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4. THE LANDING PLACE OF JACQUES CARTIER AT  
GASPE, IN 1534

BY

F. J. RICHMOND

According to his *Journal* (Hakluyt), Cartier anchored between Cape Prato (Percé Rock) and an island (Bonaventure Island), on July 12, 1534.

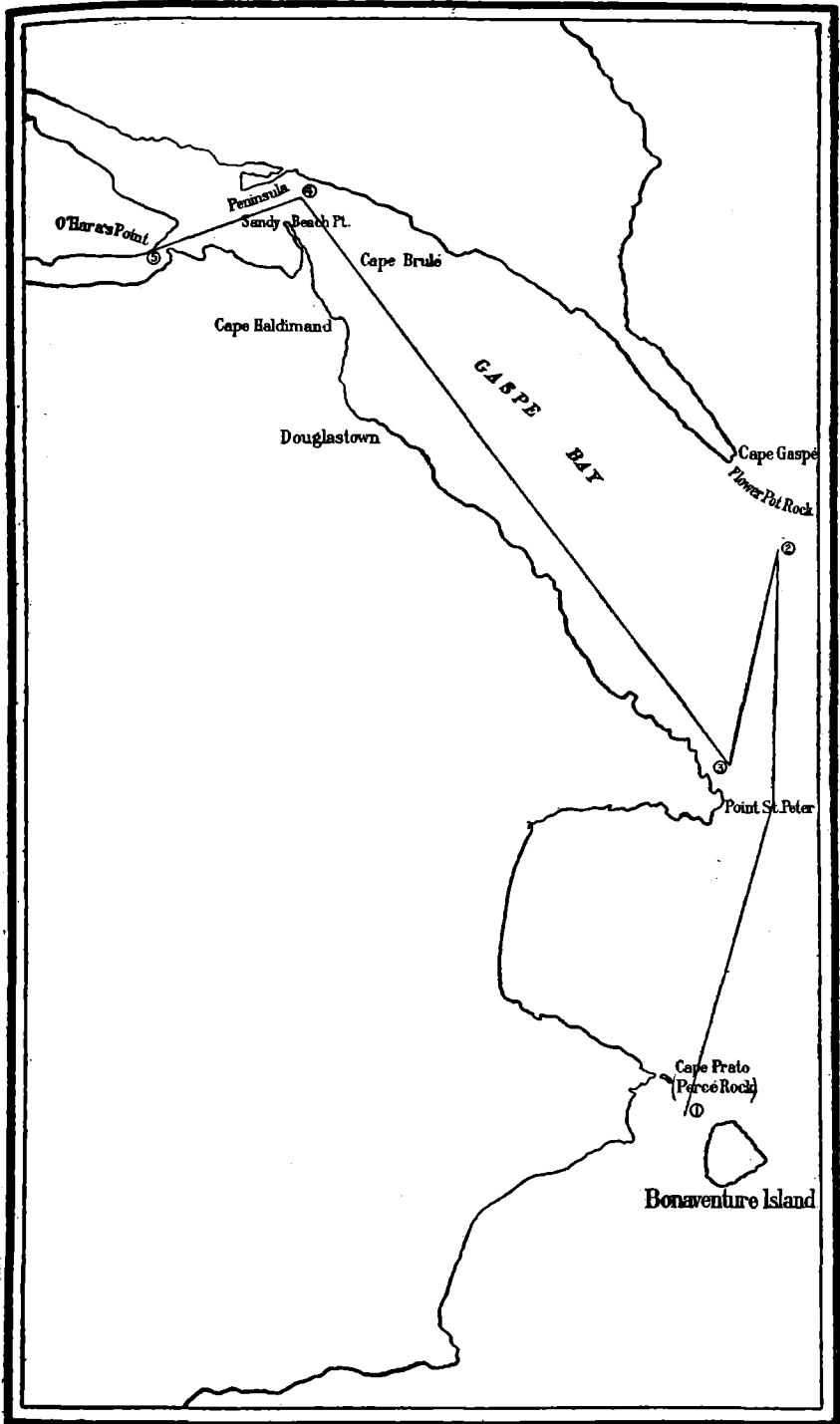
He sailed thence, on July 13, 1534, and followed the coast, which he described "as Lyeth Northeast;" we next read, "there arose such stormie and raging winds against vs that we were constrained to come to the place againe from whence we were come;" or in other words, owing to unfavourable weather conditions, he was obliged to return to anchorage between Percé Rock and Bonaventure Island.<sup>1</sup>

The *Journal* or Log entry for July 14, 15 and 16 reads as follows: "We hoised vp saile and we came to the midst of a riuier (Gaspé Bay) Northward fiue or sixe leagues from Cape of Prato (Percé Rock), and being ouerthwart (abreast) there arose againe a contrary wind with great fogges and stormes so that we were constrained vpon Tuesday being the fourteenth of the moneth to enter into the riuier; and there did we stay till the sixteenth of the moneth looking for faire weather to come out of it; on which day being Thursday, the wind became so ragging that one of our ships lost an anker; we were constrained to goe vp higher into the riuier seuen or eight leagues into a good harborough and ground (anchorage) that we with our boates found out."

