

## T12.13 SCENIC QUALITY

Landscape is the visual presentation of the land, whether directly in the field or indirectly through photographs, paintings, or maps. Geographers use the term to refer to the aggregate of surface features, often with no esthetic connotation. Scenery refers to the esthetic qualities of landscape. In this section, we are concerned primarily with an aesthetic assessment of the province's landscapes, and thus with scenery. A secondary purpose, however, is to describe landscapes in value-neutral terms, as a way of summarizing and appreciating the many natural and cultural elements that they comprise.

Scenic assessment is necessarily individual and subjective, since it depends on preferences related to social conditioning, personal experience, temperament, sensibilities, and even formal artistic training. Early attempts to rate and map scenic quality were largely intuitive, but researchers have since used statistical techniques to objectively identify variables influencing ratings made by sample groups. Useful summaries of empirical research are those by Dearden<sup>1</sup> and Penning-Rowsell,<sup>2</sup> while more general discussions of the issues are provided in Penning-Rowsell and Lowenthal<sup>3</sup> and Jakle.<sup>4</sup>

Only two studies to date have used objective methods to rate scenic quality in Nova Scotia: B.A. thesis by Allen<sup>5</sup> and a related paper by Millward and Allen.<sup>6</sup> These studies followed Linton in defining the scenic resource as a composite of two main elements: the "form of the ground" (topography)

and the mantle provided by vegetation and human land uses (land cover). In the case of Nova Scotia, the presence of water bodies in the landscape must also be considered, since oceans, lakes and rivers are so frequently present in the visual scene. Allen and Millward rated 10 × 10-kilometre squares on each component separately and added the sub-indices to produce composite scores. Such scores rate potential scenic resources but do not consider whether such resources can be readily viewed. The current or actual scenic value of a site is clearly much greater if there is a network of access routes for the general public. In this regard, paved roads are most widely accessible, while trails and canoe routes provide access only for the more dedicated recreationist.

### TOPOGRAPHIC COMPONENT

Scenic grandeur and interest increase with increasing relative relief (see Plate T12.13.1). Relative relief is measured by the range of elevation within an area. Scenic value is assumed to increase with increasing relief, but at a declining rate. On a five-point scale, the scenic value of topography is at a maximum only on the margins of the Cape Breton highlands (District 210). Scores of 4 occur elsewhere in the same highlands, the Mabou and Creignish hills (Units 314 and 313), the Antigonish highlands (Unit 312), and the Cobequid Hills (Unit 311). The



Plate T12.13.1: Highland topography in Cape Breton Highlands National Park (Districts 210 and 220) contrasts with the lowland area of the Annapolis Valley (District 610). Photos: A. Wilson.

flanks of the Annapolis Valley (District 610) score 4 at only three localities: Hampton, Bridgetown and Berwick.

Relative relief provides moderately high scenic value (3), primarily on upland-lowland margins between the Atlantic interior (Region 400) and the Carboniferous Lowlands (Region 500): from west to east they are South Mountain (Unit 422), the Rawdon Ridge (sub-Unit 423a), Wittenburg Ridge (sub-Unit 423b), and the scarp of the Chedabucto Fault. Other areas with moderate scores are the North Mountain ridge (720), the western end of the Cobequid Hills, interior valleys of eastern Colchester and interior Pictou counties, the Mulgrave plateau (Unit 571) and hills surrounding Bras d'Or Lake.

Areas with very little relative relief (scores of 0 or 1 on this component) fall into two main categories: (1) the more southerly and easterly parts of the Atlantic interior (Region 400), including almost all the area south of a line from Weymouth to Lunenburg, and (2) the more extensive sedimentary lowlands, notably the till/clay plains of northern Hants County and the Northumberland plain (sub-Unit 521a). On Cape Breton Island, low relief characterizes the Sydney Coalfield (Unit 531) and coastal areas between Gabarus Bay and the Strait of Canso.

#### LAND-COVER COMPONENT

A variety of land uses and vegetation adds to visual interest and thus to scenic value. Both land use and vegetation are described by the term "land cover". In terms of visual effect, three main cover types may be distinguished. These are woodland, open country (which includes farmland, barren, marsh and cutover lands) and built-up areas. For scenic rating, it is assumed that variety is more valuable than monotony, that both open country and woodland are clearly preferable to built-up areas, and that open country is somewhat preferable to woodland (mainly because it affords longer vistas). The highest-rated areas, therefore, have a mix of woods and open land, with little or no urbanization.

