

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS AT CASTLE HILL NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

Matthew Simmonds
Independent Consultant

At the request of Parks Canada an archaeological investigation was carried out at Castle Hill National Historic Site, Placentia, Newfoundland. This was a joint project between Parks Canada and the Town of Placentia.

In July 2007, three cultural features

total of 18 test units were excavated. These varied in size from one square meter to six square meters.

The first area tested was the furthest one up the hill and the possible location of the Horseshoe Battery. A week was spent in this location and eight test units were excavated.



Figure 1 Camp site at the possible location of the Horseshoe Battery (Simmonds)

were identified by Parks Canada archaeologist Ms. Jenneth Curtis while assessing damage caused by a trail. These features included the La Fontaine Battery, possibly the Horseshoe Battery, and a third area with three linear stone features. For three weeks in October 2009, archaeological investigations were carried out on these cultural features. Prior to this, no archaeological testing had been done in these areas.

Each morning for three weeks, the first task at hand was to hike up the steep hillside which was often slippery as a result of the rain. Despite having to take a spell after the march up the hill to catch our breath every morning, a

The general topography of the area matched the name of the battery and the location matched that of the French maps. It was a natural, horseshoe shaped, flat plateau that had a commanding view of the bay, the settlement of Placentia, and the La Fontaine Battery. It would have been easily supported by the Detached Redoubt above. The plateau was also easily defended; behind it was a vertical cliff face and the bank of the plateau was steep except to the northwest, where a linear stone feature probably served as a defensive role.

The investigation of this linear feature revealed that it may be remnants of a crudely constructed defensive wall (See figure 2). It is



Figure 2 Possible remnants of a crudely constructed defensive wall (Simmonds)

situated where the plateau is less naturally defended and faces the direction an enemy force would likely approach from. Underlying this, was an earlier ditch with the possible remains of a bank on the downward slope of the hill. This may be an earlier defensive entrenchment. No further testing was carried out on this feature. Much of it was under thick vegetation and to gain a better understanding of the feature, clearing away the vegetation would be necessary. This was not possible at this time as we had to keep the impact on the

vegetation to a minimum.

The remainder of the test units revealed little of the battery. However, they did show the plateau was naturally formed rather than manmade. Other than a modern boot heel, no other artifacts were recovered from this area.

The second area intensively investigated, which involved less of a climb, was in a clearing on a quite a steep hill. Here the attention was focused on, but not restricted to, three linear stone features. Two of these features lined two of the edges of the clearing, while the third was set back from the clearing and in the trees. The third was perpendicular to the other stone features and appeared to connect to one of them. At the top of the clearing there was evidence of a small vegetable garden. Ten test units were opened in this area. Only modern beer bottle glass and a spent shotgun cartridge were found.

Of the two linear stone features lining the edge of the clearing, one was extremely ephemeral while the other, which was under thick vegetation and difficult to access, appeared to have at least one defined

Figure 3 Similar stone arrangements on the opposite side of Freshwater Cove (Simmonds)



edge. With the numerous test units in the clearing and across these two stone features it was concluded that these features were possibly the result of an attempt to increase the size and yield of a nearby vegetable garden. Similar stone arrangements can be seen on the other side of Freshwater Cove less than one kilometre away. The third stone feature was different from the others. It had no apparent relationship with the clearing, was perpendicular to the other stone features, had extremely well defined edges, and at least one definitive beginning. Broken 'stubby' beer bottle glass was found within this feature. The low height of the wall and the insufficient amount of stone downhill from it suggests the wall was not built

up much higher than at present, making it inadequate to be defensive. It is unlikely to be of military origins, though its function remains uncertain.

The removal of a bench and handrails associated with the trail were also monitored in the area of the La Fontaine Battery. There were two sections of handrails with a total of ten posts. Each post hole was investigated as was the minor disturbance caused by the placement of the bench. Cultural materials and deposits were absent. A French map from 1709 depicts earthworks in the area of the handrails; however, this area has been subjected to heavy erosion. 