

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS AT RED BAY AND BLACK BAY, LABRADOR

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In 1982, Dr. James Tuck located evidence of a probable Inuit occupation in the harbour of Red Bay, Labrador. On Twin Island he found what appeared to be a tent ring of whale vertebrae and a small sod house. It seemed possible that this might be archaeological evidence of Joseph Banks' 1766 reference to Inuit camped on an island in Red Bay (Lysaght 1971:213). Some 10 km northeast of Red Bay, in Black Bay, Tuck reported another sod house, also apparently Inuit in origin. The question of Inuit occupation in the Strait of Belle Isle has long intrigued and divided investigators. In 1980, Taylor, Martijn, and Clermont pointed out the lack of knowledge about the chronology and activities of the Inuit in southern Labrador, and to a large degree this is still the case. Our plan, therefore, was to record and test the features reported by Tuck and to survey the Black Bay area in an effort to determine if further investigation would answer questions about the dates of an Inuit presence in the Strait, the nature of that occupation - whether seasonal or year-round - and the relationships between the Inuit and the various European groups who have exploited the region.

Red Bay (11 July-24 July)

During this period we investigated the two structures on Twin Island. The first of these, Twin Island-2, is located on the northern extremity of the island, some 4.5 m a.s.l. (Plate 1). It was a single roomed, sub-rectangular structure, ca. 4 m x 8 m, delineated by peat walls about 60-70 cm high. The entrance was ca. 1 m wide, located 90 cm east of the southwest corner (Figure 1). There was no entrance tunnel in the usual sense, but the walls on either side of the entrance flared outward to ca. 80 cm. After test-pitting the immediate exterior of the house, and failing to locate a midden, we divided the interior of the house into quadrants and excavated the northeast and southwest quadrants. Later we dug a 2 m x .5 m trench through the entrance, and 30 cm-wide

slit trenches along two east-west timbers found below 20 to 30 cm of sterile peat. The northerly of these timbers had been squared and measured ca. 12 cm on a side. The southerly timber was simply a log with a diameter of 10-15 cm. The six north-south rafters were also logs averaging 10-15 cm in diameter. The spacing of these rafters (Plate 2) suggested that perhaps two of the central rafters had been removed. The two slit trenches demonstrated that both east-west timbers were single pieces indicating that the structure had been topped with a flat, shed roof. No evidence that these timbers were lashed or nailed together was found, but the outer timbers contained nails with their heads protruding 5-10 mm above the surfaces of the wood, suggesting that the rafters had been covered with a piece of canvas or skin. A number of peat blocks found in the interior of this house was evidence that further insulation had been provided by blocks of peat piled on the covering. No vertical roof supports were found which led us to surmise that the roof timbers rested directly on the tops of the peat walls.

The living floor of TI-2 was a thin, 5 cm greasy black layer of organic material directly on the bedrock. The entire southwest quadrant was covered with a deposit of wood chips which extended well into the northeast quadrant (Fig. 1). Numerous pieces of cut wood also attested to what must have been extensive woodworking. A small amount of charcoal was recovered approximately 20 cm from the edge of the interior in the southwest quadrant, but this appeared to be too little to have been the remains of a hearth. The house may have been heated by a seal oil lamp, but we found little evidence of burnt fat. It is quite possible, however, that the hearth or lamp was in one of the unexcavated quadrants.

The interior of TI-2 produced surprisingly few artifacts. Most notable were 81 wrought nails, 40 pieces of cut wood, 18 red-glazed, coarse earthenware sherds, fragments of a pipe bowl and stem, 5 pieces of sheet lead, four gun flints, of which one was identified as French and the other English in origin (R. Stevens, personal communication), several sherds of green pane glass, a few fragments of a glass vessel, two small pieces of as yet unidentified fabric, and two lengths of cut baleen. No bone or ivory was found, but this may have been due to the acidity of the matrix (standing water in the house had a pH of 4.5).

