

Final Report for Sunnyside 1 (CIAI-05), Permit 13.07

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This report outlines two short but productive archaeological investigations at Sunnyside 1 (CIAI-05), a seventeenth-century European occupation located in the community of Sunnyside in Trinity Bay, Newfoundland (Figure 1a-b). First identified in 2009 as the remains of a possible winter house, this site was deemed to be of significant historical importance (Mills and Gaulton 2010). In 2010 and 2013, the authors along with several volunteers (mostly MUN archaeology graduate students and professional staff members) conducted a 5 day excavation to better define the date of occupation, delineate the parameters of the site, and identify some of the activities which took place here during the seventeenth century. Analysis of the partially-excavated features and associated artifacts are beginning to reveal an important but often overlooked chapter in early Newfoundland history.

As described in several articles by Philip Smith (1987a-b; 1995), many English and French settlers in Newfoundland initiated a pattern of seasonal movement or transhumance beginning in the latter half of the seventeenth century. After the fishing season ended, some European residents would leave their summer fishing stations and move inland to seek shelter and to hunt, trap and procure timber resources during the winter months. Despite the fact that these transhumant Europeans spent approximately half the year away from their ‘primary’ summer residences, we have very little information on the exact locations of these winter house sites; nor do we know much about the living conditions at these remote locations until the early part of the nineteenth century (see Wix 1836; Storer 1848/9).

Dr. James A. Tuck was the first to recognize that Sunnyside 1 fit this isolated and sheltered pattern as it is located deep in Trinity Bay at the western extent of Bull Arm and far from known seventeenth-century European fishing stations or permanent settlements (Gaulton and Mills 2011, 2014; Mills 2012; Mills and Gaulton 2010). Likewise, its location protects the site from the worst of winter’s weather and places it near the natural resources of both Trinity and Placentia Bays — a point not lost of the various Aboriginal peoples occupying this same area for thousands of years (Evans 1980-81; Penney 1978).

Historical references to the Sunnyside area are very brief and there is little mention of European settlement (either seasonal or permanent) until the early nineteenth century. In 1612, John Guy, governor of the first English settlement in Canada, at Cupids, visited the area to initiate trade with the Beothuk and began construction of a small house, but it was never completed (Gilbert 1990: 159). Over the winter of 1697, Pierre le Moyne D’Iberville spent several months in the Sunnyside area along with French soldiers, Aboriginal and Irish allies, and numerous English captives (Williams 1987:81-85). The reason for this occupation was to transport the English prisoners overland into Placentia Bay and from there to the French stronghold at *Plaisance*. In the 1760s, English sources refer to the Sunnyside area as a suitable place to cut lumber, trap for furs and hunt seals in the fall and winter (Handcock 1989: 225), and in 1835 Reverend Edward Wix recorded the presence of four English families wintering in the area (Wix 1836:43).

