

# **An Analysis of Jacques Cartier's Exploration of the Gaspé Coast, 1534**

Donald Cahill et Martin Ouellet

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## RESEARCH NOTES/NOTES DE RECHERCHE

### An Analysis of Jacques Cartier's Exploration of the Gaspé Coast, 1534

SOME ASPECTS OF JACQUES CARTIER'S VOYAGE OF EXPLORATION along the Gaspé coast in 1534 continue to be subject to debate and discussion. This study takes account of the divergent views expressed in published works by scholars and historians relating to this voyage. Many years of navigation and research spent on the waters between Cap d'Espoir and Cap Gaspé have enabled us to also gather first-hand information concerning this part of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, visited by Cartier on his first voyage. We had the opportunity to follow Ganong's advice, which was to follow Cartier's course, and view the places he described in his narrative from the same positions that he did. A similar methodology was used by Lewis for the North Shore of the Gulf of St. Lawrence aboard a sailboat, and by Morison on an airplane.<sup>1</sup> We have carefully examined some facts not fully considered by previous historians, who were sometimes unfamiliar with the distinctive features of this maritime region. We reached different conclusions regarding the identification of some place names, about the possible coastal course taken by the expedition's vessels, and also over the landing place of Cartier in Baie de Gaspé. More broadly, this research note is also intended as a contribution for those interested in the early exploration of the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the history of the Gaspésie region.

Cartier's voyage of 1534 was one among several attempts by the maritime powers of Europe to find a shorter sea route leading to the spices and gold of Asia. With the landing of the Genoese navigator Christopher Columbus on the shore of the New World in 1492, Spain was given access to an immense and rich continent. Vasco de Gama's caravels had rounded southern Africa at the end of the 15th century, opening a new trade route to India for the maritime power of Portugal. Pope Alexander VI, assuming international jurisdiction, had divided the world outside Europe between Spain and Portugal in 1493. One year later, with the Treaty of Tordesillas, the two kingdoms agreed that the line of demarcation would be drawn north-south 370 leagues west of the Cape Verde Islands. Ships would soon bring back from the Americas precious metals and goods to Spain. Portugal now had access to spices and silks from India, timbers and dyes from Brazil, and gold and slaves from Africa.

1 William F. Ganong, *Crucial Maps in the Early Cartography and Place-Nomenclature of the Atlantic Coast of Canada, with Introduction, Commentary, and Maps Notes by Theodore E. Layng* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), 273; Samuel E. Morison, *The European Discovery of America: The Northern Voyages, A.D. 500-1600* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 339-429; Harrison F. Lewis, "Notes on Some Details of the Explorations by Jacques Cartier in the Gulf of St. Lawrence," *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, Section 2 (Ottawa, 1934), 117-48. The authors are very grateful to Nathalie Cadet (research assistant) and Patrick Galois (Amphibia-Nature) for their contributions to this research note. The authors also thank the anonymous referees for their comments and suggestions.

European politics, during the early decades of the 16th century, was characterized by conflicts, rivalry, and warfare among the major kingdoms in competition for the hegemony and control of the continent. The Treaty of Tordesillas was unacceptable to the other European kingdoms; it was ignored in some cases, and eventually contested.<sup>2</sup> English and Portuguese ventures in search of a northwestern passage, between 1497 and 1509, ended without lasting results, although they may have influenced the early expansion of the Newfoundland fishery.<sup>3</sup> For the king of France, Francis I, it became an economic imperative to obtain direct access to the Spice Islands and the gold of the hoped-for new lands. Already controlled by the Portuguese, the long and difficult navigation around the Cape of Good Hope was not an option for France, and neither was the dangerous sea route around the South American continent identified in 1520 by the Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan.

It was under a commission from the king of France that a Florentine, Giovanni da Verrazzano, explored the North American coast from South Carolina to New England in 1524. Verrazzano's voyage definitively confirmed that these countries were not part of eastern Asia but a new continent, a landmass blocking the access to the eastern sea.<sup>4</sup> It was also evident that the Americas were already occupied by millions of Natives, speaking hundreds of languages.<sup>5</sup> The differences between the two civilizations were great. Many European rulers considered the Indigenous people as savages to be conquered and evangelized, and the lands they occupied as territories full of resources, natural and human, to be exploited. This conceit, combined with the introduction of diseases from Europe, had already had adverse effects on Indigenous cultures in some areas. Among the resources to be exploited were the cold and rich waters surrounding some of these lands. Fishermen from Portugal, England, Brittany, Normandy, and French Basque Region were already fishing for Atlantic cod (*Gadus morhua*) in the vicinity of Newfoundland long before Cartier's first voyage. Fishermen and whalers from the Spanish Basque Country were probably not far behind.

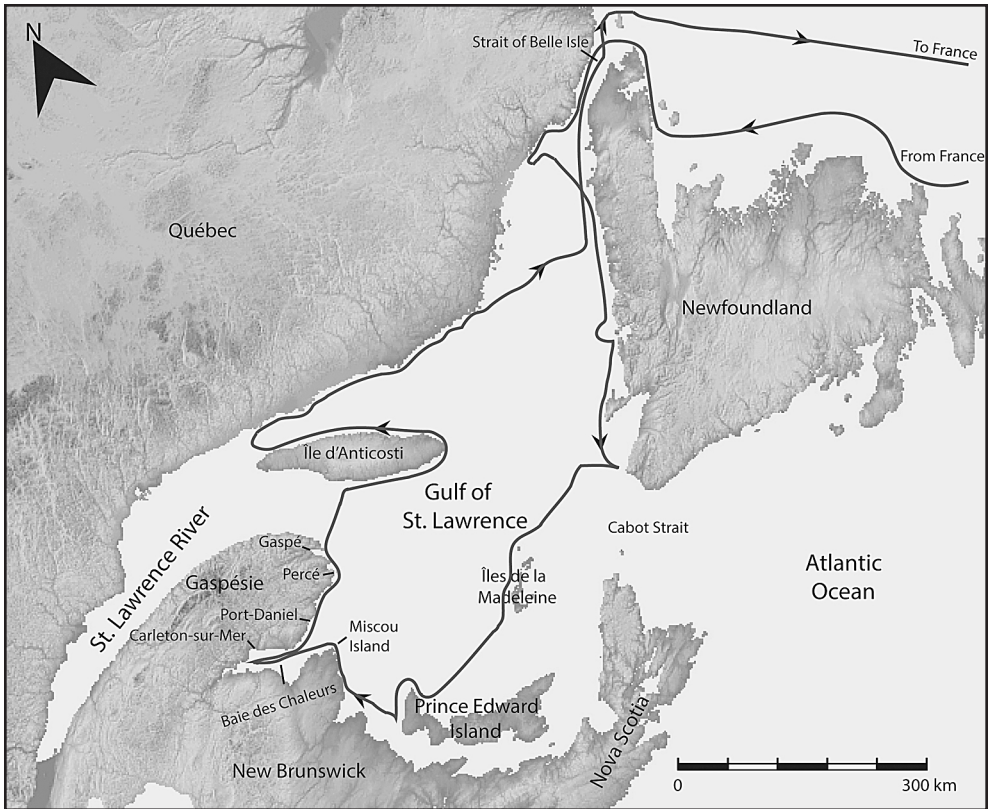
Rumours of the existence of a large unexplored gulf were certainly part of dockside discussions in certain fishing ports in Western Europe before 1534. It is highly probable that some ships had already ventured further inside the Gulf of St.

2 "Since in matters ecclesiastical the kings of England and of France did not recognise the supreme jurisdiction of the Popes, they were even less disposed to do so in affairs temporal"; see Henry P. Biggar, *A Collection of Documents Relating to Jacques Cartier and the Sieur de Roberval* (Ottawa: Public Archives of Canada, 1930), xvii-xviii.

3 On the early voyages of discovery from 1497 to 1534, see Bernard G. Hoffman, *Cabot to Cartier, Sources for a Historical Ethnography of Northeastern North America 1497-1550* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961); James A. Williamson, *The Cabot Voyages and Bristol Discovery under Henry VII* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962); Morison, *Northern Voyages*; and David B. Quinn, *North America from Earliest Discovery to First Settlements: The Norse Voyages to 1612* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977).

4 On the voyages of Verrazzano, see Lawrence C. Wroth, *The Voyages of Giovanni da Verrazzano, 1524-1528* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970).

5 "Many scholars now believe that there were between 40-100 million Indians in the hemisphere"; see William M. Denevan, "The Pristine Myth: The Landscape of the Americas in 1492," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 82, no. 3 (August 1992): 369-85.



**Figure 1: The approximate course of Jacques Cartier's first voyage, 1534.**

Source: Donald Cahill and Martin Ouellet (Amphibia-Nature).

