

2.4 Exploration Along the Ottawa River

The Ottawa River has made a remarkable contribution to Canadian heritage as a route of European exploration. Beginning in the early 17th century, the French followed its waters on their way deep into North America's interior. Famous French explorers such as Champlain, Brûlé, Vignau, Nicollet, Radisson, Jolliet, Dulhut, De Troyes, and La Vérendrye, as well as British explorers such as Mackenzie and Franklin, canoed the river's waters on many of the most important European voyages of exploration into North America's interior.

European monarchs and merchants ventured west in search of a new and faster trade route to the Far East. During the 16th century, Europe began to investigate the possibility of a passage in the Northwest that would offer a safer sea route to the Orient than those that lay exposed to possible Spanish or Portuguese attack, such as the areas of Cape Horn and the Cape of Good Hope. For two more centuries, Europeans would continue to seek this route across the North American continent, including the fabled Northwest Passage through the Arctic. The Ottawa River is central to their stories of exploration (Champlain 1993: 155).

These explorers never found the route that they were seeking, but they did discover a continent rich in natural resources. The exploitation of these resources, beginning with furs, prompted further voyages and eventual settlement. In fact, many of the first Europeans to explore the Ottawa Waterway were missionaries and fur traders. From early days, geographic exploration and discovery were therefore intertwined with other motives.

2.4.1 European Context

Between 1450 and 1750, European nations beginning with Spain and Portugal, and then including Britain, France, and Holland, underwent major transformations that enabled them to gain command of the world's key international trade routes, and led to the European colonization of many parts of the world.

European traders of the 15th century became focused on the goal of establishing a trade route to the Orient that circumvented the Ottoman-Turkish Empire, a powerful (and costly) middleman. Europeans began to seek a more direct route to access the valuable silks, gems, and spices of the Orient (Taylor 26).

The 15th century also marked the beginning of a period of European scientific enquiry and technological development. These innovations, coupled with trade, led Europe to develop new ships, navigation techniques, geographic knowledge, and cannons that would enable European mariners to travel further and dominate those whom they encountered. The period of European imperialism was underway, and would soon lead to the colonization of Africa, parts of Asia, and the Americas (Taylor 29).

The story of the colonization of the Americas is said to begin with the Italian-born and Spanish sponsored navigator Columbus and his "discovery" of North America. Contrary to popular belief, Europeans of Columbus' time did not believe that the earth was flat. In fact, educated Europeans since the ancient Greeks had agreed that the world was spherical, and that, in theory, Asia could be reached by venturing west across the Atlantic. What prevented them from attempting such a voyage was their remarkably accurate understanding, based on ancient Greek calculations, that the distance was too great. It was only a grave error in the re-calculation of this distance on Columbus' part that justified his venture at all. Had the Americas not luckily been "in the way" none would have survived this voyage.

Columbus refused to admit that the continent he had reached was not Asia, and called the First Nations Peoples whom he encountered “Indians,” a misnomer still employed by many today. Subsequent European explorers soon admitted that the continent was not Asia, and referred to it as the “New World.” Of course, this too was a misnomer, as the Americas were not at all new to the continent’s Aboriginal Peoples.

European “discovery” of the “New World” had several major ramifications on trade. The natural resources of the continent were almost immediately harvested and sold in European markets. In North America, the French, Dutch, and British all engaged in the extraction of important resources, fuelling a vigorous trans-Atlantic trade.

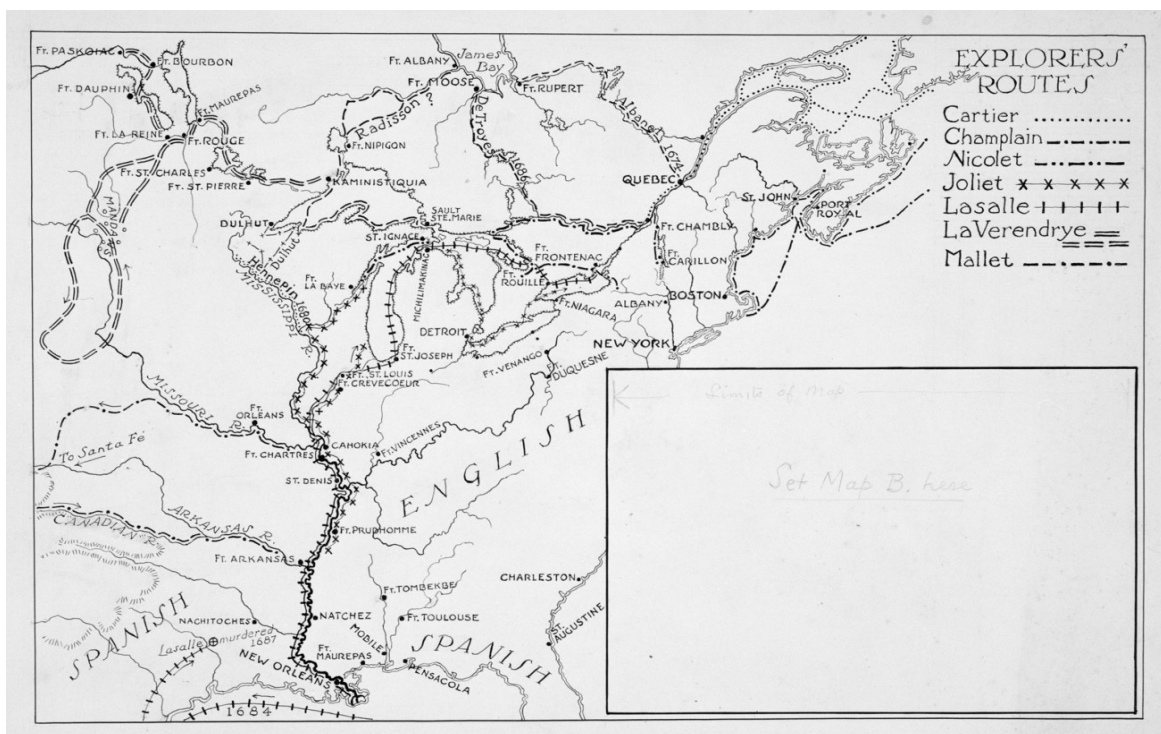
In addition to this resource extraction, the quest for a westward route to the Orient did not end. This search would continue for about three hundred years, during which explorers would brave the harsh climate and treacherous ice conditions of the North. Some men would lose their lives by starvation, scurvy, or attacks by Inuit or fellow crewmembers as they attempted to find a passage through the maze of ice and islands.

