

COMING HOME TO NEWFOUNDLAND

Introduction

Focus

Newfoundlanders and other Atlantic Canadians have a history of migrating west to look for work. But the economic fortunes of Newfoundland are improving, thanks in large part to vast oil reserves located in the North Atlantic. In this *News in Review* story we will look at why so many Newfoundlanders have left the province and what is needed to get them to come back home.

Did you know . . .

The floor of the Atlantic Ocean is about 2 000 metres deep.

Often referred to simply as “the Rock,” Newfoundland was the last province to join Confederation. The province consists of the island of Newfoundland and the mainland Labrador on Canada’s Atlantic coast. Famous for its stark, rocky geography, the province is considered to be one of the most beautiful in the country. It is one of the only places where you can spot whales, dolphins, puffins, and polar bears. It is also one of the only places in the world where you can watch icebergs float by in the Atlantic Ocean. In fact, more than 2 000 icebergs pass Cape Chidley, the northern tip of Labrador, every year.

The province is also known as a tough place to make a living. Historically, many Newfoundlanders made their living from fishing. The geological boundary of North America lies offshore, at the edge of the continental shelf. The shelf includes relatively shallow areas known as banks, and deeper areas, known as troughs, or channels. The shallow parts, known as the Grand Banks, are less than 50 metres deep. In these shallow areas, light can reach the sea bed, allowing for the growth of phytoplankton—the first link in the marine food chain—resulting in an abundant stock of fish and marine mammals. These conditions played an important role in Newfoundland and Labrador for centuries.

In 1968, at the height of the Newfoundland fishery, more than 40 000 people were employed catching and processing nearly 810 000 tonnes of cod. But by the 1980s, it was obvious that the cod stocks were dwindling. Some people blamed climate change, some blamed overfishing, and some blamed the Canadian government for mismanaging the fishery. Regardless of

the reason, by 1992, the number of cod had dropped so dramatically that fishing in the area was suspended.

As the fish stocks declined, unemployment rose. Through much of the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, Newfoundland and Labrador had the highest unemployment rate of any Canadian province. More people in the province received unemployment insurance benefits than in anywhere else in Canada. For those who did find work, the average annual salary fell well below the national average.

Not surprisingly, Newfoundlanders and other Atlantic Canadians have a history of migrating west to look for work. Many end up in Ontario, but over the past 10 to 15 years the majority have landed in Alberta—specifically, in Fort McMurray, Alberta, working in the oil industry for high wages. Some bring their families with them, but many leave their families behind and “commute” home every couple of months. This is hard on workers, their families, and local communities.

But now all this might be changing. For the first time in a long time it looks like the economic situation in Newfoundland is improving. Three major oil refineries are now operational off the coast of Newfoundland. As well, a large nickel mine has been opened at Voisey’s Bay in Labrador. These large developments are creating spin-off jobs in the hospitality and service sectors. All this should add up to a lot of jobs.

Ironically, the government of Newfoundland and Labrador is now placing advertisements in Alberta newspapers to lure locals back to the province. Some don’t need much encouragement to return. While most

Did you know . . .

On entry into Canada in 1949, the entire province was known as Newfoundland, but on December 6, 2001, an amendment was made to the Constitution of Canada to change the province's official name to Newfoundland and Labrador.

Newfoundlanders like the big money they make while working in Alberta or Ontario, many have always been homesick for the Atlantic coast and are ready to come home. In Newfoundland, they call these people “Come-Back-From-Aways” (CBFAs). Some local Newfoundlanders who never left the province in search of work feel they should be given the first opportunity at any new jobs. But most returning Newfoundlanders believe they should have the same opportunity as those who never left.

Other Newfoundlanders and Atlantic Canadians who are working outside the province are skeptical at the economic recovery anticipated for Newfoundland. They have heard promises of jobs at home before, only to be disappointed when they didn't materialize. As well, now that they are used to making big money, they might not be willing to settle for anything less. Time will tell if there will be enough Newfoundlanders to fill new jobs in the region, or whether the government will have to encourage other Canadians to migrate east for work.

To Consider

1. In a small group, talk about the experience of moving. Find out whether or not anyone in your group has moved, how frequently they've moved, or how far they've moved.
2. Discuss what was exciting and scary about the move.
3. Would the students in your group consider moving in the future for employment, even if it meant leaving their families behind? Why or why not?
4. Join with another group and compare your answers.

