

The Road to Cumberland: An early travel route that shaped history

This paper describes the Road to Cumberland, an early travel route across the Chignecto Peninsula in Cumberland County, and discusses its historical significance. The story behind this route was influenced by geological events and human activities. In describing this important Nova Scotia travel route, a number of major elements that comprise the diverse history of Partridge Island and the Ottawa House are told.

As in all historical accounts, the history of the Road to Cumberland was established by examining original maps, photographs, letters and other archival materials, property deeds, land grants and probate records. From these documents, the fascinating story of the Road to Cumberland emerged.

The Minudie to Partridge Island Route

In the interior part of the Chignecto Peninsula, several valleys form natural pathways crossing the peninsula from north to south (See Fig.3). Shaped by glaciers from the last Ice Age, the landscape contains many waterways that required minimal construction to make them passable for human transport. One such overland route connected the present-day communities of Minudie and Parrsboro. Since the natural landscape was conducive to travel, it was only natural that, with the arrival of the earliest inhabitants to Nova Scotia, it was used for transport both on water and over land.

At least three distinct groups have used the route; these include the Mi'kmaq, the Acadians and the English. Although each group may have had a name for the route; in this paper, it will be referred to as the "Road to Cumberland". This name appears on various deeds and surveyor's maps (See Fig.1) prepared for the English who were granted land along the route several years after the expulsion of the Acadians.

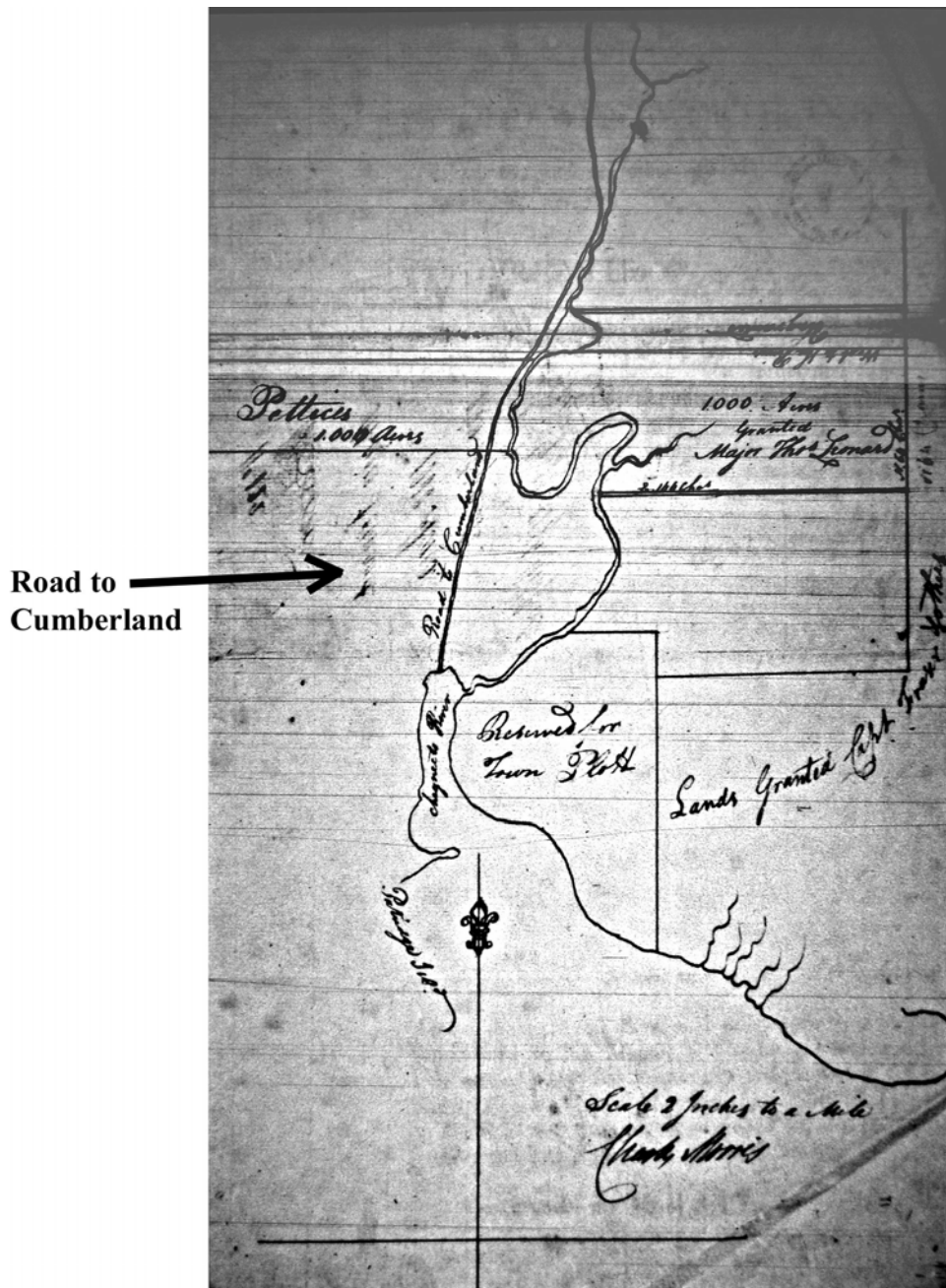
The significance of the name "Cumberland" may pertain to at least three important events that occurred shortly after the founding of Halifax in 1749. The first of these dates to the same year as the Grand Dérangement in 1755 when Fort Beauséjour was surrendered to the English. Fort Beauséjour was a French fort located on the Aulac Ridge overlooking the Cumberland Basin; on June 4, 1755, the fort was attacked by a group of British regulars and New England militia under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Robert Monckton. On June 16, 1755 the French surrendered and the English took control of the fort and re-named it Fort Cumberland. The fort became a military emplacement that guarded British interests in this region of Nova Scotia for years to come. Its strategic location allowed for the control of the Isthmus of Chignecto where an overland travel route extended from what is present-day New Brunswick (New Brunswick was established on August 16, 1784) to peninsular Nova Scotia.

