

The cultural landscape of The Beaches and Bloody Bay Cove, Bonavista Bay.

The Beaches has yielded artifacts from all the major cultures to have lived in Newfoundland up to the time of contact. It is thus one of the most significant archaeological sites in the Province (Handcock¹ 2002).

Introduction. By the criteria of the Provincial Historic Commemorations Program (PHCP), the case for commemoration of The Beaches/Bloody Bay Cove is strong. This cultural landscape is beyond question a place representative of *distinctive* and *significant* peoples and events which are touchstones of Newfoundland and Labrador history and culture.

While significance is not an objective measure, it can be demonstrated that this cultural landscape is illustrative of *several* notable stages in the development of the Province as a whole – which is to say each, and all, of the known pre-contact cultures of the Island (Maritime Archaic, Palaeo-eskimo and Recent Indian).

Framed in terms of the PHCP criteria for commemoration of places, The Beaches and Bloody Bay Cove are:

- illustrative of significant pre-contact stages in the development of the Province as a whole;
- both illustrative and symbolic of an important cultural tradition [the “Beaches complex”];
- explicitly and meaningfully associated with the life or work of other groups of people of provincial historic significance [the Maritime Archaic and Beothuk]; and
- associated with events of provincial historic significance [both the pre-contact peopling of Newfoundland and the extinction of the Beothuk].

This paper will touch upon six aspects of the case for commemoration of The Beaches and Bloody Bay Cove:

- The Beaches and Bloody Bay Cove are one of the earliest known settled sites on the Island, and significant archaeological sites illustrative of the culture of these earliest inhabitants, people of the *Maritime Archaic Tradition*.

¹ W. Gordon Handcock is a historical geographer and an expert in the historic settlement patterns of Newfoundland. The Heritage Newfoundland and Labrador website is the best introductory survey of the Province’s archaeology. The archaeology articles are written by acknowledged experts and are useful in “placing” the importance of the Beaches and Bloody Bay Cove in our knowledge of pre-history (see Tuck 1998; Pastore 1998a; Pastore 1998b). Note, however, that this material is more than a decade old and does not reflect recent work, particularly some of the ongoing excavations on the Great Northern Peninsula. This is a reminder that, while the study of archaeology in Newfoundland and Labrador is not at the beginning, neither is it at the end. Rather, we are somewhere in the murky middle.

- The Beaches is the type-site of the earliest agreed ancestors of the Beothuk, referred to by archaeologists as Recent Indians of the *Beaches complex*.
- The *Bloody Bay Cove quarry* is the second-largest known pre-contact quarry/stone-tool manufacture site in the Province.
- The Beaches is a uniquely significant *early-Beothuk habitation site*.
- The Beaches and Bloody Bay Cove are also uniquely significant as related and sizeable *multi-component archaeological sites*, illustrative of the sequence of all Newfoundland prehistory, through contact to the early relationship between settlers of European decent and the Beothuk.
- The Beaches and Bloody Bay Cove are also significantly and distinctively illustrative of the history of the development of the discipline of archaeology in Newfoundland and Labrador.

History. Bloody Bay was first identified in print as a former site of Beothuk habitation by Rev. William Wilson, who had served as a Methodist clergyman at Bonavista 1828-31 – at precisely the time of the presumed extinction of the Beothuk. “A place called Bloody Bay on the north side of Bonavista Bay, has often been named to this writer as a place where frequent encounters had occurred with the Red Indians” (Wilson 1866:308).

It was also local tradition as to Beothuk habitation which led geologist T.G.B. Lloyd (1829-1876) to the “Old Camping Grounds” at The Beaches in 1875.² Born in England, Lloyd trained as a civil engineer, worked as a geologist and surveyor in North America, and became interested in the prehistory of upstate New York. He spent three summers in Newfoundland “employed by Anglo-Telegraph Company to inspect their claims...[and with colleague John Milne] had a schooner and crew hired to take them around the island” (Howley 1873 [1914]:277; Anon 1876:87-88). Lloyd attempted the first systematic study of the Beothuk, reviewing the historic literature and gathering oral history in an attempt to establish the context of stone tools and other artifacts he encountered (Lloyd 1875; 1876a; 1876b).

It was not until the 1960s that a regular program of archaeology was begun in Newfoundland and Labrador, and an outline of the sequence of our prehistory was developed. The Beaches provides several important pieces of the puzzle. In 1964 Dave Quinton, co-host of the newly-minted

² Lloyd counted 19 housepits at The Beaches. His notes on artifacts suggest that his visit was brief and limited to surface collection (Lloyd 1876a:222-223). Lloyd did conduct at least two substantial excavations, at Conche and Sops Island, perhaps being detained for a while in his employment for the telegraph company. Lloyd’s guide during his time in Newfoundland was a Mi’kmaq who is identified as Reuben Souleau or Soulianne – otherwise known as Reuben Louis (1853-1918), after 1900 chief of the Newfoundland Mi’kmaw.

television program *Land and Sea* visited The Beaches, after having heard from Glovertown residents of a Beothuk campsite. Quinton's advocacy launched an effort to have archaeologists with the National Museum of Canada (since 1989 the Canadian Museum of Civilization) take an interest in the Province and in 1965 and 1966 Helen Devereux, sponsored by the Department of Provincial Affairs, conducted the first professional excavations at The Beaches. Hers was an attempt to identify the pre-contact origins of the Beothuk. She found that the site, although much reduced by erosion since Lloyd's visit, had quite a large number of artifacts and features, with both a large early pre-contact component and a post-contact component, indicative of a habitation site used over many centuries.

