

Progress Report on the Cliffs of Fundy Aspiring Global Geopark

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Introduction

The community-based initiative to seek UNESCO Global Geopark designation for the north shore of the Minas Basin in Cumberland and Colchester counties reached further milestones in the 2018-2019 fiscal year. The concept of a global geopark was introduced to the board of the Cumberland Geological Society, the not-for-profit organization that administers the Fundy Geological Museum in Parrsboro. The ‘Parrsboro Shore’ (Fig. 1) was identified as a candidate region for a geopark as an outcome of the Nova Scotia Geoheritage Sites List (Calder and Poole, 2017), which documented a high concentration of geosites along this coast of the Bay of Fundy. The facility and programming of the Fundy Geological Museum was a contributing factor in the identification of a prospective geopark.

Global Geoparks are community-driven initiatives, based on linking a region’s cultural heritage with that of its geological heritage. Sustainable economic development is a key aspiration of Global Geoparks. The program began in Europe in 2000, and joined forces with China’s geoparks in 2014 to become the Global Geoparks Network (GGN). In 2016, Global Geoparks became a program of UNESCO, and today the program comprises 140 geoparks in 38 countries, of which three have been designated in Canada. Unlike conventional parks in North America, Global Geoparks carry no land-use restrictions.

Community ‘town halls’ held across the prospective geopark in 2017 showed near unanimous support for proceeding with the initiative. In 2017, funding for the project was announced by the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA), with contributions from the two

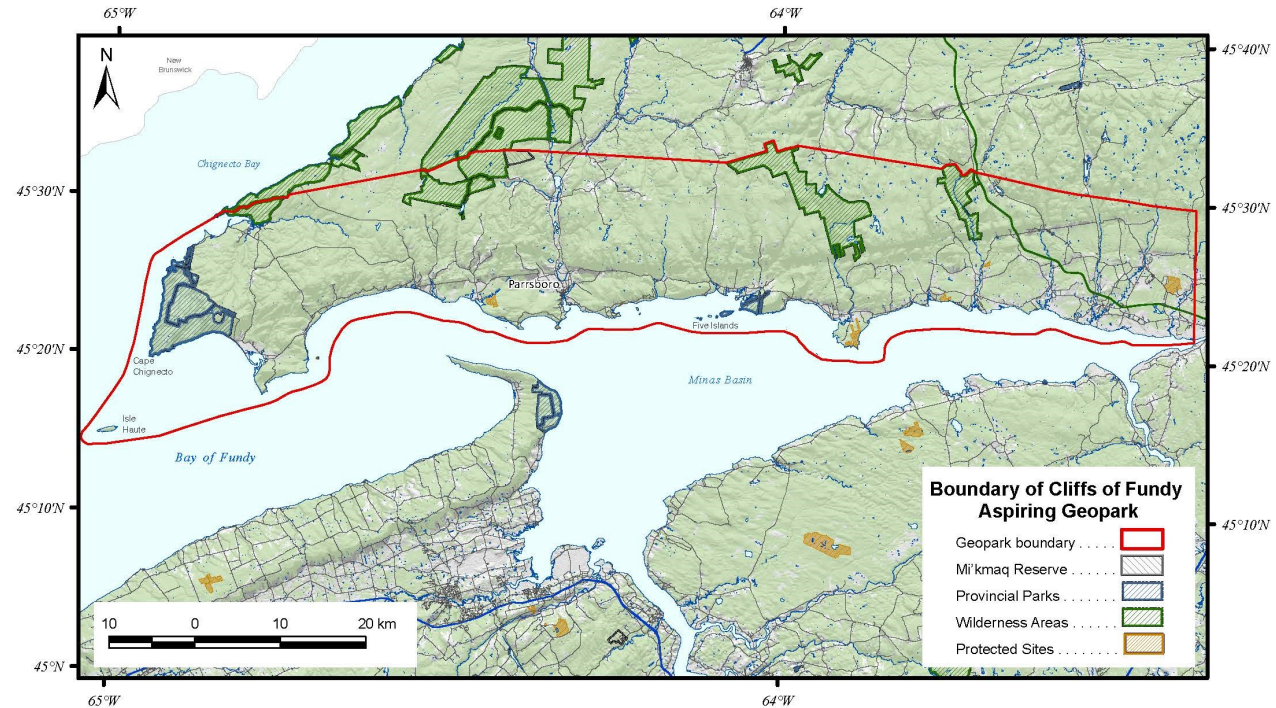


Figure 1. Map of the boundary of the Cliffs of Fundy Aspiring Geopark.

municipalities of Cumberland and Colchester, and the Nova Scotia Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage. Subsequently, a resident of Bass River, Marlee Leslie, was hired as Project Coordinator. The Geological Survey Division of the Nova Scotia Department of Energy and Mines provided expertise in identification of prospective geosites and their significance, as well as developing the over-arching geological storyline for the aspiring geopark.

A central tenet of the aspiring geopark is to represent the traditional storylines of the Mi'kmaq people, for whom the area represented by the geopark holds special meaning. The region occupies the traditional territory of Kluscap, whose exploits shaped the coastal landscape of Five Islands, Three Sisters, Isle Haute, and many other geosites. The geopark will endeavor to treat this as an example of “two-eyed seeing,” wherein indigenous and western scientific explanations are treated equally. In response to feedback from the Mi'kmaq community (Elders Advisory Council and Confederation of Mainland Mi'kmaq), the eastern boundary of the geopark was extended to include Mi'kmawey Debert, the earliest indigenous site in northeastern North America.

