

# **AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL VIEW OF THE THULE / INUIT OCCUPATION OF LABRADOR**



Lisa K. Rankin

Memorial University

May 2009

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>I. INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>II. BACKGROUND</b> .....	<b>3</b>
1. The Thule of the Canadian Arctic .....	3
2. A History of Thule/Inuit Archaeology in Labrador .....	6
<b>III. UPDATING LABRADOR THULE/INUIT RESEARCH</b> .....	<b>15</b>
1. The Date and Origin of the Thule Movement into Labrador .....	17
2. The Chronology and Nature of the Southward Expansion.....	20
3. Dorset-Thule Contact .....	28
4. The Adoption of Communal Houses .....	31
5. The Internal Dynamics of Change in Inuit Society.....	34
<b>IV. CONCLUSION</b> .....	<b>37</b>
<b>V. BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> .....	<b>39</b>

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Approximate distribution of Thule archaeological sites.....	3
Figure 2: Thule artifacts from the Canadian Arctic .....	4
Figure 3: Vertical view of a Thule winter house on Prince of Wales Island .....	5
Figure 4: Probable autumn tent structure dug into seaward face of beach .....	5
Figure 5: Map of Labrador Thule- and Inuit-related research projects.....	7
Figure 6: Calibration of carbon date from Ikkusik .....	18
Figure 7: Calibration of carbon date from Nunaingok 1.....	18
Figure 8: Calibrated dates from southern Baffin, Ungava and Northern Labrador .....	19
Figure 9: Arbitrary division of North, Central and South coast of Labrador.....	20
Figure 10: Early period artifacts from Ikkusik .....	22
Figure 11: Three miniature harpoon heads from Nachvak Village.....	22
Figure 12: Plan of House 10 at Staffe Island 1 .....	23
Figure 13: Excavated 17th century Inuit sod house at Snack Cove 3.....	27
Figure 14: Calibrated ranges of dates from Staffe Island 1 .....	29
Figure 15: Plan of communal house at Ikkusik .....	31



## I. INTRODUCTION

This paper was written under the terms of a contract between Dr. Lisa Rankin of Memorial University and the Labrador Métis Nation. The principal aim of the contract was to provide an updated summary of what is known about the Thule and Inuit occupation of Labrador. It was decided at the outset that given the expertise and experience of the researcher, the report should deal essentially with archaeological knowledge, augmented of course by ethnographic, ethnohistorical and other available data; that it should be, in other words, a culture history of the Thule and Inuit in Labrador. It was also decided that, while the report must incorporate and build on previous summaries and syntheses, it would be most useful to highlight the more recent developments in research, and to outline research issues that appear to be of greatest current importance. With this in view, the research has relied on published sources and, to the extent that they are available, recent unpublished research reports, theses and dissertations.

A number of people have provided invaluable assistance in the researching and writing of this report, and I thank them all. Réginald Auger and Jim Woollett provided suggestions for references; Bob McGhee provided a wealth of useful information regarding radiocarbon dating Thule materials; Jim Tuck shared his knowledge of Thule in Saglek Fiord and in the vicinity of Red Bay, and gave other helpful leads; Pete Whitridge was generous with information and ideas about the Thule occupation of northern Labrador; Ken Reynolds of the Provincial Archaeology Office was always available to help with access to site databases, and to provide copies of the province's field work publications and licence reports; Steve Hull of the Provincial Archaeology Office was kind enough to provide electronic versions of the provincial site database; Jenneth Curtis of Parks Canada and Jamie Brake of the Nunatsiavut Government kindly provided access to site databases in their jurisdictions; Elaine Anton was most helpful with the photographing of artifacts in the collections of The Rooms Provincial Museum; and Peter Ramsden provided the illustrations included in the report.

The report begins with a summary of previous research related to the Labrador Thule and Inuit. The summary does not necessarily attempt to be thoroughly comprehensive. It is more an effort to highlight the route by which the archaeological understanding of Labrador Thule/Inuit history has developed. It also attempts to illustrate more current research issues. Next is a brief introduction to Thule culture in the Canadian Arctic. The largest section of the report is a commentary on several debates and research questions that have characterised Labrador Thule/Inuit archaeological research over the past several decades. This is followed by a brief commentary and conclusion. Finally, there is a bibliography that includes publications as well as some theses, dissertations and reports relating to Labrador Thule/Inuit archaeology, and other items referenced in the text.

As is to be expected in a scholarly summary and synthesis of this sort, the presentation is somewhat selective, according to the research experience, expertise and interests of the author. The same report written by a different archaeologist would no doubt have been differently conceived and constructed in almost every respect. While that may have its drawbacks, it is also the strength of independent scholarly research and writing.