The lack of diagnostic artifacts in TI-2 makes it difficult to arrive at firm conclusions about its occupants. Its exposed location, flared entranceway, unusual roof construction, and lack of evidence for a chimney argue for a non-European construction (G. Pocius, personal communication). We might also note the lack of ceramic goods usually found with 18th and 19th century European structures. The rather large number of nails not used in house construction is suggestive of the Inuit practise of using nails as raw material for tools, except that none of the recovered nails showed signs of modification. There is a possibility, therefore, that this is a European structure. The dating of this house is also a problem, although its hand wrought nails provide some clue. Wrought nails were superceded by cut nails after the 1790's, and even allowing for the persistence of outmoded nails in places such as southern Labrador, it is difficult to imagine that TI-2 would have been occupied much after the first quarter of the 19th century.

The smallness of this house, its simple construction, and the scarcity of its associated artifacts contrast sharply with larger, more elaborate houses of Eskimo Island 1 and 2 in Hamilton Inlet as described by Jordan (1974) and Jordan and Kaplan (1980). Artifact collections from late 18th and early 19th century houses in Hamilton Inlet also reveal a much wider range and number of European goods. If TI-2 is Inuit in affiliation, we believe, rather cautiously it must be said, that it is evidence of a short stay, perhaps a winter hunting or trading trip, by a small Inuit group in the late 18th or early 19th century.

Twin Island 3 lies 5.2 m above sea level on an exposed, windswept hill ca. 130 m southwest of TI-2. Limited testing here revealed what appeared to be a whale vertebrae tent ring ca. 4.75 m in diameter. Three vertebrae were excavated and 9 more pieces of bone assumed to be vertebrae were noted either visually or by probing. Nine square metres were excavated inside the tent ring, producing only 27 badly corroded wrought nails, none visibly modified, 4 chunks of European ballast flint, 1 piece of baleen, and 3 unidentified bone fragments. Six 50 cm<sup>2</sup> test pits and a trench of 2 m x .5 m revealed exterior middens where wrought nails, ballast flint, baleen, and other organic material overlay a Basque occupation. We found no diagnostic Inuit artifacts

here, but excavations by Tuck later that summer resulted in the recovery just outside the tent ring of a drilled soapstone fragment encrusted with burnt fat which appears to be a portion of an oil lamp refashioned into a pendant (Plate 3). Although the tent ring may be either Inuit or Indian in origin, the presence of a soapstone object argues strongly for an Inuit presence. TI-3 also appears to be the result of a brief occupation, perhaps the summer dwelling of the people who built TI-2, which must have been built in the summer.

#### Black Bay (25 July-28 July)

For the first part of our stay in this area we surveyed the southwest side of Black Bay (Plate 1) where we located three previously unreported sod houses and a boulder fox trap. Following this survey we tested and mapped the sod house in Wiseman's Cove previously reported by Tuck. The Wiseman's Cove house was sub-rectangular, measuring 6 m by 4.5 m, with walls averaging 90 cm high, and an entrance directly in the north corner of the structure (Plate 4). The house lies in a narrow valley, 2.1 m a.s.l. A 1 m x 2 m test pit inside the walls revealed a timbered roof fastened with wrought nails over a sand floor. The test pit also produced 21 bones, which prior to analysis appear to be mostly seal, 24 wrought nails, and a fluted pipe bowl characteristic of the period 1780-1820 (Noel Hume 1970). A 2 m x 2 m test excavation immediately in front of the entrance yielded a large quantity of ceramics and iron objects, dating to the mid-19th century or later. The lack of artifacts that could be associated with the house is puzzling, but may be the result of a heavy sea, which, given the proximity of this house to the water, could have swept clean the unprotected area outside the house. The location of this house in a cove known even today for its good sealing combined with the presence of seal bones in the house suggests that it was a sealing camp. The pipe bowl argues for a late 18th century-early 19th century occupation, and the corner entrance combined with an interior midden points to Inuit rather than a European origin. Nonetheless, our excavation here has been very preliminary, and we would not rule out the possibility of a different interpretation.

