
I S L A N D

OF

A N T I C O S T I .

DESCRIPTION OF,

AND

INTERESTING PARTICULARS IN RELATION THERETO.

NOVEMBER,

1842.

ISLAND
OF
ANTICOSTI.

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ANTICOSTI, UPPER PART, SITUATED IN THE WIDEST PART OF THE RIVER
ST. LAWRENCE, LOWER PART IN THE GULF OF ST. LAWRENCE,
LYING W. S. W. AND E. S. E.

GREAT ISLANDS IN GULF OF ST. LAWRENCE,
ANTICOSTI,
PRINCE EDWARD'S ISLAND.

QUEBEC :
PRINTED BY T. CARY & Co.
1842.

ISLAND OF ANTICOSTI,
IN THE
GULF OF ST. LAWRENCE,

ACCORDING to the Survey and Measurement of that very able Surveyor and distinguished Officer Captain Bayfield, R. N., in the year 1832, who surveyed the Island of Anticosti by Order of the Lords of the Admiralty, the extent of it is ascertained to be as follows, viz :

From W. N. W. to E. S. East 142 Statute or English Miles, from S. S. West to N. N. East, 35 Statute Miles in the broadest part, and 313 Statute Miles in circumference, making a superficies of about 3222 square Miles.

The above measurement nearly corresponds with the Survey made in 1799, by Mr. Joseph Fraser, sworn Land Surveyor, who stated the superficial contents of the Island to be at that time 3300 Square Miles, but he probably meant *French* Miles.

The following further information respecting Anticosti, was furnished by Captain Bayfield to Mr. Henry Forsyth, viz. :

“ Ellis Bay,” near the West end of the Island, affords safe anchorage in all winds, for Vessels not drawing more than 12 or 13 feet of water.—“ Fox Bay,” near the East end of the Island, is at all times

a safe Harbour for Schooners, and “ Chaloupe Creek” or “ Jupiter River,” near Hamel’s station, affords good shelter for Boats.”

The Island is intersected by many fine Rivers and Streams, abounding with Salmon Fisheries, which may now, and have heretofore been carried on to a great extent ; and the Seal, Cod, and even Whale Fisheries in the Bays and on the Coasts, hold out advantages to persons of enterprize, such as are seldom, if ever, to be met with.

In the interior of the Island there are a number of Lakes abounding with Fish, and there are likewise many remarkably fine natural meadows, producing Grass five and six feet high.

The quantity of valuable Furs annually collected on Anticosti is very considerable, and unquestionably might be very much increased, were means taken to hunt the whole Island.

The Silver Grey Fox is found there in considerable numbers, and the Skins are reckoned to be of a much finer quality than those of the same quadruped found in any other part of America.

On the Coasts are inexhaustible Quarries of very fine Marble, of which the two splendid Light-Houses lately erected by Government, offer indisputable evidence, they being entirely built of that valuable material, supplied for the purpose from the excavations made previous to laying the Foundations.

So excellent has the quality of this Marble been found, that the Trinity House at Quebec has again applied this year to the Proprietors of the Island, and have agreed to pay them a sum of money for permission to quarry a sufficient quantity for the purpose of erecting a Light-House on the Island of *Biquette* in the River St. Lawrence, at a very considerable distance from Anticosti ; and numerous applications have at different times been made by other parties for permission to take what might be requisite for the

erection of a variety of projected Public Buildings in this City.

The Island is covered with Timber, a very large proportion of which, is of that valuable description called Tamarack, so much in request for Ship's Spars ; and it is a well known fact, that when any of Her Majesty's Ships, particularly those on the Halifax Station, chance to be in the vicinity of Anticosti, they invariably get a supply of these Spars from off the Island, considering them as being much superior to any that they can procure elsewhere.

On one part of the Island is a complete Fishing establishment, consisting of Dwelling Houses, Stores, Sheds, Stages for drying Fish, &c. &c., all erected 5 or 6 years ago by a Lessee of the Proprietors, who is since dead, and in consequence of which, the Buildings have reverted to them.

This extensive and very valuable property is held "a Titre de Fief et Seigneurie," subject to rendering Fealty and Homage at the Castle of St. Louis, Quebec.

Quebec, 10th October, 1842.

QUEBEC, 18TH OCTOBER, 1842.

JAMES H. KERR, Esquire.

SIR,—In compliance with the wish expressed by you, I shall proceed to give all the information in my power in respect to the Island of Anticosti.—I hope it may be considered such as to bring it into the notice which it deserves, from its many resources.

