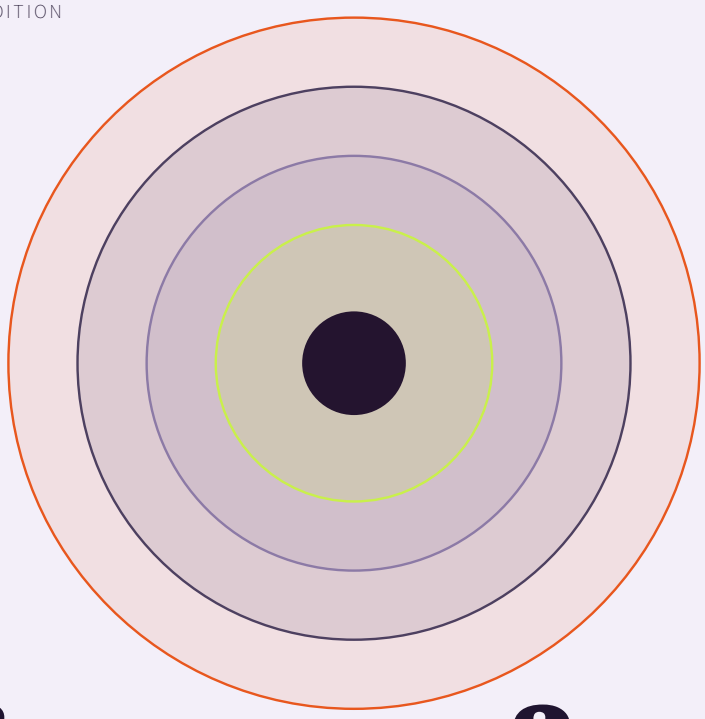


# A History of Canada in Ten Maps: Epic Stories of Charting a Mysterious Land

A reading of the book by Adam Shoalts (2017)

1. ACTION BOOK

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ABOUT THIS EDITION

This is HourLife's reading of A History of Canada in Ten Maps: Epic Stories of Charting a Mysterious Land, in our own words. It is not a substitute for the book.

BEFORE YOU START 01

# The book in a minute

Adam Shoalts is a Canadian explorer, historian and archaeologist, and a fellow of the Royal Canadian Geographical Society. In this book he tells the early history of Canada through ten old maps, from the Norse voyages of around the year 1000 to the British surveys of the Arctic coast in the 1820s. Each chapter uses one map as a way into the story behind it: Champlain in New France, Peter Pond and his hoped-for river to the Pacific, Samuel Hearne's walk to the Coppermine River, Alexander Mackenzie's crossing to the Pacific and David Thompson's years of surveying the North West. Nine of the ten stories are journeys of exploration, and one is the 1814 siege of Fort Erie in the War of 1812. Again and again the explorers depend on Indigenous guides, hosts and knowledge to travel, eat and find their way. The maps are reproduced in colour, but the book spends most of its pages on the people rather than on the cartography.

Below are the 9 ideas HourLife readers vote up most, each in our words with a note on what it asks of you, and then the steps that put them to work.

WHAT READERS KEEP

# The takeaways

1 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

### A map is the record of someone who went to look.

Each of the ten maps marks the end of a long and risky journey. Shoalts uses them as doorways into those journeys, so the chapters read as expedition stories more than lessons in cartography. The map is the receipt; the trip is the story.

2 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

### Most of these explorers got anywhere only because Indigenous people showed them how.

Samuel Hearne failed to reach the Coppermine River until he travelled with the Dene leader Matonabbee, who knew how to move and eat across the barren lands. Across the book, the routes, canoes, food and local knowledge often came from the people already living there.

3 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

### A wrong map can still start the right journey.

Peter Pond's map promised a great river running from the North West to the Pacific. Alexander Mackenzie followed the idea in 1789, and the river he found took him to the Arctic Ocean instead. He set out again and reached the Pacific overland in 1793.

4 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

### The name of a whole country began as a word for one village.

When Jacques Cartier sailed up the St Lawrence in the 1530s, he heard the Iroquoian word kanata, meaning a village or settlement. The book's second map belongs to that age, when the word moved from one place on a river to the name of a vast territory.

5 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

### New France rested on alliances as much as on forts.

Champlain founded Quebec in 1608 and spent decades travelling with Wendat, Algonquin and Innu allies, which drew him into their wars with the Haudenosaunee. His 1632 map of New France sums up what he saw, and what his allies told him about the country further west.

6

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

## In these stories, cold, hunger and fear were the normal working conditions.

Shoalts does not soften the hardship. The chapter on David Thompson, the surveyor who mapped much of the North West, takes in grizzly bears, rumours of living mammoths and a case of what was then called windigo psychosis. Getting a line onto a map often cost months of real danger.

