



Foundation Document Overview

Saint Croix Island International Historic Site

Maine



Contact Information

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Purpose



SAINT CROIX ISLAND INTERNATIONAL HISTORIC SITE protects, interprets, and commemorates one of the earliest European settlements in North America—the 1604 site of the first French attempt to colonize the region known in the 17th century as l'Acadie.



Significance

Significance statements express why Saint Croix Island International Historic Site resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

The following significance statements have been identified for Saint Croix Island International Historic Site. (Please note that the sequence of the statements does not reflect the level of significance.)

- Saint Croix Island, in the St. Croix River at the border of the United States (Maine) and Canada (New Brunswick), is the location of one of the earliest European settlements in North America (1604), which led to a lasting French cultural presence on the continent.
- The valuable insight gained from the Saint Croix Island settlement, including contributions by the Wabanaki people, and the further exploration by Samuel Champlain, formed the foundation for a successful settlement at Port Royal and subsequent French settlements in North America.
- The French colony at Saint Croix Island led to the beginning of European settlement of Canada and is historically and culturally significant to people of the United States and Canada who share this heritage.



Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Cultural Landscape.** The island and river provide context for the story and history of the 1604–1605 Saint Croix Island settlement. The cultural resources on the island relating to the settlement include archeological sites and defining landscape characteristics including natural systems and features, topography, vegetation, and views that contribute to the historic character.
- **Collections and Archives.** The collections and archives of Saint Croix Island include fragments from a wide range of household, construction, and trade objects of American Indian and European origins. They document Wabanaki occupation dating to 4,000 years ago and include collections from the 1604–1605 French settlement including bricks, nails, Normandy stonewear, and other artifacts. These collections also document the early European-Wabanaki contact. The archives include records of the 1950, 1969, and 2003 archeological excavations.
- **Archeological Resources.** Sites, structures, artifacts, and features are the in situ archeological resources that provide evidence of the expedition of French nobleman Pierre Dugua Sieur de Mons, the 1604–1605 settlement, and other land use of the island.
- **Scientific Research and Education.** Access to the island is vital to continuing research on the significance of its resources and how to best protect them. The resulting scientific research also provides unique educational opportunities for members of the public who are not encouraged to access the island.
- **Visitor Connection to the Island.** The cultural resources at Saint Croix Island are too fragile and rare to allow visitors access to the island itself. Therefore, the opportunity to view the island, either directly from the mainland or virtually, is fundamental to telling the story of the island and relating its significance to park visitors. Visitor connection to the island is facilitated through the interpretive trail and bronze statues, the island viewing shelter and bronze scale model of the 1604 settlement, and interpretive staff and exhibits in the visitor center.

Interpretive Themes



Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from — and should reflect — park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- **Roots of French Presence in North America.** The difficult experiences of French settlers on Dugua's expedition who settled on Saint Croix Island in 1604–1605 helped them adapt to new and unforeseen conditions in North America and began a lasting French presence on this continent.
- **Meeting of Two Worlds.** Although the 1604 French settlers on Saint Croix Island maintained friendly relations with the local native people—who notably assisted the French by trading game for bread following a grueling winter—they, as with other early European contact and settlement in North America, introduced new religions and European trade, technology, and diseases, all of which profoundly impacted the Wabanaki nations living within Maine and Canada who, despite continuous pressure, remain committed to preserving their languages, traditional practices, and cultures today.
- **Role of Science in Understanding and Protecting the Value of the Site.** Saint Croix Island International Historic Site preserves Wabanaki and French human history in archeological sites that will continue to be irreversibly threatened by erosion and climate change unless scientific research and documentation are used to understand the significance of these fragile remains—as well as understand the potential impacts of climate change on the island—and to develop management actions to preserve them.

Description

Saint Croix Island International Historic Site protects, interprets, and commemorates the 1604 site of France's first attempt to colonize the territory called l'Acadie or La Cadie (Acadia), one of the earliest European settlements in North America. Saint Croix Island, comprising approximately 6.5 acres, is on the St. Croix River along the United States–Canada border in Calais, Maine.

In 1604, Pierre Dugua Sieur de Mons, accompanied by Samuel Champlain and 77 other men, established a settlement on Saint Croix Island. Preceding Jamestown (1607) and Plymouth (1620), Sieur de Mons' outpost was one of the earliest European settlements on the North Atlantic coast of North America. More specifically, it was the first attempt by the French at year-round colonization in the territory.

The settlement was short-lived due to hardships suffered by the men. A combination of the harsh winter conditions and a disease outbreak resulted in the deaths of 35 of the 79 settlers by spring. In June 1605, a relief ship from France arrived with new recruits and supplies. In response to the hard winters and complications of the island settlement, Sieur de Mons resolved to relocate his settlement.

In the summer of 1605, most of the structures were dismantled and loaded onto ships. Champlain and three other survivors of the Saint Croix settlement joined the new recruits and set out for Port Royal to establish a new settlement. The valuable insights gained from both the Saint Croix settlement and further exploration formed the foundation for a more successful settlement at Port Royal and a French cultural presence in North America that continues to the present day.

Congress authorized the establishment of Saint Croix Island National Monument in 1949 (63 Stat. 158), which became effective on June 30, 1968, and redesignated it as an international historic site on September 25, 1984. In addition to Saint Croix Island, the National Park Service manages 21.94 acres in the Red Beach community of Calais for administrative purposes and is authorized to acquire as much as 50 acres total on the mainland. Acadia National Park, about 120 miles distant, is the administrative headquarters for Saint Croix Island International Historic Site.

A memorandum of understanding between the United States and Canada, signed on September 9, 1982, recognizes the international significance of Saint Croix Island and commits both nations to joint planning and commemoration. In 1997, Parks Canada established a new Canadian unit, Saint Croix Island International Historic Site, in Bayside, New Brunswick, where a self-guiding interpretive trail overlooks Saint Croix Island.

Archeological evidence suggests that the area around Saint Croix Island had already been inhabited for several thousand years by American Indian groups known collectively as the Wabanaki people before European settlement. Today, the Wabanaki are represented by the following federally recognized tribes in Maine: Passamaquoddy Tribe with reservations at Indian Township and Pleasant Point; Penobscot Indian Nation; Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians; and Aroostook Band of Micmacs. The Passamaquoddy were living in the immediate vicinity of the island at the time of European contact. Tribal members continue to have an enduring connection to Saint Croix Island to the present day.

