

EXCAVATIONS ON BLACK ISLAND, LABRADOR

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The summer of 2010 was the first season of my PhD research on Black Island, northern Labrador. According to a 1776 census this dwelling on Black Island was occupied by a woman named Mikak. Her life story is significant in the history of Labrador as she was very influential in securing British land grants to the Moravian missionaries, who established their first mission in Nain in 1771, and was heavily involved in the coastal baleen trade network. The Black Island site is an 18th century Inuit sod house settlement which had been identified during the 1960s but has received little attention since. My goals for this season were to map the site and surrounding area and test excavate portions of the house to determine the length and nature of occupation.

We started by clearing out the dense vegetation and overgrowth. Despite the rest

of the island maintaining a light covering of mosses, berries, and grasses, the interior of the house structures were filled with dense willow and alder shrubs. Once cleared, it became obvious that the settlement consisted of two sod houses rather than one large bi-lobed structure. We set up the total station to begin making a detailed contour map of the cove and once that was complete we set to work mapping the house structures.

Once we finished mapping we set up our first test trench (1 x 4m) in House 1. Excavations revealed large wooden beams that resembled roof collapse and later we came down upon some flat wooden planks laid over a paving stone floor. Very few artifacts were recovered from this trench with the exception of some pipe stem and bowl fragments, small pieces of ceramic, bottle glass, and a musket

Figure 1 Vegetation cleared from both houses, facing south.





Figure 2 Josh Keddy, Kelly Okkuatsiak & Sam Tuglavina excavating House 1.

ball. Our next four units were placed in the entrance tunnel of House 1, leading into House 2. Here we found large pieces of cut whale bone but other than that the artifact assemblage was similar to that of the trench in House 1. Our next trench (1 x 4m) was placed in House 2, perpendicular to the entrance tunnel of House 1. The top layers in this trench appear to be midden from House 1, underneath this midden layer we found whale bone handles, beads of varying colours, large pieces of creamware, baleen, and pipe stem and bowl fragments. This house con-

tained little wood in comparison to House 1, and the paving stones were flat pieces of basalt with beautiful Labradorite inclusions.

It appears that House 1 was built later and perhaps borrowed structural elements from House 2. We found the use of test trenches rather than full-scale excavation problematic due to the inability to get a good sense of what is going on, especially when you encounter overlapping occupations with two dwellings, one built partially on top of the other. My goal for next season is to return to Black Island to completely excavate House 2



Figure 3 Large pieces of cut whale bone.

and, time permitting, excavate another trench in House 1. I plan to go back with a larger crew in 2011 in order to complete my research goals. 🏹