Torngat Mountains National Park Archaeological Assessment 2015: Komaktorvik River, Upper Kangalaksiorvik Lake and Nakvak Brook

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he Torngat Mountains National Park of Canada was established in 2005, under the Labrador Inuit Land Claim Agreement, to protect and manage the mountainous region of Northern Labrador. From the Inuktitut word *Torngait*, meaning "*place of the spirits*", the Torngat Mountains have been inhabited for thousands of years, as evidenced by the numerous known Labrador Archaic, Palaeoeskimo, Inuit and European archaeological sites found throughout the park (Curtis 2015). While archaeological sites have been found throughout coastal Labrador, most of the recent Parks Cana-



Figure 1. Map of the Torngat Mountains National Park showing areas mentioned in the text.

da research has focused on the southern extent of the park, with the exception of brief forays northward for vital monitoring of cultural and natural resources.

In accordance with Parks Canada's mandate to sustainably document, protect, conserve and present nationally significant examples of Canada's natural and cultural heritage "in ways that ensure the ecological and commemorative integrity of these places for present and future generations" (Parks Canada 2002), this project took into account previous archaeological assessments (Curtis 2014, 2015; Higdon 2015a), discussions with Parks Canada representatives, and the resources associated with visiting and conducting fieldwork in the northern reaches of the park. The aim of the 2015 archaeological field season was to assess locations along Komaktorvik River and Upper Kangalaksiorvik Lake for use as potential satellite camps for researchers and eventual visitors. It was subsequently extended to include the survey and assessment of a hiking route along Nakvak Brook that would aid with the delivery of visitor experiences at North Arm 1 (310A), Nakvak Brook and Rose Island (Figure 1). This project served to meet Parks Canada's requirement to complete a terrestrial archaeological assessment of areas within the park, in an effort to protect the cultural and natural resources of the park, while at the same time making them available to visitors, researchers and local groups.

As with previous field seasons, the 2015 field work was based out of the Torngat Mountains Base Camp and Research Station (<u>http://</u><u>www.torngatbasecamp.com/</u>) situated at the head of St. John's Harbour (kANGIDLUASUk). The field season ran from mid-July to mid-August with financial, logistical and other support provided by the Torngat Mountains National Park, Parks Canada, Nunatsiavut Group of Companies and Nunavik Rotors.

Methodology

The selection of potential satellite base camp locations along Komaktorvik River and Upper Kangalaksiorvik Lake and potential hiking routes along Nakvak Brook took into account topography, proximity to water bodies, natural resources, such as char, seal, etc., and previously documented archaeological sites. Brief helicopter and systematic terrestrial surveys of each area were conducted to identify and assess potential impacts on cultural resources within each area. This included walking five metre transects of each potential satellite camp area, and noting the location, extent and features associated with new and previously recorded archaeological sites. Features were flagged during the course of the survey and then recorded with GPS coordinates, photographs and measurements, as time permitted. While no artifacts were collected, representative samples of tool and material types were photographed and recorded with GPS coordinates. It is also worth noting that numerous new archaeological sites were observed while en route to the survey areas. In these instances, their locations were recorded with GPS, photographs and very brief site descriptions, so that that they may be revisited and more intensively surveyed at a later date. Not only has the survey increased the number of known archaeological sites within the park, but further research may ultimately shed light on the use of the park's interior by both Palaeoeskimo and Inuit groups.

Upper Kangalaksiorvik Lake Satellite Base Camp Survey

Upper Kangalaksiorvik Lake is located 130km northeast of Saglek Bay and the Torngat Mountains Base Camp and Research Station, and approximately 25km inland from Seven Islands Bay (Figure 1). A campsite established here would begin as a satellite research base of operations with the potential to expand to include visitors (Curtis 2014:7).

Archaeological survey of the lake began when three archaeological sites were recorded along the southern end of the lake in the late 1970s (Fitzhugh 1978a-c; Kaplan 1983). There were three additional sites recorded during an initial satellite camp survey



Figure 2. 2015 Upper Kangalaksiorvik Lake satellite camp survey area with InterShelter dome, facing southeast.



