



A History of Canada in Ten Maps: Epic Stories of Charting a Mysterious Land

Adam Shoalts

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The sweeping, epic story of the mysterious land that came to be called "Canada" like it's never been told before.

Every map tells a story. And every map has a purpose--it invites us to go somewhere we've never been. It's an account of what we know, but also a trace of what we long for.

Ten Maps conjures the world as it appeared to those who were called upon to map it. What would the new world look like to wandering Vikings, who thought they had drifted into a land of mythical creatures, or Samuel de Champlain, who had no idea of the vastness of the landmass just beyond the treeline?

Adam Shoalts, one of Canada's foremost explorers, tells the stories behind these centuries old maps, and how they came to shape what became "Canada."

It's a story that will surprise readers, and reveal the Canada we never knew was hidden. It brings to life the characters and the bloody disputes that forged our history, by showing us what the world looked like before it entered the history books. Combining storytelling, cartography, geography, archaeology and of course history, this book shows us Canada in a way we've never seen it before.

A History of Canada in Ten Maps: Epic Stories of Charting a Mysterious Land Details

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Author : Adam Shoalts

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From Reader Review A History of Canada in Ten Maps: Epic Stories of Charting a Mysterious Land for online ebook

Rhea Peterson says

Adam Shoalts makes Canadian history an exciting and interesting read. I really enjoyed the format of this book, although including some drawings of maps would have been a nice addition. A must read for all history students.

Duckpondwithoutducks says

I received a copy of this in a Goodreads giveaway.

This book is a history of Canada from approximately 1000 A.D. to the mid 1800s, told through the lens of various explorers and map makers.

Each chapter focuses on a different explorer and mapmaker, some well known, like Samuel de Champlain and Alexander Mackenzie, some not as well known, like Jacques-Nicolas Bellin and Peter Pond.

Chapter 9 included a detailed account of one particular battle of the War of 1812, though, that didn't quite seem to fit in with the rest of the book.

The book was full of action and adventure, and I really enjoyed it.

The only thing is that, with the title, I expected there to be maps in the book.

It would greatly enrich the experience of reading the book if you could refer to the maps spoken about in the text.

My copy was just a proof copy, so maybe there will be maps in the hardcover when it comes out next month.

David Kitz says

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. But then I love both history and maps, so the combination of the two made for a delightful read.

Adam Shoalts writes from personal experience as an avid outdoors man and canoeist. He has personally explored many of the rivers that he describes in this book.

It's easy for us to forget that for the early explorers Canada was a vast uncharted wilderness. Our history is a history of discovering the sheer size of this landmass that was not fully known even to its aboriginal inhabitants. The same can be said of us today. We don't fully know or grasp the size of this massive wilderness.

Shoalts does an excellent job of sketching the character of these early explorers and mapmakers. There are scoundrels and heroes in these pages. I felt enriched by reading every account.

Ryan says

This was a really neat read! In each chapter, Shoalts looks at a different pre-confederation map of Canada, and the conditions under which it was created. The maps range from Leif Erikson's first map of Vinland to the maps of the Arctic produced by the Franklin expedition, so there's a wide range of material drawn from. With each map, Shoalts takes time to present the cultural and political reasons behind each map's

development, in a manner that is welcoming and open to those without much Canadian history knowledge.

Due to the nature of the book, it's not without its limitations. The book relies heavily on settler sources (although it does acknowledge the role of Indigenous people in the development of the country), and the map-making conceit means that a lot of the political and cultural history that shaped the country is overlooked. If you understand those limitations going in, though, it's a real treat, because Shoalts' ability to relate the compelling and complex nature of Canadian history is incredible.

Rick says

I heard the author speak at a Rotary Conference in Collingwood; not having read his first book, wasn't sure what to expect, but his talk was very entertaining and funny so I bought his book afterwards. I was lucky to get a copy as the bookseller at the event quickly sold out. I've read a lot of Canadian history; much of it boring, some of it interesting. But nothing like this! History would be everyone's favourite subject if it were taught like this. I ended up staying up until 2:30 that night because I couldn't put the thing down! The book has an epic scope that transcends a more traditional approach to the country's past, weaving in Vikings, First Nations, Champlain, legends, monsters, voyageurs, explorers, wars, heroes, villains, and more into a story that is often inspiring but also at times quite funny. The maps in the book are beautiful colour reproductions of very old maps, with each one linked to a chapter in the book. Shoalts has a knack for bringing the past to life; even more impressive for a book that reads as well as this one are the hundreds of notes on sources included at the end of the book for readers wanting to know more.

Kristen Lesperance says

This book is a fantastic read. The author really took the time to research this book and get all the facts. I found that he had a fantastic way of writing that really showed his passion and really added additional fuel to my passion for Canadian history. I had the opportunity to meet the author at a book signing where he talked about his time he did canoeing the arctic and followed the same route as the explorers. It was awesome to see the pictures and then to read about what the explorers did while in the same places. I think this is a read every Canadian should read as it gives an interesting prospective on Canada history.

