign in the window of a home read, "Wanted: Good Woman. Must be able to clean, cook, sew, dig worms and clean fish. Must have motor boat and motor. Please send picture of boat and motor."

No airs

There were no airs put on by the community's members during this visit. The group at the welcome site - no more than 100 people - did, however, applaud and wave excitedly as the motorcade for the Royal couple arrived.

Prince Charles and Camilla Parker Bowles responded warmly to the welcome, walking up to the crowd, shaking hands and speaking to individuals.

"It's the first time I ever met any royalty. I shook hands with the prince and his wife," said Harbour Grace resident Mavis Inkpen, before being asked what, if anything, she said to the couple.

"I said, 'Welcome to Newfoundland.'"

Also from Harbour Grace, Eileen Mahoney stood next to Inkpen during the chilly wait, but didn't seem to mind. "It was really nice just to see them," she said.

While the royal couple were taken through some of the recovery and historical research work being done in Cupids, by archaeologist William Gilbert and Charles Adams of the Baccalieu

Trail Heritage Corp., the crowds made the two-minute walk down the road to the United Church.

Those invited in advance to the event at the church - Prime Minister Stephen Harper, Premier Danny Williams and members of the Cupids 400 committee - were met a few minutes later by the Royals and all entered the church.

Those without advance invitations - about 30 that were not media, security or organizers - gathered in a tent area next door where there were chairs and television screens to watch the happenings inside.

The turnout at the church was less than predicted. Two-thirds of the folding chairs inside the tent were left empty.

But, Harold Sparkes stood inside the tent with a small, paper Union Jack tucked into one breast pocket of his blue coveralls and a small, paper Canadian flag tucked into the other breast pocket.

"It's a bit cold, but I don't mind the weather," Sparkes said. "It's the first time I've been so close to royalty."

For workers busy building the new Cupids Legacy and Interpretation Centre, the start of the ceremony next door meant they could take a break from swinging their hammers. They came to watch the televisions as, inside, Harper stood at the microphone.

"I never cease to be astonished by the rugged, natural beauty of a land that has been said to - quote - demand the spirit of heroes. It was just such a spirit that inspired the 39 intrepid English colonists who first settled at Cuper's Cove in August of 1610," the PM said.

"Along with Cupids and Newfoundland and Labrador, (the Government of Canada) is especially proud to have been able to share the treasures of this very special place with your Royal Highnesses."

Williams followed Harper. "We are especially pleased that your Royal Highnesses are today launching this celebration of the 400th anniversary of England's very first settlement in modern-day Canada."