Thirty-nine years ago, I was directed by the then holders of Anticosti, (of which the late Honorable William Grant was the chief one,) to proceed from Mingan, on the North Shore of the River St. Law-

rence, to the Island of Anticosti, to explore it and to report upon the quality of its soil and its capabilities.

I proceeded thither with 6 men, in 1803, arriving on the Island in August, and left it again in November of that year.

On the South West side, myself and my party went down as far as Jupiter River ; and on the Point where now stands the Light-House, I planted a Picket, and then gave it as my opinion in a Journal which I kept, (and which Journal I handed in 1804 to the Proprietors of the Island,) that that was a very suitable place for the erection of such a building, and one was erected there about 30 years afterwards.

On the South West side of the Island, I ascended a River running South West from a place called " La Bellé Baie," (afterwards Godin's Post,) and exploring on either Bank, I took samples of the Soil, which I found to be very good every where, and the Country level. From the tops of the Trees we could see that the Country was level on every side, and that this part of Anticosti abounded with Red and White Spruce of a fine quality. So far as I went up this River I did not discover any Falls, but it is my belief that there are Falls at a greater distance up than my exploration extended to, and should this prove to be the case, the erection of Mills on this River for sawing timber, would be found a very profitable investment.

In 1804, I returned to the Island and had a House erected on the South West side of it, around which House we made a Clearance and sowed Wheat, Barley, Oats, and indeed every description of grain usually sown in Canada, all of which grew very luxuriantly and ripened Vegetables and Garden stuffs of every description grew remarkably well, and came to as great perfection as any I have ever seen during my residence in Canada, a period of 51 years.

I ascended Salmon River for a considerable distance ; it abounds with Salmon, as may be judged from the circumstance of my having caught in a very short time, the first day I went up, from 200 to 300 fine Fish of that description, and that too with a small net, and confining our fishing to only two or three of the numerous holes to which Salmon resort in that River.—At the entrance or mouth of this River, Lobsters are found in almost incredible quantities.—On the Bank of this River we saw a few very large and high Pine Trees from the tops of which my men reported that they could see groves of Pine, but which appeared to them to be of a lesser size.—On the Banks of this River, we saw also a grove of Ash, which is considered in Canada to be an infallible indication of rich soil.—From the Gulf of St. Lawrence, Anticosti appears to be mountainous, but on arriving on the ground, we found the slopes to be so gradual, that the appearance proved to be a complete deception.—There is not to be found in any part of the world finer building Stone, than there is on Anticosti. What I call Stone, is by others called Marble, and the two Light-Houses on the Island, are built entirely of it.

This Stone, or Marble abounds as well in the interior, as on every part of the Coast of the Island. There is also a thin, flat Stone generally met with on the surface of the soil of Anticosti; it is easily removed, and wherever it is, the soil below is richly luxuriant.

On the Coast of Anticosti at the proper seasons, immense shoals of Seals are found.—We killed, with sticks, in a short time, as many as completely loaded a large Barge that we had with us.—In the article of Seal Oil alone, the owners of the Island might make large sums of money.

Cod, Halibut and a variety of other Fish, can be caught all round the Island in incalculable quantities,

and no finer Cod is caught on any part of the Coast of America, or on the Banks of Newfoundland, than is to be met with there.

A few years-ago (in 1837 or 1838) I had occasion particularly to examine a lot of about 1500 Quintals of Cod Fish, caught on the Coast of, and cured and dried on the Island of Anticosti, and I can safely say, that I never saw a finer lot of Fish.

A small sort of Fish called Caplin, are washed on the shores of Anticosti at particular seasons in myriads, sometimes covering the Beach to the thickness of a foot.—They are much esteemed for eating, and as a manure are invaluable.—Oil of a very superior quality is made, by simply boiling them, and the return yielded is very great.

Bears are very numerous on the Island, as are also Foxes of every description.—At the time that I was at Anticosti, there were Deer on the Island, but whether these animals still continue to be met with there, I cannot say.—Never having wintered on Anticosti (which is the proper hunting season,) I cannot say that I have seen Martens *there*, but have often seen brought to Quebec, the skins of those that had been caught on the Island, and the quality of them was very fine.

In consequence of the Proprietors of the Island not exercising their rights, great numbers of persons from the Magdalen Islands and from other places, resort thither, to catch, cure and dry Fish; and without a doubt, the Fisheries on the Coasts of Anticosti might, with great facility, be carried on to any extent, with, in my opinion, large profits to the Proprietors.