Despite the hardships and challenges faced by the European explorers, the land accessible via the Ottawa River provided all the materials necessary for extensive travel by canoe. Birch bark is found in all parts of Canada served by the Ottawa Waterway. The long Canot de Maître, developed for the fur trade between Montreal and Grand Portage (at the west end of Lake Superior), relied on readily available materials such as white cedar, spruce and juniper roots, and pine or spruce gum.

2.4.2 The Explorers

The French were the first Europeans to travel up the Ottawa River. François I commissioned the earliest French voyages of exploration in the 16th century to obtain a share of the New World’s riches - goods that, up to that point, had been taken by Portugal and Spain.

Figure 2.8 The Explorers’ Routes



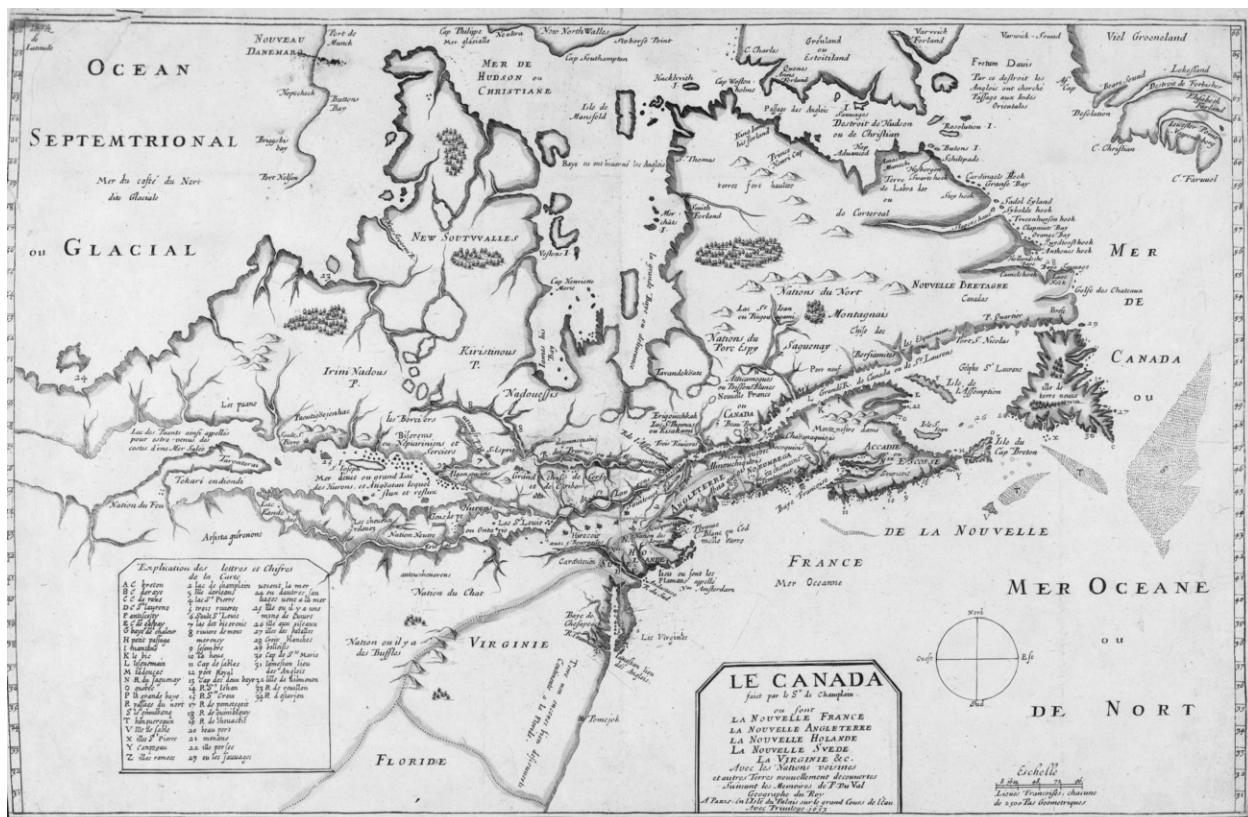
Source : Charles William Jefferys/Library and Archives Canada/C-069751

In 1534, Jacques Cartier was charged with finding a route to China by which France could trade with distant Asian lands. In 1535, Cartier stood atop Mount Royal (in modern-day Montreal) and recorded what he saw. Among the lands new to his eyes, he noted a great river extending toward the western horizon: the Ottawa River, weaving its way into the distant wilderness of a vast, unexplored region.