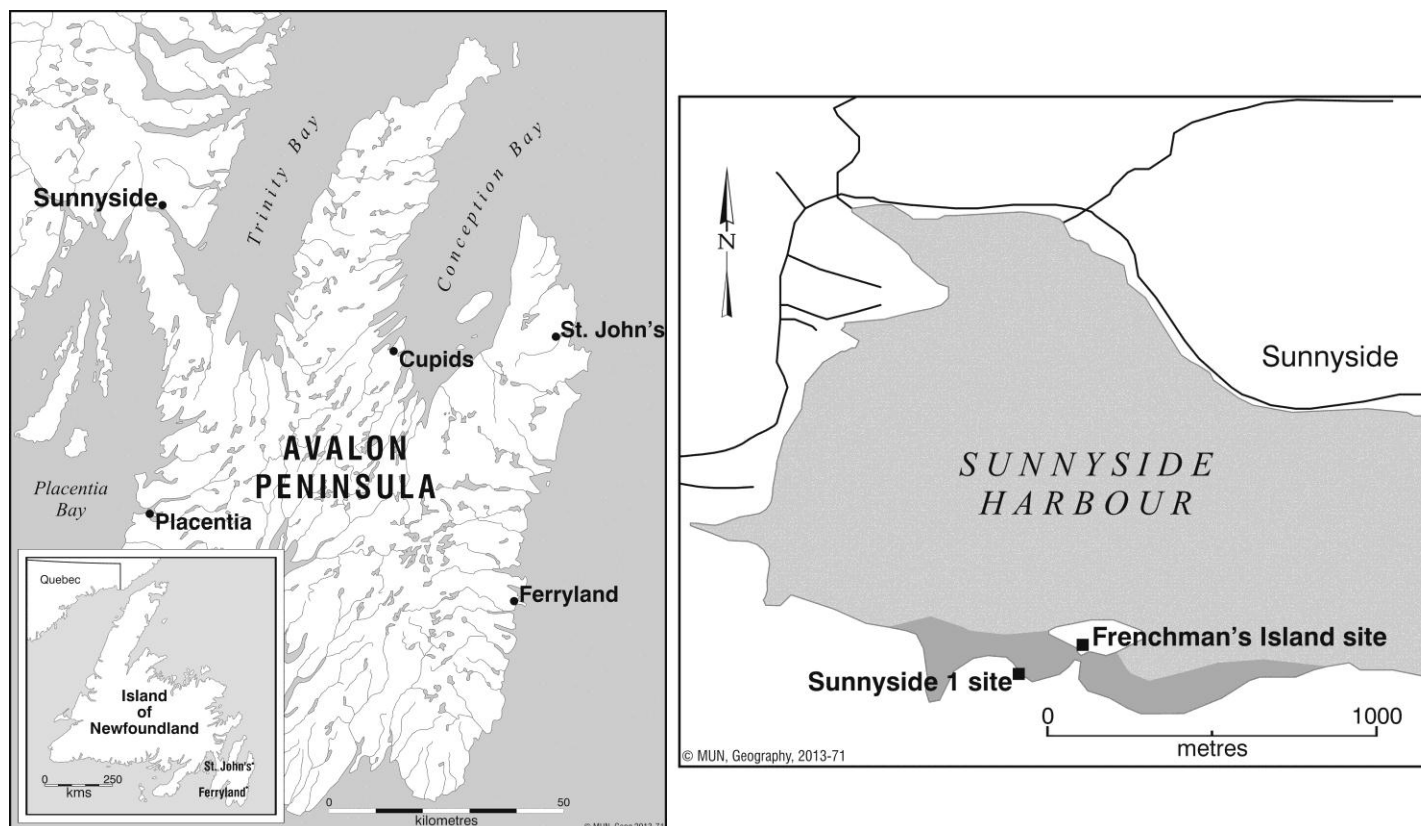


Figure 1a (left): The Avalon Peninsula showing the location of Sunnyside (Island of Newfoundland inset); **1b** (right): the location of Sunnyside 1 (CIAI-05) and nearby Frenchman's Island (CIAI-01).

2010 Excavations

The 2010 excavations at Sunnyside 1 began by clearing much of the overgrowth from the site, establishing datum points and a grid and exposing portions of a fireplace/oven collapse (Feature 1) identified the previous year (Figure 2). The focus then shifted to the south and southeast of this feature in an effort to expose evidence for a living surface and the extent of outlying midden deposits, respectively. A one by four metre trench south of Feature 1 revealed a thin layer of charcoal containing clay tobacco pipe fragments, iron nails and a few pieces of coarse earthenware. A second one by four metre area was opened up to the southeast, in a location identified in 2009 as containing substantial refuse deposits (Figure 3). Significant numbers of clay pipe and flint fragments were recovered along with large numbers of nails and scattered pieces of ceramic, glass, and lead. This second test trench also showed the midden deposits to be thickest at the western end but thinning out to the east, in the direction of the nearby shoreline.

In both excavation areas, mixed among the European artifacts, were a few large flakes of local (patinated) chert, at least one of which shows signs of further modification. A large (Dorset) biface of the same material was likewise recorded in the midden area.

Unfortunately, the later European presence appears to have resulted in significant mixing of earlier Aboriginal occupation(s), at least in the areas tested.



Figure 2: Partially exposed fireplace/oven collapse in 2010 – Feature 1.