Figure 3. Upper Kangalaksiorvik Lake satellite camp. Top Left: Helicopter slinging the aluminum boat from
Komaktorvik River satellite camp, facing east; Top Right: helicopter slinging an InterShelter to camp location C; Bottom: camp with bear fence and personal tents, facing south (Courtesy of Kristin Westdal 2015).

of portions of the lake in 2014 (Higdon 2015a-b). Building on the results of the previous surveys, we were able to continue with the assessment of the proposed satellite camp area along the northwestern extent of the lake to find a suitable location for the camp. An InterShelter dome and aluminum boat were



Figure 4. Aerial view of 130A, located on the terraces and hill in the centre of the image and 131A, located along the sandy spit to the east, facing southwest.

subsequently slung via helicopter to the approved location. Parks Canada and Nunatsiavut Government staff travelled to the campsite a few days later to finish setting up an electrified bear fence and personal tents, thus allowing them to conduct fieldwork in the area (Figures 2 & 3).

During the afternoon of the second day, we were able to relocate the three archaeological sites documented by Fitzhugh and Kaplan and also to document the location of a new archaeological site along the eastern end of the lake. While we only had enough time to locate and conduct limited transects of each site, we were able to take photos and GPS measurements of each, noting the more clearly visible artifacts and features. This initial data may serve to inform more systematic archaeological studies of the area in the future.

A summary of the newly documented and revisited archaeological sites are as follows:

130A Kangalaksiorvik Lake 2 (IiDb-02)

Situated on the southern shore of Upper Kangalaksiorvik Lake, 130A is a Palaeoeskimo and Inuit spring and summer habitation, as evidenced by the tent rings, caches, and grave and boulder features (Kaplan 1983:768) (Figure 4). The site is located on a series of terraces and hills overlooking a shallow area where seals appear to congregate in large numbers. While we only had time to conduct a very cursory survey of the area, we were able to confirm the location of the site, record numerous features, relocate the feature that Kaplan (1983:768) described as "*a rectangular stone structure with double line of rocks down the center*" (Figure 5), as well as a solitary Ramah chert flake, which may be evidence of a previously recorded Palaeoeskimo component of the site (Fitzhugh 1978a:1; Kaplan 1983:768).

131A Kangalaksiorvik Lake 1 (IiDb-01)

Situated along the sandy spit to the east of 130A, 131A Kangalaksiorvik Lake 1 was first recorded by Fitzhugh in 1978 (Figures 4 & 6). Described as a prehistoric chipping station with a 2m diameter "near the centre of the spit, just below a recent tent ring" (Fitzhugh 1978b:1), two utilized flakes were collected and later described as being Dorset in origin. With just an hour remaining in the day to confirm the location of the site, we were able to note the location of six separate lithic scatters eroding out of the sandy blowouts. The scatters included several small Ramah chert flakes, a Ramah chert core fragment, and a small lithic scatter containing the base of a Ramah chert biface (Figure 6) and a green-grey Mugford chert flake. The cultural affiliation of the biface remains undetermined. Archaeologist and lithic expert Tim Rast (pers. comm. 2015) indicated that it "could be a lot of things...the base of a Maritime Archaic point, or a side notched Groswater or Dorset knife".

Taking into consideration the artifacts observed during the 2015 field season and the Dorset artifacts collected from the site in 1978, the assemblage suggests that it is probably a Palaeoeskimo Dor-



Figure 5. Relocating rectangular structure recorded by Kaplan (1983) on lower terrace at 130A. Left: View of overgrown structure, facing south; Right: B) sketch map of the to aid in the cultural identificafeature (Kaplan 1983: 769).

set site. A more systematic survey of the area is needed to fully determine the extent and nature of the site, and to determine if they may have camped along the spit to take advantage of the resident harbour (Ranger) seal (Phoca vitulina) populations (Higdon 2015a-b).

132A Kangalaksiorvik Lake 3 (IiDa-02)

This site is located along the southeastern shore of Kangalaksiorvik Lake, approximately 5km west of the mouth of Kangalaksiorvik Fiord. The site consists of a series of lithic scatters eroding out of several exposed sand and gravel areas, as well as a possible tent ring with an associated cache (Figure 7). With little time left in the day, we only managed to do a cursory flyover of the area, set down, confirm the location of the site and have a quick look around. In fact, most of the recorded features were located by

Martin and Nunatsiavut Group of Companies' bear monitor Robert Harris, as Parks Canada's Martin Lougheed aided me in the systematic documentation of the largest of the lithic scatters.

