

## T12.1 COLONIZATION BY PEOPLE

The story of habitation in Nova Scotia extends over 11,000 years and is known from oral and written history. It is also known from physical evidence of human activity in the landscape: buildings, roads, managed land, etc. In order to interpret the landscapes of today, we need to understand the history of human settlement and land use.

Distinct periods of history have been dominated by specific cultures that have interacted with the land in individual ways. This topic identifies the main periods during which human interaction with the landscape has changed significantly. It provides the temporal framework for the subsequent topics, which discuss the evolution of the use of resources in Nova Scotia.

Figure T3.3.5 in T3, Landscape Development, shows the correlation between climatic changes and human settlement. Refer to the *Historical Atlas of Canada* series<sup>1,2,3</sup> for a more comprehensive interpretation of human colonization of Nova Scotia.

### 11,000–10,000 BP: PALEO-INDIANS

By 11 000 years ago, the glacial ice had all but disappeared, and a tundra environment prevailed (see T3.3 and T4). The earliest-known inhabitants in Nova Scotia were peoples we now call Paleo-Indians. Excavations at Debert (District 620) have uncovered one of their campsites. (Others, as yet unexcavated, are known from this area.) This camp was situated on a high knoll overlooking the tundra, with a freshwater spring to the north, good drainage and a view of the Caribou winter-migration route into the Cobequid Hills (Unit 311). Analysis of blood residues on a blade from the Debert site shows three overlapping smears of caribou blood. These people may also have hunted other large mammals, such as mastodon and bear.

Following this period, the environment underwent rapid change (see T3.3). In all likelihood, a temporary readvance of glaciers forced the first peoples of the Maritimes to abandon the region.

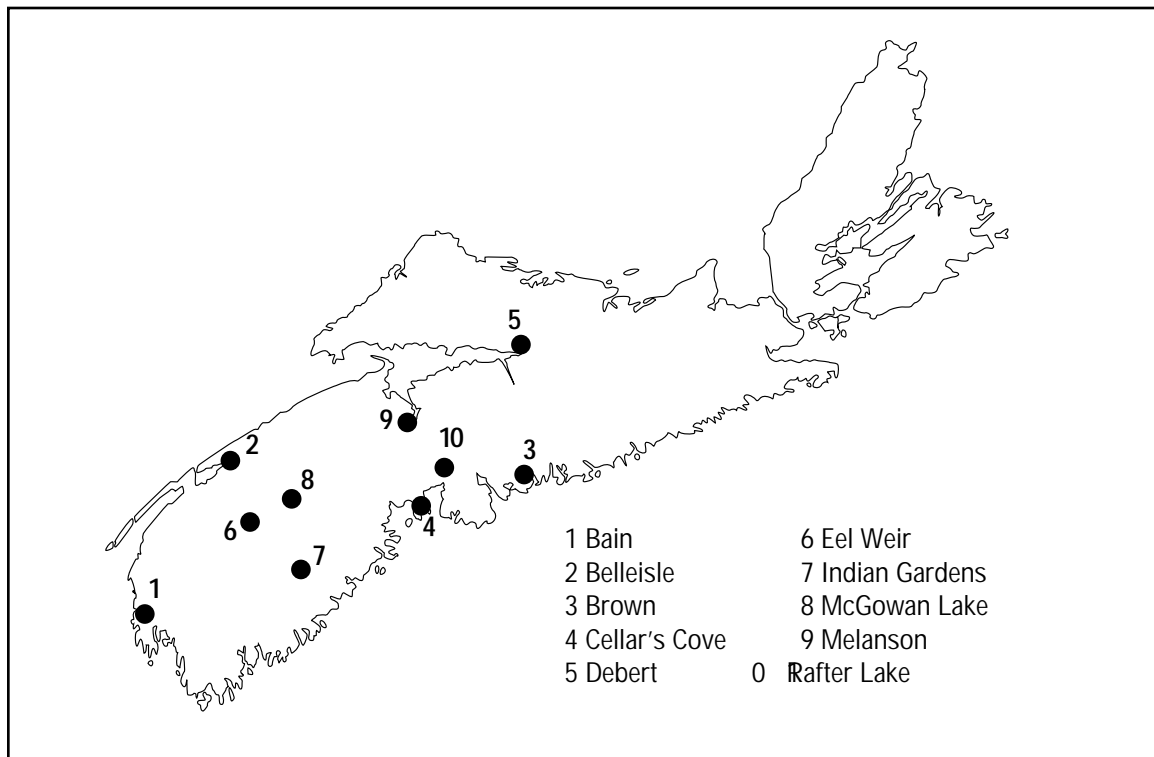


Figure T12.1.1: These sites represent the main Ceramic Period sites that have been excavated and reported in Nova Scotia. Adapted from Davis, 1991.<sup>4</sup>