With the exception of the disturbed prehistoric component(s), the remaining site stratigraphy was intact and fairly straightforward. The primary layers consist of the uppermost forest littermat (Event 1) of fir needles, leaves and other vegetation in various stages of decomposition. This layer is soft, moist and reddish black (Munsell color 2.5YR 2.5/1) and between 8-10cm thick. Below this is the seventeenth-century occupation (Event 2) mixed with occasional artifacts previously deposited by Aboriginal peoples. Event 2 is black (GLE Y1 2.5N), sandy and organic, ranging in thickness from 1-10cm.

In addition to the eight excavation units opened up in 2010, we test pitted in several areas to the south and east of Features 1 and 2 (Feature 2 is a 4.6m x 5.5m sod-walled structure, identified in 2009, see Mills and Gaulton 2010). The presence of European artifacts in many of these test pits clearly demonstrates that the site spans an area of at least 200 square metres, not including the above-mentioned structural remains. The site plan for 2010-2013 (Figure 4) shows the major structural features and location of these test pits (noted as T.P.)



Figure 3: 1x4 metre trench to the southeast of Feature 1.

Of the over 1300 artifacts recovered during the 2010 excavations, European flint (n = 690) was the most common and included everything from large cores to tiny retouch flakes. The presence of several tinder flints and crude gunspalls in the assemblage show the end result of these flint-working activities (Figure 5a-b). The relatively high percentage of flint at the site can be explained, in part, by its necessity for making fire and discharging firearms; however, it is the relative scarcity of other European manufactured objects (especially glass and ceramic) which makes the quantity of flint tools and debitage stand out.

Iron was another common find, the vast majority of which consisted of nails (n= 200) of various sizes from 7 inch spikes to ½ inch tacks, likely indicating the presence of a timber-framed structure. Based on the topography, the density of the midden deposits to the east and the presence of a thin band of charcoal south of the possible chimney/oven collapse, the structure is likely immediately south of Feature 1. The sod-walled structure (Feature 2) to the west may have been an adjoining outbuilding, possibly for storage.

