



# Facts on Canada

## Newfoundland and Labrador

### The Land

Nestled into the northeast corner of North America, facing the North Atlantic, is Newfoundland, Canada's most easterly province. Lying between the 46th and 61st parallels, the province consists of two distinct geographical entities: Newfoundland and Labrador.

The island of Newfoundland, which forms the southern and eastern portion of the province, is a large triangular-shaped area of some 112 000 km<sup>2</sup>, while the province's total area is 405 720 km<sup>2</sup>. Located at the mouth of the St. Lawrence River, the island is about halfway between the centre of North America and the coast of western Europe. The island of Newfoundland is separated from the Canadian mainland by the Strait of Belle Isle in the north and by the wider Cabot Strait in the south. The mainland, Labrador, is bordered by northeastern Quebec. Approximately two and a half times as large as the island, it remains a vast, pristine wilderness, where the northern lights, or aurora borealis, flicker over the largest caribou herd in the world.

The province's coastline, stretching over more than 17 000 km, is varied and scenic with its bold headlands, deep fiords and countless small coves and offshore islands. The interiors of both Labrador and Newfoundland have a rolling, rugged topography, deeply etched by glacial activity and broken by lakes and swift-flowing rivers. Much of the island and southern and central Labrador is covered by a thick boreal forest of black spruce and balsam fir mixed with birch, tamarack and balsam poplar. Northern Labrador is largely devoid of forest and is marked by the spectacular Torngat Mountains, which rise abruptly from the sea to heights of up to 1 676 metres.

Newfoundland's climate can best be described as moderate and maritime. The island enjoys winters that are surprisingly mild by Canadian standards, though with a high rate of precipitation. Labrador, by comparison, has the cold winters and brief summers characteristic of the Canadian mid-North.

### The History

The central region of the island of Newfoundland was once the home of the now extinct Beothuk Indians. The first Europeans to visit Newfoundland were Norsemen, who arrived in the late 10th century; the Norse settlement at l'Anse aux Meadows was the world's first cultural discovery location to receive recognition as a UNESCO World

Heritage Site. Other early visitors, the Basques, Portuguese, Spanish, British and French, staged fishing expeditions in the 16th century and probably even earlier.

In 1497, the Italian seafarer Giovanni Caboto (John Cabot) went to investigate what lay in the northern section of the western Atlantic. John Cabot landed on the island on June 24, 1497, on the feast of St. John the Baptist. Cabot called the new land "St. John's Isle" in honour of the saint and claimed it for Henry VII of England, his patron and employer.

France, already well-established on the mainland of Eastern Canada, also played an important role in the exploration of the area and by the 1600s had begun to make claims to parts of Newfoundland. In 1662, France established a fort and colony at Placentia, despite protests from British merchants and fishermen. The Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 ended a long period of raids and skirmishes by both nations and reconfirmed British sovereignty over Newfoundland and the fishing banks.

The people of Newfoundland were granted the right to vote for an elected assembly in 1832 and, after much debate, Newfoundland was given responsible government in 1855. In 1865, Newfoundland postponed the decision on whether to join the Dominion of Canada. Following the Second World War, the question of Newfoundland's future status became an issue once again. A public referendum was held on the subject in 1948; Newfoundlanders voted in favour of joining the Canadian Confederation. Newfoundland became Canada's newest province on March 31, 1949.

## **The People**

The province's present population of approximately 550 000 is largely descended from settlers from southwestern England and southern Ireland who immigrated to Newfoundland in the late 1700s and early 1800s. There is also a small but vibrant francophone population, perhaps reflecting France's early presence in the area. The pattern of settlement was mainly determined by the fishing industry, a population distribution that has persisted to this day. The Avalon Peninsula and northeastern Newfoundland, the traditional base for the fisheries, continue to be the most heavily populated areas.

St. John's, the historic commercial centre and capital of the island, is the province's largest city, with a population of approximately 174 500. Other major centres are Grand Falls, Windsor, Corner Brook, Gander and Happy Valley-Goose Bay. The smaller communities — often called outports — remain, nevertheless, a major element in Newfoundland society. The twin towns of Labrador City and Wabush, which together form the largest urban community of Labrador, are based on the iron-ore mining industries of the area.

Today, Newfoundland and Labrador are home to four peoples of Aboriginal ancestry: the Micmac, who are located on the island portion of the province, and the Inuit, the Innu and the Métis who are concentrated in the coastal communities of Labrador.

## **The Economy**

Since its first settlement, Newfoundland and Labrador has been highly dependent on its resource sector. The province was initially settled because of its rich fishing grounds on the Grand Banks. The mainstay of the province's fishing industry has been groundfish (primarily cod); however, other important catches are flounder, redfish, capelin, shrimp and crab.

Protection of the rich fishery resources off the coast of Newfoundland has been an ongoing concern which has intensified in recent years. In 1977, the Canadian government extended its fishery jurisdiction to 322 kilometres around the coast of the province in an attempt to gain better control of fishing activity. This move produced positive results in the 1980s, but in 1989 scientific studies revealed that, due to a number of factors, some of the Atlantic's key groundfish stocks were in severe decline. Since that period, there have been successive reductions in quotas and fishing moratoria.

The second prominent aspect of the provincial economy is the mining industry. This industry ships mineral products valued at approximately \$800 million a year, mostly iron ore from Labrador. Other minerals mined in the province are gold, asbestos, limestone and gypsum. In 1994, a major discovery of nickel, copper and cobalt was made at Voisey Bay and a significant development project is now under way.

The third significant traditional goods-producing industry is the newsprint industry. This industry consists primarily of three pulp and paper mills located in Corner Brook, Grand Falls and Stephenville, which have undergone extensive rationalization and modernization over the past decade.

Recently, the discovery of offshore oil and gas reserves has added a new dimension to the marine resources of the province. In 1999, offshore-related activity and associated spin-offs accounted for over 10 percent of the provincial gross domestic product and 2.6 percent of employment. The Hibernia discovery in 1979 was Newfoundland's first significant oil find; reserves are estimated at 884 million barrels, making it the fifth largest oil field in Canada. Production began in November 1997 and cumulative oil production to December 1999 totalled about 57 million barrels.

The province's largest utility industry is electric power. The largest hydroelectric facility is located in Churchill Falls, Labrador, with a total installed capacity of 5 403 megawatts.

In addition to fish products and pulp and paper products, about half of the province's manufacturing gross domestic product comes from other resource- and non-resource-based manufacturing. Numerous companies are engaged in the manufacture of items such as boats, lumber, chemical and oil-based products, food and beverages, clothing and footwear. In total, the province shipped about \$1.76 billion in manufactured products in 1998.

Newfoundland's agriculture industry is small compared with other Canadian provinces. The output of the agriculture industry is mainly for domestic consumption, although some agricultural products such as blueberries and furs are sold to markets outside the province.

Newfoundland's service sector has experienced substantial growth over the years. In recent years, Newfoundland's efforts to develop a solid tourism industry have intensified. The province's rich cultural and historical heritage, rugged geography and unique character are considered to be major selling features to other Canadians and travellers from around the world. It is estimated that 393 000 people visit the province each year, spending an estimated \$260 million annually.

Catalogue No. PF3-2/2-2001

ISBN 0-662-65595-8

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