Samuel de Champlain

The story of European exploration along the Ottawa River can be said to have begun with the vision and efforts of Samuel de Champlain. Geographer, explorer, as well as colonizer and founder of Quebec City, where he carried out most of his works, Champlain was the first to publish maps of the Ottawa River and names of topographic features in the Ottawa region as well as in Hull, Pontiac, and Renfrew counties (Kennedy 71). By the time he began exploring the Ottawa River in 1611, he had already sailed the St. Lawrence, explored the mouths of the Saguenay and the Richelieu, and founded colonies in Acadia and Quebec.

Figure 2.9 Champlain’s Map of Canada, 1653



Source : Pierre d'Abbeville du Vall/Library and Archives Canada/NMC 6333

Commissioned by the King of France to establish a colony in North America and to continue the search for the China Sea, Champlain encountered a group of Algonquins, Malécites, and Montagnais at Tadoussac in 1603 (Hancock: “Champlain Anniversary”). These allies were celebrating their recent victory over the Iroquois in a battle on the St. Lawrence. Champlain’s presence offered these First Nations Peoples a timely opportunity to ally themselves with the French - an opportunity that, strategically, they seized (Legget 1975: 32).

Figure 2.10 Samuel de Champlain



Source : Hamel Théophile Moncornet/Library and Archives Canada/C-014305

In 1609, the allied Montagnais, Algonquin, and Malécite tribes guided Champlain into the Iroquois country. In honour of the French-First Nations alliance, Champlain and several of his men fought and won a battle against the Iroquois alliance on the shores of Lake Champlain, at Cape Ticonderoga. Samuel de Champlain and a group of Frenchmen participated in a second battle on the Richelieu River the following year.

Champlain earned much of his historical reputation because of the courage, strength, and skill of the rugged and versatile scouts that carried out his strategy of cultural penetration. While Champlain fortified his alliances with these First Nations groups, he also sent emissaries to explore the Ottawa River to lead French exploration deep into the interior of the land.

The First of Champlain's Emissaries: Etienne Brûlé

Although the Ottawa is often called "Champlain's River", Champlain was not in fact the first European to canoe on its waters or to witness its beauties; rather it was Champlain's emissary, Etienne Brûlé, who deserves the credit. Around 1608, Brûlé was the first European to paddle up the Ottawa at the young age of 19. He is known to have made his way to the Georgian Bay via the Mattawa River by 1611, and was the first European to see Lake Huron (Legget 1975: 31). Unfortunately, Brûlé did not leave any written records of this voyage.

Brûlé's mission for Champlain was to explore the country of the Hurons, to learn their language, and to familiarize himself with their culture in order to establish a trading alliance with them and to better organize the fur trade (Germain 32).

After his first winter among the Huron, Brûlé returned to the colony accompanied by Aboriginal warriors. He was dressed like them, wore his hair like theirs, and his face was painted after their fashion. After greeting Champlain, Brûlé left once again with his companions (Germain 32).

Figure 2.11 Passing the Line: Hauling a Canoe Up a Rapid on the Ottawa River, ca. 1845



Source : Henry James Warrel/Library and Archives Canada/C-031230

Having traveled around Lakes Ontario, Erie, and Huron, Brûlé already had an excellent knowledge of the surrounding lands. In addition, he spoke the Huron and Algonquin languages, enabling Champlain, an excellent cartographer, to make remarkably accurate maps of the region in 1615 based on Brûlé's descriptions of his travels (Germain 32). Brûlé went on to be the first European to explore what is now the State of Pennsylvania.

Brûlé's Assimilation and Death

Brûlé lived among the Huron for eighteen years. After the Kirke brothers captured Quebec for the British in 1629, Brûlé had no qualms about selling his furs to the British. Champlain thought that Brûlé had betrayed his king by agreeing to trade with the competition, but Brûlé had supposedly lost his emotional ties to France, and had taken on a Huron identity. He had no more interest in European politics or trade.

The tale of Brûlé's death underlines the extent to which he had assimilated and been accepted into Huron life. Brûlé had been captured by a group of Seneca, members of the Iroquois Confederacy and enemies of the Hurons. When the Seneca spared his life, the Hurons believed that it was because Brûlé had served as an intermediary between the Seneca and the French, thus compromising the Huron position in the fur trade (Germain 33).

It is unknown whether this allegation was true. However, Brûlé, familiar with Huron customs, almost surely knew that he was in an untenable position. In fact, he confided his fears to the Recollet priest Gabriel Sagard soon after the Seneca freed him. He could easily have returned to Quebec, but instead chose to take his chances and face the Huron system of justice. He told the Huron that he had been freed by a miracle, and relayed a tale of a storm so violent that it could only be a sign. The Huron, with whom he had lived for so many years, did not believe Brûlé's story. They executed and ate him, as they would their own traitors, in 1633.

Brûlé is often considered a classic example of an explorer and *coureur de bois* who became assimilated into First Nations society, and is a central figure in the history of the Ottawa Valley and Great Lakes area (Germain 33).

Champlain's First Voyage Along the Ottawa – Vignau and the Northern Sea

Forced to return to France himself, Champlain next sent Nicolas de Vignau to live with the Algonquins in 1611. Vignau returned to Paris in 1612 with the startling news that he had seen the "Northern Sea": presumably today's Hudson's Bay (Legget 1975: 31-33). He reported encountering the remains of an English ship, possibly Henry Hudson's ship. This tantalizing news seemed to mean to Champlain that Vignau had found a potential passage to the Orient via a northern ocean.

Accompanied by Vignau, Champlain himself first ventured along the Ottawa in 1613. He had been planning a trip up the Ottawa River after encountering Brûlé and a group of Hurons and Algonquins near Lachine in 1611. In addition to following up on Vignau's reports of a "Northern Sea", Champlain sought to further extend the French trade in furs already established at Tadoussac, and to learn more about the Ottawa River. Through his thorough written records, we are able to reconstruct his voyages with some accuracy.