The two other events involving the name Cumberland occurred shortly after Louisburg fell to the English in July of 1758. England quickly decided that it was now important to place more settlers in the Colony of Nova Scotia and instructed Charles Lawrence, (Conrad, p.17 and Murphy, p.56) the governor of the province at that time, to take the

necessary steps to attract settlers. Before the fall of Fort Beauséjour and Fort Louisburg, Nova Scotia had received only two substantial groups of colonists. One group of settlers arrived with Cornwallis in 1749 and founded Halifax; the so-called Foreign Protestants of Nova Scotia who arrived between 1750 and 1752 formed the second group. Since these groups lived mostly in Halifax and Lunenburg, Governor Lawrence was expected to place English-speaking settlers in other parts of the province; this was especially true for the fertile lands vacated by the Acadians when they were forcibly removed in 1755.

One of the first steps taken by Lawrence and his Council was the establishment of five counties in 1759 (Ferguson 1966, p.14). The boundaries and the names of the counties are shown in Fig.2; the newly formed county of Cumberland appears at the top of the map. Its boundaries are very different from those of today and from the map one might think that Cumberland County was initially very small. However, quite the opposite is the case. When Cumberland County was created, it included all of present-day New Brunswick and possibly more. Portions of Maine and Quebec may have been part of the county in 1759 because the location of its western and northern boundaries is largely unknown.

Before settlers could be given land, Lawrence and his Council had to create townships and establish their boundaries. The townships created in 1761 are shown on Fig.2. Notice that Cumberland County was given three townships and that one was called Cumberland Township (Wright, 1946). Thus, by 1761, a traveler could start at Partridge Island and take the Road to Cumberland to reach Cumberland County, Cumberland Township, and Fort Cumberland.



