FOUR EARLY EXPLORATIONS OF THE KENNEBEC
VERRAZZANO, CHAMPLAIN, DAVIES & BIARD

VERRAZZANO – 1524

Sailing for Henry II, the king of France, Verazzano sailed across the Atlantic, reached North Carolina and headed north. He explored Chesapeake Bay, sailed into the mouth of the Hudson River and interacted with people in Massachusetts. Natives at the mouth of the Kennebec were less welcoming. Verazzanno was the first European to report a visit to the Maine coast.

The shore ran eastward. At a distance of fifty leagues keeping more to the north, we found high country full of very dense forests, composed of pines, cypress, and similar trees which grow in cold regions.

The people were quite different from the others, for while the previous ones had been courteous in manner, these were full of crudity and vices, and were so barbarous that we could never make any communication with them, however many signs we made to them. They were clothed in skins of bear, lynx, sea-wolf and other animals. As far as we could judge from several visits to their houses, we think they live on game, fish, and several fruits which are a species of root which the earth produces itself. They have no pulse, and we saw no sign of cultivation, nor would the land be suitable for producing any fruit or grain on account of its sterility. If we wanted to trade with them for some of their things, they would come to the seashore on some rocks where the breakers were most violent, while we remained in the little boat, and they sent us what they wanted to give on a rope, continually shouting to us not to approach the land; they gave us the barter quickly, and would take in exchange only knives, hooks for fishing and sharp metal. We found no courtesy in them, and when we had nothing more to exchange and left them, the men made all the signs of scorn and shame that any crude creature sold make (such as baring their buttocks and laughing). Against their wishes, we penetrated two or three leagues inland with 25 armed men, and when we disembarked on the shore, they shot at us with their bows and uttered loud cries before fleeing into the woods. We did not find anything of great value in this land, except for the vast forests and some hills which could contain some metal: for we saw many natives with “paternostri” beads of copper in their ears.

(From DOWN EAST)
CHAMPLAIN – 1605
He reaches the Kenebec

From THE VOYAGES OF SAMUEL DE CHAMPLAIN (1613)

In 1604 a group of French explored Nova Scotia’s Bay of Fundy area, settling near Annapolis. Champlain explored southward as far as the Penobscot River. After spending a hard winter at St. Croix, he and Sieur de Monts sailed further south in June and July, reaching the Kenebec and Saco Rivers.

On the 18th of June, 1605, Sieur de Monts set out from the Island of St. Croix with some gentlemen, twenty sailors, and a savage named Panounias, together with his wife, whom he was unwilling to leave behind. These we took, in order to serve us as guides to the country of the Almouchiquois, in the hope of exploring and learning more particularly by their aid what the character of this country was, especially since she was a native of it.

1 These were the ships which came yearly in search of cod.
2 He was killed by the Almouchiquois, which led to a war.
3 The Almouchiquois, or Armouchiquois, lived in what is now Massachusetts. 1605]

Coasting along inside of Manan, an island three leagues from the main land, we came to the Ranges on the seaward side, at one of which we anchored, where there was a large number of crows, of which our men captured a great many, and we called it the Isle aux Corneilles. Thence we went to the Island of Monts Deserts, at the entrance of the river Norumbegue, as I have before stated, and sailed five or six leagues among many islands. Here there came to us three savages in a canoe from Bedabedec Point, where their captain was; and, after we had had some conversation with them, they returned the same day. On Friday, the 1st of July, we set out from one of the islands at the mouth of the river, where there is a very good harbor for vessels of a hundred or a hundred and fifty tons. This day we made some twenty-five leagues between Bedabedec Point and many islands and rocks, which we observed as far as the river Quinibequy, at the mouth of which is a very high island, which we called the Tortoise. Between the latter and the main land there are some scattering rocks which are covered at full tide, although the sea is then seen to break over them. Tortoise Island and the river lie south-south-east and north-north-west. As you enter, there are two medium-sized islands forming the entrance, one on one side, the other on the other; and some three hundred paces farther in are two rocks, where there is no wood, but some little grass. We anchored three hundred paces from the entrance in five and six fathoms of water. While in this place, we were overtaken by fogs, on account of which we resolved to enter, in order to see the upper part of the river and the savages who live there; and we set out for this purpose on the 5th of the month. Having made some leagues, our barque came near being lost on a rock which we grated in passing.

