Canada’s UNESCO World Heritage Sites

Lecture Series Outline

Week 1: An Introduction to UNESCO and The World Heritage Convention

The World Heritage Convention is the most “universal” of all of UNESCO’s conventions, with 193 of the 195 Member States having ratified it. Since 1972, 1092 cultural and natural heritage sites in 167 countries – including 19 in Canada - have been deemed to be of “outstanding universal value.” This lecture will “set the stage” for understanding Canada’s World Heritage Sites by providing a brief history of UNESCO, an examination of the origins and purpose of the Convention, and what it takes to become a designated site.

To provide an international context and demonstrate the economic importance of World Heritage Sites to tourism, an overview of the “top 10” Sites as selected by National Geographic will be presented. More than just winners of a “beauty pageant” however, World Heritage Sites also play an important role in addressing climate change, urbanization, mass tourism, and sustainable socio-economic development. Their contributions in these areas will all be presented and discussed.

In the five following lectures, Canada’s World Heritage Sites will be examined in the chronological order that they were designated to provide both a geographic perspective and an understanding of how the concept of world heritage has evolved in Canada.

Week 2: Canada’s World Heritage Sites #1

- L’Anse aux Meadows National Historic Site, Newfoundland and Labrador, is the first and only known site established by Vikings in North America and the earliest evidence of European settlement in the New World.

- Nahanni National Park, Northwest Territories is located along the South Nahanni River, one of the most spectacular wild rivers in North America. This park contains deep canyons and huge waterfalls, unique geological formations and is home to diverse animals of the boreal forest.

- Dinosaur Provincial Park, Alberta, is located in the heart of Alberta’s badlands and contains some of the most important fossil discoveries ever made from the ‘Age of Reptiles’, including about 35 species of dinosaur, dating back 75 million years.

- Kluane / Wrangell-St. Elias / Glacier Bay / Tatshenshini-Alsek, Yukon Territory and Alaska, USA: these national parks and protected areas along the Canada/USA border are the largest non-polar ice fields in the world and contain examples of some of the world’s longest and most spectacular glaciers.

Week 3: Canada’s World Heritage Sites #2

- Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump, Alberta, demonstrates nearly 6000 years of use of the buffalo jump by Aboriginal people of the Northern Plains. This site is of cultural, archaeological, and scientific value and provides insights into the way of life and practices of traditional hunting cultures elsewhere in the world.
• **Sgang Gwaay, British Columbia**, is located on a small island off the west coast of Haida Gwaii (formerly the Queen Charlotte Islands). Remains of houses, together with carved mortuary and memorial poles, commemorate the living culture of the Haida people and their relationship to the land and sea.

• **Wood Buffalo National Park, Alberta and Northwest Territories**, is home to North America’s largest population of wild bison and includes the world’s largest inland delta, located at the mouth of the Peace and Athabasca rivers.

• **Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks, Alberta and British Columbia**, are comprised of Banff, Jasper, Kootenay and Yoho national parks and Mount Robson, Mount Assiniboine and Hamber provincial parks. They are renowned for their scenic splendor and bio-geographical features, including the Burgess Shale Cambrian site that contains important information about the earth’s evolution.

**Week 4: Canada’s World Heritage Sites #3**

• **Historic District of Old Quebec, Quebec**, is made up of two parts: the Upper Town, defended by fortified ramparts, the citadel, and other defensive works; and the Lower Town, which developed around Place Royale and the harbor. The historic district is a remarkable example of a fortified city of the colonial era, and is the only remaining fortified city in North America.

• **Gros Morne National Park, Newfoundland and Labrador**, illustrates some of the world’s best examples of the process of plate tectonics. Within a relatively small area are classic examples of these modifying forces that are unique in terms of their clarity and accessibility. The park also presents an outstanding demonstration of glaciation in an island setting.

• **Waterton Glacier International Peace Park, Alberta and Montana, USA**: In 1932, Waterton Lakes National Park (Alberta) was combined with Glacier National Park (Montana) to form the world’s first International Peace Park. The particular geography of the park has resulted in the evolution of plant communities that occur nowhere else in the world.

• **Miguasha National Park, Quebec**, is a paleontological site that is the world’s most outstanding illustration of the Devonian Period known as the ‘Age of Fishes’. Dating from 370 million years ago, this fossil formation contains five of the six fossil fish groups associated with this period and the best-preserved fossil specimens of the fishes that gave rise to the first four-legged, air-breathing terrestrial vertebrates.

**Week 5: Canada’s World Heritage Sites #4**

• **Old Town of Lunenberg, Nova Scotia**, is the best surviving example of a planned British colonial settlement in North America. Established in 1753, it has retained its original layout and overall appearance, based on a rectangular grid pattern drawn up in England.

• **Rideau Canal, Ontario**, was built primarily for strategic military purposes at a time when Great Britain and the United States vied for control of this region. It is the best-preserved example of a slackwater canal in North America, demonstrating the use of this European technology on a large scale. It is the only canal dating from the great North American canal-building era of the early 19th century to remain operational with most of its original
structures intact.