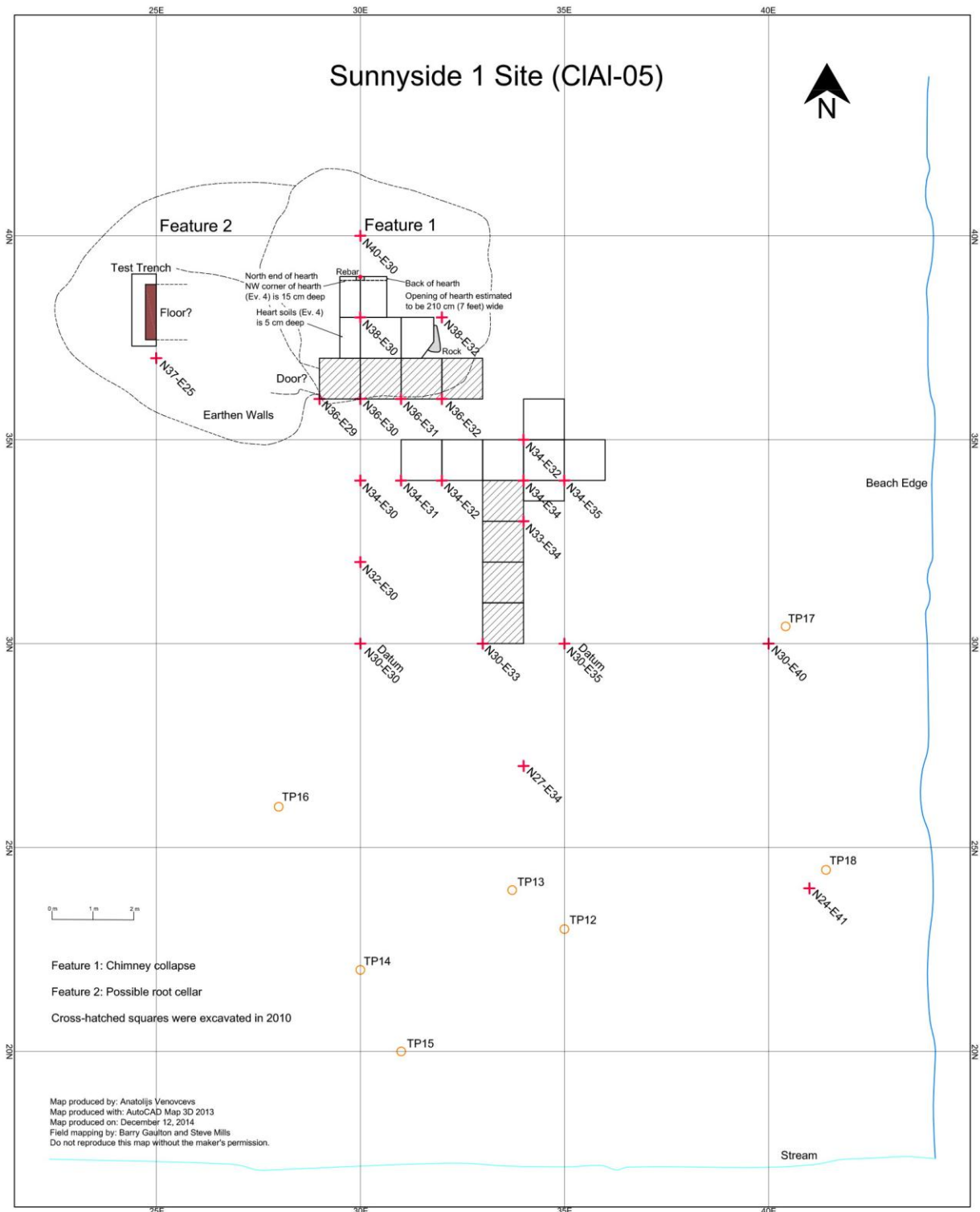


Figure 4: Current site plan showing visible features, excavation units (2010 excavations are indicated by hatched lines), and location of test pits. Map produced by Anatolijs Venovcevs, MUN.



Figure 5a (left): Two tinder flints; **5b** (right): and four crude gunspalls.

Other iron artifacts included a door hinge fragment, two knives — one of which still has the remnants of a bone handle — and what appears to be a pit saw blade fragment (Figure 6). The pit saw blade, in particular, would fit very well with a winter occupation because cutting wood and sawing boards was considered, at least by the 1660s, as an important part of winter activities (Yonge 1663, in Poynter 1963:60). Notably absent from the collection were fish hooks, prongs, and other ferrous and non-ferrous metal objects (line and net weights) associated with the cod fishery.



Figure 6: Iron hinge fragment (left); pit saw blade (top right) and knife with bone handle (bottom right).

The ceramic and glass artifacts (Figure 7a-c) although few and scattered, make sense in light of the circumstances. It would not be feasible for Newfoundland residents to pack up and transport all of their possessions from their summer homes to their winter abodes each and every year. Therefore, the material goods brought to winter houses must have been chosen based on people's basic needs. Unlike summer habitations where settlers focused on the fishery and relied on preserved foodstuffs, winter activities involved hunting, trapping and foraging. In this context, it is not surprising to only find the occasional ceramic and glass vessel for the storage of provisions and alcohol, a small tin-glazed bowl for personal food consumption and even small a pharmaceutical bottle which contained medicine in the event of illness.

