

TOPIC 2.8

Contact

2.74

Why didn't Europeans negotiate treaties with First Nations and Inuit who lived here?

How might the lives of First Nations and Inuit have been influenced by the European migratory fisheries?

Introduction

Although European activity and residence at Newfoundland and Labrador dramatically increased during the era of the migratory fisheries, First Nations and Inuit, for the most part, came into little contact with colonial authorities. One reason for this lack of contact was that European governments were much more interested in Newfoundland and Labrador's rich cod stocks than they were in land resources and establishing permanent settlements. As was common elsewhere in North America, this made it unnecessary to negotiate treaties with indigenous groups. However, First Nations and Inuit did have some informal encounters with European fishers when accessing marine resources. Sometimes these encounters were peaceful; at other times there was conflict. In either case these interactions resulted in change.

Inuit

Inuit of Labrador began having contact with Europeans during the 1500s. It is difficult to determine if the earliest exchanges were peaceful or not, but records suggest that by the last half of the 1500s Inuit were involved in skirmishes with European fishers and whalers. By the early 1600s relations were still generally hostile, especially in southern Labrador where French fishers had established shore stations. When the French left after the fishing season, their stations provided Inuit with a supply of boats and equipment, including iron nails, which they obtained by burning fishing stages. When European fishers returned the following summer, they would retaliate by attacking Inuit who ventured near their stations.

There are accounts of peaceful trade relations developing towards the end of the 1600s. By this time,

Inuit had acquired many objects manufactured in Europe – including wooden boats with sails, barrels, screws and nails, knives, and some European clothing. In 1743, a trading post was established in North West River by Louis Fornel, a French merchant and explorer. This led to a regular pattern of trade.



Experiencing The Arts

View the sculptures of Michael Massie on page 630 as he explores his mixed ancestry by combining modern and traditional elements in his work.

2.75 This is possibly the first European depiction of Inuit. It is a 1567 woodcut of what is likely an advertisement for the exhibition of an Inuit woman and her child in the German city of Augsburg.

Innu

Innu were one of the first Aboriginal peoples in North America to encounter European explorers – the Portuguese, Basques, French, Dutch, and British. Yet Innu remained relatively unknown because they spent most of the year inland and less time in coastal areas.

Although European nations were using Newfoundland and Labrador as a migratory fishing station by the early 1500s, their presence did not greatly alter Innu life. Innu families maintained a seasonal round. Innu gathered berries in the fall. During the colder months, Innu hunted caribou, beaver, porcupine, ptarmigan, and other game

in the Labrador-Quebec interior before visiting coastal areas to catch fish and sea birds. While marine resources were important in season, these resources did not have the same significance as they did for Inuit. For Innu, caribou was particularly important as it provided food, clothing, and other materials and also played a central role in many spiritual beliefs and rituals.

2.76 Skirmish at North West River, by artist William B. Ritchie

This picture shows what an encounter between the Norse and Innu may have looked like.



Beothuk

Prior to the establishment of the migratory fishery, Beothuk occupied Newfoundland and travelled throughout the island and to the coast of southern Labrador. The arrival of European fishers not only disrupted Beothuk travel patterns but also their **resource-based** life on the island.

Few contemporary reports mention contact with the indigenous population, but those that do state that European explorers captured several Beothuk to take back to Europe. Hence, Beothuk soon would have become wary and avoided coming in contact with Europeans or engaging in trade. The earliest account of an exchange of goods dates from 1612, when the colonist John Guy and his men met Beothuk in Trinity

Bay and shared a meal with them. However, a planned second meeting miscarried when a passing ship “let fly their shott” at the assembled Beothuk. In revenge, Beothuk are said to have taken or destroyed gear from seasonal fishermen in Trinity Bay.

No records inform us about Beothuk activities in the latter half of the 1600s as there seem to have been few contacts or sightings. This changed dramatically in the early 1700s when English settlements expanded into Notre Dame Bay, Mi'kmaw families began to settle on the Newfoundland west and south coasts, and Innu from Labrador exploited fur bearing animals on the Northern Peninsula more extensively.

2.77 John Guy and the Beothuk

After an initial friendly trading encounter with Beothuk in 1612, John Guy returned to the spot where he and Beothuk had met. He found furs and shells left by Beothuk, who probably expected that Guy would leave goods in exchange. The image below is a fanciful depiction of this encounter in Trinity Bay. It is “fanciful” because the canoes are dugouts which Beothuk did not use; the depiction of Beothuk is not authentic; and it is unlikely that Guy would wear this type of clothing in his colony.

Source: Theodor de Bry, *Historica Americae sive Novi Orbis*, pt. XIII, 1628





2.78 A Mi'kmaq encampment is shown in this 1790 watercolour by Hibbet Newton Binney, a Halifax customs officer.

Mi'kmaq

Mi'kmaq probably had the closest relationship with Europeans, particularly in the early contact years. On the mainland, Mi'kmaq hunted small animals for their furs and traded these with Europeans for needed supplies. These supplies included items such as iron kettles and guns. Food such as flour was also traded. Over time, Mi'kmaq integrated these European items into their way of life. Although Mi'kmaq now had guns, they were tied to Europeans for a supply of bullets and servicing of the guns. Likewise, the use of European foodstuffs continued to erode their traditional ways of living.

Mi'kmaq oral tradition maintains Mi'kmaq lived in Ktaqamkuk (which means "land across the water") prior to European contact. Historians suggest Mi'kmaq

came to the island of Newfoundland to hunt and to trap at the beginning of the seventeenth century, as European settlement encroached on their territory on the mainland. A number of writings indicate that Mi'kmaq continued to travel to the island occasionally over a period of about 50 years. In the mid-1600s, Mi'kmaq from Nova Scotia began using European shallops for travel – these vessels made the trip across the Cabot Strait easier. Travel and trade increased.

Newfoundland's environment and resources were conducive to Mi'kmaq way of life. Mi'kmaq families began to permanently settle on the south and west coasts, as well as in the central area of the island, during the last half of the seventeenth century.

Questions:

1. Interactions between indigenous peoples and Europeans resulted in the adoption of some European commodities into indigenous lifestyles. Give examples of these items. What impact might this adoption of commodities have had on indigenous peoples?
2. For each indigenous people noted in this section, summarize the nature of the relationship that each people had with Europeans. What similarities and differences do you note?