

HISTORY OF NOVA SCOTIA

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GEOLOGY AND LANDFORMS

1.2 billion years of Earth's history can be traced in Nova Scotia's rocks. Today's provincial landmass can be roughly divided into thirds, and each fraction has developed its own separate geological story as it drifted around the world's ancient oceans, joining up with other lands to form continents, then breaking away only to join another. These three unique fractions represent ancient microcontinents: geologists call them Ganderia, Avalonia, and Meguma, in order of their sequential joining what is now North America.

Ancient sedimentary and volcanic rocks of the Ganderia microcontinent joined Laurentia (the predecessor of North America) 430 million years ago (mya) and this now comprises northern Cape Breton Island. Northern mainland Nova Scotia and southern Cape Breton Island originated as volcanic rocks on the microcontinent Avalonia, which docked against the Ganderia rocks 400 mya. Finally, sedimentary rocks of the microcontinent Meguma were added to Laurentia 380 mya and now form southern mainland Nova Scotia.

These separate histories still affect Nova Scotia today as the rocks underlying the land determine the resources and economies of each section. The geography of Nova Scotia is also somewhat controlled by this jigsaw puzzle of geological history. For example, a large fault like today's San Andreas in California defined the collision zone between Avalonia and Meguma and helped form today's world-famous Bay of Fundy between Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. The world's highest tides strip away its cliffs to expose the early history of life on Earth, including fossils of trees, the first Devonian period reptiles, and some of the Triassic period's early dinosaurs.

There have been at least five major ice ages in Earth's history, beginning around two billion years ago. The most recent started about 2.5 million years ago at the beginning of the Quaternary Period, and since then, the world has seen cycles of glaciation with ice sheets advancing and retreating on 40,000- and 100,000-year time scales called glacial periods, or advances, and interglacials or glacial retreats. Earth is currently in an interglacial as the last glacial period ended about 10,000 years ago. All that remains of the continental ice sheets are the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets, smaller glaciers in the Columbia Icefield in British Columbia and Alberta, and several islands in Nunavut.

Mastodon bones found at different locations in Nova Scotia, including a complete skeleton found at Milford, sixty kilometres north of Halifax, attest to the presence of these animals during ice-free periods.

Science indicates that at the height of the last glacial period, around 34,000 years ago, glaciers had expanded to tie up Earth's water in vast continental ice sheets. The Bering Sea lay hundreds of metres below its current level, and a land mass 1,500 kilometres wide emerged between Asia and North America. Plants, animals and—at the end of the last glacial period—people moved into North America when the ice retreated.

THE FIRST PEOPLE

Atlantic Canada today is very different from the world its first inhabitants found as they pushed into lands newly free of ice at the end of the Wisconsin Glaciation. As land areas rebounded from the weight of the ice, coastlines remained much lower than today: as much as 100 metres lower in some regions.

Today's shallow water in the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence was exposed land at that time. Geological evidence suggests that nine or ten thousand years ago, even Prince Edward Island and the Magdalen Islands may have been part of the mainland. Portions of the Grand Banks and continental shelf were also exposed land, supporting vegetation, animals and people.

The Debert site, near Truro, is probably the best known of Nova Scotia's early human habitation sites, where hearths date to approximately 11,000 years ago. Seasonally occupied and re-occupied over generations, Debert was a strategic place to wait for the herds of caribou in a landscape that would have resembled today's Canadian Arctic. These camps would have been short term because at other times of the year people likely moved to exploit marine and riverine resources.

The rich marine environment encouraged the development of a new culture which archaeologists call Maritime Archaic in northeastern Canada. Sea levels rose with the continued melting of the glaciers and the lowest areas gradually submerged and disappeared under the rising waters by about 5,000 years ago, taking with them most of the campsites of these early coastal dwellers. Thousands of square kilometres of once-habitable land slipped beneath rising waters as the climate continued to warm.

Aquatic animals like seals and walrus could be hunted from land, but these early people would also have used boats for both fishing and hunting. Birchbark and cedar canoes developed for both fresh- and salt-water travel and are still made and used today. Their designs remain relatively unchanged.

