



## Fundy Model Forest

### *~Partners in Sustainability~*

**Report Title:** A Book on the Traditional Medicinal and Other Uses of the Trees and Shrubs of Atlantic Canada by the Mi'kmaq and Maliseet First Nations

**Author:** G. Blouin

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**Principal contact information:**

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***The Fundy Model Forest...  
...Partners in Sustainability***

*“The Fundy Model Forest (FMF) is a partnership of 38 organizations that are promoting sustainable forest management practices in the Acadian Forest region.”*

Atlantic Society of Fish and Wildlife Biologists  
Canadian Institute of Forestry  
Canadian Forest Service  
City of Moncton  
Conservation Council of New Brunswick  
Fisheries and Oceans Canada  
Indian and Northern Affairs Canada  
Eel Ground First Nation  
Elgin Eco Association  
Elmhurst Outdoors  
Environment Canada  
Fawcett Lumber Company  
Fundy Environmental Action Group  
Fundy National Park  
Greater Fundy Ecosystem Research Group  
INFOR, Inc.  
J.D. Irving, Limited  
KC Irving Chair for Sustainable Development  
Maritime College of Forest Technology  
NB Department of the Environment and Local Government  
NB Department of Natural Resources  
NB Federation of Naturalists  
New Brunswick Federation of Woodlot Owners  
NB Premier's Round Table on the Environment & Economy  
New Brunswick School District 2  
New Brunswick School District 6  
Nova Forest Alliance  
Petitcodiac Sportsman's Club  
Red Bank First Nation  
Remsoft Inc.  
Southern New Brunswick Wood Cooperative Limited  
Sussex and District Chamber of Commerce  
Sussex Fish and Game Association  
Town of Sussex  
Université de Moncton  
University of NB, Fredericton - Faculty of Forestry  
University of NB - Saint John Campus  
Village of Petitcodiac  
Washademoak Environmentalists



Final Report  
to  
Fundy Model Forest

Title of Project:

A Book on the Traditional Medicinal and Other Uses  
of the Trees and Shrubs of Atlantic Canada  
By the Mi'kmaq and Maliseet First Nations

submitted by:

Glen Blouin

March 31, 2002

## **Abstract**

This project entails the research and writing of a book whose primary focus is the traditional use of the native trees and shrubs of Atlantic Canada by the Mi'kmaq and Maliseet First Nations. The emphasis is on the medicinal or healing aspects of the vegetation. This is compared or contrasted with the practices of First Nations elsewhere on the continent. Where the information is available, such usage includes the part of the plant used, its method of harvesting, its manner of preparation, its internal or external application, and its dosage. Wherever possible, the scientific explanation for the curative power of the plant is explained, along with its historical and current recognition by the medical community. Other aboriginal uses of the trees and shrubs are also examined, including food, wood and bark in housing and transportation, the preparation of dyes, arts and crafts, tools and implements, weapons, as well as any ceremonial or religious aspects of the species. Secondary focus is on identification, the species' range, site requirements, and role in the ecosystem. Color photographs will be interspersed throughout as a guide to identification.

## Introduction

Within Canada's Maritime provinces and the neighbouring Gaspé peninsula, two First Nations peoples have dwelt for over a millennium. The Mi'kmaq currently reside in eastern and northeastern New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia (including Cape Breton Island), and in Maria, Québec. The Maliseet have settled along the Saint John River valley in New Brunswick. Both Nations are Algonquian, culturally similar, but linguistically distinct.

Like all native people across North America, both First Nations had a close relationship with nature and an intimate knowledge of the species of flora among which they dwelt. They relied on native trees and shrubs, as well as other vegetation, for medicines, food, dwellings, dyes, arts and crafts, housing, transportation, tools and implements, and weapons.

The traditional medicinal uses were passed down orally from generation to generation, as was their religion, culture, and customs. Much of this indigenous knowledge was reserved not only for the medicine men and women, or shamans, but shared among the population at large.

The first written documentation of native cures and remedies appeared in the diaries and chronicles of early European explorers and colonists, and the voluminous writings of the *Jesuit Relations*.

Since the arrival of the white man, the upheaval of their homelands, disruption of their lifestyle, and the dominating influence of European culture threatened to break the chain of traditional knowledge.