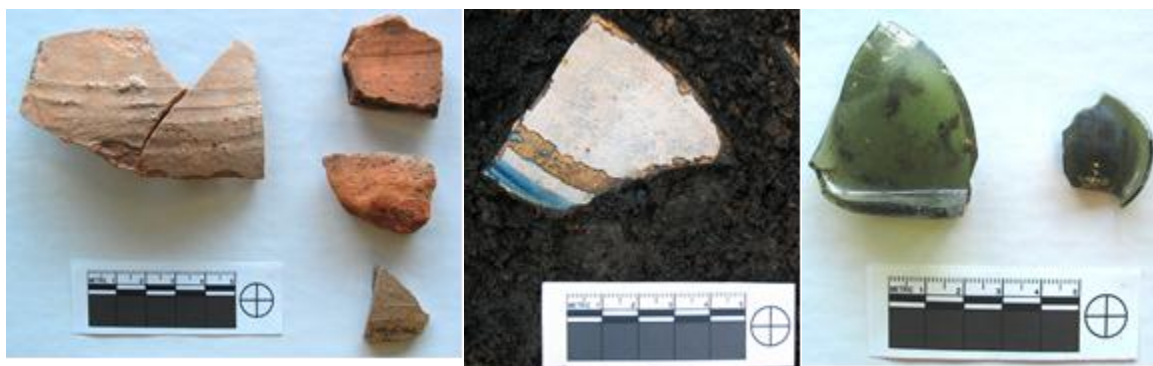


Figure 7a (left): Coarse earthenware fragments; **7b** (centre): tin-glazed bowl fragment in situ; **7c** (right) and a glass case bottle and pharmaceutical bottle base.

One commodity clearly perceived as necessary was tobacco and the means to smoke it. Three hundred and fifty two clay pipe fragments were recovered, representing a minimum of 23 pipes. The bowl forms date from around 1650-1680 (Figure 8) and based on their shape, appear to be of English manufacture or at least fashioned after typical English forms. A couple of these pipes were also broken but later modified to extend their use life, demonstrating a limited number of pipes at the site relative to the amount of tobacco. Beside clay pipes, simple pleasures and leisure activity is also represented by a small (2 cm diameter) circular gaming piece made from a fragment of tin-glazed earthenware grinded/filed down on all sides (Figure 9). Fragments of what look to be the same vessel were also found on the site, but only this piece shows any sign of further cultural modification; again demonstrating the reuse of broken objects but in this case, for a purpose unrelated to its original function.

A variety of lead shot were recovered at Sunnyside 1, mostly consisting of small 'bird shot' as opposed to larger caliber musket balls for hunting large game. Several pieces of lead waste from the shot manufacturing process were also found as well as a large chunk of lead. Unfortunately, the half dozen tiny calcined bone fragments from CIAI-05 do not shed any light on the local species its occupants were hunting or trapping other than the fact that they were mammalian remains.



Figure 8: Pipe bowls dating from ca. 1650-1680.

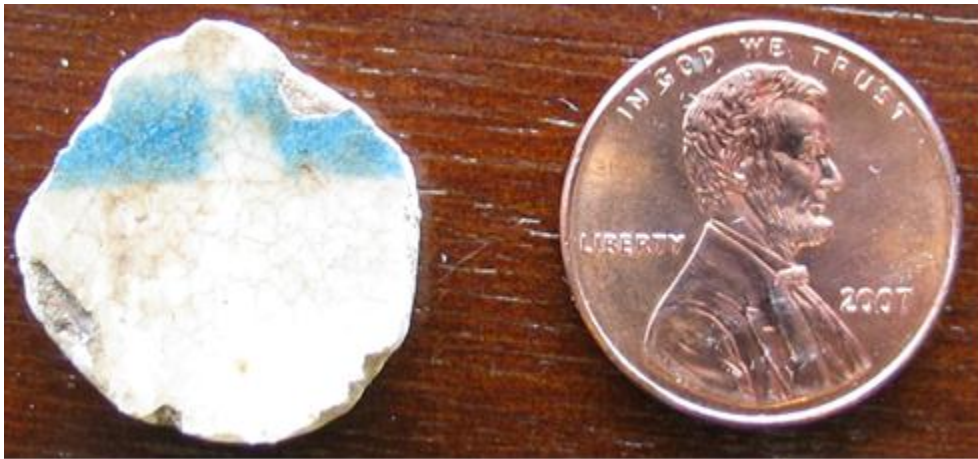


Figure 9: Circular tin-glazed gaming piece (for similar examples from 17th-century contexts see Faulkner and Faulkner 1987).

