

**PARKS CANADA ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY
AND EXCAVATIONS AT L'ANSE AUX
MEADOWS, NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE OF
CANADA**

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Parks Canada conducted archaeological excavations and survey work for three weeks in June at L'Anse aux Meadows, National Historic Site of Canada, on the northern tip of Newfoundland's Northern Peninsula. Two main components guided archaeological research at the site. The first component involved a renewed interest by Parks Canada and Memorial University of Newfoundland in the aboriginal occupations within the park boundaries of L'Anse aux Meadows National Historic Site (Figure 1). Though the Norse material earned the site its UNESCO status, a rich history of Native occupation exists including the Maritime Archaic, Groswater and Dorset Palaeoeskimo, and Recent Indian. New data from archaeological survey and targeted excavations of prehistoric Aboriginal occupation areas will be combined with existing information on Native occupations at the site (Wallace 1989, Wallace 2006) and incorporated in to the current body of archaeological knowledge of the National Historic Site and surrounding area. It is hoped that these efforts will result in a more complete and encompassing reconstruction of the prehistory and history of L'Anse aux Meadows.

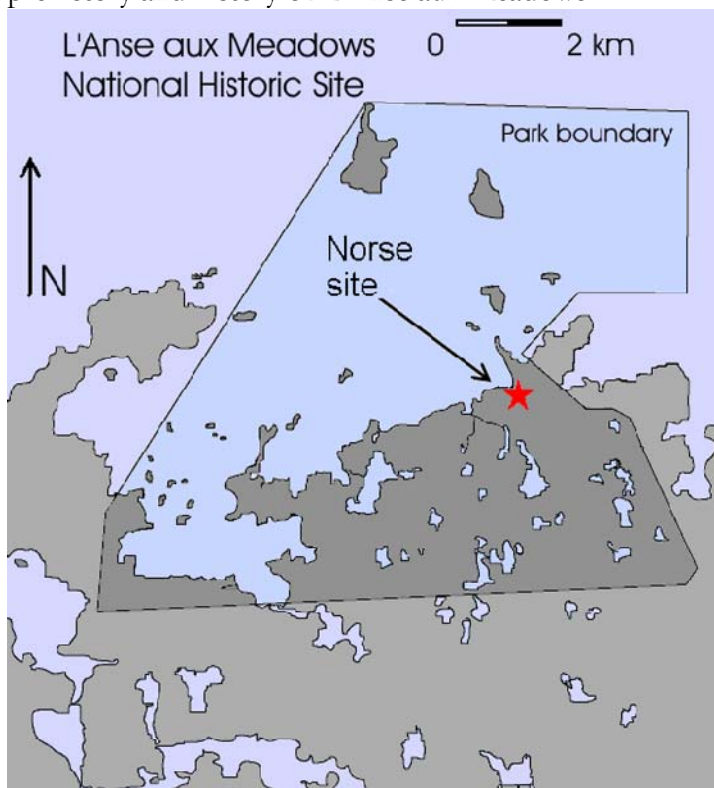


Figure 1: Park boundaries of L'Anse aux Meadows National Historic Site. (Kristensen and Curtis)

The second component of the 2007 fieldwork involved a number of small-scale excavation units in and adjacent to the Norse occupation area. The excavation of those units was motivated by: 1) a need to relocate Norse doorways in the reconstructed ruins, 2) a reassessment of previously determined cultural features near the shore of Epaves Bay, and 3) an independent research project that required sampling for invertebrate remains.

Fieldwork relating to the Aboriginal occupation was led by Parks Canada archaeologist Jenneth Curtis with assistance from Tony Adler (M.A. student at the University of Washington) and Todd Kristensen (M.A. student at Memorial University of Newfoundland). Excavations of the Norse structures were led by Birgitta Wallace (Archaeologist Emeritus, Parks Canada).

Aboriginal Occupations

Portions of the lower marine terrace west of Black Duck Brook and the Norse site were excavated in an effort to re-establish the site grid employed during previous Parks Canada excavations in the 1970s. The proper identification of previously determined Aboriginal occupation areas depended on the re-location of site benchmarks and excavated units.