7

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

## Borders were drawn by war as well as by exploration.

One chapter is not a journey at all. It is the siege of Fort Erie on the Niagara River in 1814, during the War of 1812, which Shoalts presents as the bloodiest battle fought on Canadian soil. It is a reminder that the shape of the country was also settled by fighting.

8

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

## The far north was the last great blank, and the hardest to fill.

The book ends in the Arctic, with the British overland surveys of the 1820s led by John Franklin, in which the surgeon and naturalist John Richardson also served. Long stretches of the northern coast were still guesswork on European maps well into the 1800s.

9

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

## A map credits the explorer and rarely names everyone who made it possible.

The maps carry the names of Europeans, while the guides, paddlers and hosts who got them there mostly go unrecorded. Some reviewers felt the book itself still centres the European men. Reading it with that question in mind makes it richer, not weaker.

PUT IT TO WORK

# Your action book

Do the setup steps once, then keep the habits going. The setup changes your week; the habits keep it changed after the first good one.

The download puts this whole reading and a printable action book in one PDF: the setup checklist, then a page of real calendar days for each habit, starting on the day you choose.

SET UP ONCE

- [ ] Find the oldest map of where you live
- [ ] Learn whose land your map sits on
- [ ] Trace one route on a modern map
- [ ] Keep a one-line log for each map
- [ ] Plan one small expedition of your own

KEEP UP DAILY

- ◯ Ask who told the mapmaker
- ◯ Walk without the blue dot once a week
- ◯ Read one first-hand account a month

30 days · Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026

Part two, after the reading, prints each of these as a page to fill in by hand.

THE LAST WORD

# Before you go

Pick one step from the action book and do it today. An idea from a book starts to count once it changes what one ordinary day looks like.

PART TWO

# The action book

Change the setup once, then keep it up. 5 setup actions to do once, and 3 habits to mark each day for 30 days.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026

Print it, or write on it in any PDF app.

SET UP ONCE

# The setup checklist

Each of these is done once. Do one a day, and check it off when it is done.

- [ ] SETUP 1

## Find the oldest map of where you live

Search your provincial, state or national archive's digital map collection for the earliest map of your town or region.

Note what it shows clearly, what it guesses at, and what it leaves blank.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 2

## Learn whose land your map sits on

Look up the Indigenous nations whose territory includes your home, using a local museum, a band or nation's own website, or a regional history.

Write down one nearby place name that comes from an Indigenous language and what it means.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 3

## Trace one route on a modern map

Pick one journey from the book, such as Hearne's walk to the Coppermine or Mackenzie's 1793 crossing to the Pacific.

Trace it roughly on an online map, measure the distance, and look at what that country is like today.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 4

## Keep a one-line log for each map

Use the chart above or a notebook.

For each of the ten maps, write who went, who guided them, and what changed on the map because of it.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 5

## Plan one small expedition of your own

Choose a nearby place you have never been: a trail, a river access point or a historic site.

Put a date on the calendar this month and go with a paper map.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

DAILY HABIT 1 OF 3

# Ask who told the mapmaker

Whenever you read a history or look at a map, ask where the information came from and who is missing from the credit.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

## November 2026

| MON | TUE | WED | THU | FRI | SAT | SUN |
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| | | | | | | 1 |
| 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 ○ | 7 ○ | 8 ○ |
| 9 ○ | 10 ○ | 11 ○ | 12 ○ | 13 ○ | 14 ○ | 15 ○ |
| 16 ○ | 17 ○ | 18 ○ | 19 ○ | 20 ○ | 21 ○ | 22 ○ |
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| 30 ○ | | | | | | |

## December 2026

| MON | TUE | WED | THU | FRI | SAT | SUN |
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| 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 |
| 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 |
| 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 |
| 28 | 29 | 30 | 31 | | | |

EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 2 OF 3

# Walk without the blue dot once a week

Once a week, find your way on a short trip by paper map or memory.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

## November 2026

| MON | TUE | WED | THU | FRI | SAT | SUN |
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| 28 | 29 | 30 | 31 | | | |

EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 3 OF 3

# Read one first-hand account a month

Many explorers' journals are free on the Internet Archive, including Hearne's and Mackenzie's.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

## November 2026

| MON | TUE | WED | THU | FRI | SAT | SUN |
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| 30 ○ | | | | | | |

## December 2026

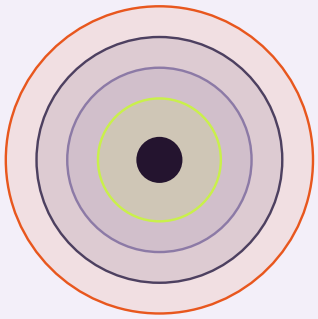
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EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP



**Every line on an old map was once a guess, a guide and a long walk.**

HOURLIFE NOTE AFTER ADAM SHOALTS