

## Exploration 1497 to 1650

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This series of maps depicts the extent of exploration that took place in Canada during the sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth centuries. There is little doubt that almost every recorded voyage of discovery proceeded from the accumulated knowledge of a host of anonymous Portuguese, Basque, French, Spanish and English fishermen who had preceded those who finally left a record of what they found. By the end of the sixteenth century the coast of eastern Canada from the Arctic Circle to Nova Scotia, with the exception of Hudson Bay were essentially known to Europeans.

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Cabot's Departure from Bristol, May 1496  
**Source:** City of Bristol Museum Art Gallery.

The overriding motive for exploration in the sixteenth century was the discovery of a sea route to the riches of Asia. By the beginning of the seventeenth century, attention had shifted from finding an easy western passage to Asia via the St. Lawrence River to the establishment of permanent settlement in order to solidify territorial claims and to further the development of the fur trade, fisheries and other resources.

The exploration of Canada in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries has been divided into two major periods:

- Maritime Exploration 1497 to 1599 and
- Penetration of the Eastern Great Lakes and Hudson Bay 1600 to 1650.

## **Maritime Exploration 1497 to 1599**

The sixteenth century exploration of Canada was divided into four major phases. The first, which lasted until about 1519, was largely confined to the east coast of Newfoundland and southeastern Labrador. During the second phase, which lasted from about 1519 to 1533, explorers, seeking a western passage to Asia, connected the Newfoundland discoveries to the earlier Caribbean discoveries by charting the Atlantic coast. The third phase was initiated by Jacques Cartier's explorations of the St. Lawrence River (1534). The fourth phase was begun by Martin Frobisher's penetration of the Arctic (1576).

## **Penetration of the Eastern Great Lakes and Hudson Bay 1600 – 1650**

During the first half of the seventeenth century exploration was divided into three major phases.

The first of these phases is represented by Champlain's resource surveys of the St. Lawrence River and Atlantic coast. Although the Atlantic coastline was known, Champlain described and mapped it in detail for the first time.

During the second phase French explorers penetrated the Great Lakes via the St. Lawrence River, and English navigators founded their way through Hudson Strait to explore Hudson Bay. French exploration ended temporarily with the British occupation of Québec from 1629 to 1632, while to the north, discouraging reports from Fox and James ended further English activities in 1632.

During the third phase, exploration was largely carried out by the Jesuit missionaries who consolidated European knowledge of the eastern Great Lakes. The period ended with the Iroquois wars and the displacement and dispersion of Aboriginal peoples allied to the French from their home territory in southern Ontario and adjacent parts of Quebec.