1 The Fox Islands.
2 Seguin Island.
3 Ellingwood Rock, Seguin Ledges, and White Ledge.
4 Pond Island on the west, and Stage Island on the east.
5 The two rocks referred to in the same sentence are now called the Sugar Loaves.
Further on, we met two canoes which had come to hunt birds, which for the most part are moulting at this season, and cannot fly. We addressed these savages by aid of our own, who went to them with his wife, who made them understand the reason of our coming. We made friends with them and with the savages of this river, who served us as guides. Proceeding farther, in order to see their captain, named Manthoumermer, we passed, after we had gone seven or eight leagues, by some islands, straits, and brooks, which extend along the river, where we saw some fine meadows. After we had coasted along an island some four leagues in length, they conducted us to where their chief was 2 with twenty-five or thirty savages, who, as soon as we had anchored, came to us in a canoe, separated a short distance from ten others, in which were those who accompanied him. Coming near our barque, he made an harangue, in which he expressed the pleasure it gave him to see us, and said that he desired to form an alliance with us and to make peace with his enemies through our mediation. He said that, on the next day, he would send to two other captains of savages, who were in the interior, one called Marchin, and the other Sasinou, chief of the river Quinibequy. Sieur de Monts gave them some cakes and peas, with which they were greatly pleased. The next day they guided us down the river another way than that by which we had come, in order to go to a lake; and, passing by some islands, they left, each one of them, an arrow near a cape 3 where all the savages pass, and they believe that if they should not do this some misfortune would befall them, according to the persuasions of the devil. They live in such superstitions, and practise many others of the same sort. Beyond this cape we passed a very narrow waterfall 4, but only with great difficulty; for, although we had a favorable and fresh wind, and trimmed our sails as well as possible, in order to see whether we could not pass it in that way, we were obliged to attach a hawser to some trees on shore and all pull on it. In this way, by means of our arms together with the help of the wind, which was favorable to us, we succeeded in passing it. The savages accompanying us carried their canoes by land, being unable to row them. After going over this fall, we saw some fine meadows. I was greatly surprised by this fall, since as we descended with the tide we found it in our favor, but contrary to us when we came to the fall. But, after we had passed it, it descended as before, which gave us great satisfaction. Pursuing our route, we came to the lake, 5 which is from three to four leagues in length. Here are some islands, and two rivers enter it, the Quinibequy coming from the north-north-east, and the other from the north-west, whence were to come Marchin and Sasinou. Having awaited them all this day, and as they did not come, we resolved to improve our time. We weighed anchor accordingly, and there accompanied us two savages from this lake to serve as guides. The same day we anchored at the mouth of the river, where we caught a large number of excellent fish of various sorts. Meanwhile, our savages went hunting, but did not return. The route by which we descended this river is much safer and better than that by which we had gone. Tortoise Island before the mouth of this river is in latitude 44; and 19 12 of the deflection of the magnetic needle. They go by this river across the country to Quebec some fifty leagues, making only one portage of two leagues. After the portage, you enter another little stream which flows into the great river St. Lawrence. 2 This

1 Westport Island.
2 Wiscasset Harbor.
3 Hockomock Point.
4 Upper Hell Gate.
River Quinibequy is very dangerous for vessels half a league from its mouth, on account of the small amount of water, great tides, rocks and shoals outside as well as within. But it has a good channel, if it were well marked out. The land, so far as I have seen it along the shores of the river, is very poor, for there are only

1 Merrymeeting Bay, so called from the junction of the Kennebec and the Androscoggin. 2 The Chaudiere, flowing into the St. Lawrence nearly opposite Quebec, about three miles above Levis.