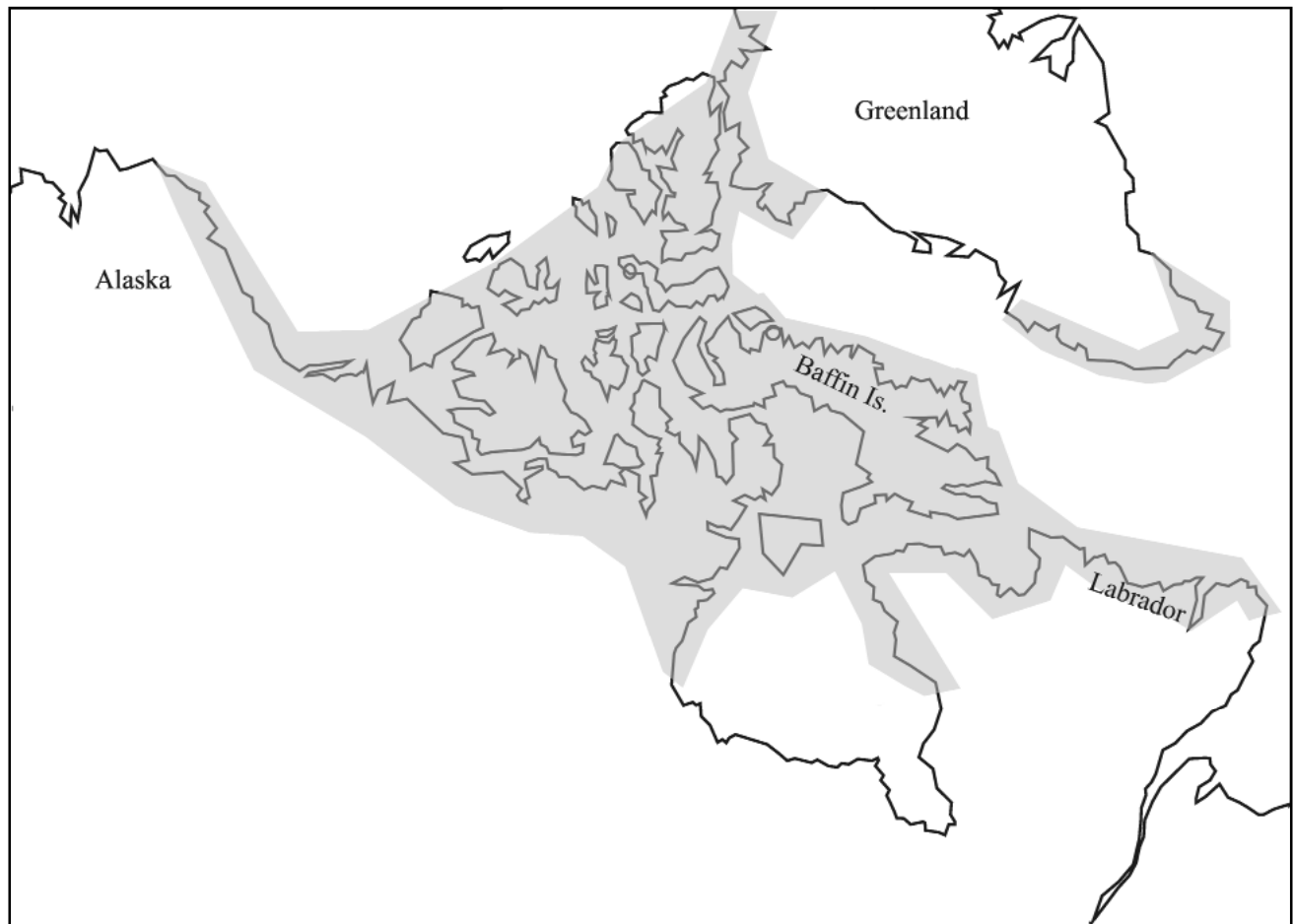
## II. BACKGROUND

This section will present a background for a consideration of contemporary archaeological research into the Thule and Inuit occupation of Labrador. This will consist, first, of a brief introduction to the Thule culture of the Canadian Arctic and its movement into Labrador. Second, a selective history of archaeological research regarding the Labrador Thule/Inuit will illustrate the development of recent debates, and current interpretations.

### 1. The Thule Culture of the Canadian Arctic

The following summary of Thule culture is based on the general works in the bibliography, personal experience, communication with colleagues and the specific references cited.

Thule culture is the archaeological manifestation of the ancestors of the present-day Inuit peoples of north Alaska, Canada and Greenland (Figure 1). The origins of Thule culture, which emerged in Alaska after A.D. 1000, lie in the earlier Punuk and Birnirk cultures of north Alaska and the Bering Sea region. From northern Alaska, the Thule people migrated eastwards, establishing settlements along the Arctic mainland coast and throughout the Canadian Arctic archipelago, eventually reaching Greenland and Labrador.

