

In 1949 Newfoundland, Britain's first overseas colony, joined Confederation and became Canada's youngest province. Situated in the North Atlantic, occupying the most easterly portion of the North American land mass, the province is made up of two distinct geographical entities. The island of Newfoundland, which forms the southern and eastern portion of the province, is a large triangular-shaped area of some 112 000 square kilometres, separated from the Canadian mainland by the 18-kilometre expanse of the Strait of Belle Isle in the north and by the wider Cabot Strait in the south. Labrador, the mainland portion of the province, is approximately two and a half times as large as the island.

Geography and climate

The interior of both Labrador and Newfoundland has a rolling, rugged topography, deeply etched by glacial activity and broken by lakes and swift-flowing rivers. Much of the island and southern and central Labrador is covered by a thick boreal forest of black spruce and balsam fir intermixed with birch, tamarack and balsam poplar. Northern Labrador is largely devoid of forest and is distinguished by the spectacular Torngat Mountains which rise abruptly from the sea to heights of up to 1 676 metres. The varied and scenic coastline of the island of Newfoundland, with its bold headlands,

deep fiords and countless small coves and offshore islands, forms the basis for two national parks. Additional parks are planned for Labrador.

Newfoundland's climate can be best described as moderate and maritime. The island, warmed by the Gulf Stream in the south, and bounded by the Labrador Current in the north, enjoys winters that are surprisingly mild by Canadian standards, though with a high rate of precipitation. Labrador, by comparison, has the cold winters and brief warm summers characteristic of the Canadian middle north.

History

In 1960, archaeologist Helge Ingstad's discovery of an abandoned Norse settlement in northern Newfoundland confirmed scholarly speculation that the Norse had visited and inhabited Newfoundland about 1000 A.D. The remains of eight sod-and-wood structures, a forge and workshops from the eleventh century, which confirm the Norse presence, constitute the earliest known European structures in North America. L'Anse aux Meadows National Historic Park, in which the site is located, has been named to the World Heritage List by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization.

Newfoundland was rediscovered in 1497 by John Cabot, a Genoese