

# The Canada-U.S. Border

## A Solvable Problem

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### Introduction

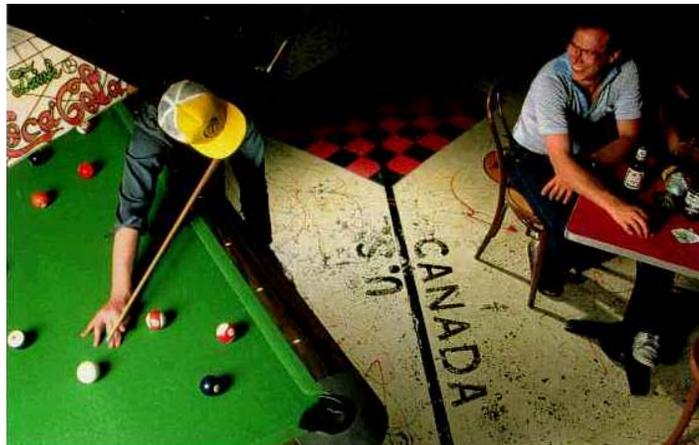
Canada and the United States share the longest undefended border in the world. This is a fascinating issue in both interest level and importance in this post-September 11 society. In researching the topic, dozens of stories of the superimposition of the border have been uncovered and many problems that thousands of people have to deal with living near and/or crossing the border every day. Even before the security concerns raised by the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, a North American Perimetre had been proposed to secure both Canada and the United States from foreign intruders while simultaneously permitting freer movement of people and goods between the two countries. A North American Perimetre, opposed to the current national boundaries, would be mutually beneficial to Canada and the United States.

### Problems with the Superimposition of the Canada-U.S. Border

The majority of communities affected by the superimposition of the Canada - U.S. border are those between Quebec and Vermont, close to the 45th parallel which makes up the border between Cornwall, Ontario and the mountains of New Hampshire.

The villages of Beebe Plain, Sutton - Richford, and Morse's Line all have portions of their community in both Quebec and Vermont. From some of those communities rises the following stories:

- The Nelson Company Store is divided by the Canada - U.S. border. On the inside, the shelves are divided as well. Import laws require that Canadian goods are stacked and sold only within the Canadian portion of the store and American goods are stacked and sold only within the American portion of the store. At the checkout (right on the line), the cashier runs the items through separately (different sales taxes) and has a telephone on each side of the counter to avoid long distance charges to the store's neighbours.
- A family farm whose vegetable garden lies in the United States, their kitchen in Canada. While surely customs officers are not lurking in the shadows of their back porch, it is technically illegal for this family to bring the vegetables from their garden into their house.
- A local pool hall has a line painted down the floor to ensure that people do not illegally take the American beer is not taken to the pool tables, which are across the border in Canada.



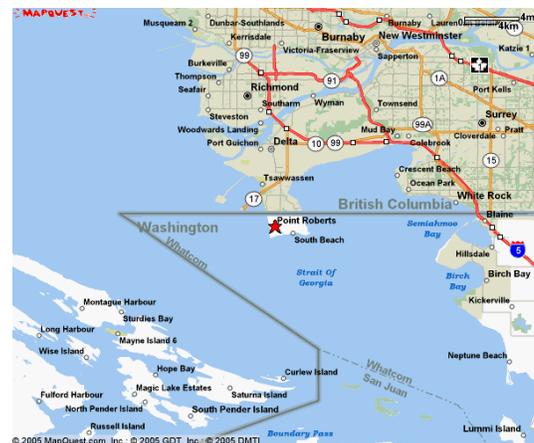
- A farmers' cattle wanders across the line - the tails of the American cattle painted with phenolphthalein which turns bright red when washed with "washing soda" to determine which side of the line they should be on.
- Rock Island, Quebec and Derby Line, Vermont have the somewhat infamous "Canusa Street" on which the yellow painted lines down the centre of the street not only serve to keep cars on the right side of the road but also double as an international boundary. I have had the strange experience of driving down this street. When I made a right hand turn at an intersection, I "remained" in Canada by heading north, passing a Canadian customs office on the corner. If I were to turn left at this intersection, I would have to stop and check in the U.S. customs office on the opposite corner.
- The joint communities of Stanhope, Quebec and Norton, Vermont share the Haskell Library and Opera House, which appeared in a series of Red Rose Tea commercials a few years ago. Another building with a painted line down the centre of the room, making an otherwise inconspicuous local theatre a famous landmark.



While infinitely amusing, these stories are numerous and create some of the most ridiculous inconveniences for those around them.

## Political Exclaves

Another type of problem created by the laying down of the Canada - U.S. border is that of political exclaves. American territory accessible only via Canada include the communities of Point Roberts, Washington, the Northwest Angle, Minnesota, the St. Regis Indian Reservation, New York, the island in the middle of Lake Memphremagog, near Beebe Plain, Vermont, and Clayton Lake, Maine. Canadian territory only accessible via the United States include the village of Estcourt and the Akwesasne Indian Reserve, both belonging to Quebec.