Lawrence, either in search of new fishing grounds or simply because they were pushed in that direction by prolonged bad weather. A strait known as the Baye des Chasteaulx (Stait of Belle Isle) could possibly lead, like the passage discovered by Magellan in Tierra del Fuego, to the eastern sea that he had named the Pacific Ocean. Jacques Cartier, a Breton mariner of Saint-Malo, was instructed by the king of France to renew the search for a passage to Cathay and to discover new lands. Cartier, at 43 years old, was known as “Capitaine et Pilote pour le roi.”<sup>6</sup> On 20 April 1534 he left Saint-Malo with two ships and 60 men, and reached Cape Bonavista in Newfoundland on 10 May. Cartier then proceeded, for the next two months, on a systematic exploration of the Gulf of St. Lawrence.<sup>7</sup> Cartier's mandate from the

6 “This means that he was captain by the king's command, but a master pilot by experience”; see Morison, *Northern Voyages*, 345. On Cartier's life, see Dan Lailler, “Jacques Cartier, homme de mer de Saint-Malo,” in *Le monde de Jacques Cartier: l'aventure au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, ed. Fernand Braudel (Montréal and Paris: Libre Expression and Berger-Levrault, 1984), 231-4.

7 For this research note, we used the following editions of Jacques Cartier's *Relations*: Michel Bideaux, *Jacques Cartier, Relations* (Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1986) and Henry P. Biggar, *The Voyages of Jacques Cartier* (Ottawa: Public Archives of Canada, 1924).



French Crown was “faire le voyage de ce royaume es Terres Neufves pour descouvrir certaines ysles et pays où l’on dit qu’il se doit trouver grant quantité d’or et autres riches choses” and “de voiaiger et allez aux Terres-Neuffves passez le destroit de la baye des Chasteaulx.”<sup>8</sup> He was ordered to sail beyond the Strait of Belle Isle in the hope of finding, in an area known as the Grant baye, a northwest passage to Asia.

As noted by Selma Barkham, “Previous Breton voyages had pioneered the Strait of Belle Isle for cod-fishing, and gradually French Basques, following the Breton lead, appear to have brought back reports of fabulous whaling grounds.”<sup>9</sup> Fishermen were certainly already frequenting the Strait of Belle Isle, and Cartier’s meeting with a large ship from La Rochelle in that area gives evidence of such activity. In his narrative, Cartier also wrote about a busy fishing harbour known as les Ilettes. Study of the early toponymy and documentary references shows that mariners from Finistère were among the precursors in the Strait of Belle Isle.<sup>10</sup> It is, however, only after Cartier’s voyage of 1534 that the Gulf of St. Lawrence makes its first appearance in early cartography.<sup>11</sup> After passing through the Strait of Belle Isle, Cartier then sailed south along the west coast of the island of Newfoundland and reached the Magdalen Islands and the northern part of Prince Edward Island. He continued his exploration along the coast of New Brunswick without entering the Northumberland Strait and finally caught sight of the northern point of Miscou Island, which he named Cap d’Esperance. Opposite to it, when Cartier and his mariners looked to the north and one point (11.25 degrees) to the northeast they saw a cape and other lands in the distance.<sup>12</sup> The cape was the reddish wall of rock forming the upper part of Mont Sainte-Anne,<sup>13</sup> which rises abruptly to 340 metres behind the present locality of Percé. The other lands were the summits of the surrounding hills in the same area, also relatively close to shore. Here Cartier observed a wide expanse of water, possibly leading to a passage open to the west.<sup>14</sup>

Taking shelter in a cove that he named la Conche Saint Martin (Port-Daniel), Cartier explored Baie des Chaleurs with two longboats and found out there was no passage such as the one for which he was searching. At Pointe Tracadigache,<sup>15</sup> Cartier and his crewmen met with members of the Mi’kmaq, whose numbers at that

8 Biggar, *Collection of Documents Relating to Jacques Cartier*, 42-3.

9 Selma H. Barkham, “The Basque Whaling Establishments in Labrador 1536-1632 – A Summary,” *Arctic* 37, no. 4 (December 1984): 515-19. “Toutefois, à partir de la date du 23 septembre 1517, il est possible de dire avec certitude que les Basques ont suivi les Bretons et les Portugais dans le commerce du baccalao (morue) provenant des eaux canadiennes”; see Barkham, *Aperçu de l’évolution de la pêche sur les côtes de l’est canadien*, in *L’aventure maritime, du golfe de Gascogne à Terre-Neuve: Actes du 118e congrès national annuel des sociétés historiques et scientifiques*, Pau, Octobre 1993 (Paris: Éditions du CTHS, 1995), 173.

10 Barkham, “Basque Whaling Establishments in Labrador,” 515-19.

11 “But, so far as known maps are concerned, the region of the gulf was a tabula rasa in 1534 when Cartier started on the voyage which first outlined its geography”; see Ganong, *Crucial Maps*, 244.

12 Mariners of the late 15th and early 16th centuries were already using the magnetic compass divided into 32 points for long distance navigation with reasonable accuracy.

13 Martin Ouellet, Donald Cahill, and Patrick Galois, *Synthèse des connaissances des massifs du mont Sainte-Anne et du mont Blanc de l’arrondissement naturel de Percé* (Percé, QC: Amphibia-Nature, 2012).

14 Cartier would later name it the baye de Chaleur, now known as Baie des Chaleurs.

15 This is a sand bar now known as Banc de Carleton.

place he estimated at more than 300 persons (men, women, and children). Cartier's narrative observed that these Mi'kmaq went from place to place in canoes catching fish in the summer season for food, and that, despite their superior numbers, they were friendly and willing to trade. Mi'kmaw groups had already had direct contact with European explorers and fishermen on the Atlantic shores, and this area of Baie des Chaleurs was the northern part of the vast Mi'kmaw territory.<sup>16</sup>

Disappointed, and certain that there was no passage through this bay, the two ships hoisted their sails and left Conche Saint Martin on Sunday, 12 July 1534:

Et fysmes couriz à l'est<sup>17</sup> le long de la coste qui ainsi gist environ dixouict lieues<sup>18</sup> jusques au cap de Pratto. Et là trouvames une merveilleuse maree et petit fontz et la mer fort malle. Et nous convint serrez à terre entre ledit cap et une ille qui est à l'est d'iceluy environ une lieue. Et là possames les encrez pour la nuyt. Et le landemain au matin fismes voile pour debvoir rangez ladite coste qui gist nort nordest mais il sourvint tant de vant controire [qu'il] nous convint relacher de là où estions partiz et y fusmes ledit jour et la nuyt jusques au landemain que fismes voile et [vinmes] le trevers d'une ripviere qui est à cinq ou seix lieues dudit cap au nort.<sup>19</sup>

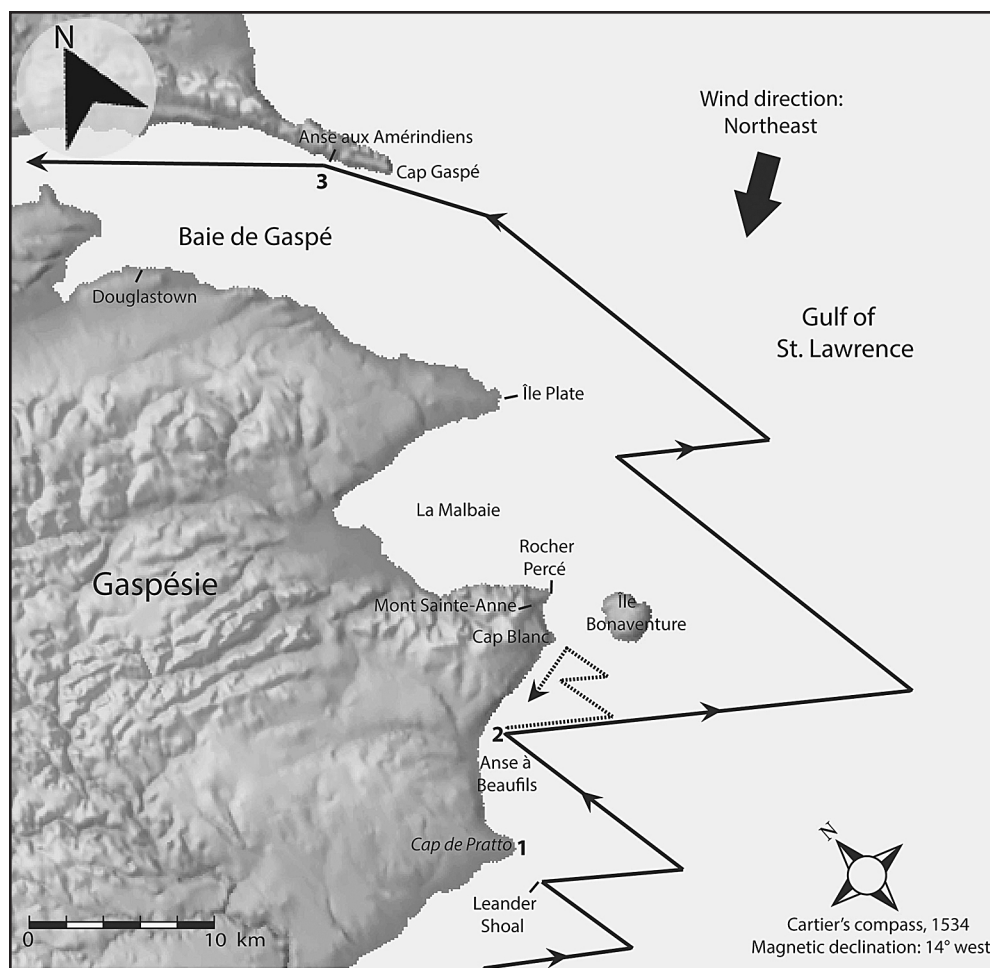
They sailed east some 18 leagues along the coast, as far as Cap de Pratto. And there, they found extraordinary tidal current, shallow water, and a very rough sea. They considered it preferable to hug the shore between the cape and an island, which lay approximately one league east of it, where they dropped anchor for the night. The next morning, at daybreak, they sailed with the intention of continuing to follow the coast, which now ran north-northeast, but strong headwinds prompted them to anchor again at the same spot they had left previously. They remained there that day and night, and then sailed on the following morning (Tuesday, 14 July), until they came abreast of a river lying 5 or 6 leagues north of the cape.