Before discussing Cartier's probable course up Gaspé Bay and landing places, I would call attention to the well-known fact that he was very inaccurate in the determination of latitude and longitude; not always correct in estimating distances run or courses followed; yet he always mentioned some distinctive feature by which places described can easily be recognized by the present day readers. It is also essential, when considering Cartier's voyages, to remember that the league in use in 1534 was equal to two and one-half nautical miles only.

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<sup>1</sup> The author is indebted for assistance to Dr. John M. Clarke, of Albany, N.Y., and to Captain Russel Coffin, of Gaspé, who, in addition to general assistance, traced upon the chart the probable course of Cartier from Bonaventure Island to Gaspé Basin.



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Cartier's Journal of his voyage from Bonaventure Island to Gaspé, recapitulated, would show:—

1. That at a certain distance from Percé Rock northward he came to the middle of a river—(Gaspé Bay);
2. That when lying overthwart or abreast of the river or bay he met a contrary wind and stormy weather and was obliged to enter the bay for shelter; that as the storm progressed he was driven from anchorage, and sought refuge in a good harbor and ground (anchorage), which he used boats to find out—(evidently Gaspé Basin).

In order reasonably to determine the exact point of landing, it is necessary to consider:—

1. The position of Cartier's ships when the contrary wind was encountered;
2. The direction of the wind and storm which, without doubt, exercised great influence upon his choice of anchorage and subsequent course;
3. The approximate course and distance run from anchorage to Gaspé Basin;

Accepting the minimum run stated in log, namely five leagues or twelve and a half miles northward from Percé Rock, Cartier's ships should have been fairly early in the day of July 14, 1534, about in the position designated upon the accompanying chart by the figure 2.

Cartier apparently did not have any intention of examining Gaspé Bay, but rather of continuing his voyage along the coast. He could have done so with wind from the west, southwest, south, southeast, east, but not with head winds from the north, northwest and northeast. A contrary or head wind I would define as one coming from a direction opposite to that which had propelled a vessel to a given point; or as one coming from a direction opposite to that which it is the desire of the navigator to follow.

Local mariners,<sup>1</sup> after careful consideration of the question, are of the opinion that the storm encountered by Cartier must have come from the northeast. The writer, besides, has found

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<sup>1</sup> Captains George T. Annett, Clement Roberts, and Edwin Miller, of Gaspé, First Officer Hubert Coffin, also of Gaspé, and many mariners and fishermen.

out from weather diaries kept by him for a number of years that during the month of July in nearly every year there occur from one to two storms from a northeast direction (cf. appended weather diary extracts for years 1903 to 1910 inc.). The storm met by Cartier was not unlike those that occurred in the months of July, 1907 and 1910.

A 'northeaster' begins, generally speaking, with cloudy weather and light wind. About the second or third day, the wind, which has been increasing in force and accompanied by fog and rain, veers as the storm progresses to the east, then southeast, often going around to the southwest in the clearing stage. The lower Bay of Gaspé anchorages in the first stage of a storm are none too good, but when the wind veers to east and the sea enters the Bay, it is impossible for ships to ride at anchor. (For description of sea conditions in the lower Bay of Gaspé during storms, see *The St. Lawrence Pilot*, 1894, vol. 1, page 79).

The next important question is whether Cartier anchored upon the northern or southern shores of Gaspé Bay. Two courses were open to him, when he encountered the contrary or head wind: Firstly, he could have worked to windward and run in under the high land of the north shore of Gaspé Bay, slightly above Cape Gaspé, where he would have found reasonable shelter until that stage of the storm when the sea entering the bay would have driven him out. This shore has high cliffs and an unfavourable look, and would not appeal to a mariner seeking shelter upon an unknown coast. Secondly, he could have stood in to the south shore, which regarded from the sea has a more favourable appearance, and anchored slightly inside of Point St. Peter, the point of the southern entrance to the lower Bay of Gaspé, where he would have been reasonably safe until the stage of the storm when the sea would enter the Bay and drive him out—(which did occur).