Two permanent site benchmarks were identified and used to re-locate the site grid. Three 1 m² test units were then strategically placed to intersect the edges of previous excavation areas. One unit successfully encountered an excavation boundary while a second unit failed to detect any excavation areas or cultural material. A third unit encountered a previously undocumented cultural feature consisting of an arrangement of rock slabs. The stones likely represent a Dorset Palaeoeskimo axial feature (Figure 2). Further excavations are necessary to determine the feature's significance.



Figure 2: Possible Dorset Palaeoeskimo axial feature. (Kristensen and Curtis)

Old grid stakes and visible rectangular depressions from previous excavations were also identified. This information will be combined with data gathered from the three test units to guide future excavations on the lower terrace.

A random sampling strategy was employed in an archaeological survey of prehistoric sites west of Epaves Bay. Shovel tests were excavated on transects extending inland (south) from the shore. Test pits were dug at incremental distances from the current shoreline to ensure that a variety of landform types would be sampled. Additional shovel tests were placed in zones of high potential as determined by slope, aspect, view, proximity to freshwater, and landform type.

A number of depressions were also encountered though no cultural material was recovered from shovel tests placed in and around the depressions. One site was identified that consists of a rock feature visible on the surface. The nature of the rock feature and the depressions is unknown but may relate to historic cultivation and grazing in the cove.

One shovel test in the vicinity of the previously mentioned rock feature yielded a single flake of Ramah chert. In addition, a local resident of Ship Cove (approximately 8 km west of L'Anse aux Meadows) discovered a large biface of Ramah Chert in a backyard garden and permitted an inspection by Parks Canada staff during the 2007 field season (Figure 3). Ramah chert was recovered from excavations at L'Anse aux Meadows in association with Groswater, Dorset, and Recent Indian features (Wallace 1989). The fact that this material originates in northern Labrador suggests that the occupants of L'Anse aux Meadows were involved in widespread trade networks or were highly mobile (Gramly 1978, Hull 2002).



Figure 3: Ramah point found by landowner in Ship Cove. (Kristensen and Curtis)

Several areas of high potential were identified for continued survey in 2008 and will hopefully result in the identification of new prehistoric sites in the area of L'Anse aux Meadows.

Norse Occupations

Excavations within the Norse occupation site were led by Birgitta Wallace. Alterations of the existing Norse ruin reconstructions required the excavation of

doorways in structures A, D, and F (Figure 4). All sediment was carefully excavated and screened despite the disturbed context (the remains of the Norse ruins were reconstructed after their excavation in the 1960s by the Ingstads and the 1970s by Parks Canada). The 2007 excavations did not proceed in to undisturbed contexts and no Norse or aboriginal artifacts were encountered.



Figure 4: Excavation of doorway in existing Norse ruin reconstruction. (Kristensen and Curtis)

Two small test pits were placed west of the Norse structures near the shore of Epaves Bay. The first was excavated within a series of shore features originally identified as Norse boat sheds during the 1960s excavations (Christensen 1985). Stratigraphic profiles and radiocarbon samples will be analysed to determine whether these features are cultural or were created naturally by storm waves.

The second unit along Epaves Bay (Figure 5) was excavated to collect shell samples as part of an ongoing research project led by John Chapman of Oregon State University. This unit and four other shovel test pits were examined for shell that could shed light on the source of a European introduced species of periwinkle (*Littorina littorea*) to North America.

Future Excavations

Survey work west of Epaves Bay will continue in 2008 in an effort to expand the prehistoric site inventory of L'Anse aux Meadows National Historic Site and surrounding area. A small scale excavation of a Recent Indian occupation area at L'Anse aux Meadows is also planned for 2008. It is hoped that excavations will

enhance the understanding of a poorly understood phase on the Northern Peninsula. The resources exploited by Recent Indian occupants, specifically seabird colonies, will be the subject of Todd Kristensen's M.A. thesis at Memorial.



Figure 5: Collection of shell samples west of Norse site. (Kristensen and Curtis)

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