Andrew says

For starters, this isn't really a book about maps. So put aside notions of a boring tome of cartography. Sure, there are maps here, but they feel more like an organizing principle than the topic of discussion.

What is that discussion? The dramatic, heroic, foolhardy, bloody, frozen, and inspired exploration of Canada. How did our vast country come to be drawn on the maps and understood? Before Google Earth documented everything from the heavens, obstinate but brilliant men, women, Europeans, Canadians, and most of all Indigenous People trekked past the last ramshackle fort and into the forest. And sometimes beyond to the frozen wastes.

Why we haven't learned THIS version of Canadian history in school is black mark on curricula across the country. More students would pursue history as a proud discipline while standing with humility before the feats of those who literally put it on the map.

Koit says

I enjoyed this throughout though it kind of also missed out on what it said it would be. The stories presented -- about the explorers and voyageurs -- were well worth the space on the paper, but throughout the entire book the maps were more of a secondary thought. This could have been 'A History of Canada in Ten Episodes' and the difference would have been immaterial.

So, for the lack of emphasis on the maps I deducted a point while the excellent quality of the stories is worth quite a few others. I do think the author's biases come through and he is perhaps not as harsh as one should be on Mackenzie (and how original he was and who he borrowed from in his journeys), but at the same time the chapter on the Norsemen is illuminating and the early Frenchmen get a lot of credit (as is their due).

The final points about the future are perhaps less required in a book like this although it came at the right time for me when I'd just been looking into the Canadian Arctic and its general mapping. Hydrography is where it is right now, but the pace of the afterword was quite different from the rest of the book -- but if my main problem is with the title and the afterword, I think we can say that the book itself was pretty good indeed.

More importantly, heed my warning about maps. Maps aren't a part of this story, but Canada is -- so if you are more interested in Canada, go ahead, but if it is maps, then rather stay away.

This review was originally posted on my blog.

Dana Larose says

This was a neat premise for a book -- the author took 10 maps he felt were important to Canadian history and gave each one a chapter detailing the people who charted and crafted the map, the story of its creation, what was going on in Canada at a time, etc.

I learned a lot more about Cartier and Champlain, about the exploration of the West and about the War of 1812.

Shoalts emphasizes how much the explorers relied on the knowledge of First Nations people, which is a nice touch (and one I dimly recall being glossed over in my grade school history classes).

Danielle Tremblay says

This is definitely not a historical or an adventure novel. But the author succeeded in showing this immense country's history through the eyes of those who mapped it, the adventurers who wanted to see beyond the trees near its natural borders. The book goes back as far as modern knowledge allows it, that is to say up to its very first inhabitants and until the confederation, passing by the coming of Vikings. It tells of its legends, trades and deals, rivalries, partnerships, and agreements, mysteries and much more.

The author has done a tremendous research work. His book is not just a rough map of the country's borders;

it's a visit to the heart of the country's first nations, the people who created it and lived there.

Obviously, we are not shown everything that happened at that distant time. But how could that be? It was necessary to stay with the founders and other outstanding figures and milestones. But the author has managed to give this magnificent country its place on the world map and to do so in a reader-friendly way.

I recommend this book to all history lovers, of course, whether they are Canadian or not, but also to those who are interested in geography and anthropology. If you think you know everything about Canadian history and culture, I can assure you that you will discover a few things here. But even readers of historical novels or adventure story could find what they are looking for in its pages.

Thanks to *GoodReads giveaways* for this book I won in exchange for an honest review.

Joan says

A very interesting book about Canada's earliest explorers and their stories. The men seem very real and alive.

Trisha says

So this only got four stars because i naively thought that i would get to look at some maps in this book. There were no maps pictured! That is the only disappointment with this book. Yes, it told the story through maps, without pictures sigh. The stories were vibrant and compelling. They were told in a way I had not experienced before through school and self interest.

I won a copy of this book thru a first reads contest.

Angel says

A well-researched compilation of both acclaimed and lesser known explorers and moments in the history of Canada (Or rather, Canada before it became Canada). I found it to be a fun read, and I appreciate the author's ability to capture this eclectic collection of events.

As mentioned by another review, the chapter on the War of 1812 seemed somewhat out of place amongst the tales of explorers. Also, while I recognize that the aim of this book was not to be comprehensive, I am a bit disappointed that the author didn't include details on Tecumseh along with General Brock, especially since significant Indigenous figures are prominent in most other chapters.