While any of the observed lithic scatters may have corresponded to Fitzhugh's (1978c:1) "undetermined lithic scatter" description, the 13m x 16m lithic scatter (Figure 8) appears to be the best candidate, as it is

located on a sandy/gravely area just 50m northwest of the location indicated on Fitzhugh's site record form. Located next to the small pond, the area contained approximately 20 separate lithic scatters and over 40 individual lithics. A representative sample of the white quartzite and Ramah chert flakes and core fragments were photographed, but no diagnostic tools were found amongst the flake scatters

tion of this portion of the site. With the exception of a few core

fragments, many of the lithics appear to be secondary or tertiary flakes.

Other areas of note included a possible Ramah chert flake knife eroding out of the sand and an additional Ramah chert flake scatter with the medial portion of a white quartzite biface, eroding out of a sand and gravel blowout (Figure 9). When asked his opinion of the biface, Tim Rast (pers. comm. 2015) indicated that it "looks a little rough for Palaeoeskimo, but [he is] not used to seeing such narrow points for MAI [Maritime Archaic Indian]." He indicated that he favour [s] MAI over Palaeoeskimo for that particular artifact. 448A Kangalaksiorvik Lake 7 (IiDa-04)

448A is located at the southeast end of Upper Kangalaksiorvik Lake, along the northern side of the river that feeds into Lower Kangalaksiorvik Lake (Figures 7 & 10). Noted while on route to 132A, this

Nunavut Rotor's Jean-Francois Figure 6. Left: Sandy spit at the northern extent of 130A; Right: Notched base of a Ramah chert end blade found eroding out of one of the many sandy blowouts.





Figure 7. Aerial view of the southeastern end of Upper Kangalaksiorvik Lake, showing the location of 132A, in the foreground and 448A on the opposite side of the river, facing northeast.



Figure 8. Jean-Francois Martin and Robert Harris placing survey flags to mark some of the numerous lithic scatters at 132A1, facing west.



Figure 9. Medial portion of white quartzite biface observed at 441A.

previously unrecorded site consists of two multitiered circular stone features (caches) along the sandy gravel area overlooking the river, and also a large multi-tiered rectangular feature and associated cache along the beach ridge to the northwest (Figure 10). The large rectangular feature appears to have been built into the beach ridge by removing boulders from interior area.

Komaktorvik River Satellite Base Camp Survey

The survey area for the Komaktorvik River satellite camp is located approximately 16km southwest of the head of Komaktorvik Fiord, along the southern shore of the Komaktorvik River, as it bends eastward toward Komaktorvik Lake (Figures 1 & 11). Curtis' 2015 archaeological overview assessment for the satellite camp along the Komaktorvik River revealed a dearth of known archaeological sites within or adjacent to the proposed campsite, due to the lack of archaeological survey in the area. She went on to note that,

Numerous archaeological sites are known in nearby Komaktorvik Fjord, representing Palaeoeskimo and Inuit occupations over the last 4000 years. Given the campsite location along the Komaktorvik River which flows from Komaktorvik Lake out to the fjord there is a high potential for archaeological resources (Curtis 2015:1).

This high potential was soon realized with the recording of two previously undocumented archaeological sites found along the Komaktorvik River (442A, 443A), while *en route* to the proposed satellite camp area. A third site, 441A, along the northern extent of the proposed satellite camp location (441A) (Figure 11) and a fourth site, 444A, to the east along the western extent of Komaktorvik Lake, were also recorded.

Both the proposed satellite camp area and site 441A were intensively surveyed to ensure that the placement of the camp would not compromise the integrity of the site. Once the area was cleared and the camp set up, Parks Canada and Nunatsiavut Government staff members stayed at the camp to conduct research and other monitoring-related work. Having spent considerable time on the land, they were able to pass along the locations of five additional areas of interest, including tent rings, caches and possible house depressions. The appearance of the archaeo-



Figure 10. Aerial View of 448A, facing southeast with close up of the large multi-tiered rectangular feature, facing east.