Areas scoring 4 or 5 on this five-point component are at least fifteen per cent open, mostly due to farm activity. They represent core areas of agricultural activity, related both to soil capability (Canada Land Inventory classes 2 and 3)<sup>7</sup> and easy access along the coast or via tidal rivers. Notable are the Clare district, the Annapolis, Cornwallis and Avon valleys, lowland areas centred on Stewiacke, and coastal lowlands adjacent to Cobequid Bay, Cumberland Basin, the Northumberland shore (particularly Baie Verte, Tatamagouche Bay, Pictou lowlands, and St. Georges

Bay), and the Sydney area. Except for Clare, these areas are all in the Carboniferous (Region 500) or Triassic (Region 600) lowlands. Smaller and more adjacent to the above-mentioned cores, plus Isle Madame, are "frontland" areas of Cape Breton Island and the major drumlin fields (Units 831, 833, 433 and 434).

Open wildlands (barrens, marshes, etc.) increase scenic ratings in five main areas: around the southernmost tip of the province in Shelburne County, south of Lake Rossignol, on the exposed headlands of the Chebucto peninsula (e.g., Peggy's Cove), similar headlands around Tor Bay and Dover Bay, and areas of barrens and "flowage" on the Cape Breton highlands.

Most of the interior and upland Nova Scotia, being unrelieved woodland, scores only 2 on this component, as does much of the Atlantic Coast. The Halifax metropolitan area also scores 2, since its built-up areas are interwoven with much woodland. A larger or less fragmented urban area would score less.

#### WATER COMPONENT

The positive scenic effect of water bodies is assumed to decline marginally; that is, even a fairly minor water presence can add significantly to scenic value, but beyond a certain proportion there is no further gain.

On a five-point scale, almost all coastal areas score the maximum, including the shores of Bras d'Or Lake and its associated channels. In the interior, large freshwater lakes such as Rossignol and Ainslie raise scores to 4 and even 5, but scores generally range between 0 and 3. Scores of 0 occur throughout the interior north of the Atlantic uplands, both on highlands and in sedimentary lowlands, owing to the absence of lakes. The Atlantic upland, by contrast, has the deranged drainage attributable to glacial scour: its many lakes produce scores of 1 to 3. Within this region, two "lake districts" are worthy of mention: one lies to the north and east of Lake Rossignol; the other is situated inland from Yarmouth.

#### THE COMPOSITE SCENIC RATING

Scores for topography, land cover, and water features may be added to produce a composite scenic score. The Millward/Allen results are shown on the accompanying map (Figure T12.13.1). The pattern is intuitively satisfying, in that it reaffirms popular perceptions of the province's "beauty spots". Of the

