

## Churchill River

[http://www.ccge.org/resources/rivers\\_of\\_canada/churchill\\_river/default.asp](http://www.ccge.org/resources/rivers_of_canada/churchill_river/default.asp)

### The price of power

**Original Innu name:** *Mishtashipu*, meaning 'big river'

**Current official name:** Churchill, for British war leader Winston Churchill

**Source:** Smallwood Reservoir in Central Labrador

**Mouth:** Atlantic Ocean

**Direction of flow:** east

**Main Characteristic:** exploitation of its power displaced a First Nation and created conflict between two provinces.

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To the Innu who travelled the interior of Labrador, the imposing waterfall was something to dread. According to some accounts, the Innu once believed that death could come from just looking at what today is called Churchill Falls. They were right, but in a way that the Innu could not have foreseen.

When industries and governments turned their attention to the riches and power of the Labrador interior in the middle of this century, they condemned Labrador's Native cultures to epidemics of disease and the loss of their food resources. Disease depleted the Native population and hunger resulted in Innu dependence on outsiders that seriously undermined their way of life.

A massive power development at Churchill Falls on the Churchill River flooded Innu hunting grounds and sacred sites. Pollution poisoned the fish they depended upon. It was the death of the Natives' sense of identity as self-sufficient survivors in a difficult land.

The huge Churchill Falls dam and underground power station is without doubt a great engineering achievement. Much of the electrical power ends up in New York, and nearly all of the profits go to Montreal. A long-term contract gives Hydro-Québec all of the Churchill Falls power at a low, fixed cost. Hydro-Québec resells the power at a great profit to electricity companies in the United States.

The long-term contract was not an equitable business deal for the government of Newfoundland and Labrador which tried but failed to have the contract cancelled by the Supreme Court of Canada. The biggest losers of all were the Innu.

Old photographs of the Innu show a healthy, apparently happy community that had learned to live in a harsh climate with sparse vegetation. Today, Labrador's 13,500 Innu are striving to emerge from cultural despair and to define for themselves a new identity that mixes the pride of their past with the benefits of modern technology.

The Innu are fighting against widespread addiction to alcohol and gasoline sniffing, family violence, and an economy controlled entirely by non-Native outsiders. In the process, the Innu are demanding rights to land and money so that they can rebuild their community.

With the help of non-Native experts, the Innu are employing archaeology, media relations and the Internet to ensure that their rights are respected in the future mining and power projects of Labrador.

Outsiders, investors, and governments are planning big mining developments in Labrador and more massive hydroelectric dams on the Churchill River. This time, though, there is greater public awareness of Native rights. And, because of their better political organization, Innu claims for land, financial compensation, and cultural respect will have to be taken into consideration.

## Churchill River - Cold comfort

[http://www.ccge.org/resources/rivers\\_of\\_canada/churchill\\_river/cold\\_comfort.asp](http://www.ccge.org/resources/rivers_of_canada/churchill_river/cold_comfort.asp)

### How the tiny ptarmigan survives winter

The willow ptarmigan does not migrate to warmer weather in winter. Instead, this tiny member of the grouse family has evolved a set of unique features that allow it to survive the harsh Labrador winter.

Its pure-white winter plumage is excellent camouflage against the snow. The bird's nostrils are protected from the freezing cold by a cover of feathers. It even grows feather snowshoes that give it enough stability to tug small branches from beneath the snow.

The willow ptarmigan burrows into the snow for two good reasons: to benefit from the insulation against cold air, and to hide from predators.

## Churchill River - Low-level fright

[http://www.ccge.org/resources/rivers\\_of\\_canada/churchill\\_river/low\\_level\\_fright.asp](http://www.ccge.org/resources/rivers_of_canada/churchill_river/low_level_fright.asp)

### **Fighter planes buzz the caribou herds**

They arrive without warning, streaking a few scant metres above the ground and then vanishing in a frightening explosion of sound. They are military attack planes whose pilots are learning to fly below the view of enemy radar.

From their base here at Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Canadian and European air forces practise over Labrador because the land resembles that of northern Russia - still considered by military leaders to be their most likely potential enemy.

The land is barren but not empty. It is home to hundreds of thousands of caribou whose well-being is a vital concern to Native peoples. The Innu First Nation, for thousands of years, has depended on the animals for physical survival. Dependence on the caribou is fundamental to Innu cultural identity.

There are fears, but no scientific proof, that the shrieking military bombers are terrifying the animals and harming their health and reproduction.