**Fig.1: 1784 Surveyor's Map created by Charles Morris II uses "Road to Cumberland" to indicate the route from Partridge Island to the mouth of the River Hebert.
Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management: Land Grant Vertical File.**

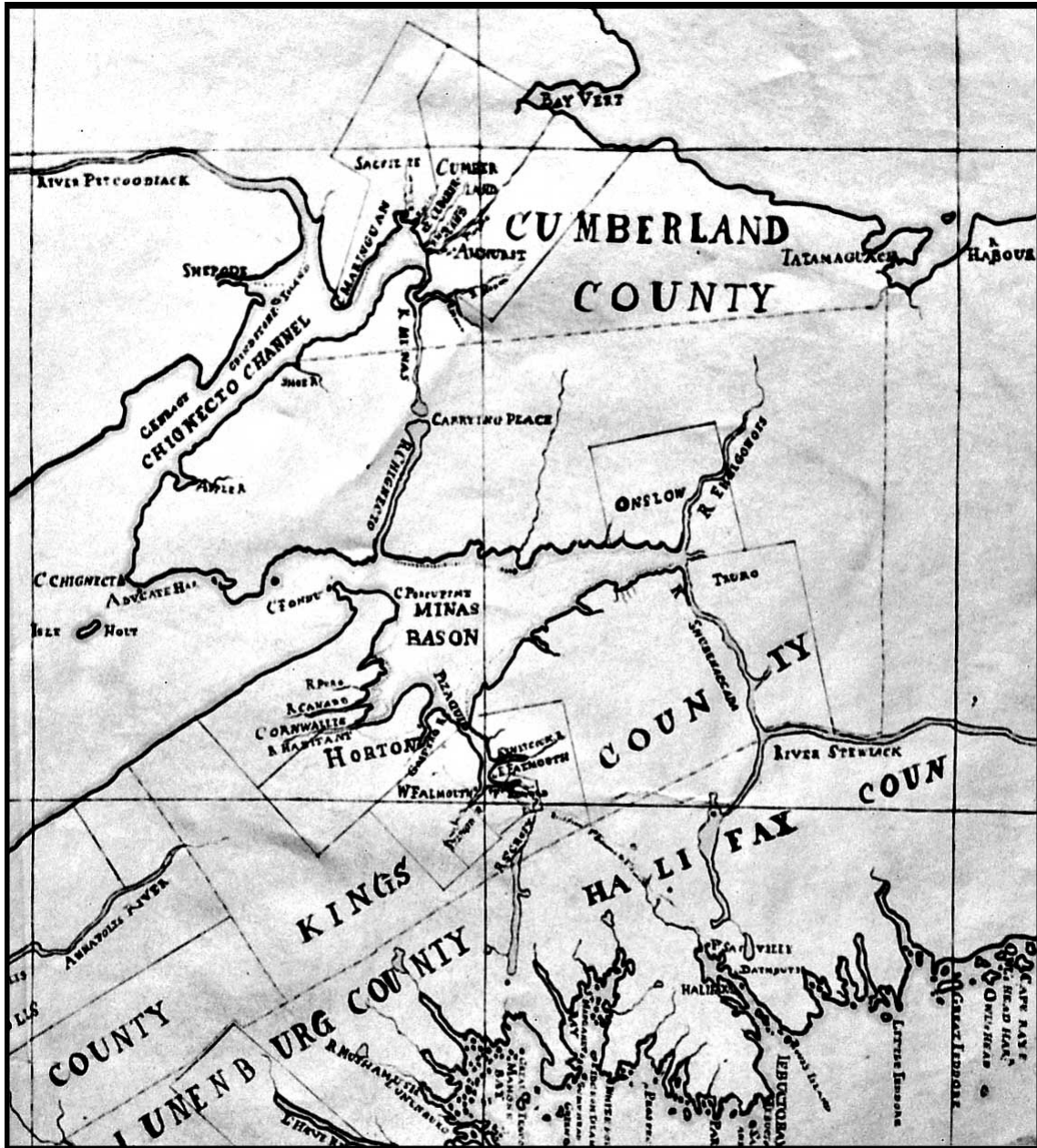


Fig.2: A portion of the 1761 Charles Morris Chart of the Peninsula of Nova Scotia giving Place Names, Townships, and Counties. Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management: Map Section 202 Nova Scotia, 220 - 1761, PANS N - 658, 230 - 1761 Location 3.5.7

The Location of the Ottawa House on a Network of Travel Routes

The historical significance of the Ottawa House and Partridge Island stems largely from their location on the Road to Cumberland. The fact that the Road to Cumberland is part of a larger network of early overland travel routes in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Eastern Quebec, and Maine meant that the Ottawa House and Partridge Island were an integral part of the historical development of the entire region. The Road to Cumberland is just a small portion of a network extending from Halifax to Riviere-du-Loup on the Saint Lawrence River and on to Castine and Machias on the coast of Maine (Campbell, 2005).