16 "Des Micmacs, dont la nation occupait, au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle, le sud et l'est du golfe du Saint-Laurent, les Maritimes et la péninsule de Gaspé, disputant ce dernier territoire aux Iroquois du Saint-Laurent"; see Bideaux, *Jacques Cartier, Relations*, 331n229. They also had contact with Mi'kmaq at *Conche Saint Martin* and at the sand bar of today's Paspébiac (Site patrimonial du Banc-de-Pêche-de-Paspébiac). Concerning the presence of Europeans on the Atlantic shores in early 16th century, see Peter E. Pope, "The 16th-Century Fishing Voyage," in *How Deep is the Ocean?: Historical Essays on Canada's Atlantic Fishery*, ed. James E. Candow and Carol Corbin (Sydney, NS: University College of Cape Breton Press, 1997), 15-30.

17 Cartier's compass courses were all magnetic, not true north. For the Gulf of St. Lawrence in Cartier's time, Ganong estimated the magnetic declination to be 14° west. See Ganong, *Crucial Maps*, 264. Biggar averaged it just under 14° west. See Biggar, *Voyages of Jacques Cartier*, 316.

18 "There is no doubt that Cartier and Roberval used the petit mille marin, three of which made the petite lieue marine. The petit mille measured 1,440 meters, or 0.77 English nautical miles; the petite lieue, therefore, measured 4,320 meters or 2.31 nautical miles – other authorities say 2.2. Information kindly furnished by Professor Michel Mollat, who refers to the *Composo da Navigare* of c.1250"; see Morison, *Northern Voyages*, 387.

19 Bideaux, *Jacques Cartier, Relations*, 113-14.



**Figure 2: Cartier's approximate course from Cap d'Espoir to Baie de Gaspé: 1 = Cap d'Espoir (Cap de Pratto), 2 = anchoring location in Anse à Beaufils, and 3 = anchoring location at the entrance of Baie de Gaspé.**

Source: Donald Cahill and Martin Ouellet (Amphibia-Nature).

There is a controversy among historians over exactly which cape was Cartier's Cap de Pratto, and over the meaning and origin of the word itself.<sup>20</sup> There are also diverse opinions as to whether Cartier named it or whether the name is older than Cartier's first voyage. In order to identify clearly which cape it was, it is important

20 Ganong identified Cartier's Cap de Pratto as Mont Sainte-Anne and Percé; see Ganong, *Crucial Maps*, 284-5. Biggar considered it to be Cap d'Espoir; see Biggar *Voyages of Jacques Cartier*, 58. Deschênes and Morison considered the Cap de Pratto as Cap Blanc (Whitehead); see E.-B. Deschênes, "L'apport de Cartier et de Jean Alfonse dans l'ononastique de la Gaspésie," *Bulletin des Recherches Historiques* 40, no. 7 (1934): 410-30, and Morison, *Northern Voyages*, 386. Richmond, Lewis, and more recently Mimeault have identified the Cap de Pratto as Rocher Percé

not to rely solely on distances given by Cartier in his account but to also carefully examine other important pieces of evidence such as his compass headings, descriptions of geographical features, and soundings as well as the state of the sea and the weather conditions.

The essence of navigation in this era was dead-reckoning, which means "plotting your course and position on a chart from the three elements of direction, time, and speed."<sup>21</sup> A precise measurement of the distance travelled required knowledge of the ship's speed. Among the problems involved was an inability to measure time precisely, compounded by having only an approximate knowledge of the speed of currents. Cartier had no chip log or other reliable method of measuring accurately the speed of his vessels,<sup>22</sup> and he frequently used the word "environ" (approximately) when giving a distance travelled. For all that, Ganong rightly observed "His few soundings, matched on our charts, are surprisingly accurate. His compass directions, of course always magnetic, are rarely much in error, and in cases we have reason to suspect a vagary of copyists. He was least successful in his distances, which, in absence of the log or equivalent, could be nothing but estimations."<sup>23</sup> His accounts of distance were estimations certainly, but more than just guesswork. Cartier and his pilots were skilled and experienced navigators and an error of one or two leagues is quite acceptable when sailing uncharted water with 16th century crude instruments, especially when confronted by bad weather conditions, strong tidal currents, and poor visibility.<sup>24</sup>

One of the most important things a pilot must know is the depth of water under the vessel's keel. Sailing unknown coastal waters, Cartier's men were constantly taking soundings with their leadline, a precise and reliable instrument when properly operated. When he left Conche Saint Martin Cartier travelled approximately 18 leagues (some 56 km), and at Cap de Pratto his soundings, which were accurate, warned him of an area of shallow water (*petit fontz*).<sup>25</sup> We believe that Cartier's *petit*

and Percé. See Frederick J. Richmond, "The Landing Place of Jacques Cartier at Gaspé, in 1534," *Report of the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Historical Association* 1, no. 1 (1922): 38-46; Lewis, "Notes on Some Details of the Explorations by Jacques Cartier," 117; and Mario Mimeault, "Le régime français 1534-1763," in *Gaspé au fil du temps*, ed. Fabien Sinnett, Mario Mimeault, and Ginette Roy (Gaspé, QC: Ville de Gaspé, 2009), 18.

21 Samuel E. Morison, *The European Discovery of America: The Southern Voyages, A.D. 1492-1616* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 55.

22 "It is not known what Englishman developed the idea of the log and log-line. The earliest reference in any language appeared in *A Regiment of the Sea*, published in 1574 by William Bourne. It had already been in use for a time when Bourne reported it, and was probably developed between 1553 and 1573"; see Duane A. Cline, *Navigation in the Age of Discovery: An Introduction* (Rogers, AR: Montfleury, 1990), 112. "La ligne de loch, pour le calcul de la vitesse, n'est apparemment pas encore en usage [au temps de Cartier]"; see Gilles Proulx, *Une nef pour Jacques Cartier, première partie: une évocation* (Québec, QC: Patrimoine Canada, 1998), 88.

23 Ganong, *Crucial Maps*, 261.

24 There is no doubt that Cartier and his pilots were able to make celestial observations in order to determine their latitude.

25 "Shallow, adj., shallow water. We are in shallow water. Take soundings carefully, for we are in shallow water. Peu profond, eau peu profonde, bas-fond. Nous sommes sur des petits fonds. Sondez avec soin, car nous sommes sur des bas-fonds"; see Henry Witcomb and Edmond Tiret, *Dictionary of Nautical Terms French-English & English-French*, 2nd volume (Paris: Challamel aîné, 1883), 530.



**Figure 3: On Cap d'Espoir a lighthouse marks the Leander Shoal, where there is only 4.3 m of water.**

Source: Photo by Martin Ouellet (Amphibia-Nature).

fontz was Leander Shoal (Haut-fond Leander), which lies 1.5 nautical miles (2.8 km) off Cap d'Espoir. The stretch of water between Port-Daniel and Percé is free from danger except at Leander Shoal where that the water depth changes suddenly, measuring only 14 feet (4.3 m).<sup>26</sup> Leander Shoal is well known to local mariners and is best avoided in rough weather. It is considered a difficult area, especially for small craft,<sup>27</sup> and presents a danger of grounding for large vessels with deep draught. At Leander Shoal, facing adverse winds and bad seas,<sup>28</sup> Cartier decided to sail closer to shore between Cap de Pratto and an island approximately one league east of it in order to anchor for the night. This island is unanimously identified by historians as Île Bonaventure.

