

NICHOLAS GUITARD

*Waterfalls*  
of New Brunswick



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*To my mother, Margaret Rankine, for instilling  
an appreciation for the natural world*

*and to my wife, Marlaine Roberts,  
for her encouragement and love.*



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# Introduction

“. . . a good land, a land of brooks of water,  
of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills.”

— Deuteronomy 8:7

New Brunswick possesses neither the largest nor the highest waterfalls in Canada. Our waterfalls pale in comparison with those found in British Columbia and Alberta; there are even some provinces that can claim many more. What New Brunswick does possess, however, is a small geographical land mass coupled with multi-geological formations, all overlaid by numerous lakes, wetlands, and rivers. And this combination has produced a unique situation: no matter where we live in this beautiful province we have a local waterfall to call our own.

Fredericton has its own Garden Creek Falls near the edge of town, while Silver Falls dazzles the residents of Saint John. Monctonians drive only thirty minutes to see the spectacular Gordon Falls on the Pollett River, the people of Dalhousie can visit the Charlo Falls on the South Charlo River. And this scenario plays out across the province, giving us the distinct advantage of being able to visit and appreciate our waterfalls.

A discussion of waterfalls is inevitably a discussion about geology. Although New Brunswick is situated in the interior of a relatively stable land mass, we know that the province has had a tumultuous geological history. Its formation involved periods of volcanism, continental collision, and glaciation. Pressure from successive continental collisions produced volcanic activity that left New Brunswick with some striking topographical features, such as Mount Carleton and Sugarloaf Mountain in Campbellton. The province encompasses the northern most section of North America's Appalachian Mountains that stretch the length of the eastern seaboard. Once as lofty as the Himalayas, the Appalachians were formed as the result of continental collisions. New Brunswick's collage of geological zones is a melting pot of rock types that give it a character unlike any other.

The continental glaciers of the last ice age — 10,000 years ago — drastically modified the landscape by shaving down the high peaks of the Appalachian Mountains, scattering debris that blocked rivers, forming lakes, and releasing volumes of water that rushed seaward. The resulting turbulent rivers carved the valleys and deep ravines that are home to the province's abundant waterfalls. Although New Brunswick's geology is its most enduring landscape feature, continual erosion means that each waterfall site will change with time.

The rivers of New Brunswick belong to three great natural river systems:

- the Saint John River and all its tributaries, sloping southerly into the Bay of Fundy; this includes the Petitcodiac and its tributaries, which also flow into the Bay of Fundy;
- the northeastward-bound Miramichi River and its many tributaries, which run into the Gulf of St. Lawrence; and
- the Nepisiguit and the Restigouche Rivers, with numerous tributaries that empty into the Chaleur Bay.

If one superimposes these river systems over a geological map of New Brunswick, the relative locations of the waterfalls becomes apparent. Waterfalls are formed by various phenomena, but the majority are located at transition points between geological formations.

Beginning with the earliest documented history of the Maliseet and Mi'kmaq nations over 9,000 years ago, river systems have been fundamental to life. Every aspect of daily life hinged upon the availability of fresh water for crops, fishing, and hunting. Essential portages connected traditional winter hunting grounds and summer fishing villages. From the historical Maliseet Trail to the traditional hunting grounds of Nictau Lake, survival and fresh water were inextricably linked.

The Europeans clearly understood this reliance on rivers. As they settled the land, they established communities in the estuaries and further along the great branches of the rivers. During the early phase of European settlement, most communities were built near waterfalls, not only for the availability of fish and game, but eventually for the waterwheels to power grist- and sawmills. Over time, the necessity to live near waterfalls diminished, and many smaller



communities vanished, leaving the waterfalls behind. Our provincial map is dotted with small settlements, such as Sproule Settlement in Albert County, which no longer exist.

One of the most appealing aspects of waterfalls is their scenic splendour — the awesome power of water gushing down a vertical drop affects people in a positive way. At the turn of the last century, William Francis Ganong documented and mapped the location of waterfalls such as Falls Brook Falls, Trout Brook Falls, and Gordon Falls. The original Pokiok Falls near Nackawic was a favourite destination for visitors from near and far. Over the years, New Brunswick's waterfalls have been tapped for their economic potential as eco-tourism sites. For example, there is a \$10 fee per car to access what is reputed to be New Brunswick's highest waterfall, Falls Brook Falls, on the Irvings' private land on the Southwest Miramichi. Other examples are Fuller Falls in the Fundy Trail Parkway, Williams Falls in Mount Carleton Provincial Park, and the various waterfalls in Fundy National Park. Examples of waterfalls located in recreational areas with no admission charge are Little Sheephouse Falls, Grand Falls, and Lepreau Falls.



New Brunswick's waterfalls support many habitats of diverse flora and fauna, and the government of New Brunswick has taken steps to allocate a network of protected natural areas within several ecological regions of the province. The Little Salmon River Gorge south of Sussex in the Caledonia Highlands is one example. Within this area there is a myriad of waterfalls such as McLeod Brook Falls, Walton Glen Gorge Falls, and eleven falls on the Little Salmon itself.

The Stillwater watershed in Restigouche unfortunately has not attained protected status. This pristine area, a truly magnificent habitat of plants and animals, may not remain so. Although a coalition, made up of concerned citizens, industry, and naturalists, lobbied the government, they were unsuccessful in getting the area declared a protected zone.