Figure 11. Northern extent of Komaktorvik satellite camp survey area 2015 and archaeological site 441A, facing east.

logical sites and potential areas of interest once again serve to highlight the use of the interior portions of the park by Inuit groups.

A short summary of the four newly recorded archaeological sites within or adjacent to the Komaktorvik River area as follows:

441 A Komaktorvik River 1 (IhDa-01)

The site is located approximately 16km southwest of the head of Komaktorvik Fiord, along the southern shore of Komaktorvik River, as it bends eastward toward Komaktorvik Lake. 441A is situated along the river to the east of a large waterfall, where char appear to congregate before heading up river to spawn. The notable features include two multi-tiered circular paved structures built against the bedrock outcrops directly adjacent to the river and the waterfall (Figures 11 & 12), and an Inuit tent ring with clear sleeping platform and paved lampstand area on a sheltered grassy area to the east (Figure 13). Additional tent rings were located in well-drained gravel areas that overlook the river at the eastern extent of the site.

The walls of the two multi-tiered structures are made up of three to four courses of stone, with some of the walls having partially collapsed toward the river. Inundated with mosses and grasses, the flat paving stones, which line the interior of the structure, are partially visible under the non-vegetated overhang of the bedrock outcrop. With the bedrock outcrop and walls providing some shelter from the elements and an ample view of the surrounding area, these features may have been used as hunting blinds or caches. Nunatsiavut Group of Companies' (NGC) bear monitor, Elias Harris (pers. comm. 2015), suggested that they may be hunting blinds or shelters, as there were not enough stones surrounding the feature to cover it completely as a cache. Having sat in and measured each feature, it appeared as though each was approximately big enough for two people to sit in and/or lie down.



Figure 12. *Top:* Multi-tiered rectangular stone features, 411A1 & 441A2, built against bedrock outcrop, facing south; *Bottom Left:* Side view of 411A1, facing east; *Bottom Right:* Overhead view of 441A1.

NGC bear monitor, Joe Atsatata (pers. comm. 2015), suggested that they could have been caches used to hold char. He postulated that people could easily catch the char in that location with a kakivak, "a three pronged Inuit fishing spear" (Inuttut - English Dictionary 2006) (Figure 14), as the char gathered in the pool before making their way up to the waterfall and lake. He went on to suggest that the char could be easily tossed into either of the two structures and drawn upon at a later date. He indicated that if the fish were harvested later in the season (late summer/early fall), they would keep better because of the cool temperatures. Aligning with this interpretation, Peter Whitridge (pers. comm. 2015) suggested that it may be a cache missing capstones or simply a cache without capstones, which would have been used as a temporary storage facility by people, camped nearby (Figure 14). He went on to suggest that the walls could have been used to suspend and dry char. The notion that it could be a temporary storage cache with people camping nearby is supported by the numerous tent rings located along the river to the east and across the river to the north at 443A.

442A Komaktorvik River 2 (IhDa-02)

Located 13km southwest of the head of Komaktorvik Fiord, the site is situated on a terrace where an unnamed river flows from Chasm Lake into Komaktorvik River. A single cultural feature stood out as we flew over the sparsely vegetated gravel terrace (Figure 15). Too substantial to be a tent ring, this multi-tiered circular structure with few rocks within the interior space may have been a caribou hunting blind with a possible cache.

443A Komaktorvik River 3 (IhDa-03)

Located along gravel terraces on the opposite side of the Komaktorvik River as 441A, the

observed features at 443A consisted of two large circular tent rings. Closer inspection of field photos revealed that the two circular tent rings appear to be divided in two, with a sleeping area on one side and a paved lampstand area in the other area, not unlike some of the tent rings observed at 441A.

444A Komaktorvik River 1 (IhDa-04)

Located on a sparsely vegetated lichen and gravel-covered area along the northeastern extent of the smaller of the Komaktorvik Lakes, 444A consists of at least one or two possible tent rings. The size and square nature of the stone features suggest that they may be more recent in origin.