The Department of Anthropology at Memorial University began a program of research in the late 1960s and in 1968, also sponsored by Provincial Affairs, began excavation of a large pre-contact cemetery at Port au Choix, since recognized as a National Historic Site. On the basis of these finds the Maritime Archaic Tradition was defined, the earliest culture known to have inhabited the Island. In 1972 and 1973 MUN graduate student Paul Carignan revisited The Beaches, confirmed a Maritime Archaic element, identified a Palaeo-eskimo component and further speculated on the question of Beothuk ancestry as revealed in the archaeological record.³ Some of Carignan's related work in the 1970s included the identification of a large multi-component site at Cape Freels, and finding lithic artifacts at Bloody Bay Cove. When James A. Tuck published his survey *Newfoundland and Labrador Prehistory* (1976), he identified The Beaches as one of the four most important Maritime Archaic sites on the Island.⁴ At that time The Beaches was also one of only four known Beothuk habitation sites.⁵

In the early 1970s it was presumed that the Maritime Archaic were the direct ancestors of the Beothuk and that this cultural evolution had occurred *in situ*, on the Island. In the 1980s there were a number of developments in the discipline, such as the definition of the "Little Passage

³ In publishing the results of his work (1973; 1974; 1977), Carignan was unstinting in his appreciation of the hospitality, assistance and expertise of the people of the community of Burnside. This community support for archaeology is also a significant and distinguishing aspect of the cultural landscape of The Beaches and Bloody Bay Cove.

⁴ The others being Port au Choix, the Curtis Site (Back Harbour, Twillingate) and Cape Freels. See also Tuck 1998.

⁵ The others being Indian Point (near Millertown, a National Historic Site), Wigwam Brook on the Exploits River and Cape Freels. Since that time additional sites with a significant Beothuk habitation component have been discovered at Inspector Island and Boyds Cove (a Provincial Historic Site) in Notre Dame Bay, and Russell's Point, Dildo Island, Frenchman's Island and Stock Cove in Trinity Bay.

complex⁶,” which helped to develop the current theory: that the Island was settled in distinct waves across the Straits of Belle Isle, separated by extinction/abandonment – the Maritime Archaic, the early Palaeo-eskimo, the late Palaeo-eskimo and the ancestral Beothuk (re-defined as “Recent Indians”). The Department of Tourism and Culture began annual *Archaeology in Newfoundland and Labrador* series in 1980⁷ and in 1982 the *Historic Resources Act* was passed.

The Beaches was again revisited in 1989, during a survey of Bonavista Bay (McLean 1989), at which time residents of Burnside suggested to archaeologist Laurie McLean that he investigate “Indian Steps” in over the hills at Bloody Bay Cove. This led to the discovery and recognition of an extensive rhyolite quarry, which was used by both the Maritime Archaic and Recent Indian peoples.

Since 1989 there has been continuing archaeology⁸ at The Beaches and Bloody Bay Cove, with an element of local participation by the people of Burnside which has become the model for community archaeology in Newfoundland and Labrador. An important benefit of this program and the work of McLean and others has been to extend investigations to many other nearby sites. Bonavista Bay has thus been one of the most intensively investigated areas of Newfoundland and a “fairly detailed picture of prehistoric settlement patterns across many environmental zones” has emerged (Schwarz and Skanes 2007:24).

Notable stages in the development of Newfoundland and Labrador. The earliest inhabitants of the Province were an Archaic Indian people, known as the Maritime Archaic Tradition, who crossed the Straits prior to 3000 BC and lived on the Island for about 2000 years, until c. 1000 BC, after which their artifacts ‘disappear’ from the archaeological record.⁹ While there are more than 600 known Maritime Archaic sites in the Province, there are only three substantial

⁶ From L’anse au Flamme, Gaultois Island (CjAx-1), first excavated in 1979.

⁷ Continued by the annual *Provincial Archaeology Office Archaeology Review*. Both series are available on-line.

⁸ The only other sites to have been continuously excavated over decades, and arguably the only sites to have made a greater contribution to the emergent understanding of Newfoundland prehistory, are those at Port au Choix and vicinity.

⁹ It is presently posited this is the first of four such extinctions to have occurred on the Island, which was later re-populated in subsequent waves, by Indian and Eskimo peoples from Labrador in the pre-contact period, and later by Europeans. It may be that some waves reached shore before the tide had completely gone out on their predecessors and that the new arrivals contributed to the extinction [absorption?] of the earlier peoples.

habitation sites on the Island: Port au Choix and area, The Beaches, and Cape Freels. The proximity of major Maritime Archaic sites at The Beaches, Bloody Bay Cove and Cape Freels are posited to further illustrate a range of seasonal movements.

