

# The Aboriginal People of Newfoundland

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## The Aboriginal People of Newfoundland

The Beothuk people of Newfoundland were not the very first inhabitants of the island. Thousands of years before their arrival there existed an ancient race, named the Maritime Archaic Indians who lived on the shores of Newfoundland. (Red Ochre Indians, Marshall, 4.) Burial plots and polished stone tools are occasionally discovered near Beothuk remains. Some people speculate that, because of the proximity of the artifacts to the former lands of the Beothuk, the [Maritime](#) Archaic Indians and the Beothuk may have been related. It is not certain when the Beothuk arrived on the island. In fact little is actually known about the people, compared to what is known about other amerindian civilisations, only artifacts and stories told by [elders](#) tell the historians who these people really were. Some speculate that they travelled from "Labrador to Newfoundland across the [strait](#) of Belle Isle, which at one time was only 12 miles wide. By about 200 AD the Beothuk Indians were probably well settled into Newfoundland."(Red Ochre, 8)

The Beothuk were not alone on Newfoundland wither. The Dorset Eskimos, who came from Cape Dorset regions of the north around 500 BC also shared the island. They presumably had contact with the Beothuk, exchanging tools or engaging in battle. In any

case the Dorset Indians died out leaving Newfoundland empty to the control of the Beothuk people who now had no enemies and a wide vast territory. The Beothuk, although part of the Algonkian family developed their own language and culture. The 400 words that are still known from their language prove their Algonkian heritage. The development of their culture was a great success. The success of the Beothuk people as a whole was in part because of their skills in fishing, hunting and travel. They were the "only amerindian group to navigate on the high seas."(Grabowski lecture Oct 4, `96.) This was because of the construction of their canoes. Normally paddling on the high seas is dangerous, but Beothuk canoes were so designed to with stand high waves and stay accurately on course. The canoes "were made of a frame work of spruce and then covered with birch bark."(Red Ochre, 9) They curved high at the sides and a sharp bottom acted as a keel. The high sides protected as a barrier from wave swamping the boat. Because of hunting expeditions on the Funk islands, 60 kilometres from shore, ocean travel was evident and sea worthiness was essential.

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