26 Fisheries and Ocean Canada, Nautical Map 4485, *Cap Des Rosiers to Chandler*, Edition Sept. 26 1997. "Nearly 2 miles S.S.E. from Cape Despair [Cap d'Espoir] lies the sunken rock, called the Leander Shoal, over which there is a depth of 16 feet of water in one spot"; see John Purdy and Alexander G. Findlay, *The British American Navigator: A Sailing Directory for the Island and Banks of Newfoundland, the Gulf of St. Lawrence, Breton Island, Nova Scotia, the Bay of Fundy, etc.* (London: R.H. Laurie, 1847), 142.

27 "Haut-fond Leander. Winds easterly or southeasterly, high breaking waves. Cap d'Espoir extends underwater. Very difficult zone. One of the most difficult areas in Baie des Chaleurs"; see Environment Canada, *The Secrets of the St. Lawrence: Marine Weather Guide* (Saint-Laurent: Environment Canada, 1992), 20.

28 "Shallows, n. Avoid these shallows, as we are sometimes struck by heavy seas. We are going to pass over shallows, we shall perhaps get some bad strokes of the sea"; see Witcomb and Tired, *Dictionary of Nautical Terms*, 530.



The manoeuvre described here by Cartier is quite clear. He took shelter in the cove of Anse à Beaufile, partially protected by the headland of Cap Blanc. Our conclusion is that Cap de Pratto is Cap d'Espoir.<sup>29</sup> The Rocher Percé cannot be considered as Cap de Pratto, as the Île Bonaventure lay between south and south-southeast of the rock when using Cartier's compass.<sup>30</sup> The channel between Île Bonaventure and Cap Blanc or Rocher Percé cannot be considered as shallow, the depth of water varying between 11 and 20 fathoms (20 and 37 m), as it is deep enough to accommodate even today's largest ships.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, Cartier's narratives identified Cap de Pratto as the entrance of Baie des Chaleurs<sup>32</sup> and also informed us that this bay runs east-northeast and west-southwest.<sup>33</sup> We cannot consider the Rocher Percé or Cap Blanc as the entrance of Baie des Chaleurs and, following Cartier's compass, it is at Cap d'Espoir that the coastline takes an east-northeast and west-southwest orientation.<sup>34</sup>

On Monday, 13 July, at daybreak, Cartier's ships left the cove of Anse à Beaufile with the intention of following the coast. It ran north-northeast, which suits the orientation of the coast between Cap Blanc and Rocher Percé. But at Cap Blanc, strong northeasterly winds prevented them from sailing any further and so they had to anchor again, for the rest of the day, in the cove of Anse à Beaufile. It was not possible for Cartier to sail through the channel between Percé and Île Bonaventure against strong northeast or north-northeast winds with his ships. If a sailing ship wishes to proceed in the direction from which the wind is blowing, it is necessary to follow a zigzag course, known as tacking. Square-rigged ships could not come closer to the wind than six points (roughly 60 degrees). This meant that there was a sector of 12 points where the wind was contrary.<sup>35</sup> In the narrow channel between Percé and Île Bonaventure, any fresh breeze from the northeast invariably builds up big swells and breaking waves, and this also would have prevented Cartier's ships from tacking into the wind.<sup>36</sup> If Cartier could sail his ships through this difficult

29 Cartier's estimation of the distance between Cap d'Espoir and Île Bonaventure was inaccurate, partly because of the bad conditions of sea, strong tidal current, and deteriorating weather he experienced on the Leander Shoal.

30 The magnetic compass and the leadline were the main tools of the mariners of that period.

31 "Between Bonaventure Island and the Percé Rock the channel is about 1 1/3 miles wide and free from danger"; see Henry W. Bayfield, *Sailing Directions for the Gulf and River of St. Lawrence* (London: Hydrographic Office, 1837), 78. Bayfield was a naval officer and hydrographic surveyor for the British Admiralty.

32 "Et fysmes courir jusques le travers du cap de Prato qui est commencement de la baye de Chaleur" (Cartier's second voyage); see Bideaux, *Jacques Cartier, Relations*, 183.

33 "Icelle baye gist est nordest et ouaist surouaist" (Cartier's first voyage); see Bideaux, *Jacques Cartier, Relations*, 109.

34 "The entrance to Baie des Chaleurs is guarded to the north by the Haut-fond Leander and, to the south, by the Miscou shoals"; see Environment Canada, *Secrets of the St. Lawrence*, 58. "Beginning with Cape Despair, at the entrance of the Bay of Chaleur"; see Bayfield, *Sailing Directions*, 77. "Cape Despair, the N.E. point of the Bay of Chaleur"; see Bayfield, *Sailing Directions*, 78.

35 "A square rigged vessel when clause-hauled, (i.e. as close to the wind as she can possibly lie), can approach no nearer to it than six points"; see Darcy Lever, *The Young Sea Officer's Sheet Anchor, or, a Key to the Leading of Rigging, and to Practical Seamanship* (London: Longman, 1808), 75.

36 "If the vessel were a dull sailer, or if the bow was knocked back by waves, the manoeuvre [tacking] might fail"; see Brian Lavery, *The Line of Battle: The Sailing Warship, 1650-1840* (London: Conway Maritime Press, 1992), 177.



channel against strong headwinds, probably towing his longboats, nothing would prevent him from continuing his course for Baie de Gaspé. However, to sail against the wind, if it could be done at all, it was necessary to proceed with extended tacks.

So the next morning, this time not trying to follow the coast through the channel, the vessels aimed to get round Île Bonaventure and with a series of tacks they sailed five or six leagues (some 30 km) north of Cap de Pratto. What was then the meaning and origin of the word “pratto”? Some historians believe it to be a Spanish word meaning “meadow” that was given by anonymous Basque fishermen on early fishing voyage.<sup>37</sup> The Spanish and Portuguese translation for meadow is *prado*.<sup>38</sup> The absence of any concrete material evidence of fishermen presence on the Gaspé coast before Cartier’s exploration enjoins us to be sceptical about pre-Cartier fishing voyages in this area. Cartier was using an old French word – “prateau”<sup>39</sup> – a “small meadow” (petit pré). As defined by Moisy, “Prat, du lat. *pratium*, se dit encore pour pré. En italien *prato* et en espagnol *prado*. Prat avait un diminutif, prateau. En provençal, ce diminutif est pradel ou pradet.”<sup>40</sup> The forms pratto and prato are possibly spelling variations of prateau in the narratives, or may have been taken from one of the numerous dialects of the time. The Desceliers world map of 1546 gives Cap de Prey. It seems that there were several words to describe a meadow or pré in old France.<sup>41</sup> Two of these words were “prael” and “placel.”<sup>42</sup>

For what reason did Cartier used the toponym Cap de Pratto to identify Cap d’Espoir? Considering that this rocky coast was full of trees at that time, Cartier was not pointing to the existence of a meadow on these cliffs.<sup>43</sup> We believe that Cartier used the word pratto as a nautical term, an equivalent of the word *parcel* used by the Portuguese mariners of the early 16th century – that is, a word that designated a

37 “Le village de Percé est alors fréquenté par des pêcheurs et l’endroit porte, au moment de son passage, le nom de *Cap Pratto*, cap du pré en espagnol. Cartier ne donne pas de nom à ce lieu; ce sont ceux qui pêchent là qui lui apprennent et il ne fait que nous le transmettre”; see Mimeault, *Le régime français 1534-1763*, 18.

38 “Prado, s. m. Pré. + Promenade publique de Madrid, etc.”; see J. L. Barthelemy Cormon, *Dictionnaire portatif et de prononciation, Espagnol-Français et Français-Espagnol, à l’usage des deux nations* (Lyon: Chez B. Cormon et Blanc, 1800), 545. “Prado, s. m. Pré, prairie”; see Pierre Beaume, *Nouveau dictionnaire de poche Français-Portugais* (Bordeaux: Chez Pierre Beaume, 1811), 334.

39 “Prateau: s. m. (v. Lang), petit pré; Prat: s. m. (v. Lang), pré, terrain couvert d’herbe”; see Académie française, *Complément du dictionnaire de l’Académie française* (Bruxelles: Wahlen, 1843), 824. “Prateau, petit pré: item une *prateau* avec une petite aubraye, audit Cheseau appartenant [an. 1458]”; see Jean-Baptiste de la Curne de Sainte-Palaye, *Dictionnaire historique de l’ancien langage français*, Tome huitième (Paris: H. Champion, 1875), 417.