The disappearance of the Maritime Archaic Tradition c. 1000 BC may be related to the arrival of an Eskimo people, identified as the early or Groswater¹⁰ Palaeo-eskimo, with later arrivals being identified with the Dorset (or late Palaeo-eskimo) culture.¹¹ The next Indian culture on the Island, perhaps equivalent to the people of the Point Revenge complex in Labrador, are known to archaeologists as the *Beaches complex*, the earliest agreed ancestors of the Beothuk. Obviously, The Beaches is critical to the understanding of both the ‘early’ (Beaches) and ‘late’ (Little Passage) Recent Indian ancestors of the Beothuk. Both complexes are represented at The Beaches, although the Little Passage phase was not recognized and defined during the excavations of Devereux and Carignan, but during the early 1980s.

Rhyolite is a difficult raw material when compared to the more finely-grained cherts, and, as the Beaches complex is defined by the materials and methods used in the manufacture of their toolkit, the *Bloody Bay Cove quarry* is critical to the emergent understanding of the people who occupied Newfoundland during early contact (AD 1000-1500). While the rhyolite quarry is unique there are two other known pre-contact quarries in the Province: a chert quarry at Ramah Bay¹² (Maritime Archaic, Palaeo-eskimo and Recent Indian) and a much-smaller soapstone quarry at Fleur de Lys (Maritime Archaic and Palaeo-eskimo).

Many archaeological investigations, and much of the popular/romantic interest in Newfoundland’s aboriginal peoples, are driven by the twin mysteries of the origins and extinction of the Beothuk. Consequently, much of the significance of The Beaches and Bloody

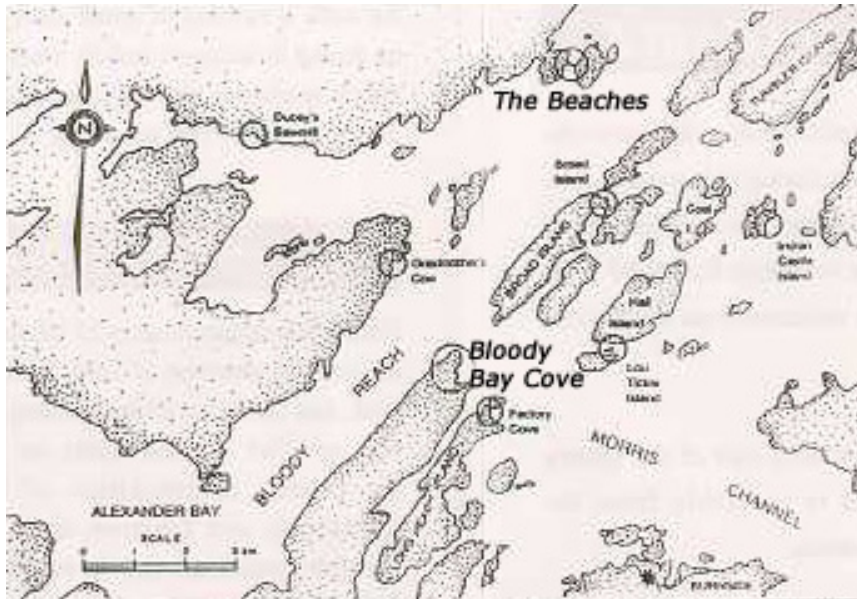
¹⁰ Sub-groups or “complexes” of pre-contact peoples are named by convention for the earliest sites at which their material culture is identified, described, and distinguished from other sub-groups.

¹¹ Questions of Groswater and Dorset “extinctions” on the Island –and/or questions concerning the arrival of a new Indian people c. AD 800 –are currently matters of some debate, occasioned by ongoing work of the Port au Choix Archaeology Project. The Beaches does have an important Palaeo-eskimo component, which will be touched upon below.

¹² The Ramah Bay quarry, discovered by Elmer Harp in 1964, is within Torngat National Park and is currently the subject of an application for recognition as a place of National Historic Significance by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada (Curtis *et al* 2010).

Bay Cove cultural landscape derives from its being a unique *early Beothuk habitation*, illustrative of both the rediscovery/contact period (AD 1500-1600) and the “retreat” of the Beothuk to the north coast and the interior in the face of expanding fishery-related settlement (McLean 1994). This cultural landscape is critical to our emergent understanding of transitional aspects of Little Passage/Beothuk.

Finally, it should be noted that the temporal range and cultural variety of The Beaches site has been, and will remain, critical to interpretation of the sequence of Newfoundland and Labrador prehistory. As a *multi-component site*, the fact that The Beaches and the proximate cultural landscape has been explored, excavated and contemplated for more than 20 years has been critical to analysis of the full sweep of human occupation of the Island, over a 5000-year period.



(Burnside Heritage Foundation Inc.)

Robert Cuff
Researcher/writer
Gerald Penney Associates Limited
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