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Video Review

Did you know . . .

In 2004, Alberta and British Columbia were the only provinces in Canada that enjoyed a net gain in interprovincial migration.

Archives

To learn more about the people and politics of life in Newfoundland, consider a visit to the CBC Digital Archives at www.cbc.ca/archives and explore the audio-visual files "Pelts, Pups and Protest: The Atlantic Seal Hunt" and "Has Confederation Been Good for Newfoundland?"

Respond to the following questions as you view the video.

1. Record the reasons why Newfoundlanders move away from the province.

2. List the reasons why some Newfoundlanders never return home.

3. How common is it for Newfoundlanders to move out of province?

4. How is outmigration today different from the outmigration that occurred 20 or 25 years ago?

5. How are work schedules designed in Fort McMurray, Alberta, so that out-of-province workers can maintain ties to their families?

6. What impact does outmigration have on families and communities back in Newfoundland?

7. Why might new jobs created in Newfoundland not be enough to get out-of-province workers back home?

For Discussion

In a small group, discuss the impact of telecommunications on separated families. One woman in the video stated that it is not such a big deal to move out of province today because telecommunications allow family members to keep in touch frequently, and inexpensively. Do you agree? Do relationships between people change when they don't get to actually see each other every day or every week? Why or why not? Record your answers in your notebook.

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Migration to the West

Quote

"The movement to the West is significant, and there is every indication that it is going to continue for some time. Oil patch companies are very aggressively recruiting our region's young people." — Greg Byrne, New Brunswick's minister of business, *The Christian Science Monitor*, December 15, 2006

Further Research

To learn more about the wealth of oil in northern Alberta, check out "Oil" at www.cbc.ca/news/background/oil/alberta_oilsands.html.

To learn more about Fort McMurray, visit the site of *Fort McMurray Today*, the local newspaper at www.fortmcmurraytoday.com.

Migration from the East to the West is a common pattern in Canada. Young workers flock to Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia from provinces like Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, and Nova Scotia. From 1996 to 2001, one in 10 islanders headed to the mainland, the highest number in 20 years. And in 2001, Quebec saw the highest spike in outmigration in the province's history. More anglophones left Quebec than francophones, and of those who left, many reported leaving because they were tired of the continued debate over language and politics.

Most Canadians migrate west because of better economic opportunities. Higher wages, lower unemployment, and greater job stability help to draw Canadians to the West. Canadians between the ages of 15 and 29 move most frequently—and the farthest. They head largely for the biggest cities. And they are much more likely than older Canadians to stay put and make the new province their permanent home. Older Canadians are more likely to settle in small cities or rural areas.

Fort McMurray, Alberta

It is impossible to talk about western migration without focusing on Fort McMurray, in northern Alberta. Commonly called "Boomtown," the former small town's population exploded after the discovery of oil sands in the area. Although estimates vary, it is believed that there is five times more oil in the sands of northern Alberta than in all of Saudi Arabia.

Extracting oil from sand is a complicated process. It requires a huge labour force and a huge amount of energy. As a result, Fort McMurray has grown from a population of under 1 000

in the 1960s to its current population of around 50 000 people. That does not include the 10 000 people who live in construction camps in the outskirts of town, or the people who live year-round in trailers at campgrounds. It does not include the workers who stay with their friends until they can get a place of their own, or those who crowd into hotels while they are in town for short-term jobs. And it does not include those who commute to somewhere by car or on one of the 50 buses that leave every Thursday night for Edmonton, 450 kilometres to the south.

The city is a series of pockets connected to each other by Highway 63. Each pocket is built in a scramble to accommodate the latest influx of workers. Although home construction is booming, there are not nearly enough homes or apartments to accommodate the 150 new people who arrive every week. Not surprisingly, rent is high, and so is the price of houses. People who work for the big energy companies in the oil sands make good money and can afford the price, but those who work in the stores and restaurants that service the workers cannot.

People who live in Fort McMurray complain about the fact that everything is expensive. Crime rates are climbing, along with drug use and drinking and domestic violence. There are fights in the bars on the weekends. There are not enough doctors or hospital beds. Pollution is terrible. Oil-sands mining produces huge amounts of air and water pollution and leaves large tracts of land barren. Some workers report that they can smell the pollution from the oil-sands refineries at their homes an hour's drive from the sites.