### Recommendations

We believe that further work at Twin Island, Wiseman's Cove, and Black Bay would result in a better understanding of the chronology and purpose of what appear to be brief Inuit winter and summer occupations of these areas. Our impression is that the sites we have reported represent temporary hunting or trading camps dating to the late 18th or early 19th centuries, but until more work is done, these must represent impressions rather than conclusions.

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PLATE I

Southern Labrador from Red Bay To Black Bay

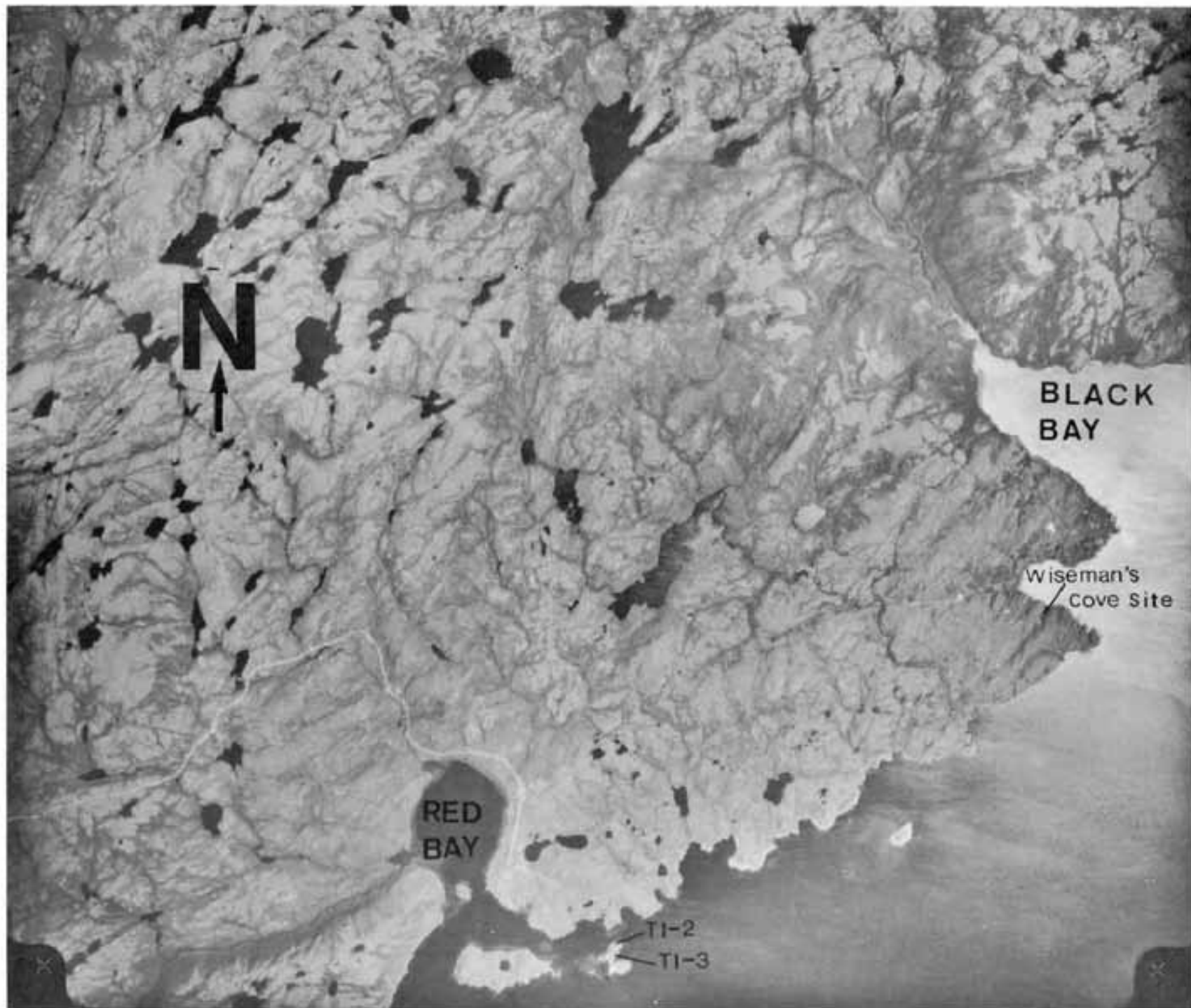


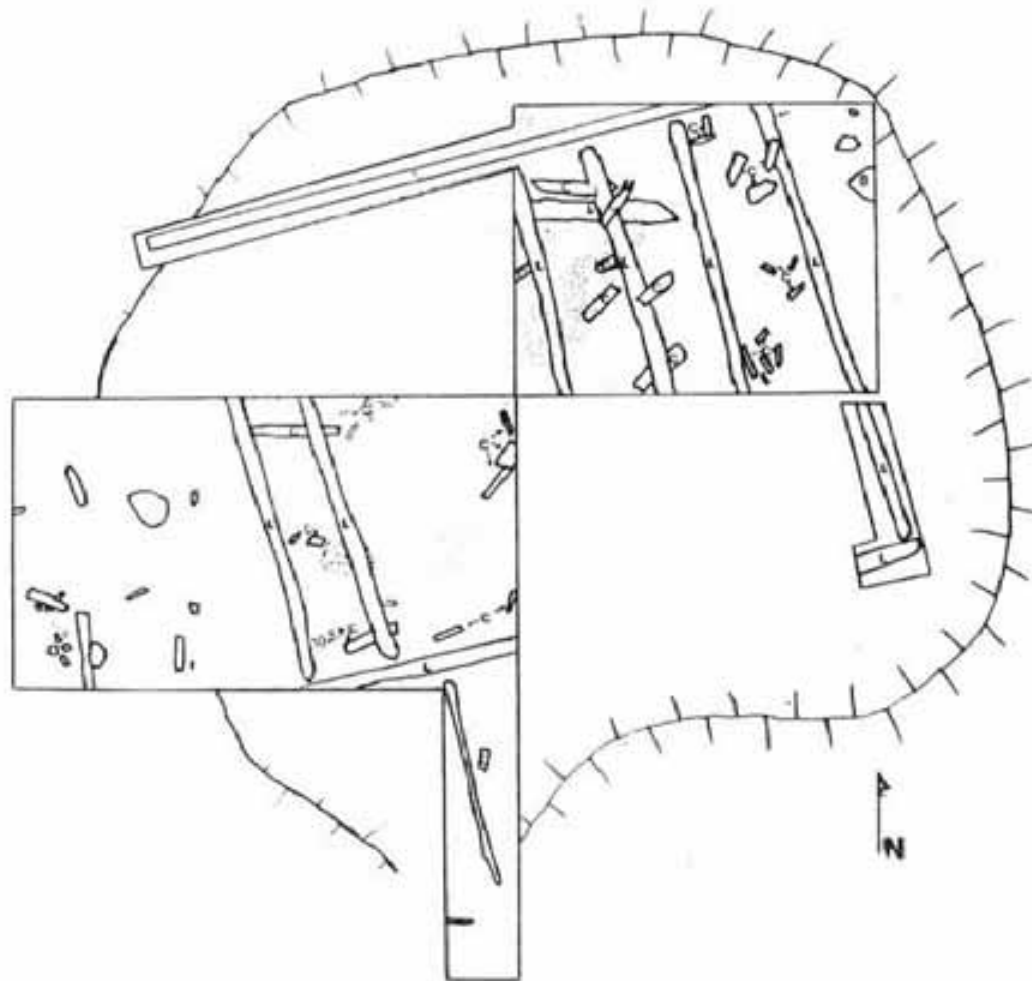
FIGURE 1

Peat-walled house at Twin Island-2 (EkBe-6)



# Twin Island-2 (EkBc-6)

SOD HOUSE



## LEGEND

- Line
- C Squared timber
- Stone
- Beaten
- ⊗ Charcoal
- Bedrock depression
- Wood chips
- Wall cover



