

“ABORIGINAL PEOPLES IN CANADA”

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Aboriginal peoples in Canada comprise the First Nations, Inuit and Métis.

First Nations

First Nations peoples had settled and established trade routes across what is now Canada by 500 BCE – 1,000 CE. Communities developed each with its own culture, customs, and character. In the northwest were the Athapaskan, Slavey, Dogrib, Tutchone and Tlingit. Along the Pacific coast were the Tsimshian, Haida, Salish, Kwakiutl, Nootka, Nisga'a, Senakw and Gitksan. In the plains were the Blackfoot, Kainawa, Sarcee and Peigan. In the northern woodlands were the Cree and Chipewyan. Around the Great Lakes were the Anishinaabe, Algonquin, Mikmaq, Iroquois and Huron. Along the Atlantic coast were the Beothuk, Maliseet, Innu, Abenakiand and Mi'kmaq.

Many Canadian Aboriginal civilizations established characteristics and hallmarks that included permanent or urban settlements, agriculture, civic and monumental architecture, and complex societal hierarchies. These civilizations had evolved and changed by the time of the first permanent European arrivals (c. late 15th – early 16th centuries), and have been brought forward through archaeological investigations.

There are indications of contact made before Christopher Columbus between the first peoples and those from other continents. Aboriginal people in Canada interacted with Europeans around 1000 CE, but prolonged contact came after Europeans established permanent settlements in the 17th and 18th centuries. European written accounts generally recorded friendliness on the part of the First Nations, who profited in trade with Europeans. Such trade generally strengthened the more organized political entities such as the Iroquois Confederation. Throughout the 16th century, European fleets made almost annual visits to the eastern shores of Canada to cultivate the fishing opportunities. A sideline industry emerged in the un-organized traffic of furs overseen by the Indian Department.

Inuit

The Inuit are the descendants of what anthropologists call the Thule culture, which emerged from western Alaska around 1,000 CE and spread eastward across the Arctic, displacing the Dorset culture. Inuit historically referred to the Tuniit as "giants", or "dwarfs", who were taller and stronger than the Inuit. Researchers hypothesize that the Dorset culture lacked dogs, larger weapons and other technologies used by the expanding Inuit society. By 1300, the Inuit had settled in west Greenland, and finally moved into east Greenland over the following century. The Inuit had trade routes with more southern cultures. Boundary disputes were common and gave rise to aggressive actions.

Warfare was common among Inuit groups with sufficient population density. Inuit, such as the Nunatamiut who inhabited the Mackenzie delta area, often engaged in common warfare. The Central Arctic Inuit lacked the population density to engage in warfare. In the 13th century, the Thule culture began arriving in Greenland from what is now Canada.

After the disappearance of the Norse colonies in Greenland, the Inuit had no contact with Europeans for at least a century. By the mid 16th century, Basque fishermen were already working the Labrador coast and had established whaling stations on land, such as been excavated at Red Bay. The Inuit appear not to have interfered with their operations, but

they did raid the stations in winter for tools, and particularly worked iron, which they adapted to native needs.

Métis

The Métis are a people descended from marriages between Europeans (mainly French) and Cree, Ojibway, Algonquin, Mi'kmaq, Maliseet, and other First Nations. Their history dates to the mid 17th century. The Métis homeland consists of the Canadian provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Ontario, as well as the Northwest Territories (NWT).

The languages inherently Métis are either Metis French or a mixed language called Michif. The Métis today predominantly speak English, with French a strong second language, as well as numerous Aboriginal tongues.

There is debate over legally defining the term Métis. Unlike First Nations people and Inuit, there is no distinction between status and non-status. S.35 of the Constitution Act, 1982 mentions the Métis. Métis, their heritage and aboriginal ancestry have been absorbed and assimilated into their surrounding populations. On September 23, 2003, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that Métis are in fact a distinct people with significant rights.