Further Research

Learn more about pollution and the oil sands by checking out the photos and the February 2008 report prepared by the organization Environmental Defence at www.environmentaldefence.ca/reports/pdf/TarSands_TheReport.pdf, or view the scope of the oil sands project yourself via Google Earth.

About 11 000 Newfoundlanders now live in Fort McMurray, the largest concentration outside St. John's, their capital. In April 2006, Air Canada began running direct flights between those two cities to meet the demands of workers, many of whom leave their families behind in Newfoundland when they move west. Oil companies have advertised aggressively to encourage Atlantic Canadians to migrate west. The

Westfair supermarket chain has held job fairs across the East Coast in an effort to hire the hundreds of cashiers and supervisors it needs to work in its Alberta stores. Some fast-food restaurants and convenience stores in Fort McMurray pay as much as \$14.95 an hour, while the salaries for skilled workers are often more than 60 per cent higher than in Atlantic Canada.

Activity

With a partner, create a list of the pros and cons of living in Fort McMurray. Try to create a balanced list, with a similar number of points for each side. When you are finished, write a concluding statement that explains whether you, as an individual, would want to move to a boomtown like Fort McMurray. Provide reasons for your choice.

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Newfoundland's Economy

Did you know . . .

When John Cabot sailed to Newfoundland from Bristol, England, more than 500 years ago he said the cod was so plentiful that sailors could pull them up in baskets.

Definition

A *moratorium* is a suspension of activity, or a waiting period set by an authority.

Archives

To learn more about the failed fishery, visit the CBC Digital Archives at www.cbc.ca/archives and explore the file "Fished Out: The Rise and Fall of the Cod Fishery."

To say that the economic engine of Newfoundland has always been fishing, is an understatement. The plentiful cod fishery enabled permanent settlements—or outports—to be established all along the coast of the island. These outports, located as close to the cod fishing grounds as possible, varied in size from a few families to 1 000 or more people.

In most communities, everything revolved around the cod fishery. Indeed, the word *fish* in Newfoundland referred only to cod. The typical community saw the entire family involved in fishing. Fathers taught sons, brothers fished together, and mothers and daughters helped to process, salt, and preserve fish.

In 1968, at the height of the Newfoundland fishery, more than 40 000 people were employed catching and processing nearly 810 000 tonnes of cod. But by the 1980s, it was obvious the cod stocks were dwindling. Most people blamed the depletion on overfishing. By 1992, the number of cod had dropped so dramatically that a moratorium on fishing in the area was imposed by the Canadian government.

When the government imposed the moratorium on cod fishing in 1992, it did so in the hope that cod stocks would bounce back. But they did not. In fact, 10 years after the moratorium was imposed, the death rate of young cod reached 50 per cent, up from an annual average of 15-20 per cent. Although marine biologists are not exactly sure why, some suspect that cooler water temperatures, natural predators, and ultraviolet radiation might be factors.

Failed Attempts to Diversify

The Canadian government has long been concerned about Newfoundland. Whenever a region is heavily invested in

one primary industry there is always the potential for disaster. Most prosperous communities have a number of primary industries. This diversification protects the communities against economic disaster in the case of the failure of one of its industries. So in an attempt to diversify Newfoundland's economy, the province has been the target of a number of projects, referred to by locals as "get rich quick" schemes. Unfortunately, these schemes have largely been unsuccessful.

Churchill Falls Power Contract

- This deal was negotiated in the 1960s.
- It allowed the province of Quebec to buy electricity generated from Churchill Falls in Newfoundland and resell it for profit.
- Unfortunately, Quebec buys electricity from Newfoundland for only about one-tenth of the hundreds of millions of dollars it gets on resale.
- Newfoundland has exhausted all legal avenues to get out of the deal and is stuck with it until 2041.

Come By Chance Oil Refinery, Owned by Shaheen Resources

- Originally built in 1971, the facility refined its first shipment of crude oil in 1973.
- In 1976 the company that ran the refinery went bankrupt and the refinery was shut down.

Hibernia Oil Project

- In 1979 the Hibernia oil field was discovered off Newfoundland.
- Despite having potential oil resources estimated to be at 615 million barrels, the project has started and stopped a number of times.