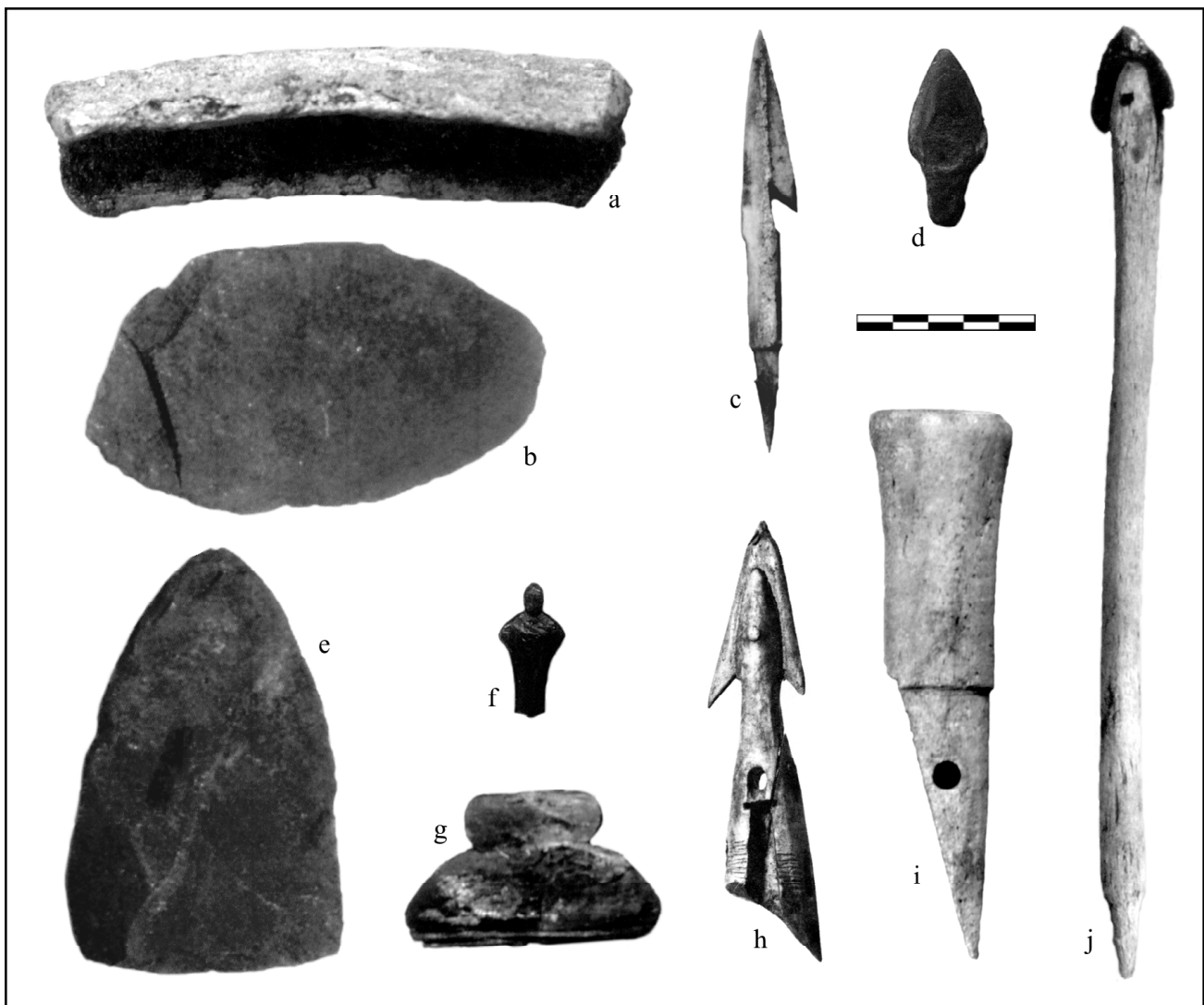


*Figure 1. Approximate distribution of Thule archaeological sites.*



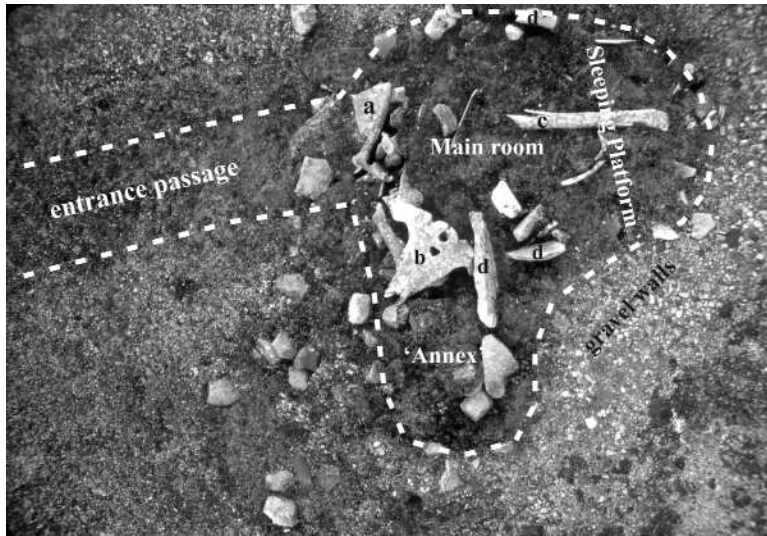
Thule culture was first recognized and defined by Therkel Mathiassen, an archaeologist with the famous Fifth Thule Expedition (Mathiassen 1927). This was a Danish-sponsored expedition sent from Greenland into the Canadian Arctic to make ethnological and archaeological observations in an attempt to clarify the then much-debated issue of the origin of Eskimoan peoples. Based on his excavations at the large Thule site of Naujan near Repulse Bay, northwestern Hudson Bay, Mathiassen defined the Thule culture as an ancient whale-hunting culture pre-dating the contemporaneous Inuit societies of the Canadian Arctic.

The archaeological Thule culture is characterized by an extensive bone and antler industry (Figure 2). Hunting gear includes a series of seal-hunting harpoon heads, either self-pointed or with separate blades; other harpoon gear including foreshafts, socket-pieces, ice picks, finger rests and kayak rests; float mouth-pieces; wound pins; drag-line handles; arrow points; bird darts; whaling harpoon heads; lance heads; bow parts; and bolas balls among other items. These objects are variously made from bone (including whale bone), antler and ivory. Other bone/antler/ivory artifacts include



**Figure 2.** Thule artifacts from the Canadian Arctic. a: antler ulu handle; b: slate ulu blade; c: antler arrow head; d: slate harpoon blade; e: slate knife blade; f: wooden doll; g: toy scraper or ulu of baleen; h: open socket harpoon head with copper blade; k: whale bone harpoon socket piece; j: 'bear' arrow head with iron point. Sources: h: the Clachan site, Coronation Gulf (Morrison 1983); others from the Cape Walker site, Prince of Wales Island, courtesy P. Ramsden.

men's knife handles, ulu handles, snow knives, whale flensing knives, needle cases, needles, combs, mattocks, sled parts, ice creepers, dog trace buckles and toggles, toys, art objects, and others. Stone artifacts are predominantly ground slate blades for knives, ulus, harpoon heads and lances; as well as



**Figure 3.** Vertical view of a Thule winter house on Prince of Wales Island, central Arctic. *a*: lintel stone; *b*: whale skull probably placed over lintel; *c*: whale mandible roof support; *d*: stone uprights. Dashed line indicates inner edge of mounded gravel walls. (Photo P. Ramsden).



**Figure 4.** Probable autumn tent structure dug into seaward face of raised beach, with slightly raised earth platform at rear and paved floor in front. Prince of Wales Island. (Photo P. Ramsden)

adzes, lamps and bowls. The contents of many Thule sites have been frozen since being deposited, and a variety of organic artifacts are thereby preserved. These include various objects of baleen and wood, and parts of skin clothing.

Thule winter houses are often prominently visible on the Arctic landscape, recognizable by their stone uprights and whale bone roof supports (Figures 3). They are usually round to sub-rectangular, semi-subterranean structures with a seaward-facing sunken entrance passage. Interior features typically include a raised flagstone sleeping platform at the rear, a paved floor, one or more stone lamp stands and often a small paved alcove or 'pantry' to one side. While most houses consist of one main room with sleeping platform, some are more complex and have two or three conjoined rooms that share a common entrance passage and sometimes a common central floor area. The rooves were apparently supported by whale mandibles and ribs and in some cases driftwood poles, and probably covered with skin, sod and dirt. Other structures that occur on Thule sites are tent rings, probably representing warm weather occupation, heavier tent rings and Qarmats that were probably occupied in between warm and cold seasons (Figure 4), kayak supports, boulder caches, boulder alignments, and graves.

The Thule people subsisted primarily by hunting sea mammals. While

the staple of the Thule diet was undoubtedly the ringed seal, the hallmark of Thule subsistence is their pursuit of large bowhead whales. There has been considerable debate about the real importance of whale hunting in Thule economy (for example see Freeman 1979; Savelle and McCartney 1994; Stanford 1976), but it seems likely that while some whale products may have been scavenged from beached animals, the Thule people did engage in open water hunting of whales from boats. It has even been argued that it was reduced ice conditions in the Canadian Arctic, permitting the migration of

whales through the passages between the Arctic islands, that prompted the Thule migration eastward from north Alaska (e.g. McCartney 1977; McGhee 1969/1970).

Just when the migration of Thule culture into the Canadian Arctic occurred is not entirely clear, partly as a result of the difficulties involved in precisely dating Arctic materials. As McGhee (2000: 184) has noted: “The potential problems involved in sampling and dating material from Thule culture sites are significantly more complex than those which bear on most other archaeological traditions”. The most recent work on this problem (Friesen and Arnold 2008; McGhee 2009) suggests that the Thule migration across the Canadian Arctic was very rapid, and was accomplished during the 13th century AD, some two centuries later than was previously believed. Indeed, there is a growing consensus that the Classic Thule occupation of Arctic Canada and Greenland was, in contrast to long-held perceptions, sparse and relatively short lived, spanning the 13th to 15th centuries, and that in many areas there was a hiatus between the Thule period and the (re-)establishment of modern Inuit populations, just as Mathiassen had originally proposed (McGhee 2009).

