

When east is north and west is

Now that Canada agrees Quebec is a distinct society, maybe we can afford to do away with another distinction that divides us from the rest of the country.

Montreal's distinct geography.

As the Michelin Guide to Canada points out, this is the only city on the continent where the sun rises in the south and sets in the north — a topsy-turvy town with directions confusing enough to get a homing pigeon lost.

I've always known our city's geography was a little different, but it wasn't until I took a close look at a couple of maps recently that I realized just how distinct we really are.

On the usual city of Montreal map, things look quite secure: Westmount, Montreal West and Westminister Ave. are in the west end of town, right where their residents think they are. Likewise, Montreal East is in the east, the South Shore is in the south, and the sun sets in the west.

Wishful thinking.

The fact is our city map has been doctored: twisted sideways by mapmakers to hide the confusing truth. Look at the city on a map of the whole province, and a terrible realization hits you:

Nothing is where it's supposed to be.

The city's main east-west drag, Sherbrooke St., actually runs north-south. St. Laurent Blvd. the official dividing line between east and west, really cuts the city into north and south.

Montreal East is in the north end. And Westmount — our best-known west-end district — is deep in



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Montreal's east end.

That's right. The east-end jokes you heard in your childhood were really about you.

Confused? Who isn't?

The whole mess started in the 1700s when city fathers laid out our town according to the French seigneurial system. In other cities main streets were built to run east-west, but here they simply ran parallel to the St. Lawrence River.

To create directions, officials said the river ran due east — but they were wrong. The truth is the St. Lawrence turns sharply north at Montreal.

And so the distinct geography was born, dooming generations of Montrealers to a directional nightmare: 300 years of geographic oppression in which we've been haunted by the same cardinal questions:

Why does Sherbrooke St. E. lead north to Quebec City?

s south, it's a topsy-turvy town

Why do we drive east to get to the South Shore?

Why is up north in the wrong place?

Frankly, it's a wonder anyone ever finds their way home.

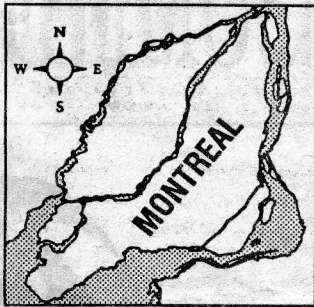
Geographic disorientation led to cultural disorientation too. Like many anglos I grew up convinced I was a west-end resident while French Quebecers lived in the east end, a whole city away.

The east end was a distant mysterious place, and St. Laurent Blvd. a psychological Berlin Wall. Who knew the French lived in the north end and I lived in the south? When it came to east and west, we lived on the same side of town.

It might be too late for this generation of Montrealers to get its bearings straight — but why not let future generations redraw the map?

When Meech Lake passes, let's realign ourselves with the rest of Canada — straighten out our geography and join the continent.

Let's pass a companion resolution called the St. Lawrence River Accord — changing the river's direction from east to north.



The St. Lawrence River flows north at Montreal.

I know it's a serious thing to tamper with nature — but history has seen bigger changes.

In the 1500s, the calendar fell way behind the seasons because leap year hadn't been invented. So Pope Gregory XIII introduced something called the Great Correction.

On Oct. 4, 1582, people bedded down for the night and awoke the next day to find it was Oct. 15. Many never forgave the pope for stealing 10 days from their lives — but future generations happily adapted to a calendar that got the arrival of spring right.

Why not have a Great Correction for Montreal — to take place the morning Meech Lake takes effect? Montrealers would go to sleep with the river running one way and wake up to find it running another.

And all our other directions would change with it.

Sherbrooke St. would officially run north-south. The South Shore would be called the East Shore, as it should have been long ago. Up north would be renamed correctly — as out west.

And smoked meat would no longer be served on St. Laurent Blvd. — but on the street that really divides the east end from the west: the true "Main" of Montreal. Côte de Liesse Blvd.

The day the distinct society was officially recognized, the distinct geography could be forgotten, along with our distinct sunset.

And when parents placed an arm around a teenager's shoulder and gave the advice: "Go west, young man!" they would no longer point at the North Pole.