

WORKING TOGETHER FOR WORLD HERITAGE STATUS

Cindy Gibbons
Parks Canada

Newfoundland and Labrador has two amazing UNESCO World Heritage Sites, at L'Anse aux Meadows National Historic Site and Gros Morne National Park. When the Federal Government released its Tentative List for World Heritage Sites in 2004, we gained the potential to double that number, with the inclusion of the Precambrian fossil deposits at Mistaken Point and the 16th-century Basque whaling site at Red Bay.

Archaeological evidence of 16th-century whaling activity at Red Bay and several other locations in southern Labrador was first discovered during an expedition organized by Selma Barkham in 1977. Barkham had spent several years studying archival material in the Basque Country and other areas of Spain related to this little-known aspect of Canadian history. The following year Dr. J.A. Tuck of Memorial University of Newfoundland began terrestrial excavations at Red Bay that would continue until 1992. Late in the summer of 1978, underwater archaeologists from Parks Canada found the remains of a whaling galleon that they believe to be the San Juan – a vessel lost during a storm at Red Bay in the fall of 1565. The ship was excavated, dismantled, recorded in great detail and reburied on site be-

tween 1979 and 1985. Intensive study, both archival and archaeological, relating to Red Bay and 16th-century Basque whaling in Labrador has revealed a clear picture of this very significant part of our history.

In recognition of its significance to the history of Newfoundland and Labrador and of Canada, Red Bay was declared a Provincial Historic Site in 1978 and a National Historic Site in 1979. The opportunity now exists to have Red Bay recognized for its global significance as well. In order to achieve the World Heritage designation, a lengthy dossier is required that documents the history of the site, justifies the reasons why Red Bay National Historic Site is considered to be globally significant and outlines the management practices in place to ensure the perpetual care and protection of the site should it be inscribed on the World Heritage List. The compilation of the material for this file is being undertaken by a group of dedicated stakeholders from the local area, and from across Canada. Led by Parks Canada and guided by community members, regional partners, historians, archaeologists and researchers, this process seeks to bring together the knowledge, research and expertise accumulated through more than thirty years of

study in a document that showcases Red Bay National Historic Site's unique historic status in the world.

Since the 1980s, the 16th-century Basque whaling site at Red Bay has been at the centre of the development of the tourism industry in the Labrador Straits region, and it continues to be the main attraction in the area. Those involved in the regional tourism industry are therefore supportive of the World Heritage nomination for Red Bay. An integrated regional approach to the nomination process has been taken, involving representatives from various community, economic development and tourism organizations. Since a World Heritage designation for Red Bay National Historic Site would raise the profile of the site, in turn benefiting the tourism industry of the region as well as the larger Labrador tourism industry, all major stakeholders in the area are working together towards a shared vision and a common goal.

The management of archaeological resources at Red Bay is shared by the Town of Red Bay, the Provincial Archaeology Office and Parks Canada. This three-way partnership is strongly committed to the long-term care and conservation of these resources, and will be integral to the success of the World Heritage nomination. In fact, partnerships and community involvement have always been important at Red Bay National Historic Site. From the participation of many local residents

in archaeological excavation and research to the joint tourism and interpretation initiatives offered today, Parks Canada and the people of the region have worked to build a world-class attraction, presenting the unique history of the site to visitors from around the world while protecting it for generations to come. The collective knowledge and experience gained over the years has been invaluable to the ongoing protection and management of the archaeological resources at Red Bay. The commitment of the community to the success of the nomination bid has been evident from the very beginning. Community members have come together to discuss all aspects of the nomination process, from the core values of the site to the proposed boundary of the property to be nominated. They have been eager to sign a community declaration that recognizes the value of the 16th-century whaling site and expresses support for the World Heritage nomination. In addition, community volunteers have recently assisted with the stabilization of several archaeological features that required attention. Support and involvement such as this from community members will continue to be invaluable to the future monitoring and protection of the archaeological resources at Red Bay. We look forward to a successful nomination process ahead, so that we can connect the hearts and minds of people from around the world to this unique site here at home. 🍷