Whereas Mathiassen, along with several other scholars of that time, felt that the connection between the Thule people and the contemporary Inuit was an open question, there is little doubt today that the Inuit of Alaska, Canada and Greenland are the cultural and biological descendants of the Thule. While this had been a growing feeling for quite some time in the decades after the Fifth Thule Expedition, it was not until the 1960s that archaeological studies appeared that documented a transition from Thule material culture, settlement and economy to those of recent Inuit groups, and suggested reasons for the changes (McGhee 1972; VanStone, 1962). As a result of these and other studies that followed, archaeologists have been able to demonstrate that Thule culture reacted and adapted in a variety of ways to a series of climatic and social changes from the 15th to 19th centuries, to produce the distinctive regional Inuit cultures of the present day.

## **2. History of Thule / Inuit Archaeology in Labrador**

Interest in the history of Inuit occupation in Labrador probably goes back to the first European exploration of the Labrador coast. Certainly, English explorers in the region at least as early as the 18th century took note of the remnants of abandoned Inuit houses. While the intention of these observations may have been precise and rigorous, they lacked any comprehensive or scientific context which might have permitted interpretations that were more than speculative. The following account of more recent, and more ‘modern’, archaeological work focuses on the most important developments in the study of the Labrador Inuit.

Some of the earliest scientific archaeological work directed towards Inuit history in Labrador was carried out by William Duncan Strong, as a member of the Rawson-McMillan Subarctic Expedition of 1927-28, mounted by Chicago’s Field Museum of Natural History (Solecki and Wagly 1963: 1103). He examined Thule/Inuit sites on the central coast, and excavated a number of semi-subterranean sod houses in the Nain and Hopedale regions (Bird 1945: 131; Kaplan 1983: 13). Unfortunately, since his primary interest came to be in what would now be considered the Maritime Archaic (Strong 1930), he did not publish the results of his excavations at more recent sites.

In 1934 Junius Bird, of the American Museum of Natural History, investigated five sites of semi-subterranean sod houses along a 42 km stretch of coast in the Hopedale region. In all, he excavated 22 of the 44 house ruins that he found in the area. Bird chose Hopedale as a research site

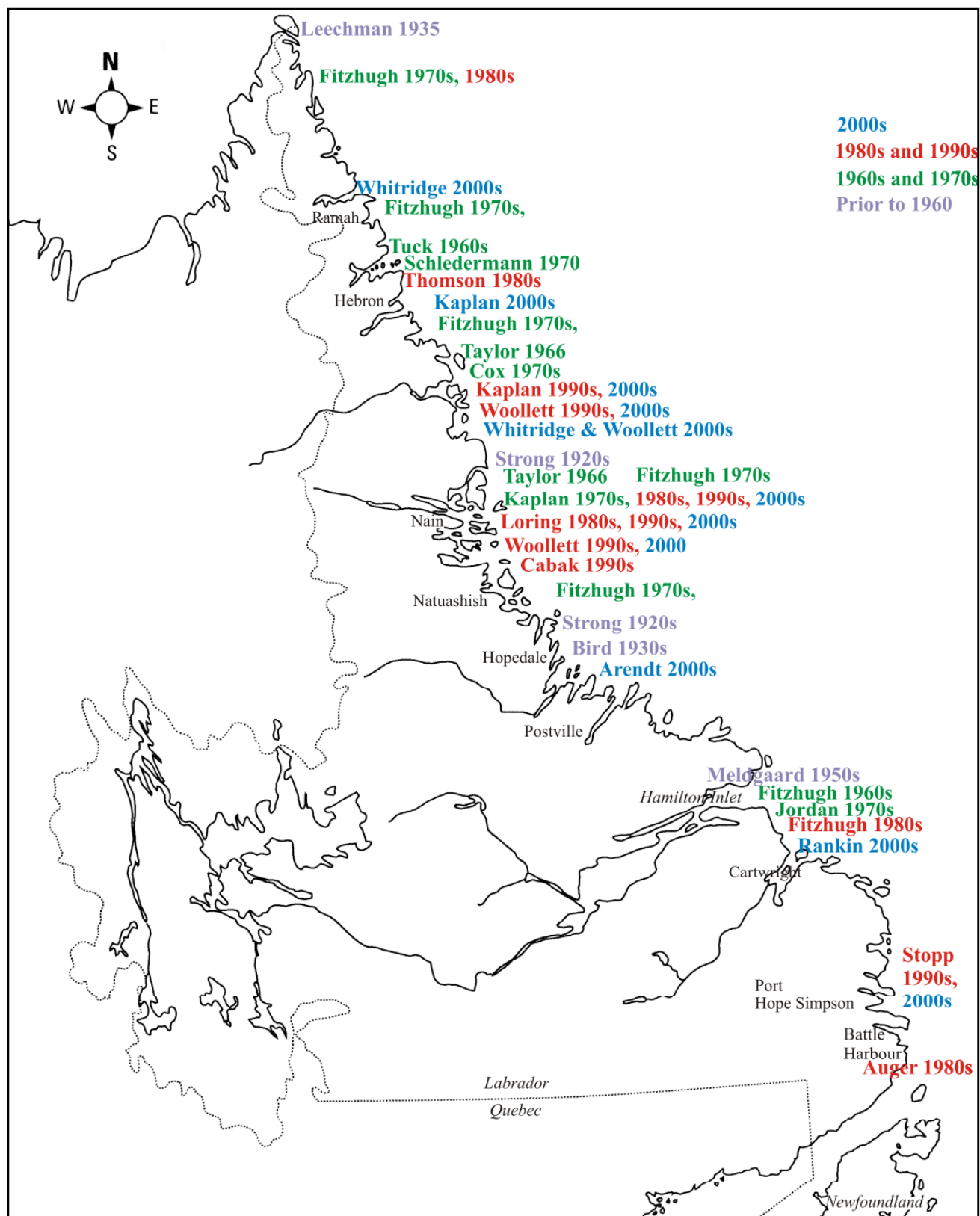


Figure 5. Map of Labrador showing the locations of Thule- and Inuit-related archaeological research projects, with the names of the principal researchers and the general time periods of the field work or primary research.

because, based on what was then understood about Inuit prehistory in Labrador, he believed that in this area he should be able to find evidence of “all phases of the Eskimo occupation of the central and southern Labrador coasts” (Bird 1945: 125). He was thus concerned, like many archaeologists since, with using archaeological evidence to construct the chronological stages of Inuit occupation in Labrador.