After I returned to Quebec in 1804 and made my report, the Honorable Mr. Grant (a gentleman of great spirit and enterprise, and who I have already mentioned as being at that time proprietor of the largest proportion of Anticosti,) thought so highly of the property, that he at once came to the determination of

settling and colonizing it, and offered to me the superintendance.—During the winter of 1804, I engaged by his directions 18 men, intending to have proceeded with them to Anticosti in the spring of 1805, and to have immediately set about cutting a Road across the Island, but unfortunately Mr. Grant died about that time, and the intention which had been entertained of colonizing the Island, was abandoned ; a circumstance much to be regretted, as I am of opinion that it might have been done with great advantage to the Proprietors.

I may mention, that although I never met with Beaver on the Island, that I saw at the mouth of Jupiter River, several blocks of wood which had evidently been cut by their teeth.—This is done in so very peculiar a manner, that having once seen any thing of the kind, it is almost impossible to afterwards mistake it.

It is impossible to desire more beautiful or finer water than is to be found all over Anticosti.

Much money has been made by Wreckers, the Coasts being frequently strewed with Square Timber, Staves and Deals, a proportion of which annually drift from the Port of Quebec, and the remainder, Cargoes of vessels cast on the Island.

At one time I had piled on my wharf at Quebec, a whole cargo of White Pine Deals which had been picked up on the Island of Anticosti, and I have likewise had Staves which had been brought up from the same place.

Whilst on the Island, I imported some Cattle from Nova Scotia, and found that they throve well. The Island has vast quantities of fine Tamarack wood growing on it, a description of wood much in repute for Spars.—I saw only a little Cedar.

There is very good Clay on the Island—I myself made some Bricks with it, and built an Oven, which answered remarkably well.

Wild Geese, Ducks, Partridges, and water Fowl of every description, are in myriads on the Coasts, as well as in the numerous small Lakes in the interior, in which, and in the small streams descending from them to the sea, quantities of remarkably fine Trout are to be found.

In conclusion, I offer it as my firm and deliberate opinion, that if the Colonization of Anticosti was resorted to, Mills erected on it, Capital invested in the Fisheries and the Stone and Marble Quarries worked by enterprising, sober minded men, that the Profits arising therefrom, would be incalculable.

I shall be happy that my information prove of service and at any time I shall be ready to give any further explanation you may call for.

I am,

Sir,

Your very obedt. Servt.

(Signed,)

ALEX. MORISON.

(COPY.)

WE the Undersigned have been acquainted with Mr. ALEXANDER MORISON, of Quebec, for a long series of years, and several of us since the year 1794, and cantestify that he is a man of the very highest respectability and a much esteemed citizen of Quebec.

We are of opinion, that any statement made by Mr. MORISON, whether in writing or by word of mouth, may be relied on as true in every particular.

Quebec, 24th October, 1842.

EDOUARD CARON, Mayor of Quebec.
EDWARD BOWEN, one of the Justices
of King's Bench.

JOHN WILLIAM WOOLSEY, J. P.

JOHN STEWART, Chairman of the late
Executive Council of Lower Canada.

WILLIAM PRICE, J. P.

JAMES MCKENZIE, Agent for the Honorable Hudson's Bay Company.

JNO. FRASER, Member of the Legislative Council Province of Canada.

HENRY BLACK, M. P. } for the City

DAVID BURNET, M. P. } of Quebec.

MATTHEW BELL, Justice of the Peace.

NOAH FREER, J. P. Cashier, Quebec Bank.

ALEXANDER SIMPSON, J. P. Cashier of the Quebec Branch of the Bank of Montreal.

Three Rivers, 24th Oct. 1842.

Sir,

Mr. Grieve has acquainted me it is your wish I should put on paper whatever observations I may have made during my 14 months residence on the Island of Anticosti, as respects Climate, Soil, Growth of Timber, &c. &c. in short its capabilities of becoming an extensive settlement for fishers and Agriculturists combined. While on the Island, in a letter to the Honble. M. Bell, I took the liberty of mentioning to him this very subject in my rough way, which he received with his usual indulgence. As I am ill adequate to my present task, and I trust you will receive it in the same spirit. Tho' I have made excursions up many of the Streams, and likewise short ones inland, I can say little respecting the Interior of the Island. My journies on foot have led me along the beach more than a third of the circumference of the Island. I have likewise paddled leisurely in a Skiff nearly the same distance—say the space between Lake La Croix, 25 miles to the Eastward of Hamel's Provision Post and Gamache's at Cape Henry, in all 145 miles. From Lake La Croix till within a few miles of South W. Point, where the Light House stands, the land, with little exception, is low, and as the action of the sea has laid bare the beach, the different strata is easily seen. The under stratum or foundation (if I may use the term) is entirely composed of Limestone, and in all the distance to S. W. P. affords most beautiful specimens of Petrefaction of fish, bones, worms, shells, wood, &c. &c. At S. W. P. tho' these abound, the rock assumes a much harder and more solid consistence, affording fine building stone. It was of this stone the Light House was built. The second stratum is often composed of the cream coloured Clay, at other places it consists of sand and gravel. The Clay often reaches the top or