## Border Costs

The governments of Canada, the United States, the 13 states, 7 provinces, 1 territory, and hundreds of municipalities spend millions of dollars each year on border patrol, customs agents, maintaining the physical border, and funding many organizations (IBC, IJC, RCMP, USBS, CBS, NPS, PCH, others).



The most frustrating aspect of governments along the line is the incredible duplication of services where a small community would have to maintain two separate fire departments, just to name one example, as the manner of house insurance plans require that the no one other than the proper local municipality must respond to emergencies within its service area. Other agencies would have to deal with conflicting planning, environmental, and other differing governmental policies.

### **Border Logistics**

On the personal level, regular citizens have to deal with the hassles of crossing borders to get to work, checking in with customs officers to visit next door neighbours, sorting out differing laws in different jurisdictions, and doubling administrative work with split ownerships of buildings and properties. On this last issue, the International Boundary Commission maintains floor plans of thousands of buildings which sit on the line so that they may provide advice as to the country of any incident or request that may arise. Tourists camping in remote locations might unknowingly cross international borders, tripping laser sensors at unmanned crossings and sending border patrols scrambling to ensure that each country's respective sovereignty is assured.

### **A History of Marking the Border**

Officials from both countries began trying to stake the boundary as far back as 1783. The original description led through the St. Lawrence River and the Great Lakes and was then clarified in 1842.

- As part of the 45th parallel boundary between Quebec and New York, the Americans wanted an old War of 1812 facility, Fort Montgomery, New York to remain part of the United States. The officials bent the boundary north of the 45th to include the fort. To compensate for the “cheated” territory into Canada, the boundary was then bent an equal distance south nearby.
- The Treaty of Oregon was signed in 1849 which extended the 49th parallel as the Canada - U.S. border to the Pacific Ocean. The border was marked on the ground westward to the Red River Settlement in 1872 and then to the mountains in 1874.



- The Alaska panhandle boundary was established by a panel of 3 Americans, 2 Canadians, and 1 Brit in 1903.
- A permanent International Boundary Commission established in 1925 to clear the border, maintain the monuments, and provide information about any exact location in question. Even so, Canada and the United States still dispute the location of the Canada-U.S. boundary off the south coast of Alaska and the boundary off the coast of Nova Scotia and Maine. In the summer of 2005, Canada reignited a boundary dispute between itself and Denmark over Hans Island, which lies between Ellesmere Island and Greenland. The United States is also questioning Canadian sovereignty in six other areas of the Arctic.



### **Opportunities of a North American Perimetre**

Not only would a North American Perimetre ease or eliminate the problems that have just been discussed, it would also create opportunities that would easily be capitalized upon.

#### *Security*

During the winter of 2002, United States Military has established a “North American Command”. While the details of this reorganization are still to be sorted out, it is a move that essentially expands the existing North American Air Defence organization (NORAD). Canada responded by creating our own “Canada Command” in 2005.



Obviously, North America is subject to physical attacks. A common, secure perimetre would greatly increase the security for both countries from external threats.

#### *Ease of Movement*

Excellent political relations and free trade agreements already cover tremendous movement of people and goods but they must cross borders. Once in either country, a North American Perimetre would allow completely free movement of people and goods across international lines, without hassles.

#### *Cooperation*

Canada and the United States are each others’ biggest trading partners; we also share intelligence for security, technology, and other information types already. The symbolic cooperation of a common perimetre, not requiring physical borders between us, would speak volumes of the reality of our situation already. Among other issues, environmental concerns know no boundaries.... while complex international treaties are in place to deal with such issues, further cooperation on these matters without hindrances of jurisdictional matters regarding the border would be mutually beneficial.

Take a look at the European Union. No member has relinquished sovereignty of any kind yet the ease of movement and cooperation taking place in Europe today is magnificent. This type of arrangement, while it need not be copied directly, is an excellent example of the kinds of arrangements that could and should be made here in North America.

## **Sovereignty**

Many Canadians are reluctant to support any perceived “Americanization” of Canada. It should be known that economic union options, while entirely unrelated to border issues that are being discussed here, would not be aided or hindered by creating a joint North American Perimetre and eliminating physical national boundaries.

Political union has always been an option for Canada - and remains one - which Canada can take advantage of whenever it wishes.... Article XI of the United States’ Articles of Confederation:  
“Canada acceding to this confederation, and adjoining in the measures of the United States, shall be admitted into, and entitled to all the advantages of this Union; but no other colony shall be admitted into the same, unless such admission be agreed to by nine States.”

By solidifying border issues and allowing free movement of people and goods across national lines would not make us any closer to becoming part of the United States than we are already able to be if we wish to..... Eliminating the Canada - U.S. border in favour of a joint North American Perimetre would not affect either country’s sovereignty status in regards to economic or political unions.

## **Conclusion**

There are many Canadians whom are more than skeptical about letting go control of the Canada - U.S. border for symbolic reasons alone. As outlined today, the problems of such a unnecessary barrier between countries that are so alike in so many ways, a North American Perimetre, would be mutually beneficial to the people and governments of both Canada and the United States.