MI'KMAQ

Maritime Archaic culture gradually split into the various Eastern Algonkian cultures known today. Mi'kmaq controlled most of what is now New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, and areas along the St. Lawrence River in Quebec. They were among the first North American native peoples encountered by European explorers, a meeting that would prove fatal for much of the population.

Unlike other Algonkian nations, Mi'kmaq practiced almost no agriculture, instead continuing the hunting, fishing and gathering practices of their earlier ancestors. They lived in large settlements along the coast for most of the warmer months, breaking into smaller family groups and retreating into the forests during the winter but emerging again to hunt seals on the spring ice along the coast.

It was a rich world. Hunting caribou, moose, smaller animals and birds on land—and sea mammals and fish on the water—provided them with everything they needed: food, skins for clothing and bedding, and bones, antlers and tusks for tools and weapons. Mi'kmaq coped with long, snowy winters by sheltering in the forest in conical wigwams made with poles and birchbark and lined with animal skins. Mats of evergreen boughs and more animal hides on the floor helped to keep out the cold, and a central fire was kept burning for up to a dozen occupants, each with their place within the shelter.

Mi'kmaq practiced an animist religion in which people were equal partners in the natural world and all things contained an enduring spirit. Hunters gave thanks to the animals which enabled them to live and treated the bones and other parts of their game with great respect. Clothing, shelter, furniture, tools and weapons were made from the parts of the animals, trees and rocks that surrounded them, or were traded for with other tribes. As a result of early contact with French settlers and missionaries, most Mi'kmaq adopted the Roman Catholic religion and allied themselves with France against the British.

Mi'kmaq families were patrilineal, and government was based on consensus and cooperation among equals, with each band led by a hereditary chief, the Sagamore. Each spring a conference of chiefs would gather to decide matters of mutual concern, such as hunting and fishing territories. These Grand Council decisions were recorded by a women's council through the creation of oral stories and the making of wampum belts, a visual history.

Today, the Assembly of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq Chiefs is the highest level of decision making for the thirteen First Nations Reserves in Nova Scotia. The Assembly members include the thirteen Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq Chiefs and two ex-officio members and meet on a monthly basis.

EUROPEANS ARRIVE

Norse explorers sailed into the Gulf of St. Lawrence around the year 1000 AD as evidenced by the discovery of butternuts (which never grew north of New Brunswick) in the archaeological remains of their settlement at L'Anse aux Meadows, Newfoundland. This camp was eventually abandoned along with their Greenland settlements, and the Norse retreated to a Scandinavian base.

Many convincing arguments have been made that suggest that knowledge of the New World remained current in European ports and that others, particularly fishermen, made the voyage before Columbus or John Cabot, who sailed to Labrador, the island of Newfoundland and/or Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia in 1497 and claimed it all for Britain. He thought it was Asia. When Jacques Cartier sailed to North America on behalf of France in 1534, he encountered other ships in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, as Portuguese, Basque, Breton, and English sailors had been fishing there for years.

Within a few decades of Cartier's explorations, thousands of fishermen and whalers were sailing to the Grand Banks and into the Gulf every spring, trading with the Mi'kmaq for furs, providing guns, metal implements and European clothing in exchange, along with liquor, to which natives had no resistance. Fish was a vital commodity in Europe due to Catholic restrictions on eating meat, and whale oil 'lit the lamps of Europe' in the days before geology provided substitutes.

The European policy of exploitation of North America's natural resources caused the decimation of Mi'kmaq populations and the complete extinction of the Beothuk people of Newfoundland, the Great Auk, the Passenger Pigeon, and regionally, the walrus, caribou and wolf.

In 1598, fresh off his victories in the Wars of Religion, France's Henri IV gave the Marquis de La Roche title to France's North American territories in Canada with the duty to plant a settlement. La Roche dumped fifty beggars and soldiers on Sable Island, a forty-kilometre-long sandbar, 175 kilometres from the nearest part of the mainland of Nova Scotia. For the next few years, they managed to survive with occasional ship visits and beachcombing, but in 1602 no ship appeared. By the time a ship managed to get back to check on their progress in the spring of 1603, only eleven men remained after a horrific winter of hunger, murder and mayhem.

