

# BORDERLINE

People often talk about the dividing line between Canada and the United States being the 49th parallel. It's true that about 2,000 kilometres of the border runs along that line of latitude, but a lot of it doesn't. Settling where the whole thing would go took more than 140 years.

## Alaska Boundary Dispute

Look at the northwest coast of British Columbia. See how the Canada-U.S. border cuts off most of the islands? For a long time, the two countries claimed different territory along the coast. Things got serious when the Klondike gold rush brought thousands of people to the region in the 1890s. A committee of three Americans, two Canadians and one British member made a decision in 1903. The Canadians were furious that the British representative agreed with the Americans on where to set the border we see today.



British Columbia coastline near Prince Rupert.

The first formal agreement on the border came in the 1783 Treaty of Paris after the American Revolutionary War.

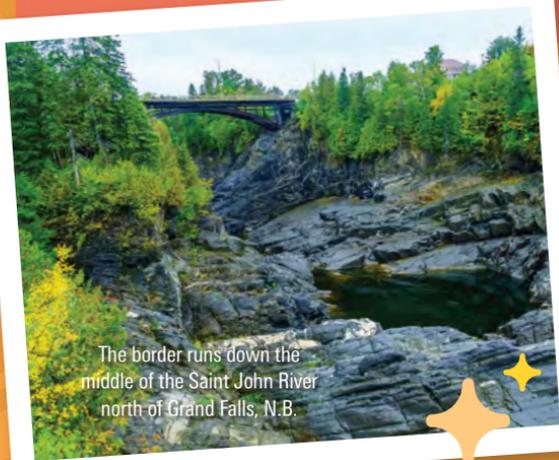
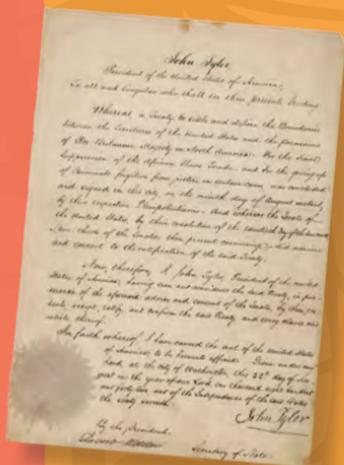


## WESTERN DISAGREEMENT

After the War of 1812, Britain and the U.S. debated who would control the area west of the Rocky Mountains, all the way from Mexico to Alaska. (The Americans called it the Oregon Territory. The British called it Columbia.) Some Americans were ready to go to war to get all the land up to Alaska, a latitude of 54 degrees and 40 minutes. Their slogan was "54-40 or fight!" (That's where the Vancouver band 54-40 took its name.) In 1846 the two countries signed the Oregon Treaty, settling on the 49th parallel as the border.

## Eastern Standoff

In the early 1800s, Britain and the U.S. both claimed an area south of Grand Falls, N.B., around the Aroostook River. They wanted its tall pine trees for valuable lumber. In 1831, they asked the king of the Netherlands to judge where the border should go, but the new state of Maine rejected his decision. By 1838, both sides were accusing the other of trespassing and stealing logs. Things got even more tense after they sent armed troops, and there was nearly a war. The Webster-Ashburton Treaty (right) of 1842 finally settled the boundary.



The border runs down the middle of the Saint John River north of Grand Falls, N.B.

A 1908 treaty did a better job of establishing exactly where the Canada-U.S. border would go. The two countries and Britain also sorted out how to mark the border in the many bodies of water.

## ODDS AND ENDS

Even with the details of the boundary settled, there are still some unusual spots. The only road to New Brunswick's Campobello Island goes through the state of Maine, although you can get there by boat from Canada. On the West Coast, the 49th parallel cuts through a peninsula south of Vancouver, leaving the American community of Point Roberts only accessible by land via Canada. Inaccurate maps led to the Northwest Angle ending up as part of the state of Minnesota but surrounded on three sides by Manitoba and Ontario.



This 2017 photo shows the phone travellers used to report entering or leaving the Northwest Angle.

# MARKING IT OUT

It's one thing to draw a line on a map and call it a boundary. It's a whole different thing to create that boundary in the real world. Everywhere that we have a boundary marker is a place someone had to get to by foot or in a boat, leaving a clear indication for others. Most of the time, the work was done by official teams of British and American surveyors.

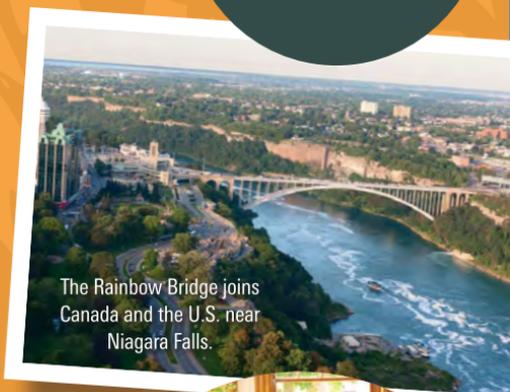
A **surveyor** is someone who measures and often marks an area of land. Before cars, airplanes, drones or other tech, surveyors slogged through swamps, hiked and canoed or did whatever else was needed to show where the border should be. And of course, sometimes they made mistakes, especially when they were trying to figure out what vague wording in a treaty actually meant on the landscape in front of them.

Surveying to determine the border was hard, even dangerous work. In 1819, three members of the British team died after falling sick while surveying marshy areas around Lake Erie.

British surveyor John Hawkins and American Archibald Campbell often disagreed, but starting in the late 1850s, their teams placed markers and cleared land to show the border along much of the 49th parallel. Their work was so careful that much of it stayed in place even after the governments did new official surveys in the early 1900s.



**Two out of every three Canadians live within 100 km of the U.S. border.**



The Rainbow Bridge joins Canada and the U.S. near Niagara Falls.

The border between Quebec and the state of Vermont runs right through the 1901 Haskell Free Library and Opera House. One door is on the Canadian side, and one on the American side. Staff speak French and English.



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