Bird identified three types of sod houses: Type I was a small, round, single-family house with a rear sleeping platform, with a variation that had two conjoined identical rooms; Type II was a rectangular structure with two platforms, one on each side, which he identified as a two-family structure; and Type III was a large, rectangular, multi-family house with a continuous platform running along the rear and side walls (Bird 1945: 128). He regarded these types as representing stages in a sequence of historical changes in Inuit culture, Type I being the earliest and Type III the most recent (Bird 1945: 179). He also suggested that the progressive growth in the size of houses, and households, was prompted by the availability of better roofing timbers, as well as by a concern for defence against the increasing presence of Europeans in the late 18th century.

On the same trip, Bird spent some time surveying Hawke Bay, north of present-day Charlottetown, without finding any evidence of Inuit occupation, such as house ruins, tent rings, caches, or the like. His deduction, reinforced by information he received from others who were familiar with the coast, was that the coast of Labrador south of Hamilton Inlet “never had a numerous Eskimo population” (Bird 1945: 178).

Some of Bird’s observations are of particular interest in the light of more recent research issues. First, as noted above, he concluded that the Inuit had never really settled the Labrador coast south of Hamilton Inlet. Second, he concluded that the Inuit had been in central Labrador for only a short time, on the order of 400 years, based on the fact that every house he investigated contained some items of European material culture. Third, he clearly identified the Labrador Inuit as descendents of the Thule culture of the eastern Arctic, and suggested southwestern Baffin Island as a likely place of origin (Bird 1945: 179). Of passing interest, perhaps, is the discovery in one of the Type I houses at the site of Avertok, near Hopedale itself, of a sherd of what appears to be Woodland pottery (Bird 1945: 143) that must have come from an Amerindian context to the south, perhaps the Strait of Belle Isle. Finally, in the last paragraph regarding his work in the Hopedale area, he suggested that Hamilton Inlet might prove to be a “promising district” for the future investigation of Inuit culture history in Labrador (1945: 182).

Douglas Leechman, an archaeologist at what was then the National Museum of Canada, made a brief trip to far northern Labrador in 1935, in search of evidence of the Dorset culture (Kaplan 1983: 16-17; Leechman 1945). Although he conducted some excavations in contact period Inuit houses in the vicinity of McLelan Strait, like Strong he was primarily interested in earlier occupations and published little regarding the Inuit material.

In 1956 Jorgen Meldgaard, of the Danish National Museum, spent a field season on the coast of Labrador seeking evidence that it might be the Markland of the Norse sagas (Appelt *et al* 2007: 216; Fitzhugh 1972a: 2). In the process, he excavated at two Thule sites in Hamilton Inlet, identifying one of them as a late variant of the Thule known from the eastern Arctic, and the other as 18th or 19th century Labrador Inuit (cited in Schledermann 1971: 17).

William E. Taylor, jr. was perhaps Canada’s foremost Arctic archaeologist, and one of the world’s pre-eminent experts in the field, from the 1950s to the 1990s. One of his research interests was the origin of the Canadian Thule culture. Although he did not do field work in Labrador, he authored a brief booklet on the prehistory of the Labrador-Ungava peninsula in which he suggested, based on an

examination of artifacts from sites in the region, that the Thule of Labrador came from Baffin Island at about A.D. 1350 (Taylor 1964: 203).

In the mid 1960s J. Garth Taylor, then a Ph.D. student at the University of Toronto, undertook a study of Labrador Inuit communities of the historic period, in an attempt to explain why the size and structure of those communities had apparently varied so widely from one place to another (Taylor 1974). His research was based primarily on the study of Moravian archives, but it also involved a season of archaeological reconnaissance in the areas of Nain and Okak in 1966. The purpose of the field work was to observe the details of the northern Labrador environment in order to better understand the Moravian accounts, and to locate and record, as far as possible, the Inuit campsites referred to in early Moravian diaries (Taylor 1974: 2). Among the aspects of Labrador Inuit culture that Taylor analysed was that of community and household leadership. While he found that, generally, leadership roles were weakly developed among the historic Labrador Inuit, he also found that a few individuals had acquired leadership powers within their communities that seemed to go beyond their expected kinship or household roles. Of particular note among such individuals was Tuglavina, a prominent man of the Nain region in the late 18th century. Significantly, Taylor noted that among the other reasons for Tuglavina's unusual influence was his role as a middleman between the Nain Inuit and European traders in the south, a role facilitated by the fact that he owned a large, two-masted fishing boat (Taylor 1974: 81). Part of the archaeological significance of Taylor's work was his identification of particular archaeological sites with Inuit camp sites described in the 18th and 19th century records, which allows those sites to be interpreted within a more comprehensive historical, environmental and socio-economic framework.

Archaeology in Labrador took a major leap forward when William Fitzhugh and James Tuck independently began conducting surveys and excavations there in the late 1960s. Each began a tradition of archaeological field work in Labrador among their students and at their respective institutions, Fitzhugh at the Smithsonian and Tuck at Memorial University. Forty years later, both of those Labrador research traditions are still active.

Fitzhugh, then a Ph.D. student at Harvard University, began his work in Labrador by conducting surveys and test excavations in Hamilton Inlet in 1968 and 1969 (Fitzhugh 1972a). Among his research aims was the investigation of "the nature of early Labrador Eskimo settlement of the central coast" (Fitzhugh 1972a: 4). Fitzhugh examined four historic Inuit winter house sites, as well as other structures, in Groswater Bay (1972a: 82-89). Like some of his predecessors, he was primarily interested in other cultural manifestations, but he did excavate "a few exploratory test pits" in both middens and houses at the Thule/Inuit sites (Fitzhugh 1972a: 127). He identified the winter village sites as sequential components of what he labelled the Ivuktoke Phase, "...the final aboriginal occupation of the coast prior to extensive European acculturation", which he estimated to date between A.D. 1500 and 1850 (1972: 127). Noting that all sites of this phase contained European materials, and that the earliest sites were on the north side of Hamilton Inlet, Fitzhugh suggested that the Inuit had arrived in the area after A.D. 1500 "...as part of a very rapid and dramatic expansion down the coast of Labrador..." which carried them to the Gulf of St. Lawrence (Fitzhugh 1972a: 128).

Both Fitzhugh and students working with him continued to do field work relating to the Labrador Inuit throughout the 1970s and 1980s, as summarized further on in this account.