2013 Excavations

The 2013 phase of our research had two specific goals. The first was to further expose the large rock/rubble feature (Feature 1) first tested in 2010 so as to determine if it is a chimney collapse and fireplace and, if yes, what is its size and orientation. Positive proof of a fireplace and its placement in relation to the surrounding landscape would be an important step in delineating the remaining architectural remains. The second goal was to expand excavations on the associated midden southeast of Feature 1 to ascertain more about the nature and duration of occupation, and the possible cultural affiliation (French or English) of the European descendants who once dwelled here.

After removing 3½ years of overgrowth from the site, locating our datum points and re-establishing and extending our grid, half the crew began exposing Feature 1 while the remainder started excavation on a 1x5 metre E-W trench in the midden area

perpendicular to the N-S trench excavated back in 2010 (refer back to Figure 4). Feature 1 was exposed to the north and east but the western extent was not fully explored due to its proximity to Feature 2 – an earth-walled ‘cellar’ adjacent to and running west of Feature 1. Once this clearing operation was completed and the extent of the chimney collapse recorded, we began removing rocks from the uppermost part of the feature in an effort to locate the fireplace. Many of the rocks used in the construction were red sandstone/siltstone with one or more square sides, likely acquired from several nearby outcrops exposed along the shore’s edge (See King 1980). A full day of rock removal was rewarded with encouraging evidence for the outline of a fireplace. Excavation proceeded in this area for the remainder of the week and by the last day of fieldwork, the remains of a fireplace and hearth area were partially exposed (Figure 10).



Figure 10: Partially excavated fireplace and hearth, looking north.

A rough estimate for the fireplace/hearth opening is 7ft (2.1m) wide. If the sides (or arms) of the stone fireplace are 1½ - 2½ft wide then the width of this stone feature should be in the vicinity of 10 - 12ft (3-3.6m). Further investigation is needed to uncover the remainder of the fireplace so as to determine its full length and width. What we can say at present is that it opens up to the south and we believe it encompasses the entire north end of the building. It is therefore reasonable to suggest that the house was oriented north-south along its long axis and the main entrance situated on the east side where the majority of domestic refuse was deposited.

The hearth area inside the fireplace contained a black, greasy matrix of charcoal and artifacts upwards of 15cm thick at the back of the hearth and tapering out to 5cm thick at

the front. As expected, there were many seventeenth-century objects in this deposit. Iron nails, flint flakes and clay tobacco pipe fragments were the most numerous but there were also significant quantities of small lead shot and bits of calcined bone, some of which are unidentified mammal and avian species. The pipe bowls in the hearth re-confirmed the occupation date of 1650-80 and the presence of several decorated Jonah/Raleigh type pipes demonstrate that the former residents had a variety of pipes from which to smoke (Figure 11). Some of the iron artifacts found in the hearth were in an excellent state of preservation. This allowed for the identification of small metal objects such as tacks once fastened to chests and other such furniture. It is also worth mentioning that all cultural strata (both in the hearth and nearby midden) were wet screened using a ¼ inch mesh, allowing for much greater recovery. Several soil samples were collected from the hearth for further examination using finer sieves located in the Department of Archaeology at Memorial University¹



Figure 11: Relief-moulded, Jonah/Raleigh type clay tobacco pipe stem.

A recent tree fall at the western end of Feature 2 also allowed for a preliminary investigation and interpretation of this associated structure. An exploratory trench was dug N-S across where the upturned roots had exposed the rear wall and, to a lesser degree, a narrow section of the floor to this cellar-like feature. This investigation exposed a dark brown organic linear depression with defined corners at the north and south ends. The organic deposit measured 1.15m (almost 4ft) long, about 6cm deep and ended sharply where the earthen walls began to rise upwards to a height of 75cm. The deposit continues to the east into the unexcavated portion of the feature. Tentatively the dark organic deposit has been interpreted as the remains of a wooden floor.

