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## Mistaken Point and the world heritage project – an update

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RICHARD G. THOMAS

*Mistaken Point Ecological Reserve, Box 12, Site 13, RR 1, Trepassey,  
Newfoundland A0A 4B0, Canada*

Being inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage (WH) List is the most prestigious, formal, international recognition a fossil site can attain. Currently, the WH List comprises 962 properties of which only 13 are 'primary' Fossil Sites. To date, there are no Precambrian WH Fossil Sites.

Mistaken Point Ecological Reserve (MPER) is a globally significant Ediacaran fossil site located on the southeast coast of Newfoundland's Avalon Peninsula. Renowned as "the place where life first got big", the Reserve contains fossils of the world's oldest (579 Ma) and largest, architecturally-complex, multi-cellular organisms. In 2004, MPER was added to Canada's official Tentative List of World Heritage properties. The province's Parks and Natural Areas Division (PNAD) manage the Reserve and are tasked with producing MPER's WH-nomination dossier.

Attaining WH Site status is a protracted, complex, demanding (and expensive) process. Work on Mistaken Point's WH application began in earnest in 2010 with the hiring of a Project Lead. Much essential preparatory work remains to be done, but writing the WH dossier will commence later this year. The provisional date for submitting the dossier to the WH Centre is February 1, 2015.

A critical component of any successful WH nomination is the involvement and support of the local communities associated with the site. Considerable progress has been made in addressing MPER's perceived community engagement 'deficit'. In March 2012, a WH Public Advisory Committee was established and has since met seven times and held two strategic planning workshops. A WH Community Liaison has been hired (August, 2012) and Dr. Alistair Bath (Memorial University of Newfoundland) has conducted 'human dimensions' research and facilitated workshops in support of the nomination process.

Late in 2012, Dr. Alex Liu and Prof. Martin Brasier completed a detailed Global Comparative Analysis (commissioned by PNAD) of the world's 109 Ediacaran fossil sites. MPER performed extremely well in this Analysis—a result which demonstrates its possession of Outstanding Universal Value and provides a major boost to its chances of success.

The Ediacaran biota remains a "hot" research topic. A recently-published claim that some Ediacaran organisms were terrestrial is proving highly controversial. Palaeontological research at MPER continues apace with significant new discoveries being made. Coastal erosion in the Reserve is the subject of a M.Sc. thesis and is presently being monitored (using RTK GPS) by NL Geological Survey

staff. A geotechnical assessment of how best to stabilize the gravel slopes and rock walls above the main "D" and "E" surfaces has also just been completed.

Since 2007 there has been a dramatic increase in media coverage of MPER. In 2012, the Reserve was featured in NL Tourism's iconic "Find Yourself" advertising campaign. The total number of guided tour participants in 2012 increased by 118% versus 2011. Concerns over fossil wear on "D" and "E" due to foot traffic has prompted PNAD to investigate alternative public tour destinations.