
Learning how to tell the story of a prospective geological World Heritage Site: rejoining art and science at Joggins

JOHN CALDER¹, HANS SAMUELSON², AND JENNA BOON³

1. Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources, Box 698, Halifax, NS, B3J 2T9 ¶ 2. Design + Communication Inc., 4749 Notre Dame St. West, Montreal, QC, H4C 1S9 ¶ 3. Cumberland Regional Economic Development Agency, 35 Church St., Amherst, NS, B4H 4A1

In seeking the inscription of Joggins on the list of World Heritage Sites, we have been compelled to come to grips with the significance of the story of a chapter of Earth history and of its place in the developing ideas of geological and broader scientific thought. In delivering this story, we are required to address the needs of a diverse audience, from local members of the community who have grown up on the cliff top, visitors of all ages and diverse educational and cultural background, to UNESCO officials and international country representatives who will decide on the worthiness of Joggins.

This challenge involves two cognitive steps: the first is to consider and fully understand the significance of a site beyond the confines of the discipline that may most appreciate it. The second is to communicate this relevance skillfully. Key to this delivery is careful distillation (possible only once a full understanding has been achieved), and ‘economic’ conveyance of the most strategic scientific principles required to avoid becoming generic or losing focus. These outcomes require the dedication of the scientist, expertise of the interpretive designer, input from others who bring the ‘public’ perspective, and a close working relationship for the three.

For the Joggins site, a starting point in this process is to consider the fundamental question ‘Why is Joggins famous?’ (or in UNESCO terms, the outstanding example in the world of this period of Earth history). Our answer is threefold, and embraces circumstances of Earth history, serendipity, and the quest for knowledge: 1) *the fossil record* of Joggins allows us to reconstruct the ‘Coal Age’ world here better than anywhere else on Earth (a bold statement that must be, and is, defensible); 2) *its grand exposure* on the shores of the Bay of Fundy, where its fossil record is continuously hewn and replenished by tides unsurpassed in the World; and 3) *the role that it played* in the developing ideas of some of the greatest scientific thinkers of the Nineteenth Century. From here, the story – and challenge – begins.