An interior width of approximately 4 feet along its short axis is reasonable considering that its length appears to be upwards of twice that dimension. Although no other structural remains or iron nails were found in the exploratory trench, we can tentatively

¹ Hartley and Morrison (2013) identified the charred remains of three wood species from the hearth, mostly consisting of Fir but also one example of Mountain Ash and Birch.

suggest that Feature 2 was built by mounding sods, rocks and loose soils against low wooden walls. As there was not much of a discernable organic overburden inside this doughnut-shaped feature, it probably had a wooden roof. Earthen cellars, known in Newfoundland as “root cellars” were ubiquitous in rural areas and in some communities are still used to store vegetables and other perishables in a dark and cool environment. Often times the cellars were created by digging into the side of a hill, or even a slight rise in the forest floor. A wooden frame, sheathed on one side and roofed over, would be constructed into the resulting depression and then soils and sods banked over the entire structure. The resulting subterranean cellar effectively keeps the winter food supply from freezing. The entrance way into Feature 2 was intentionally positioned at the west side of the massive fireplace (Feature 1) which would have provided at least some radiant heat to help keep provisions chilled but unfrozen. If our interpretation is correct, this would be the earliest root cellar recorded in the province!

In conjunction with the work undertaken at Features 1 and 2, other crew members spent the week excavating the 1x5m E-W trench (Figure 12). The wet, boggy conditions