Kogarsok Brook

Another previously undocumented archaeological site was quickly recorded while *en route* back to base camp from the Komaktorvik River satellite camp survey area. Spotted earlier in the day by Nunavik Rotors pilot, Jean-Francois Martin, the site consists of a circular stone feature west of Kogarsok Brook, over 10km north of where the brook empties into Nachvak Fiord (Figure 1). While not the focus of the survey, the location of this site was recorded with GPS coordinates and photographs so that it may be visited again at a later date. Just as it has become a



Figure 13. Solitary Inuit tent ring on sheltered grassy area to the east of the multi-tiered stone structures. The helicopter demarks the location of the approved satellite camp location.



Figure 14. Top: Fishing at stone weir using Kakivak; Bottom: Fish cache built against large boulder. © Nunavut Parks (Nunavut Tourism, n.d.).



Figure 15. Aerial view of 442A, facing south with close up of stone feature.

well-used corridor for helicopter traffic from Nachvak Fiord to Komaktorivk River and beyond, it is not unreasonable to assume this route would have also been used by Inuit people and their precursors, as part of their seasonal migrations.

445A Kogarsok Brook 2 (IgCx-12)

This site consists of a multi-tiered circular stone ring with an opening along the side facing a boulder field (Figure 17). Made up of large rocks/ boulders, the easternmost side of the interior of the feature, looks as though it may be paved with large flat rocks. This area may have acted as a bench or paved area, so that hunters would not have had to sit/kneel on the ground. While we were not able to set down to measure the feature, it appears as though it may be 2-3 metres in diameter.

Nakvak Brook Hiking Route Assessment

Nakvak Brook is situated approximately 40 kilometres west of Cape Uivak and the mouth of Saglek Bay, between Branagin Cove to the east and North Arm to the west, and directly north of the mouth of Ugjuktok Fiord (Figure 1). The brook provides access to the interior of the peninsula, with the river extending 70 kilometres inland, meeting up with the Koroc River, which can then be followed westward to Ungava Bay and Kangiqsualujjuaq (George River) or northward to the Palmer River and Nachvak Fiord's Tallek Arm.

The goal of the Nakvak Brook hiking route assessment was to determine a hiking route that would ultimately allow staff and visitors to navigate their way from the beach to the inuksuk without compromising the integrity of the many archaeological sites found along the way (Figure 19). The Nakvak



Figure 16. Aerial view of 443A in the foreground with 441A on the opposite side of the river, facing southeast.

Brook inuksuk was originally built in 2009 by members of the Torngat Mountains National Park Cooperative Management Board, in order to commemorate the connection between Nunavik Inuit and Nunatsiavut Inuit, as well as the bond between generations (Figure 19). "It is a place that has gained significance for youth and elders, who recognize the importance of passing on Inuit knowledge and connecting Inuit youth to their culture and their land" (Parks Canada n.d.:5).

With the help of Parks Canada's Andrew Andersen and NGC bear monitor John Andersen, two new archaeological sites were documented during the course of the assessment. A hiking route was determined to circumvent these sites, as well as the four other sites documented during my 2014 survey of the area (Higdon 2015a-b). Quick observations were also made concerning two previously documented archaeological sites, as I accompanied Visitor Experience Manager, Gary Baikie, members of the kAN-GIDLUASUk student program and others along the hiking route to boat landing area. Sorted by site number, the archaeological sites visited along Nakvak Brook during the 2015 field season include:

307A Nakvak Brook 1 (IcCt-01)

First tested by Schledermann (1971) in 1970, 307A is situated along the west bank of Nakvak Brook, south of the first prominent 15m terrace. It is a twentieth century Inuit habitation site with the remnants of three sod houses, tent rings, caches and several cairn graves, some with associated caches (Higdon 2015b). The site was revisited last summer while assessing the area for potential satellite camping locations (Higdon 2015a-b). Adding to the complexity of the site, a portion of a waterworn Ramah chert endblade was observed and documented in the vicinity of the site.



Figure 17. Aerial showing the location of a circular stone feature at 445A in relation to Kogarsok Brook, facing north.

