READING LOG: Donald Holly, “The Beothuk on the Eve of Their Extinction,” *Arctic Anthropology*, 37: 1 (2000), pp. 79-95

*And*

Ralph Pastore, “The Collapse of the Beothuk World,”

*Acadiensis,* 19: 1 (Fall 1989), pp. 52-71

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*The Beothuk on the Eve of Their Extinction*

This archeological article, by Donald H. Holly Jr., provides a detailed description of the process of the seemingly-inevitable extinction of the Beothuk Indians of Newfoundland during European settlement to the island in the early 1800’s. Holly clearly illustrates the fact that the Beothuk were not driven to extinction solely by European settlers, but instead that they too played a large role in their own obsolescence.[[1]](#footnote-1) While limited artifacts have been collected directly from the Beothuk people, much is to be speculated from documents discovered from the European settlers of that time. This article gives fair insight into the effects of European settlement on the sides of both the Beothuk and the settlers. Such information includes the loss of place Beothuks faced when being pushed away from the coast and into the interior of Newfoundland, and resistance from both parties in the claiming of land. Holly elaborates on this historical era by using an extensive number of sources to support his argument, including a quoted story from a descendant of a European settler in that period, explaining one of his recollections of contact with the Beothuk. “. . . [Beothuk Indians] killed and beheaded Turpin and took his head with him . . .”[[2]](#footnote-2) This quoted story explains an attack to a small group of settlers by the Beothuk. As European settlers pushed to take land from the Beothuk, the Beothuk pushed back. However, each act of violence is seen as retaliatory, not as defence or offence.[[3]](#footnote-3) Throughout the article, Holly emphasizes the difference in economical interests between the Beothuk and the settlers, creating friction as well as a lack of interaction between groups.[[4]](#footnote-4) As proven in this article, most artifacts regarding this particular event – if not all – were from the European settlers, leaving possibility that the Beothuk’s reasons for their actions are quite different as compared to what is interpreted from data collected from the Europeans. The Beothuk may very well have been striving to adapt to the changing world around them, all the while trying to preserve their culture, resulting in the unfortunate-but-unavoidable extinction of their kind.

*The Collapse of the Beothuk World*

This article by Ralph Pastore focuses on the many reasons for Beothuk extinction other than the mere settlement of Europeans to Newfoundland. While some factors did include the involvement of Europeans, additional considerations were comprised of geographical challenges[[5]](#footnote-5), a lack of food resources due to unfavourable climates[[6]](#footnote-6), as well as consequential decisions made by the Beothuk to not partake in fur trades or other potentially beneficial interactions with the settlers[[7]](#footnote-7). As Europeans came into Newfoundland, they inevitably chose to settle on the resource-rich coastline of the island, which as a result pushed the Beothuk further from the coast and into the island’s interior.[[8]](#footnote-8) This denied them access to the many food resources that the waters had to offer, and forced them to live mainly off of caribou, which was highly unreliable because of their migration behaviours. Pastore enlightens his audience that “the Beothuks died because they did not have enough contacts with the whites,” explaining their method of withdrawal from the settlers instead of working with them to obtain the land and resources they needed for their people to survive.[[9]](#footnote-9) It is revealed that unlike most other First Nations groups, the Beothuk neglected to partake in fur trade with the settlers, causing them to struggle in gaining their required resources to survive. European settlers did not bring with them missionaries or “Indian Agents” to communicate with the Beothuk.[[10]](#footnote-10) All of these factors led to the impending end of the Beothuk culture. Although Pastore allowed for many theories to come forth in his article resulting in a broad understanding of the history of the Beothuk, questions may be raised in regards to why the Beothuk lived as uniquely as they did, rather than adapting to the settling of Europeans on their land.

1. Holly Jr., Donald H. “The Beothuk On The Eve Of Their Extinction,” *Arctic Anthropology,* Vol. 37, No. 1 (Providence, R.I.: Brown University, 2000), 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid., 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid., 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid., 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Pastore, Ralph. “The Collapse Of The Beothuk World,” *Acadiensis,* Vol. 19, No. 1 (Fredricton, New Brunswick: University of New Brunswick, Fall 1989), 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid., 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid., 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid., 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid., 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid., 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)