This system of inter-connected routes developed because the Mi'kmaq and other aboriginal groups were able to take advantage of a naturally occurring inland transportation system comprised of waterways and overland trails. The waterways were rivers on which they could canoe during the summer months; they could move overland by portaging their canoes from one river to the next. These trails could be traveled on foot in the summer and by snowshoe after the snow arrived. Winter travel on snowshoes allowed a traveler to haul a toboggan or a special sled called a tobigan (pronounced *toby-gun*. See Appendix A) laden with goods. European settlers quickly adopted the aboriginal travel routes and in time adapted them for travel on horseback and by horse and cart. The European settlers also drove cattle and sheep along some of the routes, including the Road to Cumberland.

Much of the information on Nova Scotia's early overland transportation routes comes from early maps. Two of these maps are shown in Fig.2 and Fig.3. Additional maps can be found in the excellent publication "The Mapmaker's Eye, Nova Scotia through Early Maps" (Dawson, 1988). To fully understand the strategic importance of the location of the Ottawa House, both Fig.2 and Fig.3 must be examined as well as several maps in the "The Mapmaker's Eye".

The top of Fig.2 shows two rivers separated by a narrow strip of land labeled as the "Carrying Place". One river, labeled River Minas on the map, starts at an inland lake (Gilbert Lake) and flows north through the River Hebert valley to the Cumberland Basin. The other river, labeled River Chignecto (Partridge Island River on some early maps), also starts at another lake a short distance away (Devil's Lake) and flows south through the "Parrsboro Gap", a pass that cuts through the Cobequid Highlands (Stea, Finch, and Wightman, 1986,p.6), and on to the Partridge Island region on the Minas Basin. The "Carrying Place" is actually a geologically formed ridge separating the two lakes and it is also a drainage divide; the River Minas (now called river Hebert) flows north and the River Chignecto flows south. A photograph of this drainage divide, known as a recessional moraine, can be found on the top of page 185 of the publication "The Last Billion Years"(Atlantic Geoscience Society 2001). A recessional moraine is a ridge of gravel and boulders deposited during the retreat of a melting glacier from last Ice Age. In the case of the moraine at the "Carrying Place" the retreating ice formed a short portage between the headwater of two river systems: the River Hebert flowing north and the

Chignecto River flowing south. When the Mi'kmaq and other Aboriginal groups arrived in Nova Scotia, they recognized the value of the glacier that had created the Minudie to Partridge Island landscape and realized its value as a waterway and as a trail across the Chignecto Peninsula.

From Fig.3 we see that as early as 1755 the English traveled over the “Carrying Place” on a route they called “The Road from Chignecto to Minas.” Map 5.2 in “The Mapmaker’s Eye” has an even earlier drawing (1735) with the route marked as the “Carrying Place from Mines to Chignecto.” As explained at the beginning of the paper, the final designation for the inland route across the Chignecto Peninsula was “The Road to Cumberland” or “Road from Partridge Island to Cumberland”. This selection occurred sometime after the English captured Fort Beauséjour. A name for the route was necessary in order to describe land boundaries on Land Grants that were eventually issued along the road. The road name was also used in boundary descriptions on deeds written when sections of the grants were to be sold.

Both Fig.2 and Fig. 3 show the Pesaquid (present-day Windsor) to Halifax route on the south side of the Minas Basin and on Fig.3 the route has been labeled “Road from Halifax to Pesaquid. The existence of the Pesaquid to Halifax route demonstrates that it was possible to travel overland between the Fort Beauséjour/ Fort Cumberland region and Halifax. A boat or vessel would be required to cross the Minas Basin and the Ottawa House site might have been a major point of arrival or departure for this crossing.