surface, at other times it is covered with a thickness of Peat. Where the Peat is, the land generally extends into extensive Plains covered with a kind of Heather. These plains generally bear great quantities of Berries of different kinds, rich in taste and flavour. I was informed by people that fished the North Shore Rivers, that on that side of the Island there is Pine. The shore from S. W. Point to Gamache's, or Cape Henry, is much higher, of a more rugged and broken nature, so that the quality of soil and nature of surface, &c. &c. cannot be seen so easily from the beach as the other part I have mentioned. In some part it rises to a great height, 300 a 400 feet. This is the case at the mouth of the River Jupiter, 7 miles to the westward of S. W. P. On the one side this height is composed of blue Limestone, on the other, or west side, which is much the highest, of a strong soil and stones, so adhesive as to stand at an angle of 60 a 70 degrees. The view up this River is very beautiful, it extends 3 miles: where the River takes a bend to the North the banks continue high and sloping, of great width. It has all the appearance of having been at one time a Lake with a high fall where the mouth of the River now is. I believe the same idea is stated by Capt. Bayfield. This is the largest stream I have seen or heard of on the Island, as much as 40 Barrels of Salmon and Sea Trout are caught in this stream when properly fished. On some Maps it is called Seal River, from the great numbers of that animal that resort to it. I have seen more than an hundred laying on its bare channel, $\frac{1}{2}$ a mile from the mouth, which being narrow could be barred by a strong Seal net. In the space of shore which I have been endeavouring to give you an idea of, there is an immense number of streams and springs coming from the interior of the Island. There are about 20 that have obtained on the Island the name of Rivers. Tho' hardly deserving this ap-

pellation, they certainly assume all that appearance, for some time in the spring. All these larger streams abound with Salmon and Sea Trout in their season, tho' many of these streams are sometimes closed up at their mouth by the storms and action of the sea, which pile up the loose small stones of which the beach is formed, and by this means no doubt prevents great numbers of these fish from entering, and so obliges them to seek for another opening, or proceed up the St. Lawrence. On another occasion, I saw ninety salmon, and two hundred large trout, taken out of two holes, twelve miles up the small stream that passes Hamel's house. I saw many more, six miles further up the same stream. On my occasional excursions up these rivers, I found their appearance very beautiful, often opening into plains of wild hay. There are many such plains along-shore, where great quantities of hay can be cut; likewise, some extensive salt marshes. Gamache, at one time, kept forty head of cattle at his place, and he informed me, (which, from the appearance of the place, I do believe,) that he could cut hay for a thousand head, within five miles of his house. Among many parts of the shore the wild-pea grows, luxuriantly yielding a pea like the vetch, but larger. I have never seen any place where the wild-berries, of various kinds, are so plentiful. The plains yield five or six kinds of cranberries, of a rich and delicious taste and flavour. The red currant and gooseberry are as fine as any I have seen in our gardens, here. The summer is, I think, as long as it is here; though not so early in the spring, it remains longer open in the fall. The fall I passed here, it rained most part of December, and the first week of January. The capabilities of the soil for rearing grain, has never, I believe, been tested, but, I have not a doubt, the hardier kinds of grain would do well. Vegetables, such as turnips, potatoes, carrots, parsnips, cabbages, &c., &c., will, I

believe, from my own observation, do as well as they will do in this part of the country ; indeed, I think, some of them would do better, as the fly, which is so destructive to some of these plants in these parts, seems not to exist on the Island. I have seen as fine cabbage raised there as I ever saw in the markets of Lower Canada, and potatoes producing fairly, that were merely put into the ground, in the spring, and left to take their chance, without further care. An inexhaustible supply of manure can, at proper seasons, be had with little trouble, from the great quantities of sea-weed and fish that are thrown on the shore ; and, were cod fisheries established, for which there is every facility—such as quantity of fish, nearness to the shore, where they are caught, and the nature of the beach, the offal would afford an excellent manure. In many places, on the south shore, that I have visited, in place of being put to this valuable purpose, it is allowed to putrify on the shore, to the detriment of the peoples' health, or allowed to float out to sea, to the injury of the fishing. There is a paucity of animals on the island. The only one's I have ever seen or heard of, are the bear, fox, otter, and marten—the last-mentioned is the most valuable, they being very numerous. They are taken in traps, planted along the shore where trees are, and along the banks of the various streams ; the skins bear the same value as North Shore martens. The foxes are next in value, though hard to be taken—they are found on the plains, and taken by spring traps ; the blacks and silver greys bring a high price, £8, £7, £6. The otter is a fine fur, there are few of them. There are a great number of bears, they come down to the shore, in spring, to eat the fish left on the beach at that time ; the fur is very fine, and is in season until the end of June ; though numerous, they are never mischievous. There are numbers of seals, all round the Island, and great varieties of ducks and geese resort to the lakes and shore.