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Returning Home

Two major new developments have led to increased demand for workers. One is the opening of the White Rose oil field off the coast of Newfoundland. The other is a giant nickel project in Labrador—the largest mineral excavation effort in 60 years. Because outmigration from

the Eastern provinces has resulted in a shortage of workers, the Newfoundland government has taken out advertisements in Alberta newspapers to try to entice workers back home. But it might not be easy to get workers to return to the East Coast.

Task

Below you will read a selection of quotations from people who left the East Coast in search of work. Before you begin to read, create a three-column Plus, Minus, Interesting (PMI) chart in your notebook, using the example below as a model. Respond to each quotation by making an entry in the chart that addresses what is positive about the quotation, what is negative about the quotation, and why it is interesting.

Coming Home to Newfoundland – PMI Chart		
Quotation 1 – Daphne Griffin		
Positive	Minus	Interesting
Quotation 2 –		

1. “My family is one of the families who left the Maritimes (Montague, PE) to live and work in Alberta. My boyfriend is a welder and was unable to find work in our home province. If the Maritimes wants to ‘turn back the tide,’ there has to be more, better-paying jobs available. It is impossible to support a family of four on \$10 an hour, which is what he would be getting paid at home. In Alberta, the average welder makes between \$25 and \$40 an hour and more than double that if they have their own truck and equipment.” — Daphne Griffin, Edmonton, AB (“Turning Back the Tide,” CBC, March 20, 2007)

2. “It’s a lot steadier, a lot more secure than it is back home, that’s for sure. Alberta is so far ahead with regard to work, and that’s the main reason that

everyone like myself is packing up and getting out.” — Walter Andrews, Fort McMurray, AB (*The Globe and Mail*, March 13, 2002)

3. “We are forgetting that not only is the West attracting our talented youth, so is south of the border. When I graduated, there were few teaching opportunities. Saddled with a student loan, I jumped at an opportunity to gain experience and make American dollars.

As with most things, the longer you are away, the harder it is to come back. You develop roots and interests in your new-found home. While I would love dearly to come back “home” to the Maritimes, it is not a realistic choice for me.” — Mandy Copp-Wilson, Havelock, NC (“Turning Back the Tide,” CBC, October 28, 2006)

4. Robert Vargo is the General Motors dealer in Fort McMurray, Alberta. He has also entered the real estate market, but not as an agent, as a way to keep employees working for him. “It’s a staff problem. The housing is terrible. It’s just nuts. I have to tie them up so I won’t lose them. I pretty near bought a whole subdivision.” — Robert Vargo, Fort McMurray, AB (*The Globe and Mail*, August 10, 2002)

5. “The biggest problem that I encountered in IT back on PEI was that NOBODY retires. I applied at the provincial government IT department and the average age there was approximately 60. Hard for young people to get a job if there are never any openings. The one job that I did get offered was at a call centre making \$8 an hour.” — A. MacKinnon, Calgary, AB (“Turning Back the Tide,” CBC, April 11, 2007)

6. “When you’re out west, the employee calls the shots, and that is not the case in Newfoundland. The employer calls the shots. . . . It probably has gotten a bit better than it once was, but there’s still that power, and the tables are turned in,

let’s say, in Alberta or even where I am in the Northwest Territories. The employee has the power. The employee must be respected. Employees not respected, if it’s not just compensation, they’ll walk and they’ll get a job, same money, even more pay in a matter of days. And to attract people . . . the Newfoundland employment experience is going to have to match what’s out there.” — Rob, Hay River, NWT (“Home From Away,” CBC, January 25, 2008)

7. “There is no quick and easy answer, but there is an answer. With an unemployment rate that historically averages between 8 and 14 per cent and higher, with the lowest annual income in North America, with some of the highest personal and business tax rates in all of the industrial nations, with a frighteningly low birth rate, and with, the topic of this debate, an alarming outmigration that is only getting worse, it is time that we accepted the seriousness of our future and that we have been going about things the wrong way. It is time that we started making the tough steps involved in turning back the tide.” — Dan Perry, Calgary, AB (“Turning Back the Tide,” CBC, November 5, 2006)

Follow-up

Review your PMI chart and decide how easy or difficult it is going to be for the government to get people to return to Newfoundland.