40 Henri Moisy, *Noms de familles normands: étudiés dans leurs rapports avec la vieille langue et spécialement avec le dialecte normand ancien et moderne* (Paris: F. Vieweg, 1875), 377-8.

41 On the numerous words used for meadow, see J. B. De Roquefort, *Glossaire de la langue Romane*, Tome second (Paris: B. Warée oncle, 1808), 388-9.

42 “Prael, prael, pré, prairie, *pratium*”; see François Lacombe, *Dictionnaire du vieux langage français* (Paris: Chez Panckoucke, 1766), 381.

43 “Continuant la mesme route environ six lieuës la coste est des terres hautes & des rochers, au pied desquels la mer bat, le haut est chargé de sapins & de quelques autres arbres meslez; cette coste est dangereuse, il s’y est perdu un navire Basque il y a six ou sept ans; le bout de cette coste est le cap d’Espoir”; see Nicolas Denys, *Description géographique et historique des costes de l’Amerique septentrionale*, Tome 1 (Paris: Chez Claude Barbin, 1672), 224-5.

shoal or a bank – an area of shallow water where navigation could be hazardous in bad weather.<sup>44</sup> Since Leander Shoal is a bank of very small size, Cartier seemingly used the word *pratto* as a diminutive form of the Portuguese *parcel* or the French *placel*.<sup>45</sup> In this regard, it is well worth noting that Cartier knew the Portuguese language.<sup>46</sup> When scrutinizing the two narratives of Cartier, we observe that he had several nautical words to describe a reef or a bank close to the surface: “bastures,” “basses,” “hesiers,” “bancq,” “arasiffes,” and “plateys.” But to describe a small underwater bank like the Leander Shoal, he seemed limited to *petit fontz*, as the words “bas-fond” or “haut-fond” were probably not in use in his time, or at least not known by him.<sup>47</sup> It was part of Cartier's duty, as master-pilot for the king, to make maps of his explorations and survey the hazard of navigation. Did Cartier name the cape himself? It is possible that early fishermen could have informed Cartier of the existence of a strait (Baie des Chaleurs) open to the west, but, since there is no documentary or historical evidence of European presence before Cartier in this area, we have to consider highly plausible that Cartier himself named the Cap de Pratto on his voyage of 1534.

The two ships then continued their exploration:

Et nous estans le travers d'icelle ripviere nous vint le vent controire et force bruymes et non veue et nous convint entrer dedans icelle rivyere le mardi XIII<sup>e</sup> jour dudit moys et posames à l'entree jusques au XVI<sup>e</sup> esperant avoyr bon temps et sortyr. Et ledit jour XVI<sup>e</sup> qui est jeudi le vent renfforça tellement que l'un de noz navires perdyt une ancre et nous convynt entrer plus avant sept ou

44 “On s'embarqua l'après-midi entre deux et trois heures, par un vent de sud-ouest assez modéré, avec une mer traitable. C'est ce qu'on ne trouve pas toujours au Cap Désespoir [Cap d'Espoir], où la mer est quelquefois si furieuse, qu'à moins de raser le Cap, on est exposé au plus grand danger, y ayant au large des tourbillons d'eau contre lesquels il est très difficile de se défendre dans les grandes tempêtes”; see Joseph O. Plessis, “Journal de deux voyages apostoliques dans le golfe Saint-Laurent et les provinces d'en bas, en 1811 et 1812,” in *Le Foyer Canadien*, Tome 3 (Québec, 1865), 133.

45 “Parcel, s. m. de mar, bas fond, écueil (pl. Parceis)”; see Joseph da Fonseca, *Nouveau dictionnaire de poche Français-Portugais et Portugais-Français* (Paris: Thiériot, 1836), 464. “Placel, s. m. Naut. Parcel”; see Fonseca, *Nouveau dictionnaire de poche Français-Portugais et Portugais-Français*, 373. “G. Do Pracel. Ricc. = le golfe du banc de sable” (Atlas de la Riccardiana, 1534-1540); see Henry Harisse, *Découverte et évolution cartographique de Terre-Neuve et des pays circonvoisins* (Paris: H. Welter, 1900), 200. “Dans la Grande Enciclopédia portuguesa, on lit à l'article *Parcel* . . . “écueil, récif, banc de sable . . . parages malsains, tempêtes”; see Leif Sletsjoe, “L'origine de parcel, pracel, placel, etc.,” in *Litterae Hispanae et Lusitanae* (Munich, 1968), 474. It is also possible that the Portuguese word *parcel* has a Catalan or French origin: “Jusqu'à nouvel ordre nous devons considérer le catalan (-er ou bien -ell) comme l'origine des formes *placel* et *placer* en français et en espagnol, ensuite de *pracel* et des formes subséquentes du portugais”; see Sletsjoe, “L'origine,” 486.

46 Biggar, *Collection of Documents*, 476.

47 “Tous ces synonymes, qui ne devraient pas en être, sont typiques de la confusion sémantique du langage géographique des XVI, XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles. Le XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle clarifiera et éteindra, en partie, cette concurrence des synonymes qui ne fait qu'aggraver le manque de précision”; see Christian Morissonneau, “Dénommer les terres neuves: Cartier et Champlain,” *Études littéraires* 10, no. 1-2 (avril-août 1977): 85-123.

huit lieues amont icelle riviere en ung bon [hable] et seur que nous avyons esté veoyr avec noz barques. Et pour le mauveyz temps sarraize et non veue qu'il fist fusmes en icelluy hable et ryviere jusques au XXV<sup>e</sup> jour dudit moys sans en pouvoir sortyr durant lequel temps nous vint grand nombre de sauvaiges qui estoient venuz en ladite riviere pour pescher des masqueareaulx desquelz il y a grant habondance. Et estoient tant homes femmes que enfans plus de deux cens personnes qui avoyent envyron quarente barques.<sup>48</sup>

Sailing off the entrance of Baie de Gaspé, on Tuesday, 14 July, Cartier's ships encountered such strong contrary winds, fog, and poor visibility that they were forced to seek shelter inside the bay. These conditions, and the course he had sailed round Île Bonaventure, explain why Cartier made no description of remarkable features such as Rocher Percé, Mont Sainte-Anne, Pic de l'Aurore, La Malbaie, Cap Gaspé, or Rocher La Vieille.<sup>49</sup> They undoubtedly anchored somewhere between Cap Gaspé and Anse aux Amérindiens (formerly Anse aux Sauvages), temporarily protected by the high cliffs of Cap Gaspé,<sup>50</sup> to wait for better weather and make ready to set sail. They remained anchored near the entrance of Baie de Gaspé until the 16th, when the wind increased to such an extent that one of the ships lost an anchor.

To be sure, the expedition was not seriously compromised by the loss of one anchor. As noted by Proulx: "L'inventaire de la 'Michèle' de 120 tonneaux indique quatre ancrs; c'est aussi le cas de la 'Marie-Johan' de Bordeaux de 80 tonneaux. Le vaisseau 'l'Hermine' de 500 tonneaux en compte six mais il n'y en a que quatre sur la 'Barbe,' pendant qu'un navire de 39 pieds de quille et un tonnage sans doute inférieur à 70 tonneaux n'en possède que trois."<sup>51</sup> The anchor was one of the vital pieces of equipment of every sailing ship. The number of anchors carried aboard varied, depending on the size of the ship. Cartier's 60-ton ships would have carried at least three to four anchors each.<sup>52</sup> Yet the loss of one anchor indicated that Cartier's crew was dealing with a significant storm, with thick fog and strong