A duck, called the Muniack, remains about the shore all winter. I have thus endeavoured to give you some idea of the island of Anticosti, at least the parts I have seen, and its capabilities of maintaining a large population in comfort, that would combine fishing and agriculture as a means of livelihood ; at least, such is the impression that was made on my mind. I am, likewise of opinion, that immense shoals of fish must pass along the shores of the island, which would soon be made available by an industrious class of people. I have founded my opinion, on seeing shoals of fish, of different kinds, playing in the bays, and quantities of salmon laying in the mouths of small streams, enjoying the fresh-water, but prevented, no doubt, by instinct, from entering streams, too small at low-water for them to swim in. The situation of the Island is, likewise, a strong argument in favour of such an idea, laying almost mid-way in the mouth of the mighty St. Lawrence, presenting its end, not unlike a wedge, to the immense shoals of fish that must enter from the Gulf, to supply the large quantities that are caught in that king of rivers, it will naturally divide those shoals, and they not finding (particularly salmon) a resting-place, will pass on. The north side of the Island I have never visited ; all I can, therefore, say respecting it is mostly from report, but such as, combined with other circumstances, I can fully depend on their correctness. From Lake la Croix eastward to Heath Point Light-house, a distance of 35 miles, the land is such as I have stated it to be between that lake and S.W. Point. From Heath Point to Belle Bay the distance is about 20 miles, impassable on foot by the beach, and equally so by land without keeping a considerable distance in-land ; near to this place the Granisus was wrecked. This bay has a great name for the quantity of herring and cod that resort to it, besides it is said to be the safest roadstead on the island. Numbers of schooners from the islands in the Gulf come

here to fish. Heath Point shore abounds likewise with cod, with a fine beach to land them. From Belle Bay north-eastward, or I may say on the north side of the island to Bear River, the distance is, I believe, about 25 miles. This river, or stream, is the second in size on the island, and yields 20 to 25 barrels salmon, if carefully fished—seals are numerous here. Farther on to the westward there are very high cliffs of freestone, some of it as fine as water of Ayr stone; other parts of it as coarse as common grindstone; specimens of this stone I sent to the late Mr. Smillie; it is represented as lying in horizontal layers of various thicknesses easily removed. Beyond that towards Gamashe's it is little known by any on the island, except that person; I am told the Indians from the north shore, resort there in the proper season to kill seal and bear, which are said to be numerous. Gamashes bay is the safest place for vessels to anchor in I have seen on the island, and is of great depth; but all this can be learned from Captain Bayfield, Surveyor. I hope your plans for the settlement of the Island of Anticosti may succeed. It would yield a comfortable home after a time to many of our countrymen. It would likewise, I believe, save much of both life and property. Sailors entertain such a dread of that island, from what they suffer after landing, that to avoid it they often run on a far more dangerous coast. There have been seldom any people drowned, out of the many wrecks that have taken place there; it is the dread of what they suffer from the want of inhabitants that gives rise to all this feeling.

Excuse the imperfect manner in which I have complied with your desire.

I remain, Sir,

Your obedient humble servant,

GEORGE MEWAN.

To J. H. Kerr, Esq.

P.S.—In looking over this I find I have omitted to say anything respecting the great quantities of caplin that frequent the shores of the island. They are in such quantities that they are left in heaps on the beach, and with a hand-net can be caught in any quantity. They are a fine bite for cod. G. M'E.

☞ Mr. M'EWAN resided on the Island of Anticosti for 14 months in 18 and 18

☞ The parties who have at different times resided on the Island of Anticosti, have invariably endeavored to stifle enquiry as to the capabilities and resources of the Island, and this to further their own views of monopoly.—It is therefore deemed adviseable to caution all persons desiring to obtain a true account of the Island—against lending a too ready credence to the accounts of the few residing thereon.