Map 8.2 in “The Mapmaker’s Eye” states that the road from Pesaquid to Chibouctou was a “drove” road. This means that cattle and/or sheep were herded along the road. During the English period there is mention of drovers driving cattle over the Road to Cumberland. The Acadians may have driven animals along this route.

The network of overland travel routes that includes the “Road to Cumberland” has two more branches. One branch connects Annapolis Royal and Pesaquid; the other one connects with an important military communications route called “The Road to Canada” (Campbell, 2005).

The Annapolis Valley branch, as well as material on Partridge Island, is described in a small pamphlet published in 1774 that has the title "A Journey Through Nova Scotia" (DeWolfe,1997, p51 to p87; Rispin,2000). The pamphlet was written and published by John Robinson and Thomas Rispin, two farmers from York (England), who spent several months exploring Nova Scotia. A map in this publication (Fig.4) shows the Annapolis Royal and Pesaquid overland route. Robinson and Rispin traveled over this trail from Annapolis Royal to the south side of the Minas Basin and then by water to Partridge Island. From Partridge Island they traveled the Road to Cumberland to the Isthmus of Chignecto road and then on to Sackville Township. Their comments on Partridge Island and their description of the road to the head of the River Hebert, which they call river Bare, are interesting and informative (DeWolfe,1997, p63). They state that part of the island (the actual island called Partridge Island) is cultivated and that not far away two taverns are kept for the convenience of travelers who cross the Basin of Minas. Robinson

and Rispin give the cost of the passage across the Basin and a detailed description of the Road to Cumberland. This description mentions that at some locations along the road one finds interval land, meadows, and brooks where nets can be fixed.

Some of the best agricultural land on the southern end of the Road to Cumberland is located along a portion of the road where Robinson and Rispin observed the interval land and meadows (See Fig.5). The meadows were used as important sources of hay well into the 1930's. Unfortunately these extensive meadows are no longer clearly visible from the present-day highway. One meadow, located between Gilbert Lake and Newville Lake, is now a Duck's Unlimited wetland surrounded by trees. The other meadow region can be found along the first mile or so of the Boars Back road; the meadow starts just north of Newville Lake and extends to Pettigrew Settlement where a section of this meadow is called Pettis Meadow.

At the head of the River Hebert, Robinson and Rispin found two more taverns for those going to or from Cumberland. The tavern proprietors rented horses to travelers and kept a boat. The boat likely indicates that travelers arriving at the mouth of the River Hebert required water transportation in order to cross the river. The crossing was likely between Minudie and Amherst Point (see Fig.6) and probably took place at high tide. Wading the river at low tide may not have been possible because, as Fig.6 shows, extensive salt marshes and mud flats are found in this region of the Cumberland Basin. These tidal features would make crossing such a challenge that a ferry service was required. To date I have not found records to indicate that a horse and rider or a horse drawn cart could cross by wading the river when the tide was out. Two stories, reproduced in Appendix B, confirm that a ferry was necessary.

A route that crosses the Isthmus of Chignecto connects Amherst Point, Fort Lawrence, Fort Cumberland, and Sackville Township. A traveler could leave Nova Scotia and reach such distant places as Riviere-du-Loup on the Saint Lawrence River and Castine and Machias on the coast of Maine. The importance of these routes to the First Nations, the Acadians, and the English is well documented in the publication "The Road to Canada: The Grand Communications Route from Saint John to Quebec" (Campbell, 2005). This excellent book describes many of the historically significant events that took place on these overland routes, including the Eddy Rebellion (Campbell, 2005,p 36). This attack on Fort Cumberland by Jonathan Eddy occurred in 1776 and it is believed that during the siege, Eddy had a military tactic that involved sending several of his men to Partridge Island.