rocks on all sides. There are a great many small oaks, and very little arable land. Fish abound here, as in the other rivers which I have mentioned. The people live like those in the neighborhood of our settlement; and they told us that the savages, who plant the Indian corn, dwelt very far in the interior, and that they had given up planting it on the coasts on account of the war they had with others, who came and took it away. This is what I have been able to learn about this region, which I think is no better than the others.
THE ENTRANCE TO THE KENNEBEC – TWO VIEWS

CHAMPLAIN'S MAP – original drawn 1605, published 1613 - [“note qui ni be quy” at top]
Translation of Champlains comments in italics

The digits show the fathoms of the water
A to A - The course of the river. [The modern channel is west of the Sugar Loafs]
B - Islands which lie at the entrance to the River. [Pond & Wood]
C - The very dangerous rocks which lie in the river. [Sugar Loafs]
D - Islets & Rocks which lie along the coast.[The Sisters, The Black Rocks & Little River Ledges]
E - Flats upon which at high tide vessel of 60 tons burden may be laid aground. [Atkins Bay]
G (G is not shown) Sandy shoals which extend along the coast. [The State Park beach]
H - (H is not shown) A pond of fresh water. [It is not show on this map see next map: Silver Lake]
I - A brook into which shallops can enter at half tide. [“I” not shown, may be Heals Eddy]
L – (L is not shown) – Islands to the number of four which are in the river inside its mouth.
[Champlain shows four islands – Shag Rock, Long Island, Marr. The fourth actually “in the river would be Perkins Island. A smaller island, at the head of Todd Bayan dust showing on the net chart, flats out at low tide.]
On the 8th of the month, we set out from the mouth of this river, not being able to do so sooner on account of the fogs. We made that day some four leagues, and passed a bay, 1 where there are a great many islands. From here large mountains 2 are seen to the west, in which is the dwelling-place of a savage captain called Aneda, who encamps near the river Quinibequy. I was satisfied from this name that it was one of his tribe that had discovered the plant called Aneda, which Jacques Cartier said was so powerful against the malady called scurvy, of which we have already spoken, which harassed his company as well as our own, when they wintered in Canada. The savages have no knowledge of this plant, and are not aware of its existence, although the above-mentioned savage has the same name. The following day we made eight leagues. As we passed along the coast, we perceived two columns of smoke which some savages made to attract our attention. We went and anchored in the direction of them behind a small island near the main land, 3 where we saw more than eighty savages running along the shore to see us, dancing and giving expression to their joy. Sieur de Monts sent two men together with our savage to visit them. After they had spoken some time with them, and assured them of our friendship, we left with them one of

1 Casco Bay.
2 The White Mountains of New Hampshire, indicated on numerous early maps, and visible from the sea at this point.
3 Old Orchard Beach. They anchored inside of Stratton Island.
our number, and they delivered to us one of their companions as a hostage. Meanwhile, Sieur de Monts visited an island, which is very beautiful in view of what it produces; for it has fine oaks and nut-trees, the soil cleared up, and many vineyards bearing beautiful grapes in their season, which were the first we had seen on all these coasts from the Cap de la Heve. We named it Isle de Bacchus. It being full tide, we weighed anchor and entered a little river, which we could not sooner do; for there is a bar, there being at low tide only half a fathom of water, at full tide a fathom and a half, and at the highest water two fathoms. On the other side of the bar there are three, four, five, and six fathoms. When we had anchored, a large number of savages came to the bank of the river, and began to dance. Their captain at the time, whom they called Honemechin, was not with them. He arrived about two or three hours later with two canoes, when he came sweeping entirely round our barque. Our savage could understand only a few words, as the language of the Almouchiquois (for that is the name of this nation) differs entirely from that of the Souriquois and Etechemins. These people gave signs of being greatly pleased. Their chief had a good figure, was young and agile. We sent some articles of merchandise on shore to barter with them; but they had nothing but their robes to give in exchange, for they preserve only such furs as they need for their garments. Sieur de Monts ordered some provisions to be given to their chief, with which he was greatly pleased, and came several times to the side of our boat to see us. These savages shave off the hair far up on the head, and wear what remains very long, which they comb and twist behind in various ways very neatly, intertwined with feathers which they attach to the head. They paint their faces black and red, like the other savages which we have seen. They are an agile people, with well-formed bodies. Their weapons are pikes, clubs, bows and arrows, at the end of which some attach the tail of a fish called the signoc, others bones, while the arrows of others are entirely of wood. They till and cultivate the soil, something which we have not hitherto observed.