The journey was long and arduous. On the way, Champlain nearly lost his life lining his canoe up the Long Sault rapids. With the assistance of additional Algonquin guides, the group traveled along a chain of lakes (via Muskrat Lake) to avoid the most dangerous waters. Champlain, Vignau and the Algonquin guides then went to meet with powerful Algonquin chief Tessoüat at his settlement, probably at Morrison Island (across from today's Pembroke).

Champlain tried to convince Tessoüat to supply him with guides and canoes to take him on to the land of the Nipissing and beyond to the "Northern Sea". Tessoüat refused, viewing the voyage through Nipissing territory as impossible since he considered the Nipissing to be dangerous enemies. Champlain was not concerned since Vignau had successfully made the same voyage the year before:

I said I was sorry that they showed themselves so little my friends, and that I would never have thought it; that I had a young fellow with me (showing them my impostor) who had been in their country, and had not observed all the difficulties that they described, or found the people so bad as they said (Champlain 2000: 138).

Figure 2.12 Champlain in a Canoe



Source : John Henry de Rinzy/Library and Archives Canada/C-013320

Tessoüat and the Algonquins accused Vignau of lying about his journey, insisting that Vignau had been with them the whole time:

You are a bold liar; you know well that every night you slept at my side with my children, and every morning you got up there. If you have been among these people, it was when you were asleep. How have you been so barefaced as to tell your chief such lies, and so wicked as to be willing to risk his life among such dangers? You are a scoundrel, and he ought to put you to death more cruelly than we do our enemies. I am not surprised that he should be so insistent, on the assurance of your words (Tessoüat qtd. in Champlain 2000: 138).

Fearing the outrage of the Algonquins, Vignau retracted his story and confessed that he lied to earn his passage back to New France. Humiliated, the party was forced to turn back and travel down the river.

Some historians believe that Vignau could indeed have been telling the truth. Certainly, the Algonquins would have good reason for wishing to keep their control of the river and strategic trade interests, leading them to protect knowledge of this passage to the Hudson's Bay. Outnumbered, Vignau may simply have retracted his previous statements to protect himself.

The Mystery of Champlain's Astrolabe

During this arduous first journey up the Ottawa River, Champlain reported losing his astrolabe, an ancient scientific instrument used to determine and fix his latitude. In 1867, a farm boy near Cobden uncovered a bronze artefact bearing the date 1603 that may have been Champlain's lost astrolabe. The rare artefact was sold to a steamboat captain and made its way to the New York Historical Society. It wasn't

until 1989 that it was acquired for the Museum of Civilization. Today, historians still debate the origins of the astrolabe; it may also have belonged to an early Jesuit missionary.

Champlain's Second Voyage up the Ottawa: 1615

In 1615, Champlain undertook a more extensive and significant voyage up the Ottawa River and beyond, bolstered by greater experience, a host of First Nations guides, and seasoned wilderness explorer Étienne Brûlé. The trip was part of a military campaign with Champlain's Algonquin and Huron allies against the Iroquois, which Champlain saw as an opportunity for him to chart new lands and create new trading partnerships.

Champlain and his party traveled up the Ottawa and along the Mattawa, crossing Lake Nipissing, and going down the French River to Lake Huron. After suffering an injury as the result of a minor conflict with an Iroquois, Champlain spent the winter in Huron territory with his "son" Brûlé (Germain 32). He finally returned to Montreal in the spring of 1616, almost a year later, having taken a route that the French fur traders would follow for centuries to come.

Jean Nicollet de Belleborne

Nicollet's familiarity with the fur trade route as well as his knowledge of First Nations customs and languages were among the best possessed by any European in New France. Like Champlain, Nicollet sought to find a route to the Western Sea and to the famous lands described by Marco Polo.

Nicollet's explorations of North America began in earnest with a voyage up the Ottawa River. In 1618, Champlain sent Nicollet to winter on Allumette Island on the Ottawa River. His mission was to consolidate the alliances that Champlain had established a few years earlier. Nicollet spent two years with the Algonquin Peoples. He learned their language and customs, and, it is reported, gained their confidence and friendship (Germain 14).

Two years later, Champlain gave Nicollet a new task: to establish ties with the Nipissing, a tribe further inland. Nicollet stayed with the Nipissing for nine years, during which time he maintained his own household, took part in tribal councils, and contributed significantly to the organization of the continent's burgeoning fur trade.

In the early 1630s, Nicollet ventured further west, seeking to establish a peace between the Algonquin and the Winnebago, a nation that was largely unknown to the French. It was hoped that Nicollet, thought to be an excellent interpreter and diplomat, would be able to settle any potential disputes that might compromise the fur trade. For this voyage, Nicollet had an ulterior motive: he believed that from the Winnebago's territory, he would be able to reach the China Sea (Germain 14).

Figure 2.13 Champlain With an Astrolabe on the West Bank of the Ottawa, 1613



Source: Charles William Jefferys Library and Archives Canada/C-073632

After crossing Georgian Bay, he followed the North shore of Lake Huron up the spectacular rapids that would later be named Sault Ste Marie and into Lake Superior. He continued his journey, following the northern shore of Lake Superior, and entering the land of the Winnebago by way of the river leading to Lake Nipigon (Germain 14).

Figure 2.14 Lake Allumette on the Ottawa River, ca. 1870



Source : Alfred Worsley Holdstock/Library and Archives Canada/C-040097

In order to be appropriately dressed for his arrival in the Orient, Nicollet brought a long, brightly coloured robe of Chinese damask patterned with flowers and birds. He was often sighted with this robe billowing dazzlingly over the sides of his canoe. He wore this robe when he met the Winnebagoes, “striking them with terror by his gaudy array” (Legget 1975: 37). However, he soon had to admit that he was not in the China Sea.