It would appear that Cartier did not anchor on the north shore of Gaspé Bay for the following reasons:

The minimum distance from anchorage to "Harborough" is stated at seven leagues ( $17\frac{1}{2}$  miles); the maximum distance, at eight leagues (20 miles). The distance from Cape Gaspé to Gaspé Basin is given by *The St. Lawrence Pilot*—an Admiralty navigating handbook—as follows:—

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Flower Pot Rock (Cape Gaspé) to lighthouse at extreme northern end of Sandy Beach.....	11 miles
Sandy Beach Bar lighthouse to anchorage Gaspé Basin.....	3½ "
	14½ "

(an overrun of minimum log distance of 3 miles; an overrun of maximum log distance of 5½ miles.)

Dealing with the anchorage question in so far as the south shore of the bay is in question, distances, according to *The St. Lawrence Pilot*, are as follows:—

Point St. Peter to Douglastown.....	12 miles
Douglastown to Cape Haldimand.....	2 "
Cape Haldimand to the northern end of Sandy Beach Bar .....	3 "
Sandy Beach Bar lighthouse to anchorage on Western side of O'Hara's Point, Gaspé Basin (estimated) at	3½ "
	20½ "
Deduct distance of supposed anchorage inside of Point St. Peter .....	½ "
	20 "

This practically agrees with the maximum run of eight leagues, or twenty miles, from anchorage to "Harborough." Master mariners and mariners consulted have, therefore, concluded that the first anchorage of Cartier in the lower Bay of Gaspé was on the southern side, in the neighborhood of Point St. Peter, a position indicated upon the chart by A, 3. Their opinion is that, the wind probably being on shore, he anchored in about twelve fathoms of water, so as to be able if necessary to work off shore easily. They also believed that his trip from Bonaventure Island towards Gaspé Basin proceeded about as follows:—

*July 14, 1534.*—He sailed from anchorage between Bonaventure Island and Percé (Chart, A. 1); wind probably from the south; course, until opening Gaspé Bay, N.N.E., thence, N. true.

A distance run of five leagues or twelve and a half miles would bring him about to the position designated upon the chart by the figure 2. Thence, upon meeting the northeast wind, it is presumed that he stood in to the south shore and anchored in

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about twelve fathoms of water at about the position indicated by A, 3.

*July 15, 1534.*—The fleet evidently rode at anchor, but, the next day, when the wind veered and the sea entered the bay, rendering anchorage untenable, they ran up Gaspé Bay probably on a course N. by W. for a distance of fifteen and a half miles, which would carry the vessels to the extreme northern end of Sandy Beach Bar (Chart, 4). At this position they would open the Narrows leading into Gaspé Basin, and O'Hara's Point could be seen extending out into it. So it is reasonable to suppose that at the position indicated by 4 on the chart, the course was changed to W. to half N. Mag., which would carry the vessels into Gaspé Basin to anchorage on the western side of O'Hara's Point (Chart A, 5), about three and a half miles distant from position No. 4.

The distance measured along a regular ship's course is 19 miles, whereas per shore or coastal line it is 20 miles, which agrees with the distance covered by Cartier (20 miles) and shows that he did not take a direct course, but followed the trend of the shore. This accounts for the difference of one mile.

The master mariners and seamen consulted, all of whom are experienced in matters relating to the navigation of the Gulf and coast, were of the opinion that the mention of the use of boats to examine the harbor indicates that before bringing his ships through the Narrows, he used boats to examine the channel. After examining the Journal of Voyage and weighing all possible points which might have exerted influence upon Cartier's choice of a landing place, they were agreed that on July 22, 1534, Cartier must have landed upon O'Hara's Point in Gaspé Basin.

APPENDIX

*Conclusions arrived at by mariners as to the landing place of Cartier.*

1. Cap-aux-Os (charted as Cape Brulé), Sandy Beach and Peninsula, formerly considered as possible landing places, are too far down the Bay of Gaspé and were without doubt passed by Cartier. The use of boats to seek harbor and anchorage denotes narrow waters. The three above-mentioned places are situated where the bay is some miles in width, with deep water close in

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shore. Anchorage consequently could have been found without boats, the use of the lead being sufficient.

These places, besides, cannot be designated as "the Point at the entrance of the Haven." Apart from being well within the distance run by Cartier, the designation cannot apply to them. Cap-aux-Os is situated where the bay is several miles wide, and it is many miles too far down the bay. Sandy Beach might be called the Point at the entrance of the outer bay or harbor, but it is a narrow tide-swept spit, unsuitable for a landing place and the erection of a cross. As to Peninsula, it cannot be considered as "the Point at the entrance of the haven."