1 Richmond Island. The oaks, walnuts, and vines have disappeared.

In the place of ploughs, they use an instrument of very hard wood, shaped like a spade. This river is called by the inhabitants of the country Choii-acoet. The next day Sieur de Monts and I landed to observe their tillage on the bank of the river. We saw their Indian corn, which they raise in gardens. Planting three or four kernels in one place, they then heap up about it a quantity of earth with shells of the signoc before mentioned. Then three feet distant they plant as much more, and thus in succession. With this corn they put in each hill three or four Brazilian beans, 2 which are of different colors. When they grow up, they interlace with the corn, which reaches to the height of from five to six feet; and they keep the ground very free from weeds. We saw there many squashes, and pumpkins, and tobacco, which they likewise cultivate. The Indian corn which we saw was at that time about two feet high, some of it as high as three. The beans were be ginning to flower, as also the pumpkins and squashes. They plant their corn in May, and gather it in September. We saw also a great many nuts, which are small and have several divisions. There were as yet none on the trees, but we found plenty under them, from the preceding year. We saw also many grape-vines, on which there was a remarkably fine berry, from which we made some very good verjuice. We had heretofore seen grapes only on the Island of Bacchus, distant nearly two leagues from this river.

Their permanent abode, the tillage, and the fine trees led us to conclude that the air here is milder and better than that where we passed the winter, and at the other places we visited on the coast. But I cannot believe that there is not here a considerable degree of cold, although it is in latitude 43 45.(1) The forests in the
interior are very thin, although abounding in oaks, beeches, ashes, and elms; in wet places there are many willows. The savages dwell permanently in this place, and have a large cabin surrounded by palisades made of rather large trees placed by the side of each other, in which they take refuge when their enemies make war upon them. They cover their cabins with oak bark. This place is very pleasant, and as agreeable as any to be seen. The river is very abundant in fish, and is bordered by meadows. At the mouth there is a small island (2) adapted for the construction of a good fortress, where one could be in security. On Sunday, the 12th of the month, we set out from the river Choliacoet.3

1 From this comes the modern Saco.
2 Phaseolus vulgaris, the kidney-bean. All the plants here named are indigenous to America, though probably brought to New England from farther south. Cartier found tobacco growing as far north as Quebec in 1535.

[The voyage continued until July 12th as far as the elbow of Cape Cod. They then sailed back to the Bay of Fundy, stopping again briefly at the mouth of the Kennebec.

CHAMPLAIN’S MAP OF THE MOUTH OF THE SACO RIVER
THE EARLIEST KNOWN IMAGE OF SEGUIN
called “la Tortoise” by Champlain
from the 1607 James Davies account of the Popham Colony

1607: From The Relation of the Voyage to Virginia, James Davies.

In August of 1607, the two Northern Colony ships from England reached the mouth of the Kennebec. Leaders of the group explored the Kennebec, looking for a suitable place to plant their settlement. This selection describes what they found.

Munday being the 17th Auguste Captain Popham in his shallop with 30 others and Captain Gilbert in his shipes bott accompanied with 18 other persons depted early in the morning from thear ships and sailed up the Tyver of Sagadehock for to vew this Ryver and also to See whear they might fynd the most Convenyent place for thear plantation my Selffe beinge with Captain Gilbert. So we Sailed up into this river near 14 Leags and found ytt to be a most gallant river very brod and of a good depth. We never had Lesse Watter then 3 fetham when we had Lest and abundance of great fyshe\(^2\) in yt Leaping above the water on each syd of us as we Sailed. SO th nyght apochinge after a whill we had refreshed our Selves upon the shore about 9 of the Cloke we sett backward the to retourn and Cam abourd our shipes the next day following about 23 of the Clok in the afternoon. ….