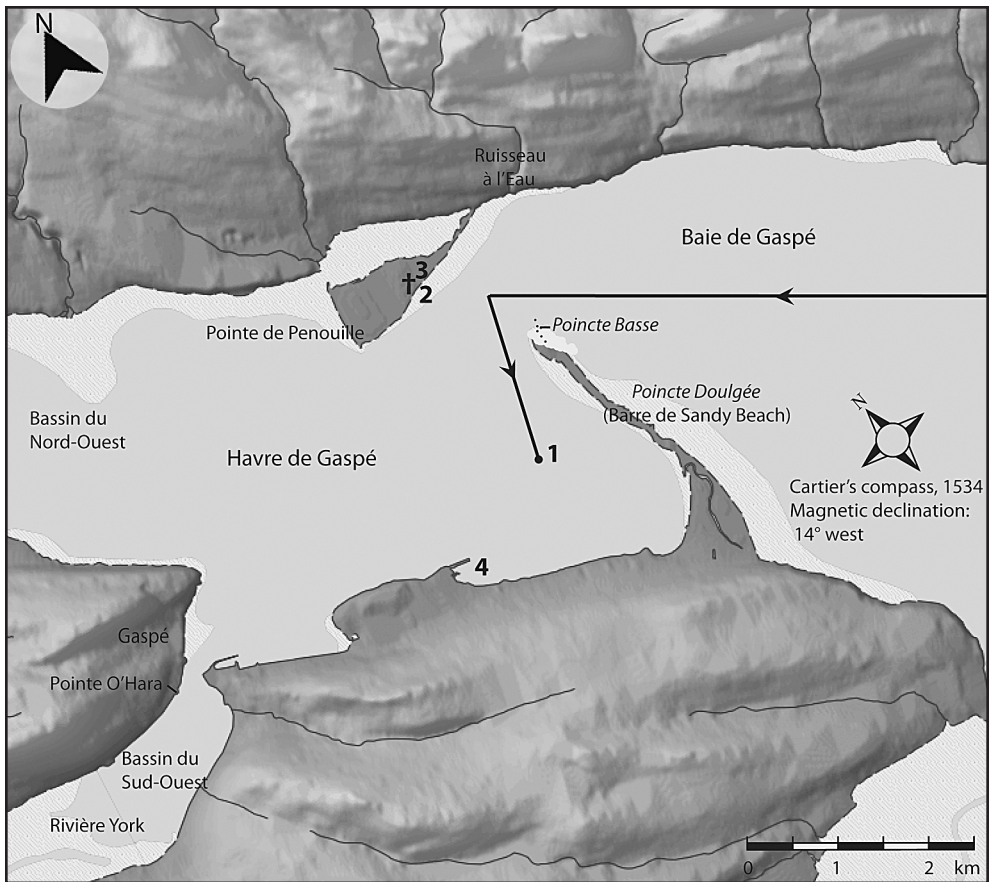
48 Bideaux, *Jacques Cartier, Relations*, 114.

49 We disagree with the theory claiming that the Rocher Percé was connected with the adjacent cape of Mont Joli in Cartier's time. In his *Cosmographie* of 1544, Jean Alfonse indicated the existence of three islands between Baye des Molues (La Malbaie) and Baye de Chaleur, without any doubt Île Plate, Rocher Percé, and Île Bonaventure: "Et entre les deux y a trois isles, une grande et deux petites"; see Bideaux, *Jacques Cartier, Relations*, 217.

50 "There is an anchorage with good holding ground, but in not less than 17 fathoms, except within a quarter of a mile of the shore, abreast of St. George Cove, Grande-Grève, and Little Gaspé"; see Bayfield, *Sailing Directions*, 81.

51 Proulx, *Une nef pour Jacques Cartier*, 139.

52 "Juan Escalante de Mendoza (*Ytinerario de navegacion de los mares y tierras occidentales*, Séville, 1575) mentionne que, peu importe sa taille, un navire doit toujours être équipé d'au moins quatre *amarras*, une *amarra* étant constituée d'une ancre et d'un cable. Trois ancrs sont destinées à l'usage usuel, tandis que la quatrième, appelée *amarra de forma*, ne sert que lorsque le navire court un grand danger"; see Charles D. Moore, Marc-André Bernier, and Daniel LaRoche, "Les appareils de mouillage," in *L'archéologie subaquatique de Red Bay, la construction navale et la pêche à la baleine basques au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Volume 4, ed. Robert Grenier, Marc-André Bernier, and Willis Stevens (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 2007), 71-90.



**Figure 4: Cartier's approximate course in Havre de Gaspé: 1 = anchoring location, 2 = Jacques Cartier's cross, 3 = Iroquoians' campsite, and 4 = actual port of Sandy Beach.**

Source: Donald Cahill and Martin Ouellet (Amphibia-Nature).

easterly or southeasterly winds causing heavy swells in the bay. They had to leave that precarious and unreliable anchorage in 17 fathoms (31 m) of water. They took shelter 7 or 8 leagues (some 21 km) farther into the bay (a mere estimation in such conditions of fog, rain, and wind), in a good and safe harbour that they had previously explored with their longboats. Cartier brought his ships behind the sand bar of Sandy Beach, where they were in perfect safety, protected from the heavy swells and breaking waves then raging in the outer part of Baie de Gaspé.<sup>53</sup>

53 "A natural dam or breakwater [Sandy Beach], upon which the heavy swell, which often rolls into the bay, can produce no effect, expending its strength in the shoal water before reaching the beach"; see Bayfield, *Sailing Directions*, 82.

Where exactly did Cartier anchor his ships inside the sand bars of Sandy Beach and Pointe de Penouille? It is important to note that Havre de Gaspé, just inside the sand bars of Sandy Beach and Pointe de Penouille, was, and is still today one of the best harbours in North America. As an 18th-century author emphasized:

La baie de Gaspé a deux lieues et demie environ de largeur prise du Fourillon à Saint-Pierre; elle n'en a qu'une et un quart à deux lieues plus haut; il y a en cet endroit une batture de sable et de gravier [sand bar of Sandy Beach] qui vient du sud et ne laisse pour chenal qu'un tiers de lieue. Il se forme au-dessus de cette baie un bassin [Havre de Gaspé] qu'on nomme Penouille, ayant trois quart de lieue en tous sens. Des vaisseaux de toutes grandeurs y peuvent mouiller et ils y sont en sûreté de tous vents. La Baie se partage ensuite en deux branches dont l'une qui en est la continuité s'appelle Baie du Nord-Ouest et l'autre, sur la gauche, est nommé Baie du Sud-Ouest [Rivière York]. L'entrée de cette dernière est très étroite et d'autant plus difficile que les deux pointes qui la terminent ont chacune une batture de sable qui se croisent et laissent un chenal large de 40 toises environ; il n'y peut passer ordinairement que des vaisseaux dont les plus gros de 200 tonneaux.<sup>54</sup>

Cartier had no reason to steer his vessels through this intricate passage to Rivière York (Bassin du Sud-Ouest), taking the risk of running aground, while he was already in perfect safety in the harbour. They were in a better position in the harbour with more room to manoeuvre, and would have been almost ready to sail with a fair wind and good weather conditions. As the later surveyor Henry W. Bayfield would put it: "The admirable bay of Gaspé possesses advantages which may hereafter render it one of the most important places, in a maritime point of view, in these seas. It contains an excellent outer roadstead, off Douglastown; a harbour at its head, capable of holding a numerous fleet in perfect safety; and a basin where the largest ships might be hove down and refitted."<sup>55</sup> It is reasonable to believe that Cartier anchored his two ships in Havre de Gaspé, southwest of the sand bar of Sandy Beach.

In his *Cosmographie*<sup>56</sup> written in 1544, Jean Alfonse, who was pilot for Sieur de Roberval's expedition of 1542, gave a detailed description of the sailing directions to enter the harbour and indicated exactly where to anchor. Alfonse, a contemporary of Jacques Cartier, was considered an expert mariner in his time:

La baye de Onguedo [Honguedo] gist nord norouest et su suest, et est une bonne baye. Et pour entrer en icelle, se fault ranger du cousté de la terre du nord, à cause d'une poincte basse, qui est devers le surouest; et quant vous serez au dedans d'elle, venez

54 Sieur De Laubinière, "Idée de la Baye de Gaspé," Ph/340/(Baye de)Gaspé/1746, Library and Archives Canada (LAC).

55 Bayfield, *Sailing Directions*, 80.

56 Jean Fonteneau, dit Alfonse de Saintonge, capitaine-pilote de François 1<sup>er</sup>, *La cosmographie avec l'espère et régime du soleil et du nord*, Manuscript of 1544 (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France), first published and annotated by Georges Musset (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1904).



querir la bande du su, et laissez la poincte Doulgée du cousté de babort, environ la longueur de deux cables et bouterez l'ancre en l'ance, quinze bras[s]es, devers le surouest. Au dedans de cette baye y a deux rivières, l'une qui va au nord et l'autre qui va à l'ouest surouest; et entre les deux y a une haulte montaigne.<sup>57</sup>

There is no ambiguity in Alfonse's indications to enter Havre de Gaspé. You must keep your vessel on the north side to avoid a shoal, poincte Basse, which lies to the southwest. This poincte Basse<sup>58</sup> was a spit of sand extending underwater at the northern extremity of the sand bar of Sandy Beach.<sup>59</sup> This underwater shoal was still considered as a danger in 1847, and Purdy and Findlay gave the same advice as Alfonse in their sailing directions. They warned mariners always to "beware of the south point entrance [Sandy Beach], off which the shoal water extends to some distance," and added that "in rounding the point of beach, give it a berth of a quarter of a mile, in order to avoid a shallow spit which extends from it."<sup>60</sup>

Continuing with Alfonse's indications, once the poincte Basse is clear you must steer your vessel toward the south shore [Sandy Beach hamlet] keeping poincte Doulgée a distance of two cables length<sup>61</sup> on your port side (left side); then you may drop anchor in the southwest of the cove in 15 brasses (25 m; near the actual port of Sandy Beach). This text indicates clearly that poincte Doulgée was the first name given to the actual sand bar of Sandy Beach. This old French word "doulgée" – means delicate and fine – and describes perfectly this remarkable sand bar.<sup>62</sup> It could have been named by Cartier, early fishermen, or by Alfonse himself. Alfonse's instruction to enter Havre de Gaspé matches perfectly those given by Captain Bayfield 300 years later in his sailing directions. A map of 1778-1781, made by Des Barres, a military engineer and surveyor for the British Admiralty, shows an area of 13 to 15 fathoms (23 to 27 m) in the southwest of the cove of Sandy Beach.<sup>63</sup> Water depths in Rivière York's Basin, between 5 to 9 fathoms (9 to 16 m), do not match Alfonse's anchoring location.

