

EXCAVATIONS AT THE BANK SITE, TERRA NOVA NATIONAL PARK

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In June 2008 Terra Nova National Park conducted salvage excavations at the Bank Site (DdAk-5) located on the north shore of Clode Sound. The Bank Site was originally identified during the 1979 archaeological survey of Terra Nova National Park directed by Jim Tuck (1980:37). Monitoring visits by Parks Canada staff in the early 1990's indicated that the site was

also documented. In September 2007 a monitoring visit to the site again revealed that the rapid erosion was threatening cultural deposits. The author thus returned to the site to direct additional salvage excavations in June 2008. An area of 16 m² was opened along the eastern part of the bank and excavated by trowel. Diagnostic artifacts were piece plotted while screening and flotation recovered abundant lithic debitage. The results add significantly to the Dorset and Recent Indian components at the site and hint at a previously unrecognized, early European presence.



Figure 1: View of the Bank Site from Clode Sound (the excavation area is just behind the birch tree at the right end of the eroding bank) (Curtis)

larger and more significant than previously believed. It was also rapidly eroding along the front of the bank. In response to these observations, Fred Schwarz led a salvage excavation on the bank area in 1992. His excavation showed the Bank Site to be a complex, stratified site with components dating from the Maritime Archaic through Groswater and Dorset Palaeoeskimo to the Recent Indian period. The Recent Indian component consisted of a linear hearth feature associated with a large number (13) of Ramah chert points (Schwarz 1992:68 and Table 12). Two Dorset house structures with associated features and middens were

Recent Indian

The 2008 excavations exposed the end of the linear hearth feature that had been partially excavated by Schwarz in 1992, giving this feature a total length of 7.5 m. An additional corner-notched point of Ramah chert was recovered (Figure 2, top left). The excavations also expanded the extent of the Recent Indian component with the identification of two smaller hearths a few metres away from the linear hearth. One of these hearths consisted of an oval concentration of fire-cracked-rock. The other was a circular hearth capped with an 8 cm thick deposit of uniform, water-



Figure 2: Recent Indian Points (Curtis)

worn gravel. Several corner-notched points of grey chert and rhyolite were associated with these two hearths (Figure 2).

Dorset Palaeoeskimo

The Dorset component was encountered across the entire excavation area, stretching from the edge of a house structure excavated by Schwarz (1992) to a slope midden and additional features beyond it. Portions of the house floor and an earth wall were identified atop the bank. Just outside the wall the bank began to slope downwards towards the east and this area was covered by a midden that was at least 20 cm thick in places. Where the slope began to flatten out an additional axial feature was represented by a darker-coloured soil and several fire-reddened stone slabs (Figure 3). It was not clear whether this feature represented a third house or an outdoor activity area, but it

Figure 3: Axial Feature represented by dark band across the centre of the unit. The fire reddened slabs are beginning to appear to the left (Curtis)



was surrounded by a dense deposit of small lithic debitage.

European

A cluster of European ceramic fragments in the easternmost excavation unit hinted at an early 18th century visit to the site. Three objects were represented: a coarse, red earthenware vessel with a green glazed interior (Figure 4); a finer, buff-coloured earthenware (surfaces were completely exfoliated); and a ceramic pipe (stem fragments). The red earthenware vessel may be a Mediterranean ware and would thus suggest the presence of French fishermen. Though the Bonavista Bay area was nominally part of the French Shore at this time, the French confined their fishing area further to the north and English settlement of the area continued (Major 1983:22).

The analyses of the results of these excavations are ongoing and promise to add more details to our understanding of the Recent Indian and Dorset Palaeoeskimo occupation of the Bonavista Bay area. Due to the complexity and richness of the deposits at the

Bank Site we were not able to reach the bottom of the cultural layers and thus plan to continue salvage work at the site in 2009.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Christina Fry, Starlen Thistle, Stephanie Kean, and Marcus Hancock for their work as members of the excavation crew and to Terra Nova National Park staff, especially Kevin Robinson and Barb Linehan, for their interest and support with logistics for the project.

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Figure 4: European ceramic (Curtis)