Progress Achieved in 2018

In 2018, a draft application for the Cliffs of Fundy was completed and submitted to the Canadian National Committee for Geoparks (CNCG), and to the Canadian Commission for UNESCO. Together, these groups evaluate the readiness of aspiring geoparks in Canada to submit their application to UNESCO for formal evaluation and first arrange for the aspiring geopark to host a pre-evaluation mission by the CNCG. The application was lauded by the CNCG as setting a new benchmark for applications of aspiring geoparks in Canada.

In June 2018, the Cliffs of Fundy hosted two members of the CNCG (Sarah Gamble, Tumbler Ridge UNESCO Global Geopark, British Columbia, and Pierre Verpaelst, CNCG member, retired from the Québec Geological Survey), who assessed the readiness of the aspiring geopark to proceed with its application to UNESCO (Fig. 2). Their assessment described the aspiring geopark as “impressive” and that it was now a *de facto* geopark.

The CNCG evaluators advised that a long-standing but controversial position of the Global Geoparks



Figure 2. Evaluators from the Canadian National Committee for Geoparks visiting the geosite of East Bay.

network has been to disallow organizations involved in the direct sale of mineral products from partaking in the governance of the geopark. This position is seen as problematic as it suggests that the long-standing tradition of collection and trade of sustainably sourced minerals, such as the provincial gemstone agate in the Bay of Fundy region, is improper, even though it has been a sustainable tradition spanning millennia. It is important to note that this issue involves governance only and does not mean that mineral collecting or sales will be discontinued; UNESCO has no jurisdiction over laws in any country. Provincial laws and guidelines for mineral collecting remain unchanged. For guidance pertaining to mineral collecting in Nova Scotia, please refer to Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources (2007).

This challenging issue consumed considerable resources during the Fall of 2018, but led to a resolution with the Cumberland Geological Society that allowed submission of the revised application to UNESCO before the end November deadline (Fig. 3). This resolution ensures that the Fundy Geological Museum will remain a key partner in the Geopark, and that the Nova Scotia Gem and Mineral Show continues as a vibrant event.

The Road Ahead: 2019-2020

A permanent governing board for the Cliffs of Fundy was established early in 2019, led by the Municipalities of Cumberland and Colchester with broad community and indigenous representation. Early in 2019, UNESCO announced that the Cliffs of Fundy Aspiring Geopark would be one of 14 aspiring geoparks worldwide to be evaluated this year. During the summer of 2019, a UNESCO evaluation mission will formally evaluate the aspiring geopark and thereafter will submit their recommendations to the Executive Committee of the Global Geoparks Network for their consideration in September 2019. Subsequently, the recommendation of the GGN will be forwarded to the general assembly of UNESCO for their consideration and decision in March-April 2020, at which time the outcome will be made known.

Regardless of that outcome, the exercise of seeking global geopark status has highlighted the rich geological heritage for the residents and government representatives of this exceptional region of Nova Scotia.

References

Calder, J.H. and Poole, J.C. 2017. Geoheritage sites of Nova Scotia; Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources, Open File Map ME 2017-032, scale 1:500 000.

Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources, 2007. A guide to rock and mineral collecting in Nova Scotia; Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources, Information Circular ME 66, 2 p.

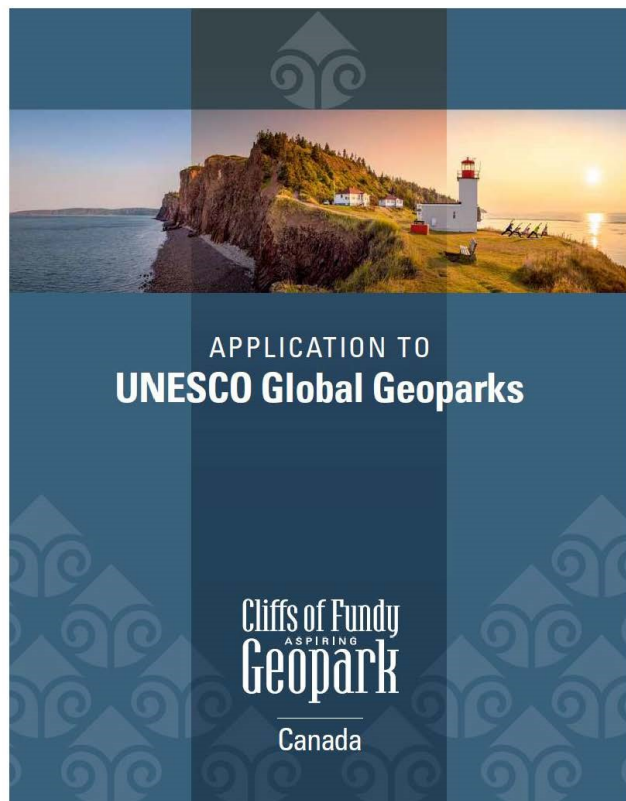


Figure 3. Cover of the Cliffs of Fundy application to UNESCO.