In 1603 Pierre Du Gua de Monts established Port Royal on the Nova Scotia side of the Bay of Fundy as the first successful agricultural settlement in Canada. By 1700 there were over a thousand Acadians and fifty years later, with a healthy environment and diet, early marriage and low mortality, they numbered over ten thousand.

The French brought the Roman Catholic religion to the Mi'kmaq and allied with them against the British. But soon war with Britain left France's overseas possessions in jeopardy and in 1745 its 'impregnable' Fortress at Louisbourg fell for

the first time. After it was returned with the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, British land and sea forces took Louisbourg for the last time in 1758.

The British feared the Acadians despite their claims of neutrality. Partly, this was fear of the Mi'kmaq who sided with the French. After trying—mostly unsuccessfully—to force them to take an oath of loyalty the British began expelling the French population from Acadia in 1755. The roundups and deportations continued until 1763, the end of the Seven Years' War.

By the Treaty of Paris, France was allotted two small islands off the south coast of Newfoundland, St. Pierre and Miquelon, and retained Louisiana. Although some Acadians tried to return to Nova Scotia, others left behind opted to leave, unwilling to endure British rule. Some scattered to remote places like the Antilles while several hundred removed to the remaining French territory of Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon. These unlucky ones would endure five or six more deportations to and from France due to the mother country's entanglements over the next forty years.

The British port of Halifax, established on one of North America's most protected harbours and fortified beginning in 1748, became the capital and principal city of Acadia.

Following the defeat at Culloden and subsequent repression, Scottish settlers began arriving in Nova Scotia along with 'Planters' from New England, to take over lands vacated by the Acadians. The American Revolution ended in 1783, and political refugees called Loyalists fled the new nation, many relocating north to double the population of Acadia. The British government in Halifax welcomed them with open arms and assisted them in elbowing aside Acadians who were drifting back, and the Mi'kmaq, whose hunting grounds the Loyalists simply appropriated. Loyalists also opened up Cape Breton, where displaced Acadians from Prince Edward Island also established settlements in Cheticamp and Isle Madame.

During the latter years of the eighteenth and much of the nineteenth century, both Black Loyalists and escaped slaves from the South arrived in Nova Scotia seeking a safe refuge. They were mightily abused, cheated and deprived, and many sailed in 1792 to establish the new nation of Sierra Leone. Those who remained established permanent settlements in Halifax, Shelburne, and smaller towns like New Glasgow.

THE MOVE TO CONFEDERATION

In 1841 Britain had given the name Canada to its remaining North American colonies. By the 1860s, three-quarters of the population lived in Upper Canada (Québec and Ontario). Leaders of the three Lower Canada colonies believed that a

Maritime union would turn these politically weak eastern colonies into a single, more powerful entity and eliminate problems inherent in three adjacent but different currencies and laws.

Maritime leaders arranged a conference to discuss the region's future, to be held in Charlottetown on September 1, 1864. Politicians in Upper Canada heard of the planned conference and were granted permission to also attend. The conference delegates, now known as the Fathers of Confederation, met in Charlottetown's Province House behind closed doors. A further meeting later that year in Québec City led to a tentative constitution for the new country.

A fierce battle was waged over Confederation in the Maritimes and Newfoundland. With a 200-seat House of Commons based on population, only 46 seats would go to the region, meaning that it would always be outvoted by Upper Canada. But Nova Scotia and New Brunswick needed a railway, and Britain—anxious to get the union done—bought the support of industrial Pictou County and Cape Breton with the promise of one. Other blandishments followed.

Despite the protests of the influential journalist-politician Joseph Howe, Halifax merchants, and others who opposed Confederation, the Dominion of Canada came into being on July 1, 1867.

