

## SNOOK'S COVE ARCHAEOLOGY PROJECT: REPORT ON FIELD SEASON 1

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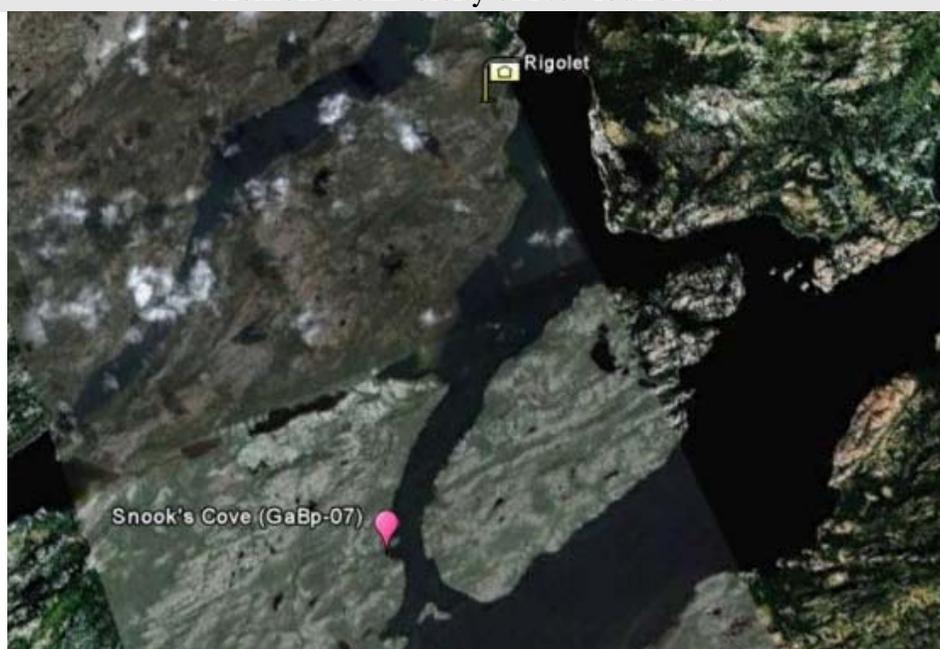


Figure 1 Narrows and Back Bay Regions of Labrador, showing locations of the town of Rigolet and the site of Snook's Cove (GaBp-07) (Pritchard)

I am happy to report that the first of two seasons of fieldwork at Snook's Cove was an overwhelming success in terms of both obtaining primary data with which to answer the major research questions and community feedback and responses to the project.

There are two main objectives of the Snook's Cove Archaeology Project. The first objective is to better understand the varied and geographically-situated responses of the Labrador Inuit to colonialism by focusing on an area (the Narrows region) and time period (post-18<sup>th</sup> century) that has hardly been researched, and on a group of Inuit that had a degree of autonomy and self-control over their livelihoods not found among Inuit that were living with and/or nearer settlers elsewhere in Labrador. Inuit were intimately familiar with the landscape, waterways and resources around the Narrows and Back Bay regions through centuries of use and experience, and many of them made this area home throughout the late 18<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (see figure 1). In con-

trast, settlers favoured the western end of Lake Melville because of its proximity to productive trapping grounds throughout this time period. Given these differences in preferred settlement locations, the Inuit living in the Narrows region continued to live their lives with relatively less influence from foreigners such as the Moravians to the north and substantial seasonal and settler operations to the south.

The second objective is to better understand how the Inuit built, used and maintained their sod-houses, and to incorporate this understanding into a typology of sod-house architecture relating to the ethnicity, or group identity, of the inhabitants. One outcome of colonialism and interaction between Inuit and foreigners in Labrador was that settlers, Inuit and Métis alike all built and lived in semi-subterranean sod-houses towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and into the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Given this conflation between group identity and building practices, one of the initial, and perhaps biggest, problems facing archaeologists working

on any post-18th century habitation site in Central and Southern Labrador is determining who lived there. It has recently been determined that Snook's Cove (GaBp-07), which is located on the north side of the Narrows, was home to several Inuit families throughout the 19th and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and it is thought that the sod-houses there were occupied by these Inuit (see figure 1).

Indeed, after eight weeks of work involving site survey and mapping, test pitting and full-scale excavations, it appears that we hit the nail on the head. This is a far cry from other times when I have gone into the field with high expectations only to be let down by poor preservation, inaccurate surveys or historical accounts, or past people not being where they are supposed to be.

With a crew consisting of myself and fellow MUN students Eliza Brandy, Josh Keddy, Pat Lavigne and Lori Williams, close to 100 (1m x 1m) units were excavated from two adjacent houses and associated middens. House 4 is a true semi-subterranean sod-house that exhibits several traditional Inuit architectural features and is tentatively dated from about 1800 to 1860 AD. This house is cut into the ground about 40 to 50cm, has earth and sod walls that have slumped inwards since house abandonment, has (at least a partially) paved flagstone floor and raised rear-sleeping platform, and has a substantial hearth feature located in the SW corner of the house (see figures 2, 3 and 4).

Tentatively dated from about 1860 to 1940, house 3 did not turn out to be a sod-house as was initially thought based on surface evidence. Instead, it is a settler-style cabin that has large log side walls laid directly on the ground (with slumping sides giving the impression of a depression like that found with sod-houses), a front stone wall constructed of dry-laid cobbles held in place with sand, a wood-plank floor covering at least a portion of the interior, and an old drum fireplace/hearth that was likely originally a wood stove (see figures

5, 6 and 7). Interestingly, house 3 also has a partially paved stone floor and raised rear-sleeping platform.

