

The end of the field season

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The 2011 archaeological field season in St. Michael's Bay was a success but it differed from previous years in two ways in that the weather was far worse and the artifacts were fewer. By these accounts, it shouldn't have been a good season but this year my focus was on different aspects of this Inuit sod house, which was lived in sometime from the mid-1600s to the mid-1700s. In other years I looked for artifacts that would help to show that Inuit lived here and the date the site, as well as for bone remains that would help to understand diet and which season(s) of the year the house was lived in. In 2011, I was interested in learning more about the architecture and design of the house.

Although only its lowermost levels remain we were able to discover some key information. A distinct entrance passage was uncovered made of stones laid on top of bedrock and a thin earth layer. The entrance passage runs downslope, towards the east, creating a cold-trap effect that prevented cold air from reaching the main living area. There also appears to be a small activity area or alcove that extends off the side of the entrance passage. From the amount of charcoal found in one corner of this alcove, this may be where cooking took place. We excavated into the walls of the house to try to learn more about construction and in one area of the interior we removed all the floor rocks to find out what was underneath. Results of

this year's findings are still being mulled over, but what can be said is that a great deal of planning went into the building of this house. For instance, the paving stones that form the house floor were carefully aligned and laid atop the bedrock. This in turn also shows that a fair amount of soil was first removed from the house area to expose the bedrock before the interior floor was laid. A course of stones can be seen within the mounded soil that forms the house wall at the entrance. Here the wall was given extra support to prevent collapse, because this is also the side of the house that slopes downward.

One aspect of the house's construction that will probably always remain a puzzle is the shape of the roofline and how the roof was constructed. Early descriptions and photos of 19th century sod houses in Labrador confirm that there is no single sod house design. Some early sod houses have a gabled roof line, while others are hipped or rounded. All seem to have wooden beams covered by substantial peat sods. In some parts of the Arctic, Inuit used whale ribs and other parts of the whale skeleton to support and shape the house roof. In St. Michael's Bay, our sod house gives no clues on how the roof was built. The thin layer of soil over the entire house suggests that roofing sods were not very thick. There are no wooden struts or beams lying about and I suspect that these were salvaged and used elsewhere at some point in the past. The wood we've uncovered so far is short and appears to have collapsed inwards from the walls. One very unusual piece in the southwest corner of the house is a nearly complete wooden plank resting atop the sloping bedrock that forms the wall in that area. It is of European origin and



The 2011 archaeology crew in Triangle, Labrador were (left to right) Dylan Morris, Art Luther, Eva Luther, Kara Wolfe, Marianne Stopp, Laura-June Zinck, Thomas McKenna. Inset: Will McGrath. READER SUBMITTED PHOTOS: MARIANNE STOPP

probably of oak.

Although the artifacts were fewer, what we found was quite unique. For instance, we now have two European spoon bowls from the house. These weren't just ordinary spoons, which the Inuit probably had no use for, but were used as decoration. The spoon handle was removed from the bowl and a small hole pierced through the edge of the bowl so that it could be sewn onto a women's amauti as decoration. Such artifacts illustrate the changing symbolic meaning of material objects as they move from one culture to another. Like the French ceramics and beads recovered from this site, the spoons also represent trade encounters with the French fishermen at this time. Another artefact of great interest, despite its tiny size, is a translucent, oval bead with a pale opalescent or lavender colour tone. It is a type known as a wound bead because it

was made by winding a strand of molten glass around a heated wire until the desired shape was reached. It was then left to cool before it was slipped off the wire. Probably made by Venetian bead-makers, it fits the time period of the house perfectly, dating to around AD 1740 and possibly as early as AD 1670. In closing, I look forward to next year, when work in St. Michael's Bay will continue.

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