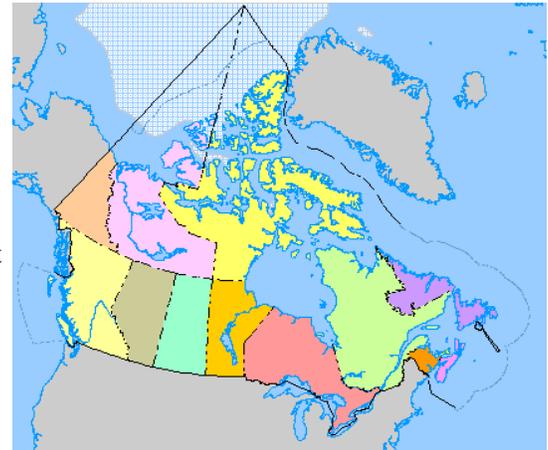


Rural Sustainability –A Far North Perspective

FIELD TRIP BY RAIL TO MOOSONEE

Although Moosonee is Ontario’s only saltwater port and Moose Factory is its oldest English settlement, they are both so isolated they don’t attract many visitors. Their isolation isn’t through distance. In fact, the map on the right, common to most Canadian classrooms, shows that Moosonee is only the first point on Ontario's seacoast, not even halfway up the “pink” province and in the scheme of things, southern Canada!



Northern Ontario is isolated by a series of bogs and waterways that make canoeing easy, but road travel near impossible. For this reason, it remains a stronghold of First Nations culture, only occasionally seeing development by European settlers, including the first and perhaps biggest mercantile venture: the fur trade that lasted well into last century.

One of the few rail lines to traverse the north country, the Ontario Northland Railway (ONR) began in 1902 with a rail line to Cochrane, a turning point on today's Trans Canada Highway (near the centre of the map on the right). Its history was tied to mine developments in the Near North. The extension to James Bay was opened on July 15, 1932, largely a make-work project to offset the effects of the Depression.



On this trip, arrive in Toronto, then make the first stop on the eastern line of the ONR (refer to map at right, the “blue line”). Orillia, on the shores of lakes Couchiching and Simcoe, was a point used by First Nations people for thousands of years for trading, hunting, and fishing. Lakehead University has a brand new campus there: a Canadian first, LEED Platinum campus heated by geothermal energy! The second stop is Cochrane, centre of the northern boreal forest and then we will spend two days in Moose Factory. Expect daytime temperatures of 15-20 C (55-75 F) and nights cooler (but not freezing!).

THEMES FOR THE COURSE COVER THE TORTUOUS HISTORY OF ONTARIO'S “FAR NORTH”....

Single-industry towns built on mining or forestry, required to re-imagine a twenty-first century existence in a new global economy. First Nations struggling against flooding of their traditional territory in the 1980s, today discussing participating in industry that ranges from tourism to diamond mining. Meanwhile, food security still comes at a premium, especially for communities not fortunate enough to be connected by rail. Will traditional food sources return to favour for a younger generation less and less connected to its past?