In addition to Inuit architectural features, there is also decent material evidence indicating that both houses were occupied by Inuit families, including the use of traditional raw materials such as whalebone, soapstone, quartz crystal and slate, and the use of traditional implements such as soapstone kulliks that you would not expect to find at settler sites. Less obvious, and more contentious, evidence includes the reworking of European materials into Inuit forms such as nails worked into blades, and extensive refurbishment and re-use of artifacts such as the mending of broken ceramics and the utilization of the sharp edges of broken glass.

For her MA research at MUN, Eliza Brandy is using a zooarchaeological approach to investigate patterns of Inuit subsistence and animal use at Snooks Cove. Because of the ambiguity in sod-house architecture relating to the ethnicity of occupants noted above, it is thought that an analysis of the faunal remains will complement the architectural and material data at the site by providing an additional line of evidence with which to identify an Inuit occupation of sod-houses in Southern Labrador.

Towards this end, there was a significant amount of faunal material recovered from both houses 3 and 4 at Snook's Cove, which considering the dates of occupation of the houses, should give us a decent picture of change through time in animal use and subsistence at the site. The recent nature of the site and the sandy matrix allowed for excellent preservation of bone, and in some cases complete skulls and articulated bones were recovered. Preliminary analysis using comparative faunal collections from the Zooarchaeological Identification Centre of the Canadian Museum of Nature indicates that the inhabitants of Snook's Cove had a diet with a heavy reliance on seals and caribou, which supports the interpretation of an Inuit occupation for these



Figure 2 The light patch on the right is old, slumping sod. Notice the dark layer on the left that runs underneath the sod; this was the old surface layer that the house cuts through and was built on (Pritchard)

Figure 3 The light patch coming out from the log (back-north) wall of house 4 is the sleeping platform. Also notice the cracked flagstones at the bottom right and bottom centre of the picture, which paved the floor of the house (Pritchard)





Figure 4 Hearth feature in House 4. The linear stones on the left are part of the front wall (Pritchard)

Figure 5 Log (east) wall and stone front (south) wall of house 3 (Pritchard)



houses. Significantly smaller amounts of other animals have also been identified, such as rabbits, hares, ptarmigan, murre, and a porcupine, and some cod remains have also been found. And given the importance of dogs for life in Labrador during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was not surprising their remains were found as well.

As her first fieldwork experience beyond fieldschool while an undergraduate at McMaster University, Eliza was very pleased with how the season turned out and the collection of faunal materials excavated. More significantly though, she is grateful for her fantastic crew and the lasting impression left by the community of Rigolet and the spirit of Labrador.

As interesting as the architectural and material evidence are for what they can tell us about Inuit building traditions and responses to colonialism in terms of cultural continuity and change, significantly more interesting is that even though house 3 is more recent than house 4 and accordingly replaces some of the earlier Inuit features such as the flagstone floor and stone-hearth with a wood floor and wood-stove, they share an internal arrangement and logic that is impossible to ignore. In fact, the internal arrangement of both houses is so similar they are almost mirror images of the other and the only discernable difference is that house 3 is wider than it is long and house 4 is longer than it is wide.

The entrances of both houses are located in the centre of the front (south) wall, which faces the water and requires you to step up substantially (approx. 30cm) to enter the houses. The hearth and stove are placed to the left of the entrances in the southwest corners of both houses. These are substantial features with stonework radiating outwards from the cooking areas (compare figures 4 and 7). Running along the entire length of the back (north) wall in both houses are raised rear-sleeping

platforms which are about 1.3m wide and are raised only about 10 to 15 cm above floor level. After the interiors were exposed, the dimensions of house 3 were determined to be about 5.1m (E-W) x 4.6m (N-S) and house 4 were about 4.2m (E-W) x 4.7m (N-S).

All told, houses 3 and 4 represent two distinct periods of time with a possible overlap around 1860 which allows me to gauge change over time in Inuit society within the context of colonialism over the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and there are lots of material and architectural data that can and will be used to answer the two primary research questions noted above.

As great as the archaeological potential of Snook's Cove is, the warm reception and genuine interest in the project by people from the nearby community of Rigolet makes this research even more worthwhile. I do not believe in doing archaeology for the sake of doing archaeology and I have actively sought to publicize this research to the people of Labrador through radio interviews and community presentations. This past summer we enjoyed an impromptu visit at the site from a number of kids and parents from Rigolet who were interested in what was going on, and we had about 40 people show up (not all at once) for our post-fieldwork show-and-tell (see figures 8 and 9). Based on past experience this is a very decent turnout. With the support of the Nunatsiavut government I also sought to hire students from Rigolet to help with fieldwork, and while only one person applied last summer (and he ended up working for the Department of Fisheries instead), I have already received interest from several people about next year. I like to think this increased interest can be at least partly attributed to the reception and interest in the project by the people of Rigolet this past summer. I hope that next year's fieldwork is as successful as this year's was.



Figure 6 In-situ plank floor in House 3 abuts the base of the rear sleeping platform (Pritchard)

Figure 7 Fireplace and partially paved floor in house 3. The barrel hoop at the top acted as a base for an oven and/or stove and the soil around this area is baked from the heat radiating from it. The smaller linear stones on the left are part of the front wall (Pritchard)





Figure 8 Me explaining the site to kids and parents from Rigolet (Pritchard)

Figure 9 Post-fieldwork show-and-tell at the Rigolet community centre (Pritchard)

