

The Search for a Western Passage c1519 to 1527

Abstract

The second phase of exploration of what is now Canada lasted from 1519 to 1533. During that period, explorers charted the Atlantic Coast in search of a western passage to Asia. This map shows the routes of four explorers: Fagundes (1519 to 1526), Verrazzano (1524), Gomes (1525) and Rut (1527). The map also shows the extent of territory known to Europeans in the period 1497 to 1650; and the navigation of all exploration routes during the period of maritime exploration between 1497 and 1599. The historical names found on the map are derived from contemporaneous maps and written documents of the period.

Between 1510 and 1515 the notion of an American continent separate from Asia had gained credibility. France, Portugal, Spain and England now contemplated expeditions in the hope of discovering a passage through this intervening landmass. The earliest official searches along the Atlantic were by Verrazano (1524), Gomez (1525) and John Rut (1527). The first two sailed from south to north and the latter from Labrador to the Caribbean. All three missed the Cabot Strait, but for the first time the entire Atlantic coast from Florida to Labrador appeared on maps. Meanwhile, the Portuguese attempted to secure their claims through colonization. From about 1519 to 1526, João Fagundes explored the coast from Newfoundland to Nova Scotia, and tried to erect a settlement on Cape Breton Island and perhaps a second one in the Bay of Fundy.

Although a western passage, civilizations, gold, spices or other riches had not yet been discovered, hope for future discoveries was still strong. In trying to minimize their failures, expedition leaders made positive comments about rich fishing grounds, vast timber resources, the possibility of procuring furs and slaves, and the existence of more temperate conditions south of Cape Breton Island and mainland Nova Scotia.

Voyages of Exploration

An audio description for each voyage of exploration shown on this map can be accessed in the folder "audio". The voyages of exploration described are:

- 1519 to 1526 João Alvares Fagundes (of Viana, Portugal; for Portugal)
- 1524 Giovanni da Verrazano (of Florence, Italy; for France)
- 1525 Estevao Gomes (of Oporto, Portugal; for Spain)
- 1526 John Rut (of Ratcliffe, England; for England)

The descriptions of the voyages of exploration are based on research by C.E. Heidenreich, Department of Geography, York University. An audio version of each description can be played as the user follows the exploration route made by the explorer on the map.

Map Sources

Exploration 1497 to 1650

Natural Resources Canada. 1991. Canada-Exploration 1497 to 1650 [map]. Fifth Edition, National Atlas of Canada.

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Related Web sites (1999 – 2009)

Federal Government

Canadian Museum of Civilization. History. Inuit and Englishmen: The Nunavut Voyages of Martin Frobisher

<http://www.civilization.ca/hist/frobisher/frint01e.html>

A Canadian Museum and Civilization virtual museum Web site that explores Martin Frobisher's exploration of the Arctic.

Canadian Museum of Civilization. Virtual Museum of New France

<http://www.civilization.ca/cmc/explore/virtual-museum-of-new-france>

The Virtual Museum of New France (VMNF) sponsored by the Canadian Museum of Civilization has information of that period of history in which the French explored North America and founded there the colony of New France.

Government of Canada. Canada's Digital Collections. Canadian Arctic Profiles. Exploration of the Northwest Passage

<http://collections.ic.gc.ca/arctic/explore/intro.htm>

This Web site provides information on a variety of topics relating to the Canadian Arctic and includes information on exploration in the Arctic.

Library and Archives Canada. Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online

<http://www.biographi.ca/index.html>

The History Makers: Exploration

<http://www.nfb.ca/FMT/E/seri/H/TheHistoMakerExplo.html>

A listing of all the available National Film Board presentations on Canada's well-known explorers, including Samuel de Champlain and John Cabot. Many of the films may be available from local libraries or obtained via inter-library loan.

Provincial/Territorial Government

Newfoundland and Labrador Heritage Web site. Exploration and Settlement

<http://www.heritage.nf.ca/exploration/default.html>

The history of exploration in Newfoundland and the Labrador coast through the centuries.

Other

Canadian Heritage Gallery

<http://www.canadianheritage.com/index2.htm>

The Canadian Heritage Gallery is a very extensive collection of historical Canadiana on the Internet.

Discovers Web Page

<http://www.win.tue.nl/~engels/discovery/index.html#nwcoast>

This site has hundreds of related exploration links, including many links to Canadian explorers. (Web site author: Andre Engels)

Giovanni Da Verrazzano

<http://beatl.barnard.columbia.edu/maritime/powerpoint/Verrazzano/sld001.htm>

An online slide show of Giovanni Da Verrazzano's voyage of exploration along the coast of America. (Personal Web page of Bob McCaughey, Columbia University)

Great Canadian Explorers

http://www.mta.ca/faculty/arts/canadian_studies/english/about/multimedia/explorers/index.html



Information on several great Canadian explorers, including John Cabot, Jacques Cartier, Samuel de Champlain, Henry Kelsey, James Knight and La Vérendrye. (Centre for Canadian Studies at Mount Allison University, Sackville, New Brunswick)

Historical Atlas of Canada Online Learning Project

<http://www.historicalatlas.ca/website/hacolp/>

This site is still under development but promises to be an excellent site for historical maps of Canada. All maps shown on the site have been adapted from the printed version of three-volume Historical Atlas of Canada.

The Canadian Institute for Historical Microreproductions (CIHM)

<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/cihm/>

The Canadian Institute for Historical Microreproductions (CIHM) was established in 1978 to locate early printed Canadian materials (books, annuals, and periodicals), to preserve their content on microfilm, and make the resulting Early Canadian Research Collection available to libraries and archives in Canada and abroad.

The Hudson's Bay Company Archives

<http://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/hbca/index.html>

The HBCA offers a wealth of information on the human and natural history of western and northern Canada and the western USA. Whether you are an historian, genealogist, ethnologist, environmental scientist or land claims researcher, the HBCA may be able to help.

The Portuguese Explorers

<http://www.heritage.nf.ca/exploration/portuguese.html>

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