The author offers a window for readers to observe Canadian history through a Eurocentric lens and does not take a critical stance on any of the explorers mentioned nor on the complex political and socioeconomic Indigenous-settler relationships and tensions that rose over the timeline covered in this book. Though I don't particularly see this as a negative point (I'd recommend those interested in this topic to look at a previous review where this is discussed much more extensively).

Note: The hardcover has a collection of maps that have been cited by others as being missing in the proof. They're printed in colour with some details - beautiful maps, though difficult to distinguish small details. The

author includes sources for each maps, allowing curious readers to delve into the archives to explore the maps, but ultimately the maps are more of a visual bonus to accompany the writing, rather than a central topic of the book.

Surreysmum says

This work of popular history by a young man who is a "modern explorer" himself is understandably chiefly centred around exploration maps of territory now within Canada's boundaries. It has a fairly informal tone, but full scholarly apparatus. I enjoyed the thoughtful preface and afterword material, and the summaries of the exploits of various famous explorers were highly readable, with many interesting anecdotes. I also thought the tone successfully avoided any suggestion of hero-worship, and also acknowledged in a timely way the major contributions of named and described indigenous allies and collaborators, some of whom, as expedition members, ventured nearly as far away from their homes as the Europeans or Canadians they assisted. The main disappointment of the volume is one that was presumably out of the author's control: the reproductions of the maps, although coloured and glossy, are constrained to too small a size by the book's standard format to be really enjoyed. A coffee-table format would have been better (but probably too expensive). One of the chief victims of this shortcoming is the Thomson map (one I am very familiar with, having worked alongside the original for many years), but that huge, faded map would likely have been chiefly illegible even in a much larger reproduction: it is largely illegible close up, in its original.

This is not groundbreaking history, nor is it really cartographic analysis, though there is some discussion of the history and techniques of cartography in the preliminaries. It's a sesquicentennial project, aimed at a general audience, and, if my quite vivid recent memories of its tales about the Vikings, about Cartier and Champlain and Hearne and Mackenzie and Thomson and Franklin, are any indication, it has certainly done its job of raising awareness of the role exploration and mapping played in the early definition of the boundaries of the state we now call Canada. The roles of other forces (war, politics and statecraft) are, legitimately I think, largely left aside. As others have remarked, the one chapter on the Fort Erie battle during the war of 1812 seems a little forced and out of place. But then military history is not something I read with pleasure in any case.

Shoalts also seems to be quite an interesting guy, and I recommend a browse through his website after finishing this book.

Ben Babcock says

So ... this is a proof copy from the publisher via NetGalley (tanks), and I have to just put it out there that I didn't actually see any *maps* in this version. I don't know if that's by design or simply that they hadn't been set into the book at the type this version was exported. It seems a *little* silly to me that a book called *A History of Canada in Ten Maps* does not, in fact, include any pictures of maps. Adam Shoalts' writing is definitely engaging and edifying, so I wouldn't say that the lack of maps is a dealbreaker. It's just odd considering the premise of the book.

When I first started writing this review, I said I had "somewhat mixed feelings" about this book. The more I write the review, though, and process the implications of Shoalts' writing, the more I'm convinced this book is trash.

Taken at face value, *A History of Canada in Ten Maps*, aside from the not-having-maps thing, is what it says

on the cover: ten stories. Starting with the Viking visitations a millennium ago and ending with Dr. Richardson's mapping of the Arctic, Shoalts examines what he considers pivotal moments in our comprehension of the geography of this land. Basically, his thesis is the history of Canada may be understood through the history of those who explored it. His writing is, for the most part, quite entertaining and holds one's interest (though I have a few qualms, which we'll get to presently).

So why the long face and low rating? Put simply, Shoalts' entire approach to Canadian history is an uncomplicated, uncritical narrative that appropriates and patronizes Indigenous cultures and histories instead of acknowledging their primacy on this land. By way of full disclaimer, I want to make it clear I'm a settler; there is no way I can adequately represent an "Indigenous perspective" of this book. But I've read enough trash takes on Indigenous peoples to recognize the broad strokes, and it behoves me to use my privilege as a settler to speak out about it.

Again, if we just launch into this book uncritically and take it at face value, it *looks like* Shoalts is acknowledging both the presence and crucial involvement of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples during the European exploration (read: invasion) of the continent. He points out that the most successful explorers and surveyors were the ones who worked with the Indigenous peoples of the area. Yet he seldom examines the *reasons* for those explorers and surveyors being there. I wish he presented the fur trade, and entities like the Hudson's Bay Company, in a far more critical light.

Moreover, Shoalts relies a great deal on primary source accounts of the explorers, such as their diaries, or secondary sources written from a very Eurocentric perspective. So we end up in a situation like endnote 7 of Chapter 6, wherein Shoalts apologizes for Hearne's account of the way Dene chief Matonabee treats women:

... on the other hand, if we try to set aside twenty-first-century perspectives and examine things from the context of the 1770s, Matonabee's views can be seen in another light. Matonabee was in essence saying to Hearne...