PLATE 2

Twin Island-2, peat-walled house, looking south

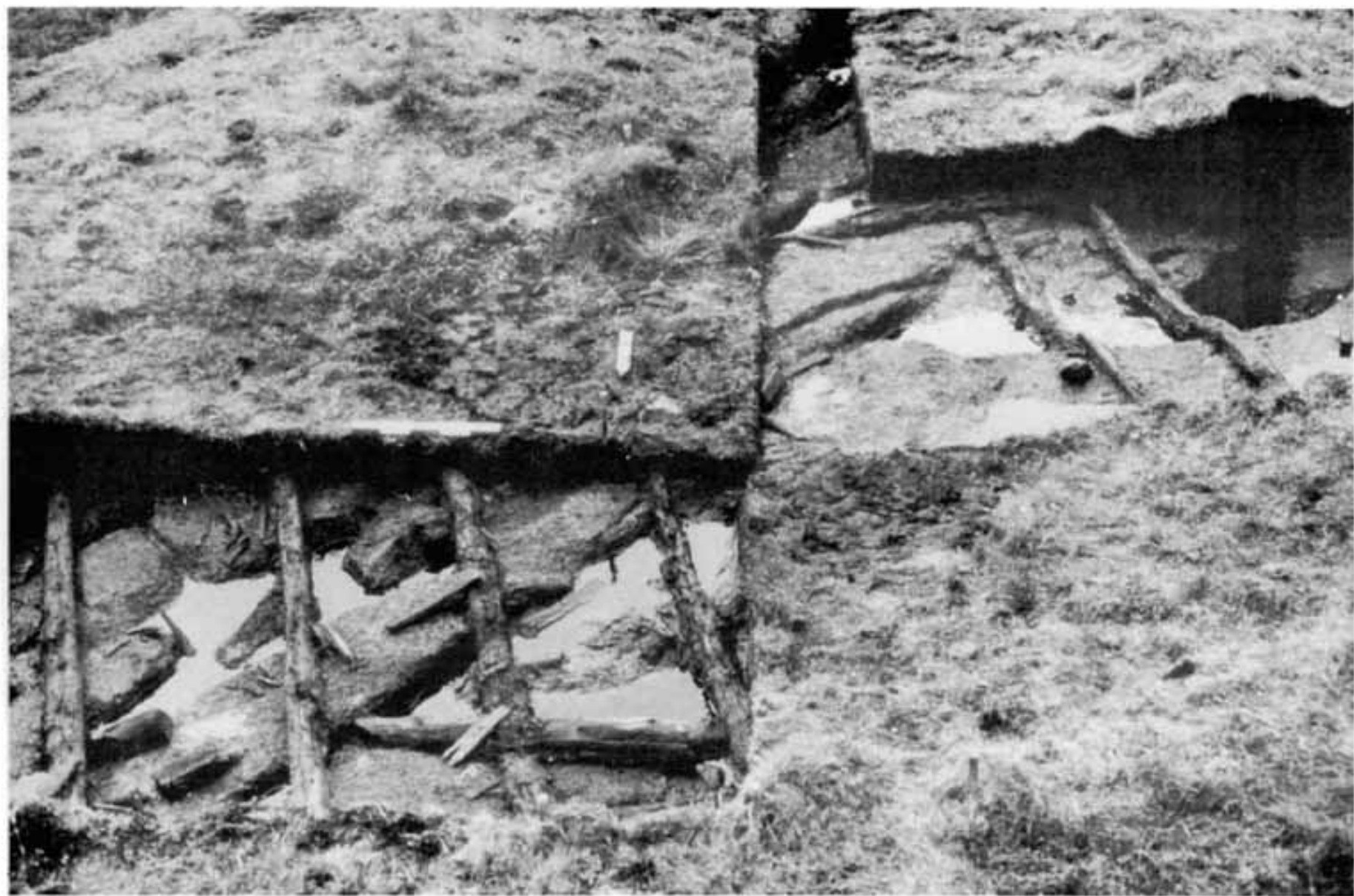


PLATE 3

Drilled soapstone, Twin Island-3



CM



PLATE 4

Sod house, Wiseman's Cove (EkBc-11).  
Reginald Auger is standing in the entrance.