There, he assembled several thousand First Nations Peoples. These people, it is reported, thought that Nicollet was godlike, and called him Manitouriniou or “Man of Wonders.” They listened to him with great respect. By using this position of power, Nicollet was able to convince the Algonquin and the Winnebago Chiefs to create peace between their traditionally rival nations. This was strategically significant for the French fur trade, as it extended the French alliance of traders further into the continent’s West (Germain 15).

In 1634, still acting under orders from Champlain, Nicollet undertook yet another mission. This time, the main purpose was to discover a sea-going passage to the Orient. Following the Ottawa River route, by that time familiar, he explored the frontiers of Lake Michigan and traveled as far west as the Wisconsin River.

Nicollet's search for the China Sea continued. He realised that it could not be in the land of the Winnebago, as he had originally thought, since this land lay to the North. His communications with the Elders led him to believe that there were waters south of Lake Superior that could only be the China Sea (Germain 14).

He spent several years exploring this country, and may have made it as far as the Wisconsin River, which flows into the Mississippi. Although Nicollet never did discover the passage to the Orient that he sought, he, more than any other explorer, extended the territory over which France would exercise its influence for more than a century as it monopolized the fur trade.

After his period of exploration, Nicollet settled in Belleborne, near Quebec City, and married in 1637. He served the French colony as a representative in the fur country until, in October of 1642, at the age of 44, he drowned on a voyage intended to rescue a prisoner whom the Huron were about to torture and put to death (Germain 14).

Radisson: Explorer of the West

Pierre Esprit Radisson was a French fur trader and explorer known for switching allegiance to the British and helping to create the Hudson's Bay Company. Born in France in the late 1630s, Radisson immigrated to New France, soon after which he endured an experience that would influence his personality for the rest of his life: he was taken prisoner by the Iroquois, and it is said that he emerged from this rite of passage quite like his captors.

Through his captivity, Radisson learned to remain indifferent to hunger, thirst, fear, and pain. He acquired a sense of the theatrical and began to value the spoken word in order to survive among the Iroquois, and to gain their respect. He lived happily with the Iroquois for a summer, but then, wishing to return to his family in Trois Rivières, he killed three of his adoptive brothers with a tomahawk and escaped. Although recaptured, he eventually made his way to Fort Orange, onwards to France, and, from there, back to Trois Rivières (Germain 54).

Figure 2.15 Radisson Meets First Nations Peoples at a Winter Camp



Source: Charles William Jefferys, Library and Archives Canada/C-073423

Radisson lived between societies and cultures. He lived with the Algonquin of the north shore of the St. Lawrence, with the Huron, the Ottawa, the Ojibwa, and other tribes around the Great Lakes, and with the Mohawk. He associated with British aristocrats, New England adventurers, and upper-class French traders. He studied with Jesuit missionaries, serving them as a guide and interpreter (Germain 54).

Radisson made several voyages to the Pays d'en Haut with his brother-in-law, Médard Chouart des Groseilliers. The brothers-in-law traveled past Lake Superior, or possibly further on to Lake Winnipeg, accompanied by Ojibwa and Cree.

They would then have encountered the Sioux (Germain 54). Their voyages began by traveling up the Ottawa River. When the fall of Huronia cut the French off from their existing trade alliances with First Nations, it was Radisson who built up a new network (Germain 55).

In the spring of 1660, des Groseilliers and Radisson were returning from a long journey with sixty canoes laden with furs. When they reached Long Sault, just up the Ottawa from the Lake of Two Mountains, they came across the site at which the Iroquois had massacred Dollard des Ormeaux and his companions only a few days before. They saw the small fort burnt to the ground and the inhabitants scalped or decapitated (Germain 55).

Upon Radisson and des Groseilliers' arrival in Montreal, Governor d'Argenson confiscated the furs that they had brought to the small colony at the risk of their lives on the grounds that they had traded without a license and infringed on the monopoly held by the Company of New France.

In response, Radisson wrote the governor a scathing letter, reminding him that he and his brother-in-law had saved the country through their generosity and daring. Upon returning from their next expedition, the two men decided to sell their furs to the British. They disclosed to the British the fur routes to Hudson's Bay, and collaborated with them to found the powerful Hudson's Bay Company (Germain 55).

When Radisson finally retired from the fur trade, he married an upper class British woman and spent his remaining years in London. During this final period of his life, he wrote: "What greater pleasure than good conversation, especially when you can see the smoke rising from your own chimney, and kiss your wife or your neighbour's wife with ease and enjoyment" (Germain 55).

Pierre Gaultier de La Vérendrye

With his three sons, Pierre Gaultier de Varennes, Sieur de la Vérendrye opened up the prairies as a source of trade for merchants in Montreal. The posts he founded for New France were extended west until one was established in 1751 almost at the Rocky Mountains.

Born in New France, La Vérendrye was a soldier and a farmer. In 1726 he joined a fur-trading venture in the Lake Superior region and while there, became convinced that exploring Lake Winnipeg and the "great Western river" would lead him to discover the Pacific Ocean. Arguing the merits of increased French presence in the west (while damaging British trade in Hudson's Bay), he applied to travel further west on an official mission. He traveled west several times, initially to establish fur-trading posts, and then to discover a passage to the Pacific Ocean.

