'Give a wide berth': maritime cultural landscapes of the French inshore salt-cod fishery, Petit Nord, Newfoundland, 1500-1904

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Project proposal summary

My research explores the maritime landscapes of the historic French inshore salt-cod fishery of the Northern Peninsula of Newfoundland, during the period 1500-1904. Building on archaeological survey undertaken by An Archaeology of the Petit Nord Project, directed by Dr Peter Pope, my research will concentrate on establishing the organisational relationships of the fishing stations along the coast, with a specific emphasis on how the wider landscape created by the fishery can be understood at a regional scale. My research will investigate the spatial distribution and chronological evolution of the fishery, and examine how the environment and local topography not only dictated where sites were selected and then established, but also how the subsequent seasonal occupation led to the wider exploitation of resources and the installation of a navigational and cognitive infrastructure to sustain and support the fishery. My research will provide new perspectives on the shore-based sites by tying these remains into the wider networks of marine exploitation, navigation and organisation in such a way that bridges the marine and terrestrial zones. Fieldwork will be undertaken to complete our knowledge of areas that have yet to be visited by the Petit Nord Project, and will comprise archaeological surveys of a number of fishing rooms on the very northern tip of the peninsula, grouped about Quirpon and St. Lunaire. The large fishing rooms found at Gricquet, Croque and Crouse will also be revisited in order to refine landscape perspectives of these sites.

By using ideas of landscape to frame the social and economic development of the historic French fishery of the region, I intend to demonstrate how the effects of cultural processes in the past persist in the patterns of land use, terrestrial and marine, which are observable in the area today. My approach focusses on the inter-relationships between sites and landscapes, seeking their wider integration, and as such it has different emphasis from earlier site specific projects. My project will therefore continue the close collaborative work already established with members of local history societies in the area, and provide further material towards the greater interpretation of regional archaeology and historic landscape history. Additionally, by briefly examining natural and anthropogenic pressures on the archaeological landscapes of the fishing rooms I also intend to highlight a number of cultural resource management issues that can be framed within current institutional conservation policies and agendas.