Tuck began working on the northern coast of Labrador in 1969, conducting surveys and excavations in Saglek Fiord. The initial impetus for Tuck's work was a report of Thule/Inuit boulder graves on Rose Island, which he undertook to investigate (Tuck 1975: iii). In the process he located and re-

corded a large number of sites in Saglek Fiord, including the first known occurrences of Pre-Dorset in Northern Labrador. Realizing that the Saglek area had a great deal of potential for unravelling the entire archaeology of northern Labrador, Tuck decided to undertake more survey and excavation there the following year. His own research interests were primarily directed towards the Maritime Archaic and Paleoeskimo occupations, and the investigation of the Thule and Inuit sites was undertaken by one of his students, Peter Schledermann (Schledermann 1971; Tuck 1975: iv).

During the summer of 1970, Schledermann excavated or tested a total of 56 sod house ruins at seven different sites in Saglek Bay, spanning the period from pre-contact Thule to the 20th century. The aims of his work were to explore the “origin and cultural development” of the Thule Tradition in Northern Labrador (Schledermann 1971: i). Specifically, he aimed to document a pre-European Inuit presence in northern Labrador, to identify the area that the Labrador Thule came from, and to relate changes in Thule culture over time to climatic change and the effects of European contact.

As a result of his excavations and the analysis of the materials recovered, Schledermann divided the Thule period in Saglek Bay into 3 phases: the Early Phase (AD 1450-1700), the Communal House Phase (AD 1700-1850), and the Recent Phase (AD 1850-present). Based on stylistic comparisons with Thule material in the eastern Arctic, and one rather dubious carbon date (see below), he concluded that the Thule had arrived at Saglek Bay prior to AD 1500, and that they had come to northern Labrador from eastern Baffin Island (Schledermann 1971: 136, 1979: 142). He suggested that European goods had diffused to the Thule in northern Labrador during the Early Phase, and that the southward movement of the Thule/Inuit from northern Labrador was all within the historic period, noting the ubiquity of European goods in the houses excavated by Bird near Hopedale (1971: 68).

Schledermann was particularly concerned with explaining the shift from the small, single-family houses of the Early period to the large communal houses of the second period at about A.D. 1700 or slightly earlier (1971: 106). While he suggested that there may have been a slight population increase at this time, he observed that the major change from the Early period to the Communal House period was that a winter community that might have occupied fourteen small houses in the previous period now occupied only four very large houses (Schledermann 1971: 107). In offering an explanation for the development of the large communal houses, he leaned more towards an environmental cause than a social or economic one (1971: 107). He cited the fact that the development of communal houses in Labrador took place during a cold period in which increased sea ice cover may have reduced the availability of whales in the near-shore area (Schledermann 1971: 111-112), making this formerly reliable source of food and blubber much less predictable. The result, he suggested, would have been a greater reliance upon seals, which are shared at the household rather than the community level, and thus a greater likelihood that households with fewer or less skilled hunters would experience shortages (1971: 111). Grouping several households together into large communal houses, he suggested, would have facilitated the sharing of resources between families, and thus would have helped to even out differences in resource access (1971: 112). While initially dismissing the presence of European whalers as “incidental” to the development of large communal houses (1971: 107), he also admitted that the process was likely to have been due to “the interaction of several factors” (1971: 112). Furthermore, in a subsequent publication he acknowledged that the effects of the cold period were probably less severe on the coast of Labrador, and suggested that whaling in fact retained its importance there, in contrast to other areas of Thule settlement where it declined (1979: 142). All in all, although Schledermann seems to make a strong argument for cooling climate, increased sea-ice and the resultant reduced availability of whales as the reason for the development of communal houses, in the end there is some ambiguity about what he would actually attribute it to.

The Late Phase of Schledermann's scheme, ca 1850 to the present day, is marked by the almost complete replacement of traditional Thule/Inuit material culture with items of European manufacture (Schledermann 1971: 114). The large communal houses of the preceding phase were replaced by increasingly smaller houses that seemed to be occupied only briefly and seasonally. Schledermann attributed this to the fact that following the establishment of the Moravian mission at Hebron in 1830, fewer and fewer Inuit resided year-round in Saglek Fiord, and after 1848 it was visited by only a few families for brief resource extraction visits (1971: 135, 138).

Schledermann's thesis made a number of significant contributions to the study of Labrador Inuit history. First, his data showed that when the Thule first arrived in northern Labrador, they were still largely unaffected by European influences. Second, he made an attempt to evaluate competing explanations for the development of large communal houses in the 18th century, and made a cogent argument that this was an internal response to an episode of climatic change, rather than an effect of European disruption of traditional patterns. Third, he recognized that, at least in the Saglek region, the communal house phase eventually gave way to a second episode of small, scattered settlements. Fourth, he attempted to grapple with the variability of Labrador Inuit ecological adaptation, as well as the highly complex interplay of environmental, social and historical factors in the causation of culture change in Labrador Inuit society.

Richard Jordan began working on the northern coast of Labrador, in collaboration with Fitzhugh, in 1972, doing pollen studies and paleoenvironmental reconstructions at the Maritime Archaic site of Rattler's Bight for his Ph.D. at the University of Minnesota (Kaplan 1991: 367). After joining the faculty of Bryn Mawr College, he continued working in northern Labrador, but turned his attention to a study of Inuit settlements in Hamilton Inlet. In 1973 and 1975 he conducted excavations of Inuit sod houses at several sites in the vicinity of The Narrows (Jordan 1977: 43). Among the sites he investigated were those on Eskimo Island, that would become reference points for later interpretations of Inuit history in Labrador. He tested or excavated a total of 19 semi-subterranean sod-walled winter houses, spanning the period A.D. 1600-1800 (Jordan 1978: 175). On the basis of his excavations and analysis, Jordan organized the sites into 4 chronological periods, characterized by different economic responses to the European presence in coastal Labrador: The Colonization and Raiding Period (A.D. 1600-1700), the Whaling and Intermittent Trading Period (A.D. 1700-1800), The trapping and European Settlement Period (A.D. 1800-1870) and the Modern Period (A.D. 1870-the present) (1978: 175).

In the initial period, European goods are plentiful in Inuit houses, alongside the traditional material culture (Jordan 1978: 176). The bulk of European items, however, are iron objects such as nails and spikes that have been re-worked into traditional forms, such as harpoon points. Jordan suggested that the European assemblage in this period was indicative of raiding trips to fishing or whaling stations in the Strait of Belle Isle, rather than trade. In the later part of this period, the first small, round houses built on Eskimo Island were replaced by larger, rectangular communal houses.