A number of enlightened anthropologists, ethnobotanists, historians, and medical doctors, beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, recognized the need to preserve in writing many of the traditional medicinal practices before they were lost forever. Among them were Silas Rand, Tappan Adney, Montague Chamberlain, William Mechling, William Ganong, Wilson and Ruth Wallis, Arthur Van Wart, Frank Speck, Bernard Hoffman, and later, Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq Laurie Lacey.

These individuals lived among and interviewed at length countless native people, publishing their findings in scholarly journals in the varied fields of anthropology, natural history, folklore, and ethnohistory, as well as a number of books published by museums, universities, and independent publishers.

Nowhere have all of these findings been compiled into a single document which describes this living legacy of the Mi'kmaq and Maliseet First Nations, and their affinity to nature, the land, and the forest, specifically their use of native trees and shrubs in healing.

This is the purpose of this book.

## Methodologies

Research for this book was conducted through: a) a comprehensive search of the literature, and b) a series of personal interviews with knowledgeable native people.

The literature search required in-depth study of the topic of traditional use of native trees and shrubs by the Mi'kmaq and Maliseet people. Since, like all their traditions, they were oral in nature, all written accounts until very recently were written by non-natives.

First were the chronicles of the early European explorers, adventurers, settlers, and missionaries - those who had initial contact with First Nations people. Although their works could best be described as historical in nature, it is remarkable that so many of them devoted considerable time to recording and documenting the medicinal practices of the native people they encountered. Clearly they were fascinated.

Among the historical documents consulted were the writings of Jacques Cartier, Samuel de Champlain, Marc Lescarbot (1609), Nicolas Denys (1672), and Christien LeClercq (1691). Additionally, the *Jesuit Relations*, written between 1610 and 1791, provided the insights of individuals who lived among the natives in an effort to convert them to Christianity. Unfortunately, most, but not all, of these writings were underlined with skepticism for the perceived pagan practices; however they do represent accurate accountings based on first-hand experience. Unfortunately as well, the Jesuits in Paris significantly edited these documents before publication, further reinforcing the bias.

This body of work represented the first stage of research into medicinal and other uses of native trees and shrubs.

What followed was a century, from about 1780 to 1880, where very little was written. In the late 1800s, a number of anthropologists, ethnologists, and ethnographers (partial list included in Introduction) recognized that much extremely valuable information was being lost through acculturation of the native people, and set about to record what they could. Many of these, both in the Maritimes and elsewhere, lived on the reserves, interviewed medicine people, and documented their findings in a wide range of scholarly journals, including:

- Acadian Naturalist
- Acadiensis
- American Anthropologist
- American Indian Culture and Research Journal
- American Journal of Pharmacy & the Sciences Supporting Public Health
- American Midland Naturalist
- American Naturalist
- Annals of Science
- Anthropologica
- Biological Monographs
- Bird Lore

- Bulletin of the Free Museum of Science and Art
- Bulletin of the National Museum of Canada
- Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine
- Bulletin of the Public Museum of the City of Milwaukee
- Bulletin of the USDA Bureau of Plant Industry
- Canadian Geographic Journal
- Canadian Medical Association Journal
- Canadian Pharmaceutical Journal
- Economic Botany
- Ethnohistory
- Illinois Biological Monographs
- International Journal of Pharmacognosy
- Journal of American Folk-lore
- Journal of the American Pharmaceutical Association
- Journal of Ethnopharmacology

These publications comprised the source of the second stage of the search of the literature on medicinal usage.

Fortunately, there is also a third source - the personal collection of William F. Ganong, which is housed in the Saint John Museum. Outdoorsman, historian, translator, and botanist, Ganong assembled a fascinating and comprehensive collection of books, reports, scholarly papers, as well as his own personal correspondence with others with similar interests in Eastern Canada and the U.S.

Finally, there are the personal interviews I have been able to conduct thus far with native people who still hold this traditional knowledge. This began in 1983, when I had the opportunity to interview Maliseet Peter Paul, and Mi'kmaq Georgina Larocque, William and Irene Simon, and Willie John and Mildred Milliea.

Unfortunately, this second round of personal research conducted in 2001 has not proven as productive. Thus far, I have been able to undertake only one productive interview with a Mi'kmaq representative, John Joe Sark of Prince Edward Island, who proved to be very helpful. I will make a third and final attempt this summer.