### 10,000–5000 BP: THE GREAT HIATUS

There is no archaeological evidence that Nova Scotia was inhabited between 10 000 and 5000 years ago. A rapid increase in temperature and subsequent rise in sea level during this period may have obliterated evidence of any habitation. One archaeological theory proposes that Nova Scotia was occupied by people settled along coastlines that are now under water.

### 5000–3500 BP: THE ARCHAIC PERIOD

The major regional culture during this period, the Maritime Archaic Tradition (5000–3500 BP) was characterized by large woodworking tools of stone, made by grinding as well as flaking. These were probably used in the manufacture of dugout canoes. These people were taking Swordfish, a deepwater fish that can put up a good fight. Draggers in the Bay of Fundy and along the north shore of Prince Edward Island have brought up artifacts that might be stone knives and implements from this period.

A culture known as the Susquehanna Tradition (3500–2500 BP) originated in the mid-Atlantic States. Isolated finds related to this culture have been discovered in southwestern Nova Scotia. The artifacts suggest that new ideas or people came into Nova Scotia during this period.

### 2500–500 BP: THE CERAMIC PERIOD

Pottery and burial mounds, already tradition in other areas of North America, were introduced to Nova Scotia during this period. A burial mound (10 m across and dating to 2300 BP) has been uncovered in Whites Lake, Halifax County (Unit 851). Sites from this period are scattered throughout the province (see Figure T12.1.1).

### 500–100 BP: THE CONTACT PERIOD

Norse people reached the shores of Newfoundland and possibly Nova Scotia approximately 1000 years ago. There is no documented evidence that they colonized Nova Scotia. However, butternuts and butternut wood have been found in Newfoundland that can only have come from New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island or Nova Scotia. Portuguese and Basque fishermen were probably the first Europeans to establish a continuous connection with Nova Scotia, around 500 years ago.

The environment which the fishermen found, and in which the Mi'kmaq lived, was very different

from today's. The only clearings in the forest were natural meadows, marshes and bogs or sections burnt over by forest fires. The Mi'kmaq harvested most of their food along the shores of the ocean and up inland waterways. They ate marine and land mammals, fish, birds and shellfish. Plants provided food, smoking material, shelter, medicine and implements. Mineral pigments were used as dyes.

The Mi'kmaq population was greatly reduced after contact with the Europeans and exposure to alien diseases. This coincided with a cultural change in Nova Scotia and subsequent increases in human impact on the landscape.

*The name Mi'kmaq comes from their word "nikmaq", which means "my kin-friends." They used this word as a greeting when speaking to the newcomers from Europe, and it soon became associated with the speakers themselves.*

### 1605–1755: THE ACADIAN PERIOD

John Cabot's arrival in North America in 1497 and the lure of the cod fishery off its shores began a hundred years of European exploration and seasonal fishing on the banks by various nations trading with the Mi'kmaq (see T12.11). Europeans did not establish a permanent settlement north of the Gulf of Mexico until 1605, when the French, attracted by the opportunities offered by the fur trade and the fishery<sup>5</sup>, erected a fort at Port Royal in the Annapolis Basin.

The military struggle between France and England delayed agricultural development in Nova Scotia. For several decades the Acadian population increased as more French people arrived to settle the land. The settlers dyked the extensive tidal marshes around the Bay of Fundy from the Annapolis Basin to the Peticodiac River in New Brunswick (see T12.7). The major population was concentrated along the Annapolis River, the Minas Basin and the Chignecto Isthmus.<sup>6</sup> The Acadians' use of tidal marshes for agriculture minimized their encroachment on forested areas.