And that's where I checked out of that note, because putting words in a historical person's mouth, even in an attempt to paraphrase, is not a good look for a non-fiction history book. It's doubly un-good when the person in question is Indigenous and the author is not. Whether or not Shoalts, or Hearne, or any of the scholars and sources Shoalts relies on is ultimately "correct" in their portrayal is beside the point: the point is that this shit is *complicated*, but Shoalts is presenting it in a very simplified, uncomplicated light.

Intentions are also beside the point. I suspect Shoalts has good intentions here. Take a look at this passage from his afterword:

Perhaps the revival of indigenous cultures provides a vision for a society that gets us past seeing the natural world in terms of dollars and cents, gross domestic product, a means to an end. Indigenous knowledge holds out the hope that we'll recognize Canada's remaining wild lands and wildlife for the irreplaceable gifts that they are.

On the surface, this seems very positive, very much in the spirit of reconciliation. But if you stop and think about it, Shoalts is positioning "indigenous cultures" as these treasure troves of "a vision for a [better] society", as if they're something we can just adopt (cough, appropriate, cough) without doing the work. He is

endorsing “Indigenous knowledge” but not actually connecting that to the action needed to restore that knowledge to primacy—i.e., restoring the land.

And this is evident from the entire rest of *A History of Canada in Ten Maps*. Time and again, Shoalts acknowledges the existence of Indigenous people on this land but relegates them to the roles of antagonist, sidekick/ally, or bystander; the protagonists are always European. Although he never sugarcoats the treacherous nature of traversing wilderness, he romanticizes the process of exploration and colonization: these explorers are intrepid (male) heroes who brave incredible odds, might be accompanied by the “good” or “noble” Indigenous person, and challenged by the “bad” or “unwelcoming” Indigenous person. There might be an element of wish fulfillment happening here; at the end of his afterword, Shoalts talks about a solo journey across the Arctic. I have to wonder if he rather identifies with these explorers, sees them as kindred spirits, and yearns for the “simpler times” of men being real men, of going on these adventures.

Because that’s really the tone of this book: it’s a “boy’s own adventure” chronicling the exploration of this country. Again, Shoalts makes attempts to acknowledge that not everyone sees Canada as a positive thing, referring at one point in the afterword to “an unwelcome empire”. Yet these attempts are meaningless considering the grand theme of this book, the emphasis on Canada’s greatness as a product of centuries of committed exploration. Within the same paragraph as the previous quote, he claims that the “unspoiled wilderness” is “the bedrock of our country—the harsh but beautiful reality that gives meaning to our national identity”. Much eye-rolling ensued.

This kind of hyperbole recurs throughout the book. Shoalts has these weird moments where he waxes way too poetical about our country and famous people, like when he says, “In a couple of thousand years, when history has mingled with legend, [Alexander] Mackenzie might become to Canada what Odysseus is to Greece”. Or when he talks about the treatment of Pierre-Esprit Radisson at the hands of the Iroquois and says, “Fortunately, it was only an ordinary bit of torture (a few ripped-out fingernails, burnt flesh, sticking a red-hot knife through his foot, and so on)”. That is an oddly macabre attempt at humour, and it feels *so* awkward and out of place.

It’s notable that not once does Shoalts engage with any of the problematic aspects of European-sanctioned map-making. There’s an entire chapter about the redrawing of the Canadian–American border after the War of 1812, focusing a great deal on the strategic and heroic efforts of figures like Brock and Drummond. But where’s the chapter on the various Treaties (particularly the numbered Treaties)? These were a series of patchwork-map land-grabs by the federal and provincial governments, well worth entire books of their own. Similarly, Shoalts could have included a chapter on the creation of Nunavut in 1999, perhaps the most successful land claim ever since colonization. That was an event that *literally* redrew the map of Canada within my lifetime. How about a map that shows all the residential schools across the country? But, you know, war maps are more fun, right?

This is a prime example of how it’s possible both to be progressive and yet still racist in one’s actions or writing. *A History of Canada in Ten Maps* commits the same error that our current federal government has done: using the right words and phrases, like *reconciliation* or *nation-to-nation relationship*, without really *acting* on those words and phrases. Shoalts often says the right things, or at least tries to, but ultimately, *A History of Canada in Ten Maps* is an extremely Eurocentric, settler-based perspective of our country’s history. It’s not that it’s poorly written or uninteresting—but we don’t really need more books like this. We absolutely do not need to mythologize the contributions of privileged white guys “taming” Canada into the country we have today. We need more Indigenous histories of this country, by Indigenous people; and we need settlers who are writing history to examine critically what they’re saying instead of just try to say what they think might be politically correct.

Not angry, just disappointed.