57 Bideaux, *Jacques Cartier, Relations*, 216-17.

58 "Basses. Sub. f. pl. Bancs de sable, ou rochers cachés sous l'eau. L'entrée de ce port est dangereuse, parce qu'il y a des basses à droite & à gauche"; see Académie française, *Dictionnaire de L'académie française dédié au roy* (Paris: Chez Jean Baptiste Coignard, 1694), 86.

59 See also Danièle Raby, Samuel Pinna, Jean-Étienne Joubert, Martin Ouellet, and Marie-Claude Brière, *Plan de protection et de mise en valeur de la barre de Sandy Beach* (Gaspé: Comité de concertation de la Baie-de-Gaspé, 2008).

60 Purdy and Findlay, *British American Navigator*, 140-1.

61 "In England, a 'cable's length' as a measure of distance was 100 fathoms, or 183 meters. In France, the *encablure* was 120 *brasses*, or 194.9 metres"; see John Harland, *Seamanship in the Age of Sail* (London: Conway Maritime Press, 1984), 232.

62 "Dougée: on appelle ainsi en Anjou, en Touraine, au Maine, & dans le Vendomois, ce qui est délié & fin"; see Gilles Ménage, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue françoise*, Tome premier (Paris: Chez Briasson, 1750), 484. "Les paysans du Haut-Maine se servent encore de *deugé*, *dougé*, pour signifier fin, délié"; see Frédéric Godefroy, *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française et de tous ses dialectes du IX au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Tome deuxième (Paris: F. Vieweg, 1883), 482. "Soie doulgée, fine et douce"; Manuscrit de Guillaume Oudin, 1710, in Charles Ménière, *Glossaire Angevin étymologique comparé avec différents dialectes* (Paris: Mémoires de la Société académique de Maine-et-Loire, 1881), 330.

63 Joseph F. W. Des Barres, Map of Bay the Gaspé and Adjacent Coast, 1778-1781, Charts and Maps Collection, HNS 129C, National Maritime Museum, London.





**Figure 5: Pointe de Penouille at the entrance of Havre de Gaspé.**

Source: Photo by Donald Cahill (Amphibia-Nature).

It was at this time, in mid-July, that Cartier's crew met with St. Lawrence Iroquoians<sup>64</sup> who lived along the shore of the St. Lawrence River Valley. More than 200 persons (men, women, as well as children) had travelled to Havre de Gaspé to fish for mackerel, of which there was a great abundance. Cartier's account mentions seeing a large quantity of mackerel, which the Natives caught close to shore with nets.<sup>65</sup> On his map of Baie de Gaspé, Captain Thomas Bell, who was secretary and aide-de-camp to General Wolfe, noted about Sandy Beach: "Part of Sand Bank dry at high water; fine mackrell on it."<sup>66</sup> The prevalence of these fish in this area is confirmed by Pierre Fortin's later account. On his way to Sandy Beach aboard his ship's boat in the summer of 1857, Fortin came across some 20 boats, line-fishing for what he described as an abundance of mackerel in this part of Baie de Gaspé.<sup>67</sup>

64 "Havre de Gaspé, 16 juillet 1534. Cartier, sitôt abrité de la houle du golfe, croise pour la première fois des Iroquoiens: environ 200 Stadaconiens, hommes, femmes et enfants"; see Roland Tremblay and Claude Chapdelaine, "La fin d'une ère, le début d'un mystère, rencontres, disparitions et hypothèses"; see *Les Iroquoiens du Saint-Laurent, peuple du maïs*, ed. Roland Tremblay (Montréal: Éditions de l'Homme, en collaboration avec Pointe-à-Callière, Musée d'archéologie et d'histoire de Montréal, 2006), 100.

65 "Qu'ilz avoyent pesché bort à bort de terre avecques des raiz"; see Bideaux, *Jacques Cartier, Relations*, 115. "Bort à bort" is the old French for "bord à bord," which Jal translated as "along side"; see Augustin Jal, *Glossaire Nautique* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1848), 312, 317.

66 Thomas Bell, "Journal of the Gaspé expedition & other matter" (1758), MG18-Msérie3, vol. 24, LAC.

67 Rapport annuel de Pierre Fortin, *Journaux de l'Assemblée législative* 15, no. 5, appendice no. 23 (Québec, 1857).

The Atlantic mackerel (*Scomber scombrus*) is a salt-water fish that never penetrates into fresh water, so the area surrounding the channel between Sandy Beach and Pointe de Penouille was certainly the best spot for the Iroquoians to spread their fishing nets. The most probable location for the Iroquoians' campsite was not on the narrow isolated sand bar of Sandy Beach, but on Pointe de Penouille at the entrance of the harbour. There, they had a small wooded area accessible for fire and shelter;<sup>68</sup> they were close to their fishing grounds, they had access to a stream of fresh water close by (Ruisseau à l'Eau), and they were also in a strategic position with a broad view of the entire Baie de Gaspé.<sup>69</sup>

On 24 July, a cross was raised at the entrance of the harbour:

Le XXIII<sup>me</sup> jour dudict moys nous fismes faire une croix de trente piedz de hault qui fut faicte devant plusieurs d'eulx sur la pointe de l'entree dudit hable soubz le croysillon de laquelle mismes ung escusson en bosse à troys fleurs de lys et dessus ung escripteau en boys engravé en grosse lettre de forme où il y avoit Vive le Roy de France. Et icelle croix plantasmes sur ladite pointe devant eulx lesquelz la regardoyent faire et planter . . . et puis leur monstrasmes par signe que ladite croix avoit esté plantee pour faire merche et ballise pour entrer dedans le hable . . . .<sup>70</sup>

We believe that Jacques Cartier and his crewmen erected the 30-foot (9-m) wooden cross on Pointe de Penouille, right next to the Iroquoians' encampment, and its essential purpose was to serve as a navigation landmark, a guide for mariners to enter Havre de Gaspé safely.<sup>71</sup> The instructions to enter the harbour given by Captain Bayfield's sailing directions also tend to confirm this conclusion.<sup>72</sup> The landmark's

68 It was probably into these woods of Pointe de Penouille that the young Iroquoian women retreated when Cartier and his men went ashore among them on Wednesday, 22 July. This action was described in Cartier's narrative; see Bideaux, *Jacques Cartier, Relations*, 115.

69 The St. Lawrence Iroquoians, like all Natives, were well adapted to their environment, and they had an excellent knowledge of the territory to undertake such summer fishing expeditions as far as 800 km from home. This practical way of using their canoes as shelters was even adopted by the voyageurs of the 17th and 18th centuries. They were well prepared for any weather conditions. Writing about the hard winter of his second voyage, Cartier noted: "Et sont tant hommes femmes que enfans plus durs que bestes au froyt car de la plus grande froydure que nous ayons veu laquelle a esté merveilleuse et aspre venoyent par dessus les glasses et neiges tous les jours à noz navires la pluspart d'eulx quasi tous nudz qui est chose increable qui ne l'a veu"; see Bideaux, *Jacques Cartier, Relations*, 161-2.

70 Bideaux, *Jacques Cartier, Relations*, 116.

71 Cartier's men also erected four other crosses, three of which were clearly navigation landmarks: at Saint Servan (Baie des Rochers, Côte-Nord) on the first voyage, and at Saint Nicollas (Baie Jalobert, Côte-Nord) and Ripviere de Fouez (Rivière Saint-Maurice, Mauricie) on the second voyage. Concerning the Gaspé cross location, Biggar and Lacoursière considered it to be at Pointe de Penouille; see Biggar, *Voyages of Jacques Cartier*, 64, and Jacques Lacoursière, *Histoire populaire du Québec*, Tome 1 (Sillery: Septentrion, 1995), 18. Richmond and Mimeault considered it to be at Pointe O'Hara inside the Rivière York; see Richmond, "The Landing Place," 38-46, and Mimeault, "Le régime français 1534-1763," 23-7.