Caribou are also hunted for sport by non-Native visitors. Because these sporthunters want to kill the biggest and strongest animals for their trophy antlers, such killing damages the genetic well-being of the entire herd. Innu hunters have estimated and observed the average weight of adult caribou to be declining.

A recent estimate numbers the herd at more than 450,000. No one knows how this compares with historical populations. Caribou were hunted to extinction on the island of Newfoundland and throughout Atlantic Canada.

## Churchill River - "Hpvlglsbylb"

[http://www.ccge.org/resources/rivers\\_of\\_canada/churchill\\_river/hpvlglsbylb.asp](http://www.ccge.org/resources/rivers_of_canada/churchill_river/hpvlglsbylb.asp)

### Life in Happy Valley-Goose Bay



On long-distance phone bills, the name Happy Valley-Goose Bay looks like a typographic error: Hpvlglsbylb.

And, for a small town of 9,000 people surrounded by the wilderness of Labrador, Happy Valley-Goose Bay does get a lot of long-distance phone calls.

The community houses a steady flow of overseas visitors. Located at the western end of Lake Melville, a saltwater lake that extends

more than 200 km inland from the Labrador Sea, it is an important training base for military fliers of Germany, France, Belgium, Holland, Great Britain, and Canada .

The military air base at Goose Bay was built during World War II as a fuel stop for aircraft flying from the United States to Europe. Hundreds of jobs suddenly became available, and people converged on the town from all over Labrador — by canoe, motor boat, dog team, and snowshoe.

They first pitched their tents next to the new base but were soon ordered to move to a spot on the Churchill River. Once called Skunk Hollow, the town site was renamed Hamilton River Village, and then, Happy Valley-Goose Bay.

For a time, the town's airport was the busiest in the world. At the end of World War II, it became a key location during the 'Cold War' with the former Soviet Union.

Happy Valley-Goose Bay was considered vital to the defence of North America against the threat of Soviet bombers attacking over the North Pole. The air base needed support services, and Happy Valley-Goose Bay grew to house, feed, entertain, and meet the daily needs of both military and civilian personnel and their families.

Happy Valley-Goose Bay has become the main service centre for Labrador. But the town's distance from major cities including St. John's, Newfoundland, its lack of highway access, and the limited shipping season deny it the potential to develop manufacturing businesses. Still, Mayor Harry Baikie describes the town as being poised for growth. Development, industry and new people are welcomed.

The town is a culturally and socially diverse community of Innu, Inuit, Métis, and transplanted, non-aboriginal Canadians including Newfoundlanders, and transient Europeans, all living in a close-knit society.

Adventure travel and tourism, hunting, and fishing are important sources of outside revenue, but Labrador's short summer season and the intensity of its biting flies prevent it from becoming an extremely popular or casual tourist destination for those without significant wilderness experience. As one Tourism Labrador employee put it, 'Labrador is not for the faint of heart.'

### Churchill River - Home Page

## The battered Innu culture strives to recover

Early photographs show healthy, self-sufficient people extracting a living from a harsh, but delicate land. Known to the French and English fur traders as the Montagnais-Naskapi Indians, the First Nation of Labrador prefers its own name, Innu Nation.



While the Atlantic coast of Labrador was dominated by Inuit hunters, the nomadic Innu occupied the interior and the shores of the St. Lawrence River. They hunted and traded as far north as the Inuit settlements on Ungava Bay, eastward as far as Chicoutimi and south to present-day Sept-Îles. The Innu call their land Nitassinan, which mean 'Our Land.'

Their land was rocky and impossible to farm, but the animals of the scrubby boreal forest did provide enough food and fur to survive. The Mishtashipu (Churchill) river system provided salmon and other fish to nourish the Innu. Above all, the Innu followed herds of caribou, their most important source of food and hides.

At first, European explorers shunned the harsh, apparently barren land. Jacques Cartier dismissed Labrador as 'the land God gave Cain,' referring to the Old Testament Biblical figure condemned to a life of misery for killing his brother Abel.

But the colonists soon discovered that the land of the Innu was in fact rich in resources. The European fur trade encouraged the Innu to kill too many animals for their pelts and hides. As a result, hunting became very difficult, and Innu families starved. These people became dependent on the charity of churches and governments for their survival.

The Hudson's Bay Company seized the richest salmon pools, keeping the Innu away under threat of death. Later, fishing privileges were seized by rich sportfishers who used the law to keep the Innu from the riverbanks they had used for thousands of years.