Figure 2.16 Encampment on the Ottawa River, ca. 1850



Source: Augustus Terrick. Hamilton Library and Archives Canada/C-040069

La Vérendrye's first journey West in 1731 took him up the Ottawa River. His numerous journeys between Montreal and the western plains hold a special place in the history of the Ottawa Waterway. As a result of these voyages, by 1763, there was a well-recognized route to the western plains, with small posts

established for fur trading, in direct competition with the Hudson's Bay Company (Legget 1975: 45). Although at first France didn't recognize the importance of his and his sons' discoveries, he was eventually recognized by the king and awarded the Croix de Saint-Louis (CMCC: The Explorers – La Vérendrye).

Sir Alexander Mackenzie

Sir Alexander Mackenzie's explorations of the West all started on the Ottawa Waterway. A Canadian fur trader and explorer born in Scotland, Mackenzie was the first European to cross the northern part of North America to the Pacific. Mackenzie entered a Montreal fur-trading firm in 1779 and soon became a partner of one of the firms that merged to form the North West Company (1787) (Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia: Alexander Mackenzie). In 1789 he made an expedition down the river that was later named after him to reach the shores of the Arctic, and in 1793 crossed the Rockies to the Pacific coast.

Since Mackenzie traveled along the Ottawa Waterway to reach the West, it is not surprising that his famous Voyages... to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans (1801) is prefaced by a history of the fur trade including an excellent description of the famous Ottawa route. Voyages won Mackenzie recognition and in 1802 he was knighted. Here Mackenzie describes in detail the start of the voyageurs' journey at Lachine:

Leaving Lachine, they proceed to St Ann's, within two miles of the Western extremity of the island of Montreal, the lake of two mountains being in sight, which may be termed the commencement of the Utawas River. At the rapid of St Ann they are obliged to take out part, if not the whole of their lading. It is from this spot that the Canadians consider they take their departure, as it possesses the last church on the island, which is dedicated to the titular saint of the voyageurs (Mackenzie qtd in Legget 1975: 60-61).

Louis Jolliet

A coureur de bois born near Quebec City, Louis Jolliet became an important explorer in the opening of North America. In 1673, Jolliet and Father Jacques Marquette became the first Europeans to explore and travel down the Mississippi River (CMCC: Jolliet). The purpose of the France-sponsored canoe expedition was to determine whether the Mississippi flowed into the Gulf of Mexico, and whether one of its tributaries might allow a passage to the Pacific and thus to China. On his way to this historic exploration of the other "Great River", Jolliet journeyed along the Ottawa River.

Daniel Greysolon Dulhut (1636-1710)

Dulhut is best remembered for his expedition to Lake Superior via the Ottawa River to improve commercial relations with First Nations communities around Sault Sainte-Marie.

Born in Lyon, France, Dulhut was a career soldier and settled in New France around 1674. He became interested in the French and Iroquois conflicts that he perceived as hindering the north-south fur trade, and became convinced that New France should immediately establish commercial relations with tribes living to the west of the Great Lakes.

In 1678, Dulhut left on a secret voyage along with seven other Frenchmen and three slaves. Heading for Lake Superior, the party traveled along the Ottawa River to Lake Huron. Dulhut aimed to convince tribes living at Sault Sainte-Marie to make peace with the other nations around Lake Superior who were at the time trading with France. Ultimately, he hoped the Saulteurs would decide to reserve all their furs for the French.

Following this secret voyage, Dulhut traveled south along Mississippi in search of the Pacific. During this time, he learned that in Quebec and Montreal he was being accused of trafficking with the English. As a result of these accusations, he was not able to obtain a seigneurie on Lake Superior as he had hoped. Instead, he agreed to return to his previous role as “peacemaker” for the Lake Superior area, as mandated by Governor LaBarre in 1683 (CMCC: Dulhut).

Pierre de Troyes (Chevalier de Troyes)

Pierre de Troyes is known for his successful campaign to regain French control over English-held forts on James Bay. His well-documented, dangerous early spring voyage up the Ottawa on his way to the Hudson’s Bay provides a vivid description of canoe travel on the Ottawa River in the 17th century.

Born in France, Pierre de Troyes moved to Quebec in 1685 when he was appointed captain of a company of marines on duty in New France. Soon after his arrival, governor Denonville ordered him to lead an expedition to occupy English posts on the shores of the Hudson’s Bay. The Compagnie du Nord financed this military expedition, revealing that it was prompted by competition by fur.

The fleet of 35 canoes, led by De Troyes and his three senior officers, Jacques, Pierre and Paul Le Moyne, left today’s Ste Anne de Bellevue in 1686 with strong ice still on lake. Reaching the foot of the notorious Long Sault on April 9th, De Troyes writes:

...it was necessary to load and unload the canoes continuously because of ice jams which covered a quarter of a league of the river. Crevasses in the ice were so wide that we had to build bridges to get our canoes, supplies, and munitions across... During the portage over the ice, however, we had two canoes smashed and one of the canoeists swam ashore despite the extreme cold (qtd. in Legget 1975: 20).

On May 1st they set up camp at the future site of Fort Coulonge, where the men erected a maypole as per the tradition. Reaching Mattawa on May 10th, the group deviated from the traditional route west and instead turned north up the Ottawa into Lake Temiskaming and on to the portage into the Abitibi River. They reached the James Bay on June 20. That summer they engaged in a number of successful campaigns and battles, seizing English-held Forts Monsipi, Rupert and Albany (CMCC: Chevalier de Troyes).

Sir John Franklin

British admiral and explorer Sir John Franklin (1786-1847) journeyed on the Ottawa River on his way to and from his great survey of the Arctic Coast of Canada in 1825-1827. From the Great Lakes, he traveled overland to the MacKenzie River which he descended until the Arctic Coast. He charted the territory from the Hudson’s Bay north to the Arctic in an attempt to delineate the most direct route for a Northwest Passage, a navigable sea route between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans through the Arctic between Baffin

Bay and the Bering Strait. Franklin is also known to have laid first stone of the Rideau Canal locks in 1827 (Bytown Museum 2004: "Timeline").