The other facets of the book research - into Maritime prehistory, forest ecology, botany, alternative and mainstream medicine, archeology, history, etc. have been conducted at the rather impressive array of libraries in the Ottawa/Gatineau region: the Museum of Civilization, CISTI, Museum of Nature, Environment Canada, Natural Resources Canada, and Agriculture Canada. In addition, I have had considerable assistance from those within the scientific and research community, who have shared their knowledge and expertise in specific areas.

## Discussion of Results

At this time, the status of the book is as follows:

- Research of the literature is 90% completed. As is the norm, new questions arise as each chapter is finalized, necessitating further minor research, validation, and clarification of specific topics;
- Personal research (interviews) is 10% completed;
- The Acknowledgments Page is completed to date, but will be amended as others provide assistance in the project;
- The Introduction is completed, with a few minor revisions to be incorporated as the book progresses;
- 27 chapters are in various stages of completion;
- The list of Mi`kmaq and Maliseet names for the trees and shrubs is completed;
- 90% of the photography has been taken, with quality sufficient for publication;
- The Glossary is completed;
- The Bibliography is 90% completed.

The project is ahead of schedule in some aspects, on schedule in others, and behind schedule in one. Specifically, the number of interviews with native elders and those knowledgeable about medicinal plants has been far short of expectations. On the two trips taken to New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, only one truly productive interview took place. A third and final trip is scheduled this summer, with leads being followed up on at the present time.

Additionally, my personal financial situation has necessitated devoting considerable time to writing for immediate income, in such publications as the *Ottawa Citizen*, *Rural Delivery*, and *Atlantic Forestry*. This has meant less time available to devote to the book, so progress on some of the chapters has been slower than anticipated.

Response to an application to the Canada Council for the Arts, submitted in September, 2001, has unfortunately been delayed, and I have been advised by the Council that a decision will not be made until early April. Should the decision be positive, I will once again be able to devote my full energies to completing this project. Otherwise progress will continue, but at a rate slower than anticipated.

## Conclusions

From the research undertaken, it is clear that the development of medicinal drugs by the native people of North America, and in particular the Mi'kmaq and Maliseet First Nations of the Maritime provinces, was at minimum on a par with that of post-medieval Europe. Some of these medicinals were derived from fish and mammals, but the majority were founded on the native vegetation among which they lived, and with which they had both a close affinity and comprehensive knowledge. Included in that vegetation were the native trees and shrubs.

As we move into this new millennium, we have begun to broaden our appreciation for all the benefits the forests provide, other than the strictly economic. Wood and paper products have been and will continue to be critical to the economies of the Maritimes. In New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, and to a lesser extent in Prince Edward Island, the harvesting, and processing, and in recent years, the silvicultural management of our forests, generate significant employment, tax and stumpage revenues, contribute most significantly to our balance of payments, and provide important spin-off benefits to the infrastructure that supports the industry - equipment, fuel, transportation, etc.

However the forests provide a host of other benefits to society that are equally, if not more important, than wood products. Among these are fresh air, carbon sinks, wildlife habitat, erosion control, aesthetics, recreation, tourism, and a host of others. One of these is the potential of the forests to provide a source of medicine. A century ago we learned this with the discovery of aspirin or ASA from the willow species. Even more significantly, we are now sustainably harvesting ground hemlock (Canada yew) as a treatment for various forms of cancer. Doubtless there are more cures awaiting our discovery in the forest - cures that our First Nations people recognized many centuries ago. Hopefully this book will in some small way help the mainstream medical community explore this potential - and in this way benefit society in ways undreamed of.

## **Accounting of Expenditures**

Research of the literature	\$ 7,600
Photography	800
Writing	18,000
Interviews	200
Ganong research	250
Travel	2,150
Office expenditures	1100
Library services	170
Film	270
Local travel	420
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<b>Total expenditures to date</b>	<b>\$ 30,960</b>

(as of March 31, 2002)

## **Summary**

I would like to thank the Fundy Model Forest for its contribution to this project. As stated in the Introduction, this work will be the first book to comprehensively document the use of Maritime native trees and shrubs by the First Nations of the region. As such it will provide some valuable insights into their prehistory, history, lifestyle, and traditional medical practices.

It will illustrate another significant benefit of our forests, and perhaps lead to further exploration of the native trees and shrubs as sources of medicine.