72 Bayfield, *Sailing Directions*, 83-4. "Pt. Panard kept inside whale shed [on Pointe de Penouille] clears Sandy beach spit"; see Henry W. Bayfield, *Gulf of St. Lawrence, Gaspé and Mal bays*, (London, 1869), R11630-1-2-E Admiralty charts, LAC.



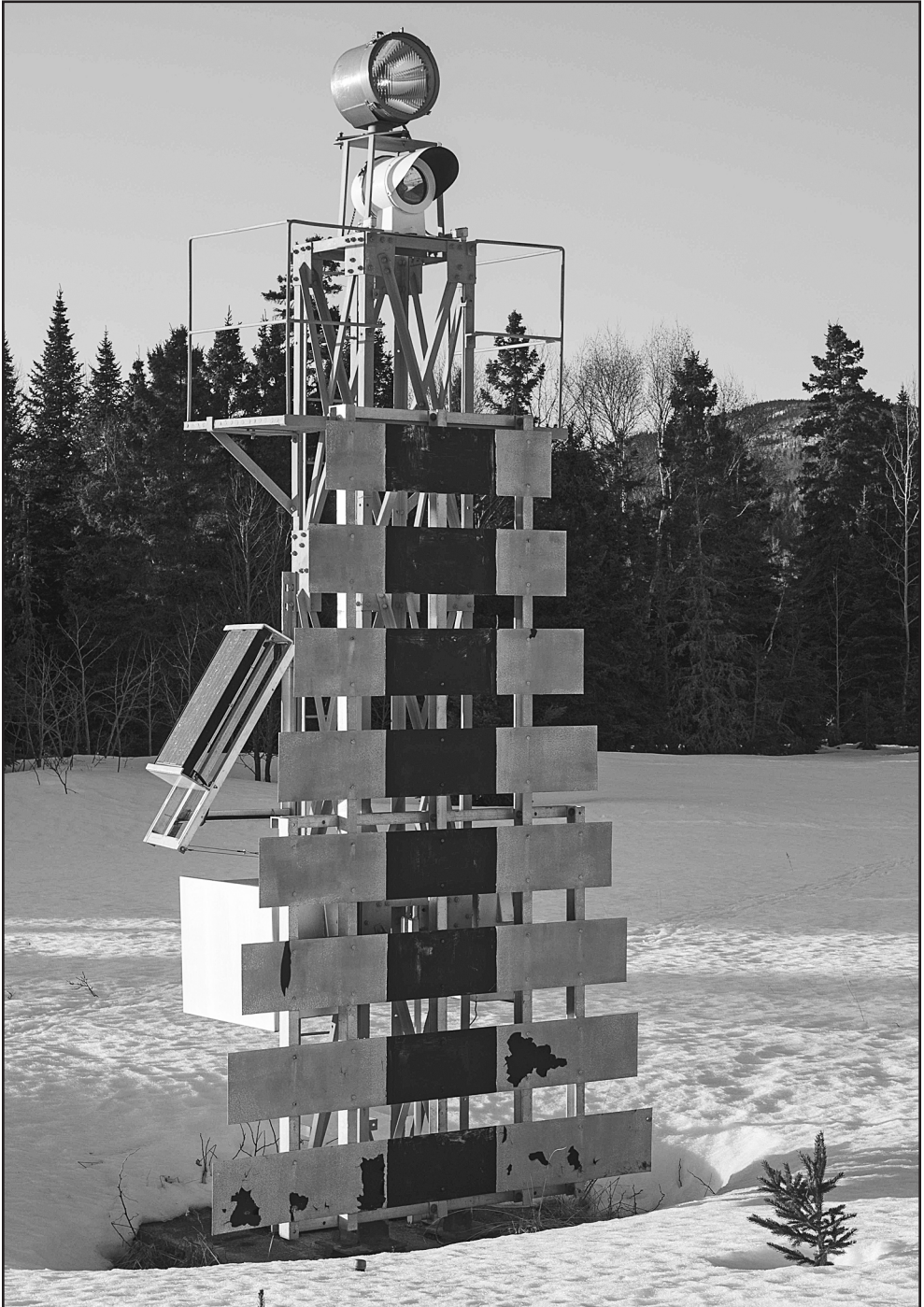
**Figure 6: Jacques Cartier's cross, a navigation landmark clearly visible at the entrance of the harbour.**

Source: Photo by Martin Ouellet (Amphibia-Nature).

alignment on Bayfield's map of Gaspé Harbour and Gaspé Basin of 1838 can also help us determine the approximate location where the cross would have been useful as a landmark on Pointe de Penouille. Clearly visible at the entrance of the harbour, the cross could also have made a strong political statement on behalf of the king of France. More than 480 years after Jacques Cartier's voyage, leading lights and a radar transponder beacon are located on Pointe de Penouille for the safety of modern mariners and commercial shipping.

The objective of this research note is to bring to bear a new examination of Jacques Cartier's exploration of the Gaspé coast in 1534. The *Relations* attributed to Jacques Cartier give us the first description of many areas of the Gulf of St. Lawrence and its Indigenous people in the early decades of the 16th century. It is highly plausible that Jacques Cartier and his crewmen were the first Europeans to sail the Gaspé coast, and we believe it is reasonable to consider his Cap de Pratto as Cap d'Espoir. Bad weather conditions and strong adverse winds forced Cartier's ships to sail round Île Bonaventure and seek shelter inside Havre de Gaspé, perfectly





**Figure 7: Leading lights and a radar transponder beacon on Pointe de Penouille.**

Source: Photo by Martin Ouellet (Amphibia-Nature).

protected by the pointe Doulgée (now called barre de Sandy Beach). It was during those days spent among the St. Lawrence Iroquoians, in a territory they called *Honguedo*, that Cartier and his crewmen erected a nine-metre wooden cross on Pointe de Penouille to serve as a navigation landmark.

The cross, on which they hung a shield with the Fleurs de Lys and the inscription “Vive le Roy de France,” was also a strong affirmation of France’s intentions for this territory. The raising of the cross may indicate that the Gaspé Peninsula and its immediate surroundings were not frequented by Spanish or Portuguese fishermen and were considered as new lands to be discovered.<sup>73</sup> The first appearance of the Gulf of St. Lawrence in early cartography was based on Cartier’s narratives and on his – now lost – original maps.<sup>74</sup> During a second voyage in 1535, Cartier continued his exploration up to the mouth of the St. Lawrence River, but he did not find a western passage to Asia nor precious metals. The first contact and trade he established with the St. Lawrence Iroquoians at Gaspé in 1534 would end in incomprehension, mistrust, and conflict during this second voyage.

Cartier’s expeditions, though not resulting in immediate benefits, had opened a new and vast country for the Kingdom of France. The Iroquoians, by contrast, would ultimately disappear as a group from the St. Lawrence River Valley. How, why, and when exactly this took place is highly debatable.<sup>75</sup> The rich fishing grounds of the Gulf of St. Lawrence and their adjacent shores were henceforth exploited for the development of the dry-cod fishery.<sup>76</sup> By the end of the 16th century, this waterway giving access to the hinterland would also prove profitable with the establishment of the fur trade industry, and eventually the colonization of a new territory called Nouvelle-France.<sup>77</sup>

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73 Regarding the papal bulls of 1493, Pope Clement VII came up with a new interpretation in 1533 that authorized King Francis I to take possession of the new lands he would discover; see Quinn, *North America from Earliest Discovery*, 171. Concerning the acts and rituals of possession over a territory for that period, see Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession: Europe’s Conquest of the New World, 1492-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

74 Ganong, *Crucial Maps*, 255.

75 See Bruce G. Trigger and James F. Pendergast, “Saint Lawrence Iroquoians,” in *Handbook of North American Indians*, Vol. 15, *Northeast*, ed. Bruce G. Trigger (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1978), 357-61.

76 Nicolas Denys, *Histoire naturelle des peuples, des animaux, des arbres & plantes de l’Amérique septentrionale, & de ses divers climats. Avec une description exacte de la pesche des moluës, tant sur le Grand-Banc qu’à la coste; & de tout ce qui s’y pratique de plus particulier, &c.*, Tome 2 (Paris: Chez Claude Barbin, 1672); Donald Cahill and Martin Ouellet, “Les chaloupes morutières utilisées sur les côtes de la Nouvelle-France vers 1650,” *Neptunia* 276 (décembre 2014): 35-41.

77 Raymonde Litalien and Denis Vaugeois (eds.), *Champlain: la naissance de l’Amérique française* (Quebec: Septentrion, 2004).