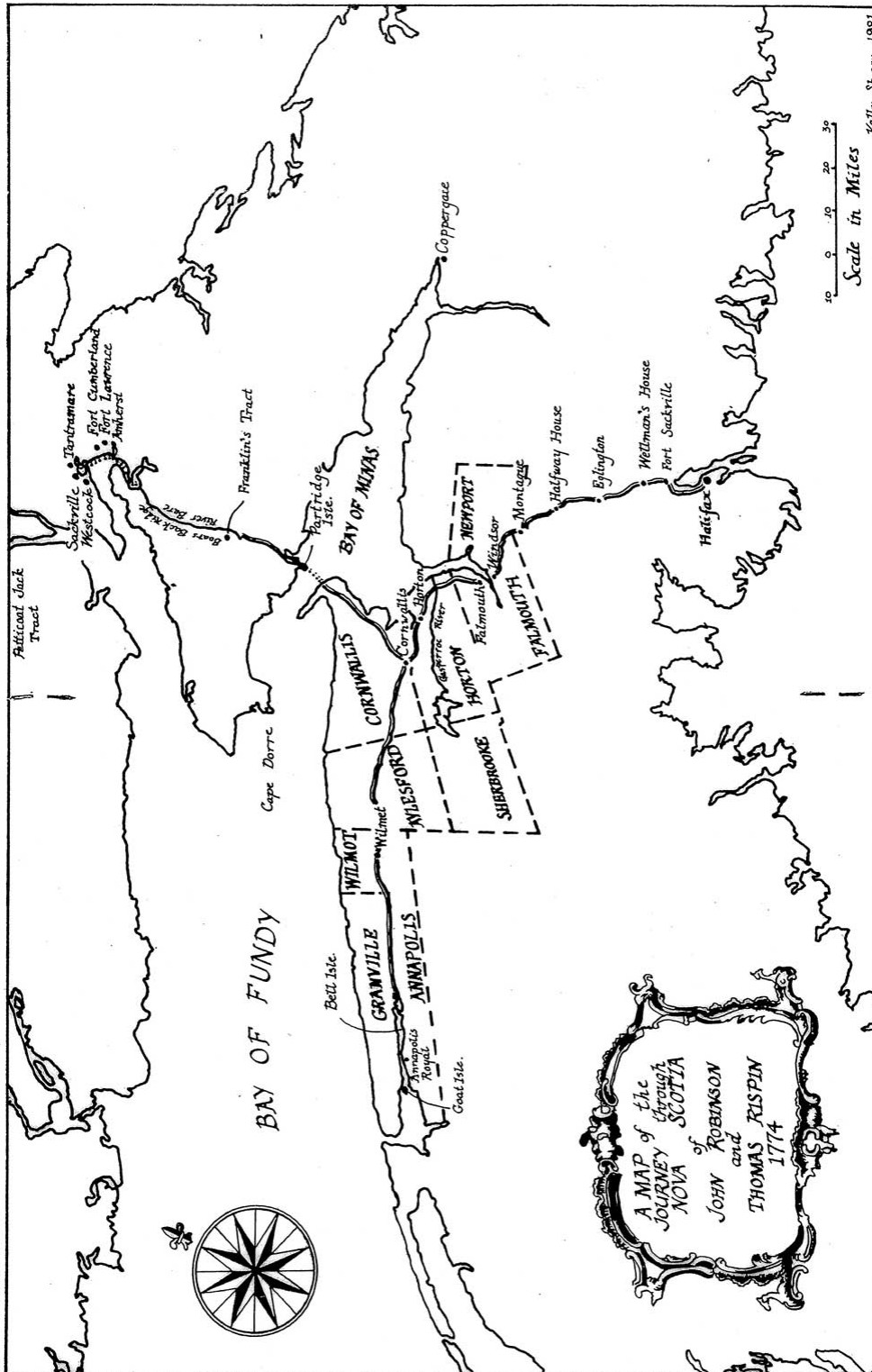


Fig.4: Taken from the 47 page pamphlet "A Journey Through Nova Scotia" by John Robinson and Thomas Rispin. Published in York, England in 1774 by C. Etherington
 See: <http://www.rispin.co.uk/farmer.html>