2.4.3 The Interpreters

Europeans were sent to live with the First Nations groups in order to learn their languages and customs and to establish ties that would promote trade. It was common for these European adventurers to acquire a deep respect for their host community and the culture of its people. Often, they would become totally and whole-heartedly assimilated into this culture, never to return.

First Nations Peoples generally considered hospitality to be a sacred duty. When a young Frenchman would arrive among them, they would treat him as a brother or a son. They also sought to teach him their language and skills (Germain 30).

Fluency could not be acquired without lengthy immersion, especially since many of the languages use barely any lip movement. Instead, sounds are produced with the tongue inside the mouth, with the speaker's lips barely moving. Europeans learning an Aboriginal language would have to learn to distinguish similar sounds without visual cues (Germain 30).

The interpreters, by virtue of their cultural immersion, would often resemble those with whom they lived, and would adopt their host's cultural values and ideas about happiness, love, war, work, and trade (Germain 31).

The missionaries of the time were shocked by the behaviour of the interpreters, and their adoption of First Nations values and lifestyle. These men of the Church felt that, far from helping to convert the First Nations Peoples, these young men were undermining the missionaries' efforts by acting like "savages" themselves, and therefore setting a bad example. In 1635, a few months before Samuel de Champlain's death, all interpreters were recalled, supposedly to "save them from the influence" of the First Nations Peoples. The presence of the interpreters in the young French colony was unsettling: some viewed them as renegades and others as inspiring role models, whom other brave young Frenchmen would soon follow (Germain 31).

2.4.4 Missionaries on the Ottawa River

Joann McCann

Founder, Friends of Oiseau Rock

The story of European exploration and settlement of the Ottawa River is intertwined with the evangelical activities of early Christian missionaries. In the early 1600s, the first missionaries attempted to convert First Nations Peoples to Christianity. Deep-seated faith led these men, and later women, to travel up the Ottawa route, enduring severe conditions and hardship. They journeyed great distances in birch bark canoes shooting rapids, suffering hunger, starvation and mosquitoes, and for some, torture and death. These missionaries possessed a Eurocentric attitude toward First Nations Peoples, who called the Catholic missionaries "Black Robes" because of their dark cassocks. Their accounts about encounters with First Nations Peoples along their journeys provide us with information, albeit from their perspective, about these first occupants of the Ottawa Valley, their culture and the land.

The Earliest Missionaries – Accompanying the Explorers

Jesuit missionaries may have accompanied Etienne Brûlé when he became the first European to ascend the Ottawa River in 1609 or 1610. After Champlain's pioneer journey up the Ottawa in 1613 and his subsequent return home to France, Champlain came back to New France with three Recollet friars and a lay brother who hoped to convert the First Nations Peoples. In 1615, Père Joseph LeCaron made the 1000 kilometre journey up the Ottawa River to Georgian Bay to carry the message of Christianity to the Hurons. The Hurons did not accept him so he tried once again in 1623, taking Father Nicolas Viel and lay brother, Gabriel Sagard, the best known of the Recollets. Sagard went barefoot like Saint Francis but found the mosquitoes the "worst martyrdom, (he) suffered in this country."

Chevalier de Troyes' 1686 military expedition was accompanied by the Jesuit priest Antoine Silvy who held mass on the sandy beach of Lamure Bay which is presently part of CFB Petawawa.

En Route to Huron Country

When the Recollet friars sought the assistance of the Jesuits with their missions in Quebec, the Jesuits planned to convert the Hurons, who were already settled farmers and traders. As the Ottawa River was a route to the Huron country, many of the Jesuits made contact with First Nations Peoples including the Algonquins along the river and at the different trading stations in Quebec.

Paul Le Jeune, the second Jesuit superior at Quebec, journeyed up the Ottawa in 1633. His letters provide information about the First Nations Peoples and landmarks on the Ottawa River. He recorded that the Hurons called a large rock formation across from present-day Chalk River "Tsanhoki Arasta". This Huron term meaning birds of prey was later translated to the present-day name of Oiseau Rock.

The Permanent Missions

In 1638, Père Le Moyne left Quebec for the Huron mission, but his guides left him at a remote spot on the Ottawa. He stayed on the riverbank and fortunately, two weeks later, Père du Peron came up the river with two Aboriginal guides and took Le Moyne to the Huron mission. This mission continued for another decade until the Iroquois, on the warpath against the Hurons and Algonquins, murdered many of the Hurons and Jesuit priests Brébeuf and Lalemant. The mission was closed the following year and the Hurons fled to Quebec.

In 1676, the Sulpicians arrived on the scene, establishing a mission on Mont-Royal, which they later moved to Oka on the Lake of Two Mountains. At this time, some of the Algonquins of the Ottawa River returned to their territories since the threat of the Iroquois had subsided, while others continued to live at the Oka mission.

Settlement and the Missionaries

Despite the establishment of permanent missions, the river would continue to be a means for missionaries to travel to their flock. The Sulpician Fathers continued to visit the Algonquins at the various trading posts on the Ottawa River and its tributaries. They also traveled up the river to minister to the spiritual needs of the trappers and settlers. In 1819, Sulpician missionary Jean Baptiste Roupe went up the Ottawa as far as Fort Coulonge.

At the time, Irish and Scottish settlers began to outnumber French Canadian settlers in the area. Consequently, both Catholic and Protestant missionaries traveled extensively during the 1820s and 1830s making many trips up the river to Allumette Island, Fort Coulonge, Temiskaming and Abitibi.