The second period saw the initiation of trade relationships between the Inuit of central Labrador and Europeans who were now visiting the area, as indicated both by historical records and the greater variety of European goods found in Inuit houses (Jordan 1978: 178-181). An increase in the number of communal houses may indicate a population increase during this period.

The third period, the latest one investigated by Jordan, seemed to see a reduction of population, and eventually a reduction in house size back to small, probably single-family dwellings (Jordan 1978: 181). The communal settlements of the previous era evolved into widely scattered single-family settlements located with reference to European trading posts, where the Inuit traded furs for European tools and other items.



Jordan suggested that the migration of Thule/Inuit into Labrador and southward was precipitated by a combination of climatic deterioration and a desire to obtain European goods (1978: 181). In considering the shift from single-family dwellings to communal houses in the late 17th century, he felt that the climatic argument advanced by Schledermann simply failed to explain the facts, and he noted moreover that according to historic and archival records this was not a time of particular environmental or economic stress (1978: 184). In seeking a more satisfactory explanation, he suggested that the communal houses resulted from the emergence of a few high-status 'big men', whose presence had been previously documented in the Moravian mission records by Garth Taylor. He suggested that these high-status individuals were a combination of three powerful roles relating to European trade: successful whaling captain, successful trader in dealing with Europeans, and effective middleman in trading with other Inuit groups (178: 184). He argued that European goods, unlike traditional food items, may have been shared at the household rather than the community level, and that this provided an impetus for the accretion of less successful households with that of the 'big man'. The resulting increase in size of the big-man's house and household in turn added to his prestige and his economic success.

In 1974 and 1975 Steven Cox, a Ph. D. student at Harvard University, conducted a programme of survey and excavation in the vicinity of Okak. This region was selected for attention for three primary reasons (Cox 1977: 6-7). First, it was known from historical records to have supported a sizeable Inuit population, which suggested that the area had strong resource potential and might have been a focus of human settlement in prehistoric times as well. Second, the area is near the forest-tundra boundary as it intersects the Labrador coast, and Cox felt that this had interesting possibilities for the investigation of cultural boundaries and cross-cultural contact. Finally, since Okak Bay had a variety of resources, he felt that it could have supported human populations at most times of the year, and therefore most or all of any past culture's economic system might be represented there archaeologically. Parenthetically, Fitzhugh had given very similar reasons for choosing Hamilton Inlet as a focus of his earlier study.

The research aims of Cox's project were to construct a culture history of the area, to reconstruct the cultural systems operating in the area at any given time, and to attempt to understand the nature and causes of cultural change in northern Labrador (Cox 1977: 7-8). A subsidiary aim, specifically in the second year of the project, was to obtain faunal samples from Thule/Inuit sites in order to "further refine and test the ethnohistorically-derived Labrador Eskimo settlement model".

As it turned out, Cox, too, was primarily interested in the Paleoeskimo and Archaic occupations, and devoted most of his field time and his analytical efforts to those areas. That is not to say that he did not do any work on later Inuit sites. He dug test squares in at least eight semi-subterranean sod-walled houses and at least five warm-season tent rings at seven different sites. Very little was recovered from most of these structures. The sites that did produce artifacts relating to Inuit occupation also contained European artifacts dating to the 18th to 20th centuries. Cox regarded only one site (Green Island 6) as possibly representing a pre-contact Inuit occupation; but perhaps ironically, and certainly unreliably, this was based on the fact the Inuit structures there produced absolutely nothing, not even faunal bone (Cox 1977: 123).

The analytical section of Cox's thesis contains only one paragraph relating to his work at the Labrador Inuit sites. In it he concluded that with the possible exception of Green Island 6, all the Inuit sites he tested were post-contact, and probably post A.D. 1700 (Cox 1977: 268). There is also an appendix that deals with the faunal material recovered from the Inuit sites, which he used to infer seasonality for the sites he tested. On this basis, he was able to suggest that the seasonal classification of

camp and villages that is given in the various historical sources is probably too restrictive, and that a settlement described as being occupied at a specific time of year was in many cases probably occupied to some extent at other times of the year as well.

Along with all the other work going in Labrador during the 1970s, Fitzhugh, now at the Smithsonian, conducted a series of coastal surveys and site excavations in central Labrador between 1974 and 1976 (Fitzhugh 1976; Kaplan 1983: 29), and in northern Labrador in 1977 and 1978 (Fitzhugh 1994). Among the important contributions of this work was the training and encouragement of a new generation of Labrador archaeologists who would make very significant contributions in their own right, including Susan Kaplan and Steven Loring. In addition, a great many sites of the Thule and Inuit periods were located, particularly in the relatively unknown northern part, where Thule as well as more recent Inuit sites were located (Fitzhugh 1980: 601).

Beginning in the mid 1970s Susan Kaplan began working on the Labrador coast as an assistant on various Smithsonian survey projects (Kaplan 1983). As a participant in the Torngat Archaeological Project, she directed her efforts towards investigating the Neo-Eskimo archaeology of the north Labrador coast (Jordan and Kaplan 1980). Her 1983 Ph. D. dissertation at Bryn Mawr College was a veritable *tour de force*, synthesizing the information from over 170 Thule and Inuit sites in central and northern Labrador, and making detailed data for many of them available for the first time. Kaplan has continued to do fieldwork on Thule/Inuit archaeology in Labrador, and to publish extensively on it. It may be fair to say that her most notable contributions have stemmed from her ability to synthesize both her own and other people's data, and to integrate diverse kinds of data into balanced, comprehensive analyses of Inuit social and economic changes of the 18th and 19th centuries (e.g. Kaplan 1980, 1985a, 1997; Kaplan and Woollett 2000). Like Fitzhugh, she has inspired others to work on Labrador Inuit research, perhaps most notably Jim Woollett.

In the early 1980s, Callum Thomson undertook a programme of survey and excavation in Saglek Fiord. Among other sites, he excavated at Shuldham Island 9, a complex site with both Dorset and Thule occupation, from 1980 to 1982. Other Thule/Inuit - related projects of the 1980s and 1990s include those undertaken by Auger and Stopp, both independently and together (Auger 1985, 1991a, 1991b; Auger and Stopp 1989; Stopp 1997, 2002), concerned in various ways with the timing and nature of the Inuit occupation in southern Labrador and the Strait of Belle Isle region. Also during this period, Steven Loring initiated a long-term programme of community archaeology (including The Central Coast of Labrador Community Archaeology Project) in collaboration with communities on the central coast, including Nain, Hopedale and Makkovik (Cabak 1991; Cabak and Loring 2000; Loring 1983, 2004, 2006). Among his other aims, Loring has been interested in the archaeological issues of agency and gender in the broader context of European contact.