2. O'Hara's Point, on the other hand, seems to suit the description. This point is of the "barachois" type, common in Gaspesia; it is low and open and situated at the extreme western end of the narrows leading from the outer to the inner harbor or Basin of Gaspé. The water is bold and the ship channel through the narrows approaches the point closely. It is the natural landing place of shipping and boats frequenting the harbor; practically the greater volume of the water-borne business of the port is to-day transacted upon it.

3. Cartier mentions the use of boats, thereby indicating that he had the narrow and shoal channel examined and sounded before bringing his ships through to the anchorage in the inner basin. Any cautious mariner would do likewise before risking vessels in narrow unknown waters.

The Narrows of Gaspé Harbor or Basin are described in *The St. Lawrence Pilot* as follows:—"The entrance to the Southwest Arm, about 360 yards wide between two sandy points; but the navigable channel which is buoyed is contracted by shoals on either side to about 120 yards and 27 feet of water can be carried in mid-channel. There are no good leading marks into Gaspé Basin; vessels therefore must be guided by the chart and by the eye."

4. Cartier mentions a mackerel fishing ground. Such were the Narrows until mackerel deserted the coast.

5. Distance from Point St. Peter to the Harbor alone would be in favour of this Point. The description, moreover, confirms this presumption.

6. Cartier states that the cross was erected "Vpon the point of the entrance of the said Hauen." O'Hara's Point is the only one within the bay that answers fully this description.



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7. Upon the Indian Chief raising objection apparently to the erection of the cross, Cartier attempted to explain to him that "The cross was but onely set vp to be as a light and leader which wayes to enter into the Port." Evidently Cartier was a shrewd observer; possibly having in mind how well situated this point would be if ever a light was required for the purposes of navigation. Later mariners were of the same opinion, for, during many years and until recently, the lighthouse which guided shipping into and out of the port stood upon the extreme end of this point, not many feet distant from the spot where Cartier's cross must have been erected. See *The St. Lawrence Pilot*, which describes it as follows:—

LIGHTS.—"From a square wooden lighthouse 37 feet high and painted white, erected on O'Hara's Point, (the north entrance point to the southwest arm), is exhibited at an elevation of 38 feet above high water, a fixed red light visible 7 miles in clear weather."

*Weather diaries of the author in connection with the direction of storms in July, 1903 to 1910*

1903—July 8, cloudy; 9, strong east wind, fog and rain; 10, east wind, fog and rain; 11, fine.

1904—July 11, northeast wind, fog and rain; 12, north-east wind, fog and rain; 13, south-east wind veering to south, rain and fog; weather moderating; 14, fine.

1905—July 8, north-east wind, very stormy, rain; 9, north-east wind, rainy; 10, fine; 24, stormy, wind strong n.e. to easterly, rain, fog; 25, conditions unchanged, wind north-east, rain; 26, north to n.e., wind, rainy; 27, clearing.

1906—July. Weather throughout month fine; no disturbance sufficiently marked to classify as storm; weather warm, on the whole, with an occasional thunder storm and showers; winds moderate; south during day and westerly during night and early mornings—on the whole a fine month.

1907—July 4, north-east wind, fog and rain; 5, north-east wind, fog and rain; 6, north-east wind, fog and rain; 9, strong east wind, rain and fog; 10, north-east to easterly wind, rain, fog and very stormy; 11, north-east wind, rain, fog; 12, north-east wind, rain and fog; 13, north-east wind,

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rain and fog; 14, weather clearing; 19, wind during day north-east to south-east, settling down to north-east; rain and cloudy; 20, strong north-east wind, fog and rain; 21, storm continues, wind north-east, rain; 22, stormy, rain, wind south to south-east; 23, unsettled, more moderate; 24, rainy, very strong south-east breeze; 25, south-east wind inclined to veer towards the south, very high wind and a very heavy storm, rain; 26, unchanged; a very heavy storm; 27, no change in conditions; strong south-east to south wind; 28, weather improved, storm moderating; 29, fine.

1908—July; no stormy weather, this month.

1909—July 1, rainy, wind moderate n.e.; 2, north-east wind, rain; 3, cloudy weather, north-east wind; 4, conditions unchanged, north-east wind; 5, north-east wind, rainy;

1910—July 4, rainy, moderate north-east wind veering to north to north-west; a very heavy breeze from north-west quarter; 24, unsettled; 25, north-east wind, rain and storm; 26, north-east wind, rainy, stormy; 27, south-east wind, stormy, rain; 28, south-east wind, stormy, rain; 29, south-east wind, rainy; 30, south-east wind, rainy; 31, wind more moderate, shifting to south, rainy, but clearing.



Fort Prince of Wales, Churchill, Man., at the present day (Photo., J. A. Campbell, 1919).



Fort Prince of Wales, Churchill, Man. View along the top of the walls (Photo., J. A. Campbell).