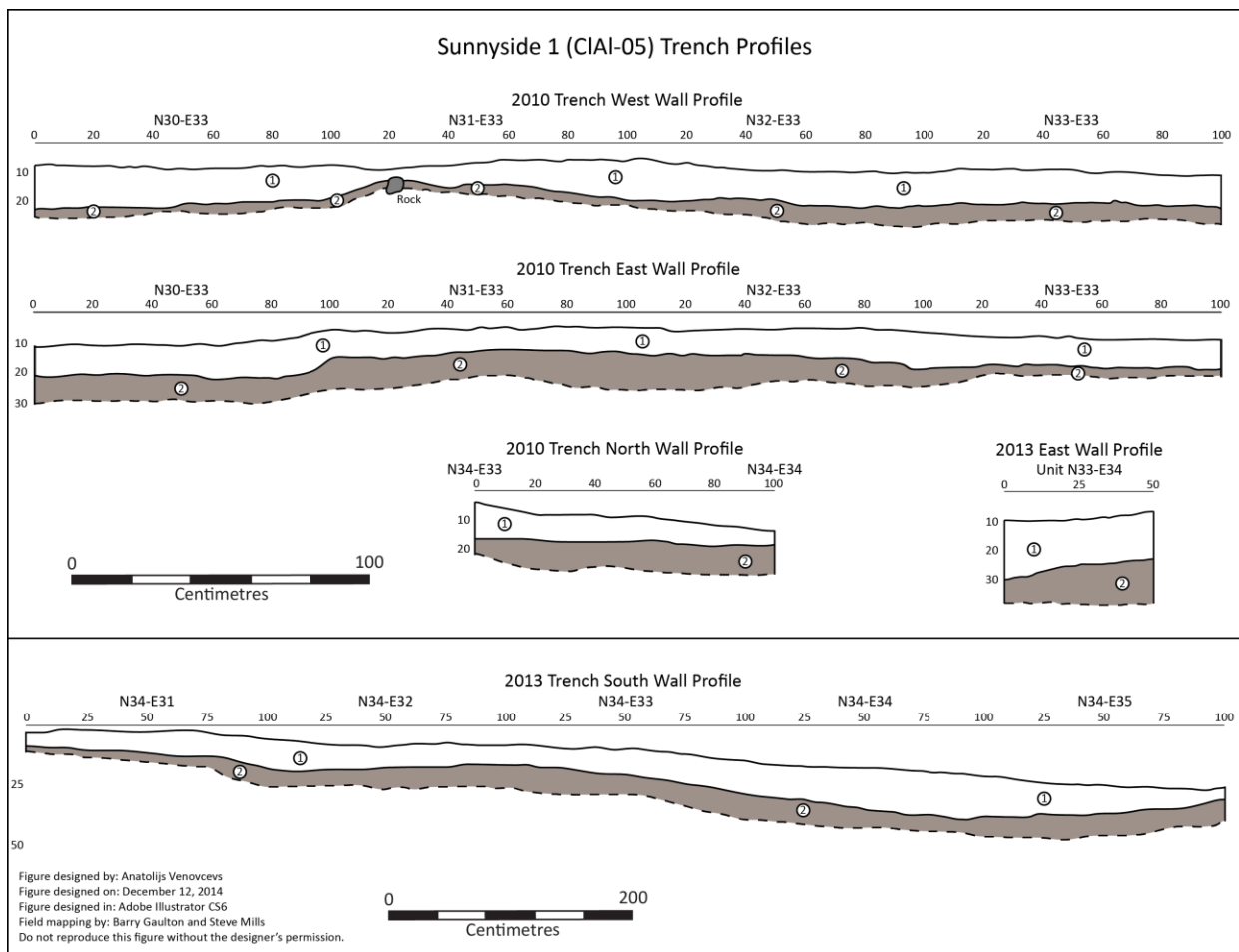


Figure 12: 2010 and 2013 trench profiles from CIAI-05.

encountered at the eastern end, combined with the large number of artifacts, made for slow digging. Several iron objects were uncovered including a boat pintle, a partial iron heel tap and a heart-shaped padlock (Figure 13). The base of a tin-glazed bowl or porringer (Figure 14), as well as fragments of a previously recorded Portuguese redware storage vessel and glass case bottle was also found. Overall, the artifact assemblage remained much the same as that recovered in 2010 – lots of iron nails, clay pipe bowl and stem fragments, flint flakes, crudely-worked gunflints and tinder flints, but very little in the way of ceramics or glass. The large quantities of ceramic and glass storage vessels found on seventeenth-century fishery sites on the outer coasts of the Avalon Peninsula are simply not present at Sunnyside 1.



Figure 13: (left) Heart-shaped padlock.

Figure 14: (right) Base of a tin-glazed bowl or porringer.

The dearth of evidence for certain artifact types may reflect the nature of occupation. If this is a winter residence, as proposed above, then the archaeological record should manifest the different subsistence practices, daily activities and perceived needs of these people during the winter months. The hectic spring/summer seasons during the cod fishery necessitated large quantities of imported provisions and beverages both for Newfoundland residents and the large influx of migratory fishermen who frequented the same locations. Come fall, some of the resident planters would move inland to seek shelter and to hunt, trap and cut wood. This seasonal movement (by land or by sea) required people to transport only that which was deemed necessary, while the rest of their possessions were kept at the primary summer residence. With access to wild game and more time to hunt and trap, it seems that clay pipes and tobacco, flint and ammunition were transported in significant quantities to these winter quarters; whereas large numbers of ceramic vessels filled with butter, lard and other preserves were not. Recognizing this

divergence in the quantity and variety of artifact assemblages between summer and winter residences may be the first step in identifying the more isolated and/or ephemeral winter occupations. However it is important to note that these results are preliminary and based on one partially-excavated site from the formative period of European transhumance in Newfoundland.

Concluding Remarks

The cultural affiliation (French or English) of these winter residents must remain unanswered for now. Excavations are still in the preliminary stages, so we are not yet at a point to state with certainty that the material or architectural expressions at CIAI-05 are suggestive of a particular group. Both the English and French were familiar with the Sunnyside area in the seventeenth century. Although Edward Wix first reports the presence of English families wintering here in the early nineteenth century, it is worth noting that his accounts also record the remnants of old wooden “ways” or cross beams across the isthmus from Trinity to Placentia Bay which he attributes to the French who “were in the habit of drawing their boats from one bay to the other” (1836: 43-44).

What does seem certain is that the ongoing research at Sunnyside 1 has the potential to shed light on the origins of a lesser known part of Newfoundland culture, but one which was commonplace in rural communities until the early twentieth century (Smith 1987a-b).

Although this is our “Final Report” on CIAI-05 we are far from finished and hope to return again in the near future. The results of this ongoing research will provide the impetus for a larger, multi-year archaeological investigation into the origins and development of European transhumance and winter housing in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Acknowledgments

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Thank you to Sunnyside resident Cordell Gilbert for allowing us to use his driveway, making our trek to the site shorter and easier. Last but certainly not least, a big thank you and acknowledgment to Dr. James A. Tuck who first recognized that Sunnyside 1 was likely the site of a winter house.

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