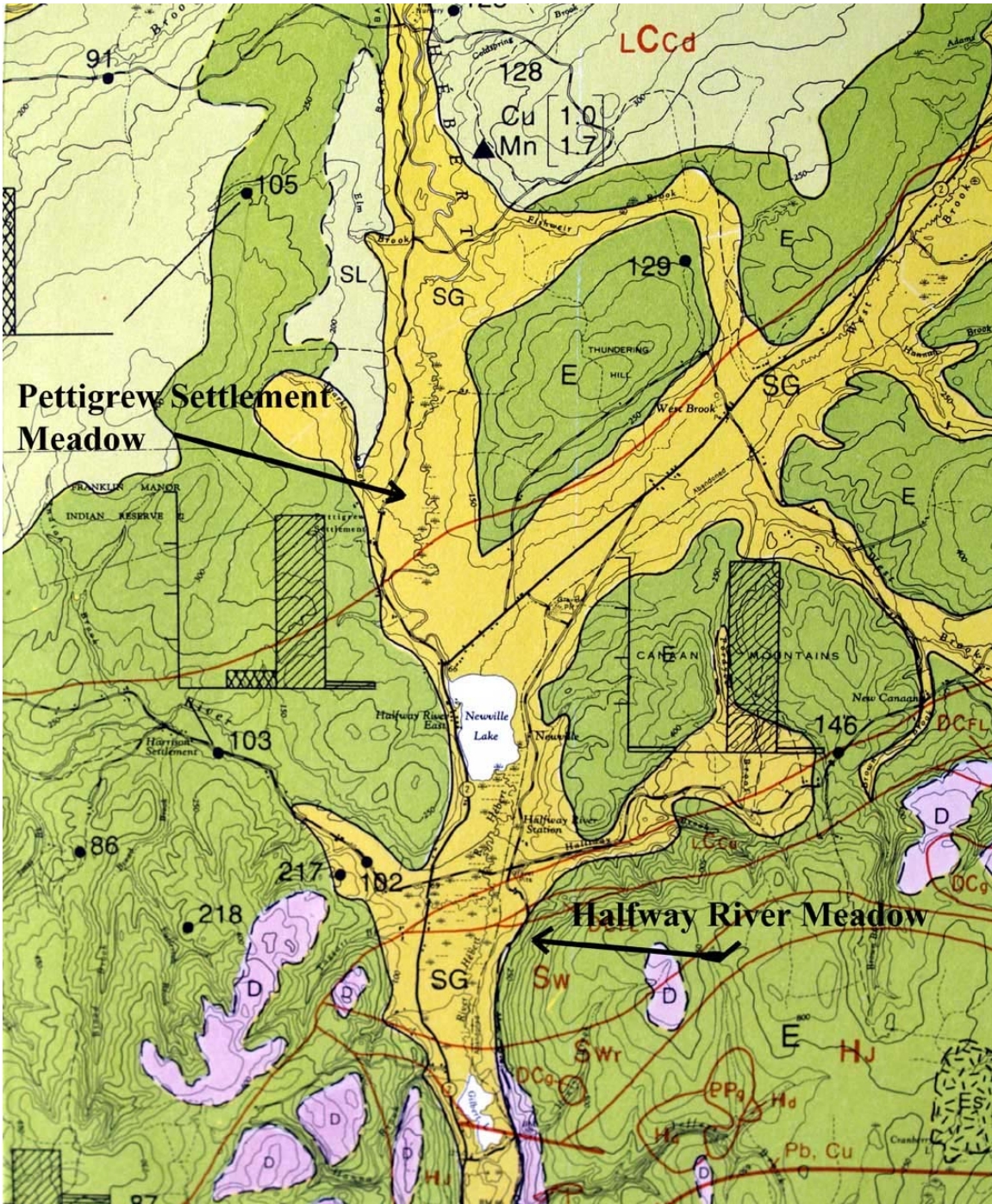


Fig.5: Meadow Land on the “Road to Cumberland”
 Taken from Figure 31, Till Geochemistry and Pebble Lithology, Chignecto Peninsula (Stea, Finch, and Wightman, 1986)