We fynd this river to be very pleasant with many goodl Illands in yet and to both Large and deepe Water having many branches in ytt. That which we tooke bendeth

\(^2\) Great fyshe – undoubtedly sturgeon – described as follows by John Josselyn as follows on page 32 of his 1672 New England Rarities:

_The Sturgeon._ The Sturgeon of whose Sounds is made Isinglasls, a kind of lLew much used in Pysick: This Fish is here in great plenty, and in some Rivers so numerous, that it is hazardous for Canoes and the like small Vessels to pass to and again, as in Pechipscut River to the Eastward.”

Sturgeon of up to 16-18 feet were taken in the early days at the Brunswick/Topsham falls. They jump out of the water and land flat on its surface. Today (2010) they reach upward of 9 feet in length in the Kennebec
ytt Selffe towards the northest . Then we landed thear to remain that Nyght. Here we fond a gallant Champion Land and exceedinge fertill . .

…..we departe from hence and sailed up the river about eight Leagues ferterr until we Cam unto an Illand being Lo Land and flat, att this Illand ys a great down Fall of watter the which runeth by both Sydes of this Illand very swyfte and shallow. In his Illand we found great store of grapes exceeding good and sweet of to Sorts both red butt th on of them ys a mervellous deepe red, by both the side of this river the grapes grow in abounance and also very good Hoppes and also Chebolls and garleck, and for the goodness of he Land ytt doth so far abound that I Cannot almost epresse the Sam. Hear we all went ashire and with a stronge Rope made fast to our bott and one man in her to gyde her aggainst the Swyfe stream we pluckt hr up throwe ytt perforce. After we had past this down-Fall we all went into out bott again an rowed near a League farther up into the river and niyght beinge att hand we here staye all nyht, and in the fryst of the night about ten of the Cloke thear Cam on ath farther syd of the river sartain Salvaes Callinge unto us in broken Inglyshe. We answered them again. So for this time they departed.  The 26th beinge Satterdaye thear cam a Canooa nto us and in hear fower salvages those that had spoken unto us in the nyght before. His name that Came unto us ys Sabenoa. He macks hemselffe unto us to be Lord of the river of Sagadehock.

3 Cheboll- A plant, *Allium-* of the leek or onion family

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Chief Justice John Popham  Map of Popham Colony’s Fort St. George  The pinnace VIRGINIA
PIERRE BIARD – 1611

Three years after the Popham colonists had returned to England, the Jesuit Pierre Biard journeyed south from Acadia to the Kennebec. He and his fellow missionaries visited Popham, viewed the site of the fort built there and traveled further up the Kennebec where an amusing event occurred.

We had already advanced three good leagues, and had dropped anchor in the middle of the river waiting for the tide, when we suddenly discovered six Armouchiquois canoes coming towards us. There were twenty-four persons therein, all warriors. They went through a thousand maneuvers and ceremonies before accosting us, and might have been compared to a flock of birds which wanted to go into a hemp-field but feared the scarecrow. We were very much pleased at this, for our people also needed to arm themselves and arrange the pavesade.¹ In short, they continued to come and go; they reconnoitered; they carefully noted our numbers, our cannon, our arms, everything; and when night came they camped upon the other bank of the river, if not out of reach, at least beyond the aim of our cannon.

All night there was continual haranguing, singing and dancing, for such is the kind of life all these people lead when they are together. Now as we supposed that probably their songs and dances were invocations to the devil, to oppose the power of this cursed tyrant, I had our people sing some sacred hymns, as the Salve, the Ave Maris Stella, and others. But when they once got into the way of singing, the spiritual songs being exhausted, they took up others which they were familiar. When the came to the end of these, as the French are natural mimics, they began to mimic the singing and dancing of the Armouchiquois who were on the bank, succeeding in it so well that the Armouchiquois stopped to listen to them; and then our people stopped and the others immediately began again. It was really very comical, for you would have said that they were two choirs which had a thorough understanding with each other, and scarcely could you distinguish the real Armouchiquois from their imitators.

In the morning we continued our journey up the river.