The paper industry cleared vast swaths of forest, reducing the animal habitat. Iron mines in western Labrador brought a railway and thousands of non-Native residents to the heart of the Innu homeland in the interior of the plateau. Most devastating of all, for the Innu's traditional use of the land, was the construction of a massive power development at Churchill Falls. The project permanently flooded much of their hunting and fishing territory and disrupted ecosystems along the river.



The resource exploitation, combined with the inevitable introduction of European diseases, almost wiped out Innu culture. Today, only 1,400 Innu remain, a fraction of the estimated population before European colonization in the 1600s.

Anthropologist Peter Armitage, who was employed by the Innu Nation to study and document their history and land use, says the Innu may have been related to the extinct Beothuk First Nation of Newfoundland. European gunfire and disease completely slaughtered the

last known Beothuk. The last Beothuk person died of tuberculosis in 1829.

The Innu of Labrador were encouraged to abandon their traditional life on the land and collect in government-built villages. But, by their own description, the change created another cultural disaster:

Unfortunately, life in government-built villages turned out to be a major trauma and cultural shock to the Innu. Treated like children by missionaries and government bureaucrats, subject to humiliating racism by their non-aboriginal neighbours, and punished by Newfoundland hunting regulations, the Innu fell into a quagmire of rock-bottom self-esteem, alcohol abuse, family violence, and other forms of cultural collapse, according to Armitage.

The Innu were never adequately compensated for the loss of their land and resources. Today, they are struggling to regain physical and cultural health and to obtain a fair and just share of the resource wealth of their land. Their leaders are determined to combine the values and skills of their traditional life with the best of modern technologies.

While Innu hunters spend months in bush camps hunting and fishing, their political organization maintains a worthwhile site on the World Wide Web. Innu leaders work with non-Native anthropologists like Armitage and other professionals to protect their interests and secure a share in the wealth from future resource exploitation.

They are hoping to share in a substantial financial compensation from developers of a rich nickel mine on the north coast of Labrador, at Voisey's Bay where their traditional hunting territory overlaps that of the Inuit.

The Innu are determined to regain their self-sufficiency. They want financial compensation for their land so that they can develop their own businesses based on the resources of their land. Their leaders believe Innu businesses and jobs can be created from tourism and outfitting for hunting and fishing expeditions.

The big issues for Innu leaders today are their negotiation of a land claim, the negative effects of the boom in mining and prospecting, low-level military flights over their caribou hunting lands, and large-scale tree cutting that is being proposed by paper producers.

## Churchill River - The Lonely Season

[http://www.ccge.org/resources/rivers\\_of\\_canada/churchill\\_river/lonely\\_season.asp](http://www.ccge.org/resources/rivers_of_canada/churchill_river/lonely_season.asp)

### Traditional bush life in Labrador

The Labrador bush is a difficult place in which to survive. Extracting a living from this harsh and unforgiving land is a challenge few humans can endure physically and psychologically. Trapping animals and selling their skins to warm the bodies of wealthy Europeans was one way inhabitants of Labrador survived.

A unique community of fur trappers, descended from native Inuit and English adventurers, dominated the lower Churchill River on the shores of the big salt-water lake into which the river empties.

The Goudie family of North West River is the best-known of the group of people who called themselves the 'settlers.' As an elderly woman, the late Elizabeth Goudie, wrote the story of her family in the book, *Woman of Labrador*.

Her recounting of life in the Labrador bush was considered so important as a historical record that she was awarded an honorary doctoral degree by Memorial University of St. Johns, Newfoundland.



Elizabeth traced one of her ancestors to an Inuit orphan girl who ran away because she was being blamed for her family's death by other Inuit who believed an evil spirit had overtaken her body. At the point where the Churchill River enters Lake Melville, the orphan encountered an Englishman who was fishing for salmon. He brought her to North West River to grow up with a neighbour's family. Eventually she married the Englishman.

Elizabeth Goudie was born in 1902 and is the great-great-granddaughter of that Inuit runaway and the English salmon fisher.

Elizabeth grew up as an only child on the barrens. In 1917 she worked for a church missionary organization for four dollars a month. Soon after, she met and married a trapper named Jim Goudie.

Because only the thick, cold-season fur of animals is valuable, trapping took place in mid-winter, far from the family's log cabin. This was the lonely season for Elizabeth. She raised eight children in her trapper's cabin.