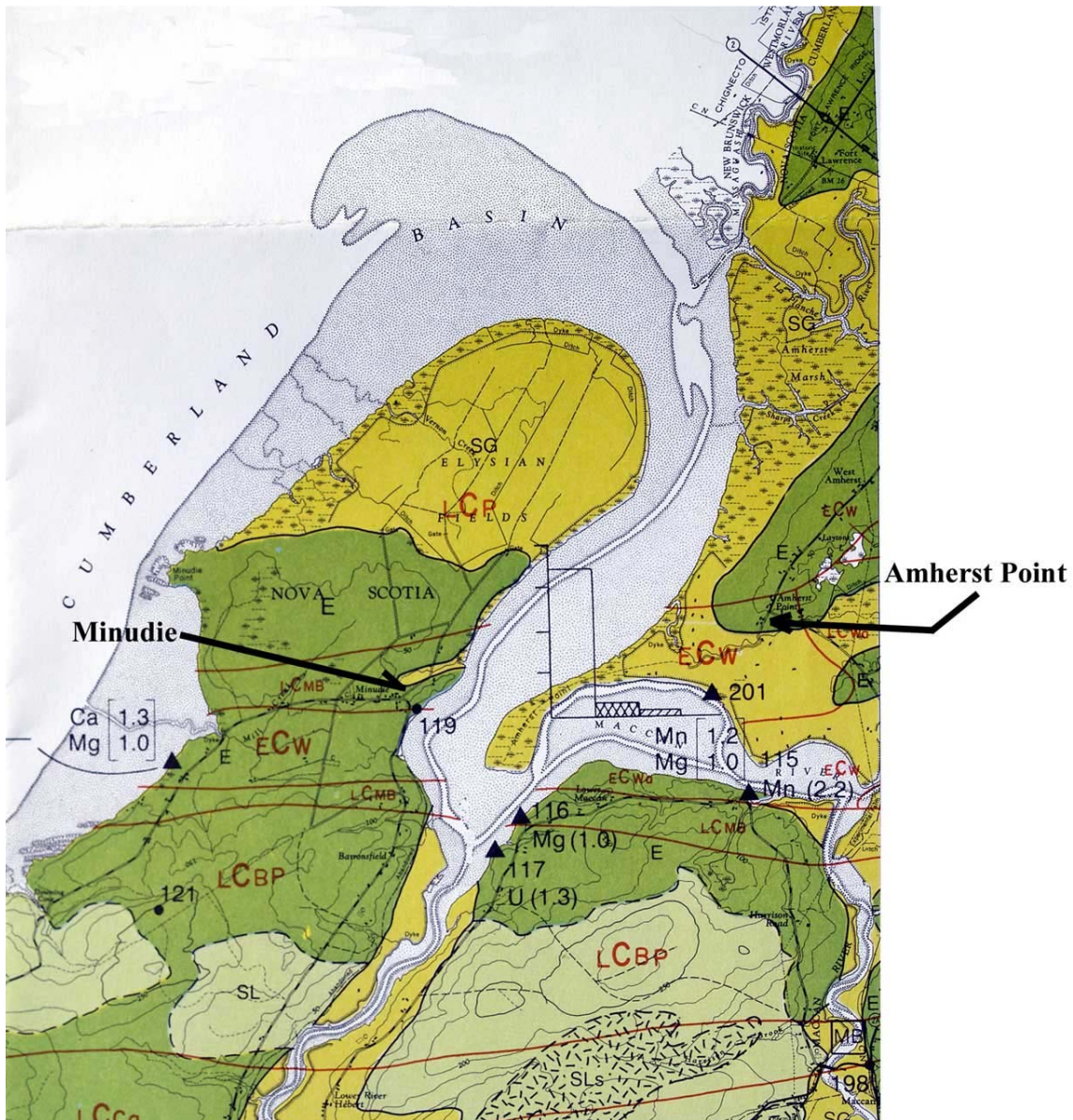


Fig. 6: The Minudie End of the “Road to Cumberland”
 Taken from Figure 31, Till Geochemistry and Pebble Lithology, Chignecto Peninsula (Stea, Finch, and Wightman, 1986)