The Acadian population continued to increase and extend into new areas. By the mid-1700s, it numbered as many as 10 000 people. They maintained their agricultural traditions and traded with the French fortress at Louisbourg and with New England. Most of the rest of Nova Scotia was wilderness, thinly occupied by Mi'kmaq.

1749-1867 : THE BRITISH PERIOD

The British regarded the Atlantic region more for its strategic military position and its fisheries than for its settlement potential. Colonization efforts were concentrated elsewhere until the capture of Quebec in 1759. In 1755, the British had deported the Acadians from the entire Maritime region, and with the capture of Louisbourg three years later, British control of Acadia was complete.

The nature of land settlement changed as the British gained control in Nova Scotia. Policies concerning settlement, granting of land and exploitation of resources were worked out by the British government. The colonial government assumed power to parcel Nova Scotia into land grants to encourage settlement. The years following the Acadian deportation brought an influx of European and American cultures to the province. Settlement continued along the coasts but also developed inland along routes established for trading or military use.

Drumlins, recognized as areas with good soil, were cleared and farmed (see T12.4).

Vacated Acadian lands were settled through a migration of New Englanders, or Planters as they were then described, who established farming townships from the Chignecto Isthmus to the Annapolis Basin. The Digby shore and Cheticamp in Cape Breton were settled by the Acadians who remained after the deportation. Beginning in 1764, many Acadians returned and were given lands in southwestern Nova Scotia.

Between 1725 and 1763, the British and Mi'kmaq signed a number of treaties to allow for British settlement and the preservation of Mi'kmaq hunting grounds.

The American Revolution and the influx of Loyalist settlers changed the relationships between the European settlers and the Mi'kmaq. The pattern of British settlement greatly interfered with traditional native hunting and migratory habits. In 1783, lands were granted to the Mi'kmaq along coastal routes

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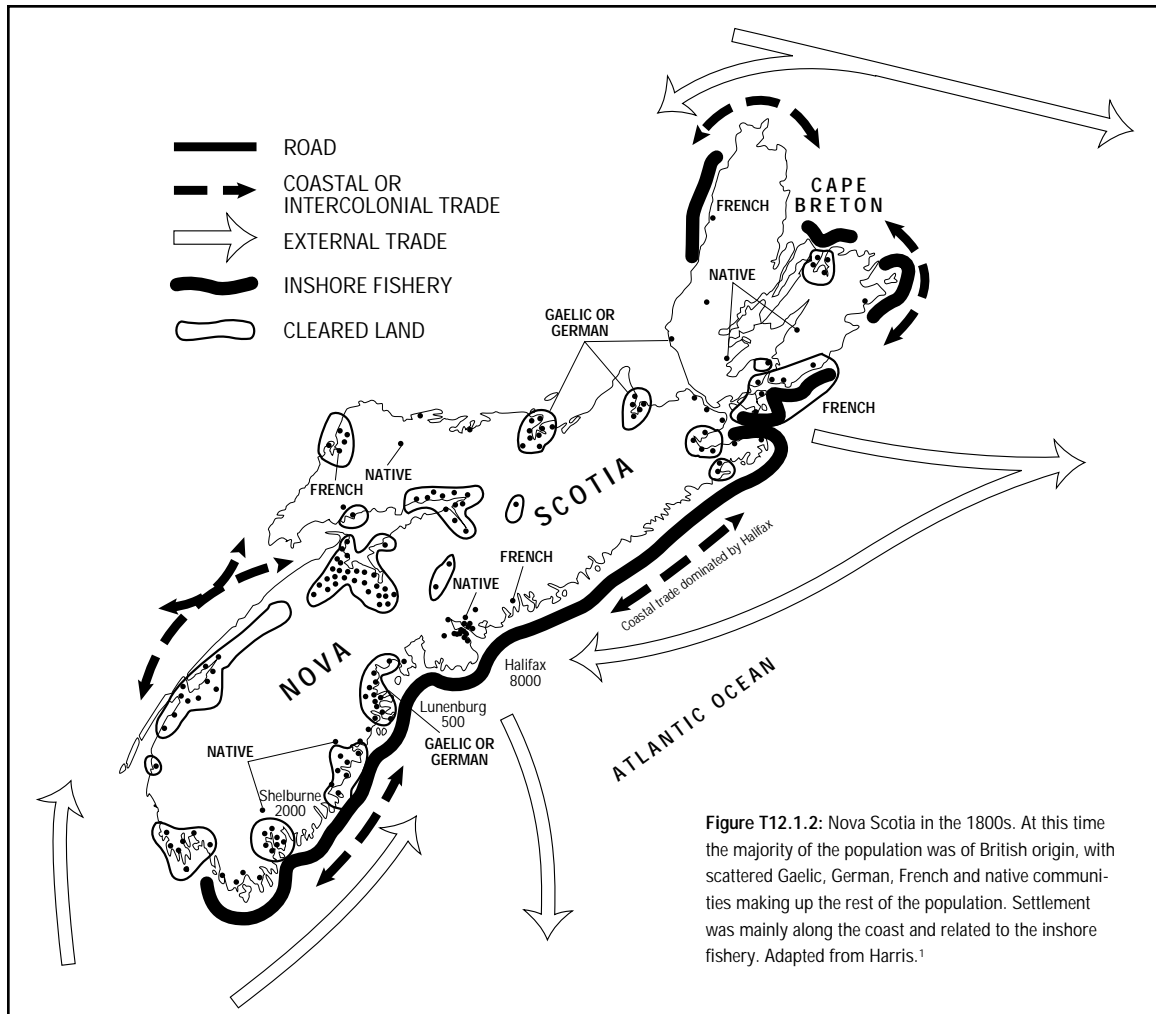