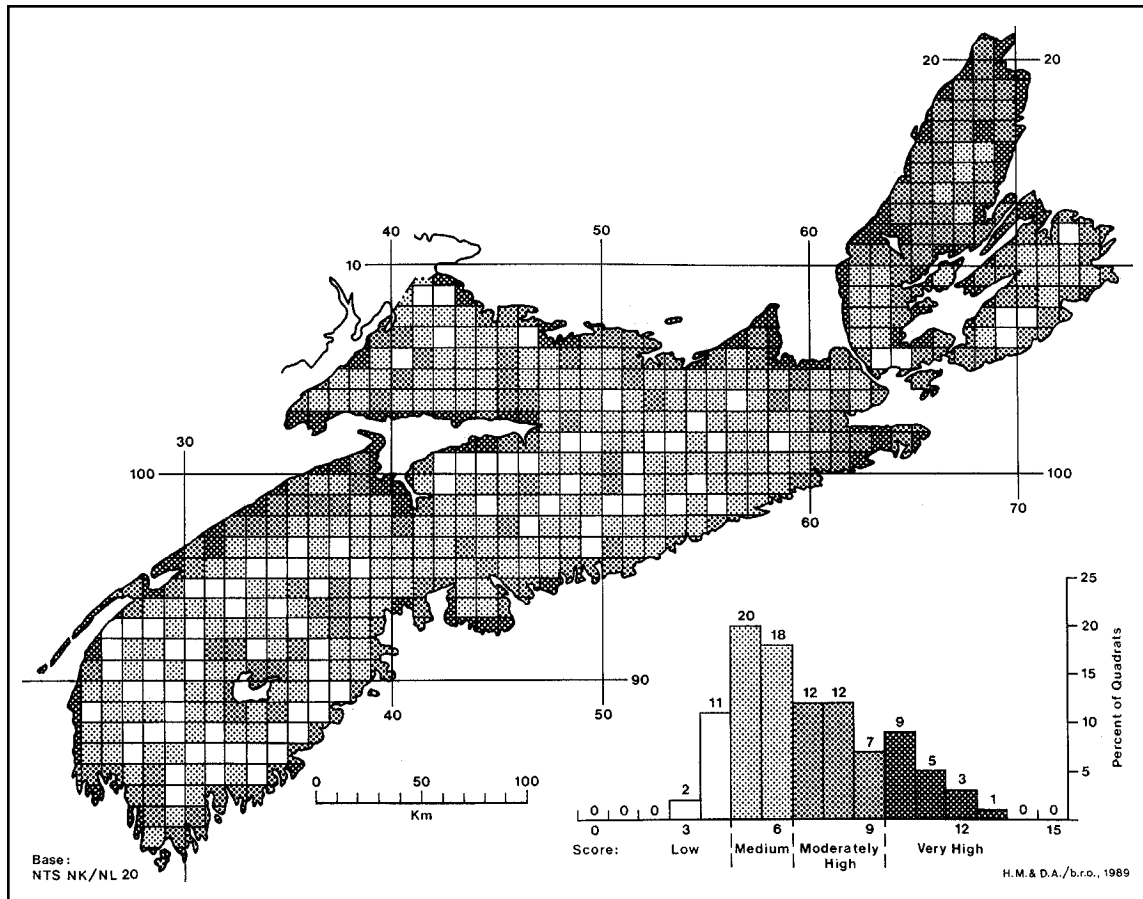


Figure 12.13.2: Index of landscape value. Composite index varies from 0 to 15. Nova Scotia values range from 3 to 14 with mean of 6.9, median of 6 and mode of 5.<sup>6</sup>

twenty-four quadrats scoring 12 to 14 (out of a possible 15), eight occur on the Cabot Trail, and six more occur elsewhere on Cape Breton Island. Of the 10 on mainland Nova Scotia, three centre on Grand Pré and four others occur at the western end of the Annapolis Valley.

#### INDEX OF LANDSCAPE VALUE

These areas are well known, as is the slightly lower-scoring area south of Halifax, on the rocky shore of the Chebucto peninsula. Other areas scoring “very high” (10 or more) are perhaps less familiar: they include the Lobster Bay area of Yarmouth County, most of the Fundy and Cobequid shores, Tatamagouche Bay, Cape George and St. Georges Bay, and much of the Canso peninsula.

As a general rule, very high scores occur either where prominent hills meet the ocean, or where farming areas abut an indented coastline. The common element is the sea. Other factors—topography, landcover and lakes—influence the overall pattern much less, since they tend to cancel each other. To

illustrate: scenic values in the Cobequid Hills (Unit 311) are indistinguishable from those on the Northumberland Plain (sub-Unit 521a), because the hills have more relief but lack open farmland. As another example, much of the Atlantic Interior (Region 400) scores in the same range as the Avalon Uplands (Region 300); the glacially-scoured erosion surface has less relief, but compensates with many lakes. Thus, it is erroneous to assume that, because many inland areas score similarly (in the 6 to 7 range), they have similar landscape characteristics. There are, in fact, three main landscape types in the interior: (1) the glacially scoured erosion surfaces of the south and east (the Atlantic upland), (2) the hills and highlands of the north and (3) the sedimentary lowlands, which are the main areas of settlement and farming.

Areas with low scenic value (scores 3–4) are most prevalent on the southern erosion surface (e.g. south and west of Lake Rossignol) or poorly drained lowlands (e.g. the Cogmagun barrens). More particularly, they occur where there are few lakes, little relief, and no glacial till to encourage farming.

**Associated Topics**

T2 Geology, T3 Landscape Development, T7.3 Coastal Landforms, T8.2 Freshwater Environments, T9.2 Soil Classification, T12.2 Cultural Landscapes

**References**

- 1 Dearden, P. (1980) "Landscape assessment: The last decade." *Canadian Geographer* 24:316-25.
- 2 Penning-Rowsell, E.C. (1981) "Fluctuating fortunes in gauging landscape value." *Progress in Human Geography* 5:25-41.
- 3 Penning-Rowsell, E.C. and D. Lowenthal, eds. (1986) *Landscape Meanings and Values*. Allen and Unwin, London.
- 4 Jakle, J. (1987) *The Visual Elements of Landscape*. University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, Mass.
- 5 Allen, D. (1988) An Assessment of the Scenic Resources of Nova Scotia. B.A. thesis, Dept. of Geography, Saint Mary's University, Halifax.
- 6 Millward, H. and D. Allen (1989) "The scenic resources of Nova Scotia: A macro-scale landscape assessment." Paper presented to the Canadian Association of Geographers, Chicoutimi, Que. (available from Dept. of Geography, Saint Mary's University, Halifax).
- 7 Canada Dept. of Energy, Mines and Resources (various dates) *Canada Land Inventory, Soil Capability Classification*.

**Additional Reading**

Millward, H. and D. Allen (1994) *The Scenic Resources of Nova Scotia: A Macro-Scale Landscape Assessment*. Nova Scotia Agricultural College, Department of Humanities, Truro. (*Rural Studies Working Paper* no. 10).