

Geologizing the East Coast Trail: Could it be a candidate for a “classic rock tour”?

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In 2018, Geoscience Canada initiated a new series of thematic articles entitled Classic Rock Tours. The idea is to combine technical and historical context for well-known and geologically informative areas with practical advice that facilitates independent visits. We see such articles as educationally valuable, but also as a service to those who seek simply to combine recreation with some learning. The series commenced with an article about James Hutton's unconformity at Siccar Point in Scotland, and we hope soon to publish an article about hiking through the remarkable stratigraphic sequence of the Grand Canyon in Arizona. We are seeking ideas for future articles, but it is important to go beyond mere ideas, and actually complete such papers for submission to the journal. Ideas are the easiest part of the process!

Newfoundland's East Coast Trail, established through many years of hard work and volunteer effort, has become an important attraction for locals and visitors alike. It currently starts in the area near Bauline, Conception Bay, and extends around Cape St. Francis, right through the greater St. John's area, and then along the Atlantic coast to the area around Cappahayden. En route, it traverses late Precambrian (Cryogenian and Ediacaran) rocks of the Harbour Main, Conception, St. John's and Signal Hill groups, which collectively define the type area for the larger crustal province termed Avalonia. The trail also reveals much about glaciation, landscape evolution and modern coastal processes. There are few other places where such striking geological features conveniently coexist with an urban centre, and can be experienced so easily from a high-quality, accessible trail network. Since 2015, I have been trying intermittently to document interesting geological sites along several segments of the East Coast Trail, with an emphasis on the northeast Avalon. A short guidebook for a “Geohike” between the Flatrock area and Torbay, produced by GAC Newfoundland, was an initial result from this work. This is probably one of the most interesting sections of the trail, but there is also great potential in the Cape St. Francis area, which has long been used by Memorial University for field-work training. The entire northern section of the East Coast Trail presents an ideal candidate for an article in the Classic Rock Tours series, and this is an obvious project for GAC Newfoundland and others to support. Four years ago, I might have seen it as something to try and pursue alone, but it is now very clear that completing it will require assistance from many others with greater knowledge of specific units and localities. Preparing such an account would not only be a contribution to GAC's scientific journal, but also a benefit for the Canadian and International geoscience communities.