I have chosen the waterfalls in this book to reflect a diversity of type and size; I also wanted to highlight waterfalls from all counties in the province. The book is divided into five sections, based on the New Brunswick's Department of Tourism and Parks scenic routes. This way the location of each waterfall can be related to a community. Each section is further defined by its ecological or geological attributes. For example, all the waterfalls along the Bay of Fundy are related to the Fundy Coastal Ecoregion and the Caledonia Geological Zone.

Venturing out into the countryside is the best way to appreciate New Brunswick's numerous waterfalls. When we explore these significant areas we encounter nature on its own terms; we make a journey of discovery into our ancient past, not to mention recent history, and are given a connection to the future. From wild spring torrents to summer trickles; from bright colours reflected in autumn to spectacular ice sculptures in winter, our waterfalls will not disappoint you.

We humans are naturally drawn by the appeal of water in motion, by its constant relentless change. It is said that the underlying attraction to the movement of water is biological. Regardless of the reason, waterfalls provide an opportunity to connect with our physical world, at a subconscious level within us. Whether it is the negative ionization of oxygen produced by a waterfall or something more primeval, we all feel refreshed and energized from the experience of spending time near a waterfall, listening to it and to the sound of breezes whispering through the leaves.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Stephen J. Paul". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized initial 'S'.

The

# Acadian



1. Melanson Falls
2. Kent Junction Falls
3. Pabineau Falls
4. Tetagouche Falls
5. Millstream Falls
6. Benjamin River Falls
7. Charlo Falls

# Coastal Drive

The Acadian Coastal Drive follows the entire east coast of New Brunswick from Aulac in the south to Charlo in the north — a distance of approximately 477 km.

Geologically, the region is comprised of two zones. The largest is the Maritimes Basin or New Brunswick Lowlands, a chevron-shaped land mass of sandstone and conglomerate rock formed by the sediments of an ancient river. The lowlands stretch from the Nova Scotia border to Bathurst. This includes the Acadian Peninsula and protrudes inland beyond Fredericton, including portions of Northumberland and York Counties. The entire region is tilted towards the coastline.

South of the Southwest Miramichi, rivers and streams are brownish in colour due to the many marshes and wetlands. Ecologically, the area is dominated by peat bogs. This fact, coupled with geological composition, means that there are few waterfalls of significant size, except for Melanson Falls in Westmorland County. North of the Southwest Miramichi River, the numerous tributaries are mountain-fed, ensuring that waterfalls such as Falls Brook Falls have clear and cold water.

From Bathurst to Charlo a second geological zone dominates the landscape. The Chaleur Highlands (Tobique-Chaleur Zone) were formed by continental convergence which folded the land back on itself in successive ridges and is part of the Appalachian Mountain range. The region runs west to east in a succession of high mountain ridges and deep valleys. This section of the route contains numerous post-glacial waterfalls. Such waterfalls — Millstream Falls in Gloucester County is one — are formed when debris from the last ice age blocked the original river. The water is then forced to flow around the encumbrance, forming a waterfall where the river drops back into the original channel.



# Melanson Falls

Westmorland County

Melanson Falls is one of New Brunswick's many out-of-sight gems. Located on McQuade Brook, in the rural area north of Moncton in the Irishtown and Scotch Settlement communities, it is named after the Melanson Family who live nearby. McQuade Brook carves a serpentine ravine into the flat countryside as it flows in an easterly direction toward the Shediac River. Along the ravine's edge, a thick cover of mixed forest conceals the brook and waterfall from view.

When you drive out through Irishtown, you see the once small Irish community now smattered with commercial and urban development. The waterfall is situated just below the steel trestle bridge on Cove Road. All signs of urbanization vanish as you walk along the edge of the brook to the falls. There is no marked trail, but getting down into the broad circular ravine at the base of the falls is relatively easy. The dense cover of the overstorey imbues the moist air with a greenish tint. The waterfall was at one time a favourite swimming location; it is also known as a great place to catch a trout or two. Melanson Falls is brightened by crystalline sparkles from the little sunlight that reaches the ravine.



Draining a series of wetlands to the west, McQuade Brook has the telltale brownish tint of swamp peat and decay. Melanson Falls is by no means large, but it is sited in a beautiful ravine. Take the time to walk up the brook to a smaller set of falls just below the bridge and bring along a fishing rod to try your luck and indulge yourself in the moment.



# Kent Junction Falls

Kent County

Some of New Brunswick's prettiest waterfalls are remote, but on occasion our roadways — and sometimes even a railway track — pass nearby. Such is the case with Kent Junction Falls, an anomaly in an area of wetland, peat bog, and only sluggish rivers. With its headwater just a few kilometres up from Kent Junction, Lower Meadow Brook falls into the Kouchibouguacis River, and is part of a large area in Kent County where most rivers and streams move slowly and are laden with rich sediment. At times the water is almost black from the peaty soil.

At one time, there was a busy sawmill on the Kouchibouguacis, just upstream from the falls. Some of the locals claim that the Lower Meadow Brook may have been diverted when the Canadian National Railway built a bridge across the Kouchibouguacis River. The brook is relatively small — just a runoff on the upper side of the railroad tracks through a forest of cedar and balsam fir. Lower Meadow Brook cascades directly into the larger river as it dances over a series of shale ledges giving you a nice sense of joie de vivre.

The waterfall is partially obscured from the highway by the railway bridge. Fortunately, there is an area on the east side of the highway that is used for canoe launching as well as parking. On the opposite side of the roadway from the parking area, a path leads up along the southside of the Kouchibouguacis River under the railroad bridge to a vantage point near the base of the falls. Kent Junction Falls, though not large, is picturesque with the Canadian National Railway bridge framing the waterfall.