In the 1790s, there were Anglican missionaries in the Bytown area. The first Anglican to hold services at Bytown was Ansley Amos who served Hull and traveled widely to cover a large area. During the 19th century, although the first preachers to conduct services in the Ottawa Valley were Methodists, the three major denominations were the Church of England, the Roman Catholic faith and the Church of Scotland.

The poverty of the early settlers spurred the churches to turn to the government for aid. The dispersed settlement along the river resulted in the creation of missionary stations and preaching tours where the clergy would travel a circuit administering to the members. The heyday of the timber industry drew Roman Catholic missionaries to visit lumber shanties up the Ottawa and its tributaries, including the Gatineau, Madawaska and the Bonnechere.

Previous to the 1840s, it was difficult to attract clergy to newly settled areas. As the congregations became more prosperous and numerous, the quality of the clergy improved. In 1845, the Sulpicians' missionary work was taken over by the Oblate Fathers of Bytown. In Bytown in 1849, there were four priests: two French-Canadian and two Irish. A year later, their numbers increased to ten. Increased immigration and the growth of these towns necessitated the need for more clergy. New churches were built and the clergy itself turned its attention to the other needs of the laity, such as hospitals, orphanages and schools. The Sisters of Charity in Bytown established a small hospital and a school.

Establishing Missions Further Upriver

In 1836, the Sulpicians held summer missions on Lake Temiskaming and along the Upper Ottawa en route to James Bay. They stopped at Fort William, Quebec (across from Petawawa) and held a mass in the presence of fifty Aboriginal Peoples. The Sulpician father Louis Charles de Bellefeuille and his companion Father Dupuis built a small chapel near the company post at Temiskaming. Two years later, in the

Figure 2.17 St. Theresa of the Little Flower, Fort William, Pontiac County,



company of one hundred Algonquins, they erected a cross at the cemetery at Fort William, Quebec. A cross and the cemetery remain there today.

The Hudson's Bay Company built an interdenominational mission chapel at Fort William in 1857 and the Oblate Fathers held services every year, baptising, marrying and confirming the Algonquins and Nipissings who would gather there every summer. These Algonquins were from the many tributaries of the Ottawa. When the various fur trade posts along the Ottawa River gradually closed, the Oblate Fathers left the area for the posts of the North. They did however return every summer to hold services at the former posts, as was the case of Fort William, Quebec. Once, after leaving that mission and heading down-river, Father Lavelochere's canoe was

overtaken in a set of rapids called “The Awakening” and he barely escaped with his life.

By turning their attention to their missions on the upper reaches of the river, the Oblates encouraged the colonization of the northern regions of the Ottawa. Father Paradis of the Oblates was sent by his Order in 1881 to the missionary district of Temiskaming. On his journey up there, he suggested the construction of a dam on the Ottawa River at Mattawa to raise the water level in order to drown out the rapids on the way to Lake Temiskaming. He saw the Ottawa as a “grand chain of communication to divert a vast trade down the Ottawa River...”

By the mid-19th century, the Oblates shifted their attention to the new frontiers of the North and the West. Consequently, when the Aboriginal Peoples along the Ottawa had settled on reserves and in permanent settlements, the Oblates transferred their missions and chapels along the river to the local dioceses. With respect to the Protestant missionaries, farming, lumbering and other industries had created towns and villages along the river. The more prosperous parishioners then chose to build their own churches, schools and other institutions.

2.4.5 Sites Related to European Exploration

- The Rideau Falls: Samuel de Champlain remarked on their beauty in 1613. Later, these falls were harnessed to produce energy for a sawmill and a textile factory.
- Jacques Cartier Park: A camp site for First Nations travelers on the river.
- Victoria Island (right below Chaudiere Falls in Ottawa). For centuries First Nations Peoples, voyageurs, and explorers rested on this island before making the portage around Chaudiere Falls.
- Green Lake near Cobden: a cairn tells the story of the astrolabe that may have belonged to Champlain.
- “The Champlain Trail”: the route that Champlain followed through Renfrew and Pontiac counties.
- “Champlain Rock” near McKenzie’s Hill, Horton Township: probably inauthentic, this rock bears the inscription “Champlain, Juin 1, 1613” with an arrow pointing away from the Ottawa River (Kennedy 77).
- Brébeuf Park: A park in Gatineau commemorating the second Chaudiere portage over which passed Champlain and nearly all the Canadian explorers and fur traders on their canoe route from Montreal west. The portage is a National Historic Site.
- Other portage sites used by explorers and fur traders including Long-Sault Rapids, Blondeau Falls, Carillon Rapids, Chats Falls, Grand Calumet Island, Allumette Island and Rapides-des-Joachims.
- Champlain statue, designated historic site and plaque located at Nepean Point in Ottawa.
- Tessoüat and le Borne designated National Historic Site, Allumette Island.

Summary

The Ottawa River was the pathway for much of the early European exploration of North America, truly a gateway to the continent. In search of a passage to the Orient, French and later English and Scottish explorers began their travels by paddling up the Ottawa River, including the illustrious Jolliet, Mackenzie and Franklin. The most famous of French explorers in Canada will be remembered for their exploits and discoveries along the Ottawa River, beginning with Champlain and his emissaries who mapped and named many features of the river after founding Quebec in 1608. Other well-known

figures in Canadian history including Nicollet, Radisson, La Vérendrye, Dulhut and De Troyes, traveled west along the Ottawa River to establish trade relationships with First Nations communities, laying the groundwork for the fur trade, a period that is central to the history of Canada.