Figure T12.1.2: Nova Scotia in the 1800s. At this time the majority of the population was of British origin, with scattered Gaelic, German, French and native communities making up the rest of the population. Settlement was mainly along the coast and related to the inshore fishery. Adapted from Harris.<sup>1</sup>

and rivers in recognition of their traditional occupation of the land.

A major migration of Europeans to Nova Scotia occurred in the 1770s and early 1800s, when large numbers of Highland Scots and Irish immigrated to eastern Nova Scotia. Approximately 17 000 of these immigrants settled lands on Cape Breton Island. Upland areas were generally settled by later immigrants, as the more desirable lowland locations had already been occupied by earlier settlers.

By the late 1820s, large-scale coal mining had begun in Pictou and Sydney (see T12.3). This marked the beginning of the industrial era in Nova Scotia and resulted in many small communities scattered across the province in areas rich in mineral deposits. Settlement and clearing continued relative to exploitable resources. The necessary buildings and roads were built to harvest or process resources, and towns developed where industries grew from resources, such as the large lumbering and shipbuilding industry in Lunenburg (see T12.10).

Transportation routes developed rapidly in the nineteenth century, as trails turned into tracks, dirt roads and then into the “great roads” linking main communities.<sup>7</sup> These “highways” led out of Halifax to Windsor and Truro, connecting with smaller roads and providing access to more remote areas of the province. The roads followed ancient canoe and portage routes used by the Mi’kmaq, linking the Minas Basin and Cobequid Bay with Chebucto Harbour (see Figure T12.1.2). The first train ran between Halifax and Windsor in 1856, following the road and increasing commercial transport. As technology developed, populations expanded and access routes opened up, the human imprint on the landscape continued to progressively broaden into the twentieth century.

## THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

During this century, land use in Nova Scotia has been heavily influenced by resource industries and development, and landscape modification has continued to reflect local and international markets and economies. The World Wars altered the population structure in the province. Rural communities fluctuated, and population growth increased around urban centres such as Halifax. The advent of paved roads and then highways increased our ability to develop new areas of land.

At the end of this century, less land is now farmed; consequently, former farmlands have regenerated into forests (see H5.3). Coastal communities, once dependent on the fisheries, now look to tourism as a

resource. Immigration to Nova Scotia continues with European, American, African, Asian and South American cultures contributing to the province’s diversity.

Our modern settlement patterns have evolved from those of the previous century as depicted on historical maps of land grants. The overall pattern of development is much the same as in the last century, with large areas of land in the interior of the province undeveloped and used mainly for primary resource management, wildlife management or recreation.



### **Associated Topics**

T3.3 Glaciation, Deglaciation and Sea-level Changes,  
T4 Colonization, T12.2–T12.11

### **Associated Habitats**

H5.3 Oldfield

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