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY AND BEYOND

The province entered the twentieth century with confidence: its fisheries, mining, and industrial businesses were booming. Two World Wars required its resources and machinery along with its young men.

But tragic explosions quickly erased the optimism of a new century: blasts in coal mines took the lives of dozens in Cape Breton and Pictou County. On Dec. 6, 1917, the worst explosion in the world's history to that time—a result of a collision between a French munitions ship and a Belgian relief ship in Halifax Harbour—killed over two thousand people, wounded thousands more, and flattened both Halifax and Dartmouth.

The *Bluenose*, a fast fishing schooner launched with the Nova Scotians' nickname, brought great pride to the Province's sailors as it defeated, time and again during the '20s and '30s, American competition for the International Fisherman's Trophy. Prohibition's smuggling opportunities lent new life to the dying years of wooden ships, but a way of life was ending for this industry, as it was for the horse-drawn carriage. Increasing urbanization and the consolidation of small farms changed the social dynamic as children left home for distant jobs.

Fishing, particularly shellfish and aquaculture, remained a mainstay of the Bluenose economy throughout the last century and into the present. Growing markets in Asia and a free trade agreement between Canada and the European Union boosted the economy in the past few years. Welcoming new immigrants continues to push the province's growth

and has brought the population to just under one million, with nearly half, 415,000, residing in the Greater Halifax urban area.

CHÉTICAMP, CAPE BRETON

Chéticamp is a small town on the west coast of Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia, on the southern edge of Cape Breton Highlands National Park. It is home to three thousand mostly-Francophone people of Acadian descent. The first mention of Chéticamp was made by French aristocrat and explorer Nicolas Denys in the late 1600s, who referred to it as “Chadye”. At that time, it was likely used only seasonally by Basque and Breton fishermen.

The Deportation of the Acadians between 1755 and 1764 occurred during the French and Indian War, the North American theatre of the Seven Years' War, and was part of the British military campaign against New France. The area known as Acadia consisted of today's Maritime provinces: Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island along with bordering areas of Maine and Québec. The British first deported Acadians to the American colonies, and after 1758, transported additional Acadians to Britain and France. Of the more than fourteen thousand Acadians in the region, over eleven thousand were deported. A 1764 census indicated that twenty-six hundred Acadians remained in the colony, some presumably having taken the oath of loyalty demanded by the British...although it was more likely that they had simply eluded them.

After 1763 and the final defeat of the French in Acadia, the British began allowing some of the deportees to return, after taking the oath. The returnees found that their farms had been taken over by British settlers and were forced to re-establish themselves on new, usually poorer lands. One such place of resettlement was Cape Breton Island, where Acadians created places for themselves on Isle Madame, Chéticamp, and in the Margaree Valley.

SABLE ISLAND

Sable Island lies almost three hundred kilometres (190 miles) southeast from Halifax, Nova Scotia. The island is the only part of the outer Continental Shelf of eastern North America that remained above water after the seas rose at the end of the last glaciation, and probably formed from a terminal moraine deposited on the edge of the shelf.

The name derives from the constitution of its approximately thirty-four-square-kilometre land area, which is mostly sand: it was called Isola Della Rena on a c1550 map of New France by Jacopo Gastaldi. Its crescent shape undulates along nearly forty-two kilometres (twenty-six miles) but is only 1.5 kilometres (0.93 miles) across at its widest point. It ends in reefs and sandbars extending from both ends. These, along with the area's frequent fog and storms, including hurricanes

and nor'easters, have caused over 350 recorded shipwrecks over the past four hundred years, giving Sable the title "Graveyard of the Atlantic". The first recorded shipwreck was that of Sir Humphrey Gilbert's *Delight* in 1583.

Sable Island is an active beach, with constantly shifting sands and shape. Several freshwater ponds on the south side change position from one year to the next. Until 2011, brackish Lake Wallace existed in the center of the south beach but that year it filled in entirely and disappeared.

Despite its uncertain water supply and fierce weather, herds of endemic wild horses have survived here for hundreds of years. Most likely these descended from Acadian horses taken to the island by a Boston merchant, having been seized from Acadians following the Deportations between 1755 and 1763, along with cattle, hogs, and sheep. The latter have all disappeared.

