

Prince Edward Island, Canada's smallest province, has always been called "the Island" by those who live there. The smallest of the ten provinces in area and population, it is 224 km long and 69 km wide at its broadest point, with a 1979 population of 123,000. There are roughly 567,000 hectares of land and most are under cultivation. No part of the island is more than 16 km from the sea.

Geography

Prince Edward Island is situated in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and is separated from the provinces of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick by the Northumberland Strait. The province's best known physical feature is its rich red soil, which is unusually deep and has a great potential for agricultural use provided it is properly treated. The island has strikingly even terrain — gentle rolling hills never higher than 150 m above sea level. The coastline is frequently indented by deep bays and long tidal inlets. In the east and south some of these inlets provide fine harbours, the best being at Charlottetown, the province's capital. On the north shore, troublesome sand dunes restrict the use of natural harbours to small boats. Most rivers are really "sea creeks" since the tides flow to their heads, where they meet modest streams flowing from the interior. There are few ponds or lakes of any size but the island has many saltwater lagoons enclosed by dunes.

Climate

Prince Edward Island has a relatively temperate climate, which is another important factor in its agricultural success. Winters are long but reasonably mild, springs are slow and chilly, summers are pleasantly cool and autumns normally late in the season and warm. Compared with other parts of the Atlantic region, the island is little troubled by fog and mist.

History

Jacques Cartier landed on the northwest tip of the island in July 1534 and described the land as "the most delightful that may be seen, and full of beautiful trees and plains . . ." Before the arrival of the Europeans, Micmac Indians regularly visited the island on summer hunting trips and it is possible that some settled permanently. The island was named after St. John and by 1632 was charted by Samuel de Champlain in a series of books he wrote about his journeys. In 1710, a number of farmers from Acadia (now Nova Scotia) settled along the Hillsborough River, which they later drained and developed for agriculture. In 1720 three ships from France arrived in Hillsborough Bay with more settlers. This development scheme was organized by Comte de Saint-Pierre, a nobleman of the court of Louis XV. With the help of carpenters and workers from nearby Cape Breton Island, the