On the trapline, trappers walked on snowshoes from one overnight shelter to the next, taking the trapped animals and rebaiting their traps. They towed their supplies and pelts behind them on a toboggan called a komatik. At the end of the day, trappers built a fire to warm their shelter, called a 'tilt,' and to cook their flat 'trapper's bread' and beans. The trapline catch was skinned and the pelts stowed in a bag.

Back home in the family log cabins, wives like Elizabeth made clothing, chopped firewood, and cared for their children. Fish and meat was the basic diet. An annual, spring tonic made from sulphur and molasses was administered to the children to kill stomach worms.



A welcome relief came with the yearly trip from the winter trapping base camp to the family's summer fishing house on the shore of the lake. Summer was the social season — time for families to get together.

But the summer air along the Churchill River is thick with mosquitoes and black flies that virtually terrorize people and animals. A smoke pot had to be kept going all day. 'You would not see grown dogs in summer,' Elizabeth Goudie recalled. 'They would live under rocks or in holes in the ground to keep alive.' The areas over their eyes and around their ears and tails would be picked to the bare flesh. 'When I saw dogs like that, I wondered how I was going to keep my children alive.'

The Goudie family lived at various times in North West River, Goose Bay and Mud Lake. Life was lived according to the rhythm of what amounted to a 'trapper's calendar.' Each month meant different tasks to be accomplished as a matter of survival.

*January:* Return from the trap lines

*February:* Month of rest

*March:* Hunting of rabbit and partridge

*April:* Trout fishing

*May:* Smelt fishing and hunting of ducks and geese

*June:* Crafting of new canoes

*July:* Salmon fishing on streams that run into Lake Melville

*August:* Cod fishing; berry-picking and jelly-making

*September:* Harvesting potatoes, storing firewood, and repairing traps

*October:* Setting out the lines of 200-300 traps.

*November:* Mending

*December:* Prime trapping time

## Churchill River - Mega Water

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### Churchill Falls generating station

The Churchill River has the greatest hydroelectric potential of any river in North America because of its volume and steep descent to the sea. The main obstacle to constructing the station was the distance of Churchill Falls from the network of transmission lines that could deliver the power to towns and cities.

The island of Newfoundland badly needed cheap power. But in order to access power from the generators, a tunnel would have to be drilled through the Churchill River seabed to route transmission lines under the Strait of Belle Isle, an impossibly expensive task.

The power of the Churchill River could be tapped only if Churchill, in co-operation with Quebec, built transmission line towers across Labrador to northern Quebec. A deal was made between the provincial governments of Newfoundland and Quebec.

The Churchill Falls dam and underground power station was completed in 1974. At the time, it was the most ambitious engineering project ever undertaken on the continent. Upriver of the dam itself, 88 dikes were built to pool the water of the Labrador Plateau into the Smallwood Reservoir.

A cavern was blasted from solid rock to hold the array of huge turbines and generators. These would convert the river's flow into electricity. To force all of the water through the turbines, the river's natural channel was diverted away from the most rugged waterfall on the continent, now a dry outcrop of granite.

The power station is two-thirds owned by Newfoundland and one-third by Hydro-Québec. Newfoundland has a contractual obligation, upheld by the Supreme Court of Canada, to provide more than 4,000 megawatts of electricity to Hydro-Québec at prices agreed upon in 1969. The price paid to Newfoundland will actually decline greatly as the agreement approaches its expiry date in the year 2041.

This contract is now seen as having been grossly unfair to Newfoundland, Canada's least prosperous province. Energy prices have risen tremendously since the contract was signed. Hydro-Québec is now selling the Churchill Falls power to the United States at a huge profit. Without Churchill Falls power, Hydro-Québec would operate at a big loss. Control over Labrador and its resources has been a long-festering issue between Quebec and the rest of Canada. Many Quebeckers still believe that the British government was wrong in transferring the Churchill River drainage basin to Newfoundland in 1927.

The Quebec government's refusal to reopen the power agreement with Newfoundland is considered to be selfish and unfair by many Newfoundlanders. Recently, Brian Tobin, Premier of Newfoundland, told Quebec's government that his province will simply shut down the power station unless Quebec agrees to renegotiate. He also threatened to cut off the power if Quebec separates from Canada.

The government of Newfoundland wants to develop two more power stations on the Churchill River. This time, Newfoundland is determined to deliver at least some of the power directly to the island, through tunnels that no longer seem to be so impossibly expensive to dig. The big increase in energy prices, that has made Churchill Falls such a bad deal for Newfoundland, could make it possible for the province to develop the rest of the river's hydroelectric potential on its own.