308A Nakvak Brook 4 (IcCt-07)

Located on the point of land to the southwest of Nakvak Brook, 308A was first documented by Callum Thomson in 1985 (Figure 20). Situated on a rolling hillside with grass, lichen and other low-lying vegetation, Thomson (1985:1) described the site as a multi-component Maritime Archaic or Pre-Dorset site with Inuit sod houses. During my very brief 10 -15 minutes at the site, I was able to reaffirm the location of the site, and also quickly note the location of two possible house depressions, a potential paved area, and numerous artifact scatters eroding out of exposed areas of sand and gravel. These artifacts include a diagnostic Dorset Ramah chert endblade, numerous Maritime Archaic or Palaeoeskimo lithic scatters, ceramic and glass bottle fragments and a rusted iron gate/door (Figure 21).

446A Nakvak Brook 7 (IdCt-03)

Situated to the south of the recently constructed Nakvak Brook inuksuk, 446A consists of a solitary single tiered oval stone feature situated on a small well-drained terrace, overlooking Nakvak Brook (Figure 22). The use and cultural affiliation of the feature remains undetermined, as no other features or artifacts were observed in the vicinity. More deliberately placed than a collapsed inuksuk, the configurations of stones may be a type of equipment cache not unlike the ones used by Inuit in Baker Lake. Consisting of "a small tent ring with closely set rocks... used to secure a covering of skins over cached equipment", such a cache could have been used to store goods during the summer, when local groups would have been travelling by foot (Stewart et al. 2000:265).

447A Nakvak Brook 8 (IdCt-04)

This site is located on the western side of Nakvak Brook, overlooking the old creek bed. Situated on a well-drained and low-lying willow-covered area, the site is punctuated by lithic scatters eroding out of the gravel and sand (Figure 24). While no discernable stone features were observed during the course of the survey, the site boasts many hard hammer flakes, biface fragments, possible flake knives



Figure 18. Northern extent of Nakvak Brook hiking route assessment area, facing north.

and numerous scatters of quartzite and Ramah chert flakes.

Observed during the course of the survey by Andrew Andersen, one of the more intriguing artifacts found on site was a large Ramah chert flake that looks as though it could have been used as a handheld expedient scraper (Figure 23). Found *in situ* embedded into the soil and in association with flakes and a possible flake knife, the large flake appears to have been worked on three sites with the straight edge exhibiting signs of use wear-related flaking. Archaeologist Tim Rast (pers. comm. 2015) suggested that it may be a "*hard hammer flake with steep edges, with no clear signs of retouch to indicate that it was worked into a scraper.*" He went onto suggest that it may be an expedient scraper and that it could be Maritime Archaic Indian or Recent Indian, as he is not used to seeing hard hammer flakes that size in Dorset contexts.

Based on the large number of flakes, expedient tools, artifact morphology and the location of the site, it appears to be a Maritime Archaic knapping, harvesting and butchering area. The designation of the site as a Maritime Archaic site seems plausible, as there are other Maritime Archaic sites found throughout the Nakvak Brook area.

Visitor Interpretation

Building on Parks Canada's mandate to present the cultural resources to the public, I was also tasked with aiding with the visitor experience and interpretation at North Arm 1 (310A), Nakvak Brook and Rose Island (Figure 1). During this time, I was able to further refine the hiking routes at North Arm and Nakvak Brook and also comment on the condition of some of the sites and features.

Conclusion

With satellite camp locations assessed and approved along Upper Kangalaksiorvik Lake and Komaktorvik River, the more remote reaches of an already remote National Park are slowly being opened up more and more to Parks Canada and Nunatsiavut



Figure 19. Left: Nakvak Brook Inuksuk, facing south toward Saglek Fiord; Right: Hiking along Nakvak Brook with the kANGIDLUASUk student program participants and other visitors.



Figure 20. Point of land featuring 308A, facing west down Saglek fiord.

staff, researchers and other visitors. In sum, a total of fourteen archaeological sites were visited during the course of the field season, including eight previously unrecorded sites and six revisits. These Maritime Archaic, Palaeoeskimo and Inuit sites reaffirm the extensive use of the interior regions of the park and certainly warrant further study.

Acknowledgements

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Figure 21. Artifacts from 308A. Left: Dorset Ramah chert endblade; Right: Rusted iron grate.



Figure 22. Oval stone feature, 446A1, facing southeast toward Saglek Fiord.

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Figure 24. Orange survey flags noting the location of artifact and lithic scatters at 447A, facing south. John Andersen and Andrew Andersen waiting patiently as I document the site.