- **Joggins Fossil Cliffs, Nova Scotia**, is a paleontological site that has played an important role in the development of geological and evolutionary principles, including through the work of Charles Darwin, for which the site has been referred to as the “coal age Galapagos.” The site includes the remains and tracks of very early animals and the rainforest in which they lived, left *in situ* and undisturbed.

- **Landscape of Grand Pré, Nova Scotia**, is a cultural landscape demonstrating the development of agricultural farmland using dykes and a wooden sluice system, started by the Acadians in the 17th century and further developed and maintained by the local inhabitants. The site – marked by one of the most extreme tidal ranges in the world, averaging 11.6 m – is also a memorial to Acadian way of life and deportation, which started in 1755, known as the *Grand Dérrangement*.

- **Red Bay Basque Whaling Station, Newfoundland and Labrador**, is an archaeological site that provides the earliest, most complete, and best preserved example of a European whaling station of this type. Established in the 1530s, it was used for 70 years as a base for coastal hunting, butchering, and rendering of whale oil that was then shipped to Europe where it was used for lighting.

**Week 6: Canada's World Heritage Sites #5 and the Future of the World Heritage**

- **Mistaken Point, Newfoundland and Labrador**, is a paleontological site with fossils that are the oldest, largest, and most complex life-forms found anywhere on Earth. The ancestors of most modern animal groups, these creatures lived from 580 to 541 million years ago when all life was in the sea. Modern erosion has exposed the fossils in a rugged strip of cliffs, making this the only place in the world where you can view 565-million-year-old deep-sea floors.

- **Pimachiowin Aki, Manitoba and Ontario**, is a testimony to the continuing Anishinaabe cultural tradition of *Ji-ganawendamang Gidakiiminaan* (Keeping the Land). Dispersed across the landscape are ancient and contemporary livelihood sites, sacred sites and named places, most linked by waterways. This is Canada’s first and only mixed cultural/natural site.

- **Future Sites in Canada**, will offer a look at some of the sites for which proposals are now being developed for submission as Canada’s next candidates for World Heritage status.

- **The Future of World Heritage** - In conclusion, we will bring together the concepts and ideas explored in lectures 1 – 5 and look at the challenges experienced by World Heritage Sites as designation also brings unintended consequences that many host-States are ill-equipped to deal with. It will also look at the growing politicization of World Heritage, the impact of climate change, the threats from armed conflict, and the future of the concept of the common heritage of humanity. In conclusion, we will explore the question of “is there a limit to the number of World Heritage Sites” (or conversely “how many is too many?”) as the number of World Heritage Sites grew to 1092 in 2018 and more will be added in 2019.
Recommended readings for continued learning:

Publications


Cameron, Christina, *Many Voices, One Vision: The Early Years of the World Heritage Convention*, Farnham, Surry: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2013 (Canadian Christina Cameron was twice Chair of the World Heritage Committee.)


Internet Resources

Borges, Maria Ana; Carbone, Giulia; Bushell, Robyn; Jaeger, Tilman, *Sustainable tourism and Natural World Heritage: Priorities for Action*, IUCN publications, PDF available for downloading at [https://www.iucn.org/about/work/programmes/wcpa_worldheritage/publications/pub_studies](https://www.iucn.org/about/work/programmes/wcpa_worldheritage/publications/pub_studies)


Web sites related to Canada’s UNESCO World Heritage Sites


- L’anse aux Meadows National Historic Site Newfoundland and Labrador
  http://www.newfoundlandlabrador.com/PlacesToGo/LAnseAuxMeadowsNationalHistoricSite

- Nahanni National Park Reserve, Northwest Territories

- Dinosaur Provincial Park, Alberta
  http://www.albertaparks.ca/dinosaur.aspx

- Kluane/Wrangell-St.Elias/Glacier Bay/Tatshenshini-Alsek, Yukon and British Columbia (Alaska, USA)
  http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/bcparks/explore/parkpgs/tatshens

- Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump, Alberta
  http://www.history.alberta.ca/headsmedsin

- SGang Gwaay, British Columbia

- Wood Buffalo National Park, Northwest Territories

- Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks, Alberta and British Columbia
  http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/bcparks/explore/parkpgs/mt_robson
  http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/bcparks/explore/parkpgs/mt_assiniboine
  http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/bcparks/explore/parkpgs/hamber

- Historic District of Old Québec, Quebec
Gros Morne National Park, Newfoundland and Labrador

Old Town Lunenburg, Nova Scotia
http://www.explorelunenburg.ca

Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park, Alberta

Miguasha National Park, Quebec
http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/progs/spm-whs/sec02/sec02m.aspx

Rideau Canal, Ontario

Joggins Fossil Cliffs, Nova Scotia

Landscape of Grand Pré, Nova Scotia
http://www.landscapeofgrandpre.ca/home.html

Red Bay Basque Whaling Station, Newfoundland and Labrador

Mistaken Point, Newfoundland and Labrador
https://www.pc.gc.ca/en/culture/spm-whs/sites-canada/sec02r
https://www.flr.gov.nl.ca/natural_areas/wer/r_mpe/

Pimachiowin Aki, Manitoba and Ontario
https://www.pc.gc.ca/en/culture/spm-whs/sites-canada/sec02s
https://pimaki.ca