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Impact of Outmigration on Local Communities

Note

The Web site of the Newfoundland and Labrador government contains information about minimum wage, careers, and activities in the province. Check it out at www.gov.nl.ca.

Outmigration from Newfoundland is common. So common, in fact, that almost every family has at least one member away. While leaving can be a difficult decision, being left is difficult as well. Consider the impact of outmigration in the following areas.

Divorce and Family Problems

It is hard to make a marriage work under the best of circumstances. But long-distance relationships create even more challenges for families. When one parent leaves the province for work, the remaining spouse effectively becomes a single parent, becoming entirely responsible for children of the marriage, any other relatives who require care, and the daily running of the household. Household details include housework, food preparation, paying bills, lawn or property maintenance, and car maintenance.

Long-distance relationships can create frustration. The spouse who is left at home may resent the perceived “freedom” experienced by the other parent. The spouse who is living out of province may be exhausted from long hours, as well as lonely and unhappy. If the two spouses begin to take their negative feelings out on one another, marital problems and divorce can result.

Children, Teens, and Young Adults

When a parent moves away, the children in the family have to adjust as well. They

will miss the parent who has moved away and may be fearful the parent will not return. The normal routine of the house may be upset by the parent’s absence, and the children may be aware the remaining parent is under stress.

Outmigration also results in a drop in enrolment, and some local schools may close as a result. Children may have to be bused to a new school if their local school closes. Teenagers who have trouble finding a part-time job may find they have extra time on their hands. For some teens, this can lead to trouble. As well, many teenagers and young adults enrol in college or university because there are no job opportunities available when they graduate from high school. Unfortunately, this can result in considerable student debt that they have little chance of repaying when they graduate. As well, professors complain that many of these students are very unmotivated in class because they do not believe they will be able to get a job even after they graduate.

Outport Communities

In extreme cases, the closing of the cod fishery and outmigration have resulted in entire outport communities being abandoned. These small communities along the coast relied almost entirely on fishing and, as a result, families were not able to sustain themselves if they stayed. Those who chose to stay have had to rely on government assistance, and poverty levels are high.

To Consider

How would your life and your local community be affected if one member of every family moved out of province? Record the impact in your notes.

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Activity: To Stay or Go

In this *News in Review* story you have explored the reasons why some Newfoundlanders have left the province. The decision to leave home is not easy for anyone, and each person and family has his or her own unique set of factors to consider when making such a decision. In this activity, you are going to participate in a role-play where you have to decide whether to stay in Newfoundland or migrate west for a job.

Preparation

Your teacher will place you in a small group with three or four other students. You will be assigned a role-play scenario from the list below. (More than one group will be preparing the same role-play.) In your group, decide who will play each of the people in the scenario, and decide whether you will stay in Newfoundland or migrate west. Prepare for your part by reviewing the material in this guide, watching this *News in Review* story again, or conducting further research about the situation in Newfoundland.

Scenarios

- You are a family of four or five. The father is a fisher, the wife works as a cashier in a grocery store, the kids are four, six and eight years old. The father has been without work since a moratorium was placed on cod fishing. The wife's parents live in the same neighbourhood and help with the children. This saves the family money they would have to spend on child care. The father has been offered work in Fort McMurray that will pay \$24 an hour. What will you do?
- You have just graduated from university with a degree in Languages. You have been offered a job in Ottawa as a translator at \$21.50 an hour. There is a similar job available in your province that would pay \$14.75 an hour. Your mother has multiple sclerosis and is unable to work. Your father works in a mine and only comes home on weekends. You have been dating your boyfriend/girlfriend since high school and he/she does not want you to move. You have two younger siblings who still live at home. What will you do?
- You are married without kids. Both you and your spouse have well-paid jobs in Newfoundland. You have been offered a once-in-a-lifetime job in Fort McMurray. If you take the job for four or five years, you'll be very wealthy. There are no jobs in your spouse's area of employment in Fort McMurray. Your brother in Newfoundland is handicapped and you spend a lot of time caring for him. What will you do?

Role-Play

Remember that your role-play should include a discussion about whether or not you stay in Newfoundland or migrate west. Rehearse your role-play a few times to make sure you are prepared for your performance. Try to consider all of the factors that would influence your decision. After all the groups have performed, discuss the similarities and differences that appeared in the performances.