Since 1962, federal statute has protected Sable Island horses from all human interference. They are a unique population: though feral horses are also found on the islands of Miquelon and Newfoundland, the isolated Sable horses are important for non-invasive studies of the history, biology (especially genetics), and behaviour of equids and in the conservation of rare breeds.

The Ipswich sparrow breeds solely on Sable Island beside many seabirds and shorebirds. The grey seal's largest breeding colonies are also found on the island, attracting numerous large shark species just offshore. The island is also home to hundreds of invertebrates, at least six of which are endemic.

There is an extensive history of attempted human settlement on Sable Island, beginning in 1598, when France's Henri IV renewed a patent giving Marquis de La Roche title to France's North American territories in Canada, with the duty to plant a settlement. La Roche dumped fifty beggars and convicts, and ten soldiers on Sable Island. For the next few years, they managed to survive with occasional ship visits and beachcombing, but in 1602, no ship appeared. By the time a ship managed to get back to check on their progress, in the spring of 1603, only twelve men remained after a horrific winter of murder and mayhem. But they had proved that people could survive on the island.

What followed was wholesale slaughter of the island's animals, beginning with a herd of eight hundred cattle that had grown from a few left behind by Portuguese explorers at the end of the sixteenth century, and proceeding to foxes, seals, and walrus that were hunted exclusively for pelts and ivory. The meat was left to rot on the shore. A similar story was enacted in other parts of Acadia, and soon the walrus was extinct in this part of the world.

Several more attempts were made to settle people on Sable Island, but all failed. In 1801, a lifesaving station was established at the island's north end, saving the crews and passengers of fifteen ships over the next eight years. Soon, frequent rescues were adding survivors to the island's small resources so regularly that provisions could not keep up with the demand. Several times, the superintendent was pressed to build a ship from remnants in order to transport

people off the island and back to the mainland. In 1873, lighthouses were finally built at each end of the island, and with their warning light and sound shipwrecks became less frequent occurrences. The last recorded was the twelve-metre sloop *Merrimac* in 1999, whose three occupants were rescued by oil rig workers.

Today, the island is considered a part of the Halifax Regional Municipality although the urban area of Halifax proper is hundreds of kilometres away on the Nova Scotian mainland. In 2011, an agreement was signed establishing Sable Island National Park Reserve. This designation prohibits oil exploration drilling on Sable Island and to one nautical mile off its shore. Advance permission is required for tourists and visitors must follow strict regulations.

LOUISBOURG

By 1710, there were nearly two thousand French settlers in Acadia, and the area had become vital to French interests. The fishery provided much-needed protein for a Roman Catholic population forbidden from eating meat. The French brought the Catholic religion to the Mi'kmaq, and allied with them against the British—who, by this time, also had economic interests in the region. Near-continual wars with Britain in Europe left France's overseas possessions in jeopardy. Between 1704 and 1710, the British attacked the settlement of Port Royal on the Fundy coast of Nova Scotia several times and, after taking it permanently, renamed it Annapolis Royal.

The Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 left France with only Ile Royale (Cape Breton) and Ile St. Jean (Prince Edward Island). In order to maintain this meagre foothold in Acadia, and in the hopes of eventually regaining supremacy in North America, the French king Louis XV decided to build an 'impregnable' fortress at Louisbourg on the edge of Cape Breton's foggy and cold east coast.

As the fortress grew, so did the town within its gates. By the middle of the century, there were over four thousand inhabitants. But its soldiers hated the place, morale was low, the buildings required constant repairs, and the entire endeavour was a financial black hole for the motherland.

In 1745 the 'impregnable' Fortress at Louisbourg fell for the first time. The British returned it to France with the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748, infuriating the British colonists who had captured it. Ten years later, a massive contingent of British land and sea forces took Louisbourg for the last time.

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Today, Louisburg is an English-speaking fishing community of 800, lying beside the restored Fortress, a National Historic Site.