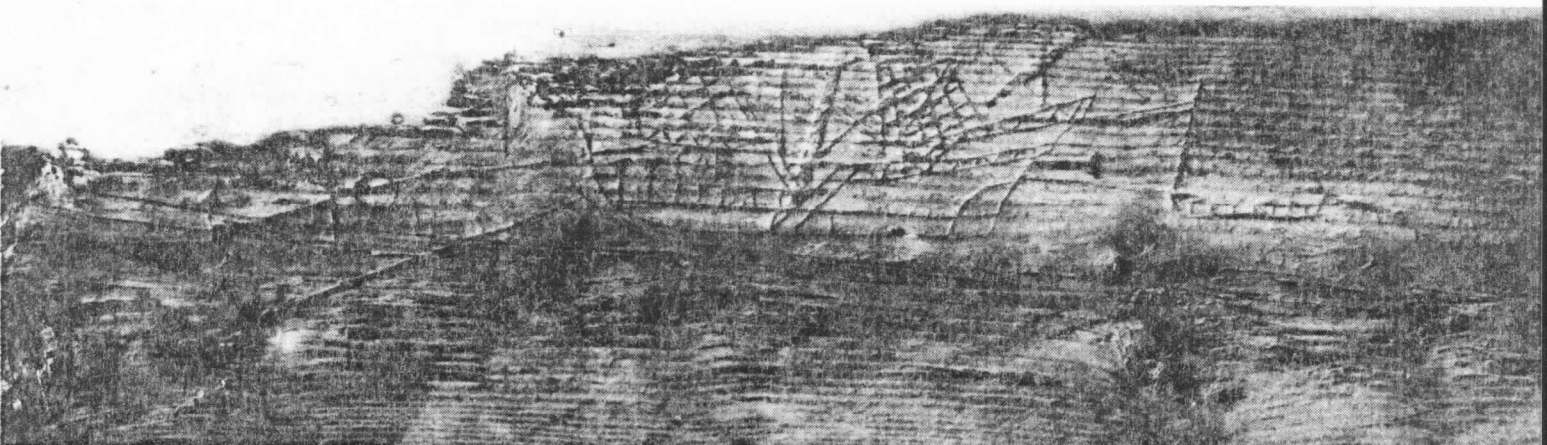


ARCHAEOLOGY IN NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR 1984

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EARLY NEOESKIMO SITES
IN CENTRAL LABRADOR

Susan A. Kaplan
The Peary-MacMillan Arctic Museum
Brunswick, Maine

In 1920 Geoffrey and Robert Gathorne-Hardy, cousins who were adventurers, artists, and writers, journeyed to Labrador. While visiting Nain they were taken to see ruins on Sculpin Island, also known as Konaiotok. The ruins consisted of mysterious angular structures that had standing walls built with multiple courses of stones.

The Gathorne-Hardys, along with local residents, missionaries, and other travelers, noted that the structures on Sculpin Island were unlike other ruins in Labrador. Amidst speculation as to who might have built and occupied the curious dwellings, the Gathorne-Hardys decided they would undertake a systematic investigation of the ruins.

The cousins identified a number of discrete sites on Sculpin Island, and mapped and excavated a number of rectangular and circular structures at these sites. In addition to dwellings, the Gathorne-Hardys identified a V-shaped stone arrangement which they interpreted to be a support for a keeled boat, stone walls which they called fortifications, and a large stone slab they called a table. The two adventurers published separate articles proposing different theories concerning the identity of the original builders and occupants of the Sculpin Island sites.

Geoffrey and Robert Gathorne-Hardy were familiar with Norse architecture and both men saw a resemblance between the ruins left by the Norse and those on Sculpin Island. Geoffrey Gathorne-Hardy concluded that the Sculpin Island stone structures had been built by Greenlandic Inuit who had migrated to Labrador. He surmised that while residing in Greenland these Inuit had been influenced by Norse architecture (1922:165). Robert Gathorne-Hardy (1963) proposed that the structures on Sculpin Island had been erected by Norse colonists, probably the "lost" group from Greenland. The angular dwelling

Okak 1 (HjCl-01)

Okak 1 is the largest sod house village in Labrador. Historic records detailing the life of Okak people found in Moravian Mission archives, also make this one of the best documented sites in Labrador. Okak 1 has been the subject of investigation by a number of archaeologists, yet a carefully measured map of the site does not exist. Cox's map was adequate for the initial reporting of this site; however, given the number of people who have tested various portions of the site, and the site's scale and complexity, future work should first begin with a mapping of houses and test pits.

Test pits in the western and northern end of the site revealed Dorset materials, suggesting that Dorset structures may be uncovered here if they have not been destroyed by later building activity. Other test pits at Okak 1 were associated with Neoeskimo dwellings.

House 2: This sod house was investigated when a test pit was placed in the entrance passage. Chert flakes, nephrite, a flake of soapstone, flakes of Ramah chert, an unmarked kaolin pipe stem, cut bones, mussels shell skins, and charcoal were recovered.

House 4: A test pit in the vicinity of House 4 revealed a thin cultural deposit containing bone smears and poorly preserved wood. A flat stone pavement was encountered 24 cm below the surface. A nephrite drill bit was recovered 30 cm below the surface and under a pavement rock. The drill is pencil-like. Its distal end is a round polished shaft with a beveled tip. The drill's proximal end remains in a roughed out form and bears evidence of cut and groove marks.

A grey slate ulu or knife fragment, a kaolin pipe bowl fragment, a kaolin stem fragment, four white glass beads, flakes of Ramah chert, quartz, and black chert were found throughout the test pit. The drill bit, ulu fragment, and slate flakes suggest that a prehistoric Neoeskimo component may be isolated in this section of the site. ✓

House A: Designated House A by Cox (1977), this is the largest sod house at Okak 1. The house sits at the crest of the beach overlooking other houses with excellent visibility in all directions. Size and location suggest that the house was inhabited by a prominent family.

A test pit placed in House A revealed 35 cm of deposit containing