Between 1993 and 2000 Jim Woollett, in collaboration with Susan Kaplan, conducted excavations at two major Inuit communal sod house sites in the Nain and Okak regions, the first such excavations since the 1970s (Woollett 2003). The purpose of this project was to test competing hypotheses regarding the development of large communal houses by the Labrador Inuit in the late 16th to 17th centuries, using primarily zooarchaeological methods. In particular, Woollett wished to determine, first, whether there was evidence for economic hardship during that time, and second, whether there was any evidence for economic specialization and surplus accumulation. As a result of his study he found, contrary to many expectations, that the period of communal house use was not, in fact, a period of deteriorating climate, but rather of climatic amelioration and increased open water. His conclusion

was that arguments linking communal houses to environmental variables were weakly supported, and that social explanations had more merit (Kaplan and Woollett 2000; Woollett 2007).

Archaeological field work dealing with Labrador Thule and Inuit has continued into the new millennium. Two new archaeologists hired at Memorial University since 2000, Lisa Rankin and Peter Whitridge, have both undertaken long-term research projects that involve survey and excavation of Thule, Inuit and, in Rankin's case, Labrador Métis sites. Rankin's work, starting in 2001, has been in southern Labrador, particularly in the vicinity of Sandwich Bay (e.g. Brewster 2005, 2006; Rankin 2004, 2006, 2007), where she has been concerned with contact period Inuit, the interaction between Inuit and European settlers in the early historic period, and the history of the Labrador Métis. Among other things, she has supervised graduate students in the excavation and analysis of mid 17th-century Inuit sod house sites on Huntingdon Island (Brewster 2005, 2006), and a 19th-century Inuit-settler sod house near North River (Beaudoin 2008a, 2008b). In the process, she is attempting to refine the criteria for distinguishing between Inuit, European and Métis sod houses in southern Labrador, a problem pointed out some time ago by Auger (1991) and Stopp (2002).

Beginning in 2003, Peter Whitridge undertook a research project in Nachvak Fiord involving archaeological survey and excavation, with a primary focus on the Thule/Inuit occupation (Whitridge 2004, 2005, 2006, 2008). The work has focussed primarily on the site of Nachvak Village, a site of Thule semi-subterranean houses of the very early European contact period whose occupation may extend back into the pre-contact period. Whitridge has also investigated a late 18th century to 19th century Inuit settlement of larger communal houses. Of particular interest at this site was the discovery of a *kashim* or ceremonial house that appeared to have been intentionally destroyed and filled in (Whitridge 2006). Whitridge has also made the training of graduate students a significant part of his project, and three of them have undertaken aspects of the research (Butler 2009, Higdon 2009, Juracik 2007, Swinarton 2008).

Beatrix Arendt has been conducting surveys and excavations at 18th and 19th century Inuit sites in the Hopedale region as part of the Hopedale Archaeology Project. The aims of this project concern the interactions between the Inuit and the Moravian mission, and the motivations for changes in Inuit settlement and other practices (Arendt 2008, 2009).

Susan Kaplan has developed a project in northern Labrador directed towards the establishment and maintenance of a dendrochronological scheme for the past several hundred years. This has involved coring standing trees, as well as coring sod houses for preserved wood contained in archaeological deposits (Kaplan 2008). She has also continued to conduct excavations at some key Inuit sod house sites, Iglosiatik and Green Island 6. Jim Woollett has also continued to work at historic Inuit sod house sites in the Nain and Okak regions, and more recently in northern Labrador in collaboration with Peter Whitridge (Whitridge and Woollett 2009).

### III. UPDATING LABRADOR THULE/INUIT RESEARCH

Fifteen years ago, in spite of the steadily accelerating pace of archaeological research in Labrador during the preceding two decades, William Fitzhugh felt justified in characterizing the state of Thule/Inuit archaeology in Labrador as “undeveloped” (Fitzhugh 1994: 242). There is no doubt that there was some foundation for his assessment for, while the unprecedented volume of archaeological work that had been carried out in Labrador since the late 1960s had amassed an impressive amount of data relevant to Thule and Inuit archaeology (see for example Kaplan 1983), the new data had predictably raised as many questions as it had answered, and some of the most fundamental issues were still being debated, as they had been for decades.

To illustrate the undeveloped nature of Labrador Thule/Inuit archaeology, Fitzhugh listed ten major research questions that still confronted the field: 1. the geographical origin and date of the Thule migration into Labrador; 2. the chronology and nature of the southward expansion of Thule in Labrador; 3. the role of the Dorset culture in the Thule expansion in Labrador; 4. the ethnicity of the Labrador “Tunit” of Inuit folklore; 5. the relationship between the Thule and Point Revenge Indians on the Labrador coast; 6. the role of Europeans in motivating the Thule expansion; 7. possible Thule contacts with the Norse in Labrador; 8. the explanation for the development of communal houses by the Labrador Inuit; 9. the relationship between the christianized Inuit of the central coast and the unchristianized Inuit of northern Labrador; and 10. the question of an *in situ* transition from Thule to Labrador Inuit *versus* an explanation involving multiple migrations.

All of these questions were then current, and some were newly emerging as the accumulation of data modified traditional perspectives. But the question to be considered here is: how much has archaeology actually progressed in grappling with these issues, and to what extent do the questions posed by Fitzhugh remain puzzling research issues 15 years later? One or two of them have, in the meantime, essentially ceased to be issues, and one or two others need not really concern us in this paper. In spite of decades of looking, very little, if any, evidence for a Norse presence in coastal Labrador has come to light. Recently proposed evidence for possible Norse contact with the extreme northern coast of Labrador (e.g. Sutherland 2000) is highly contentious, to say the least (see Park 2008), and even if accepted is very limited in scope and of dubious significance. Moreover, and more importantly here, it has not been suggested that the Norse were interacting with the Thule in Labrador, but with their predecessors, the Dorset. Although there is some evidence (Sabo and Sabo 1978) that Thule people on southern Baffin Island may have been in indirect contact with the Norse (i.e. knew someone who knew someone, who knew....), no convincing evidence of such knowledge or contact has come from Labrador. So Fitzhugh’s question 7, regarding Thule contacts with the Norse in Labrador, remains just as much a question, but it is a purely hypothetical one.

The question of the ‘Tunit’ of folklore has always intrigued Arctic researchers, as it seems to be an echo of a past reality that might be archaeologically detectable. Some researchers have suggested an identification of the Tunit with the Thule people, the cultural and biological ancestors of the Inuit, in which view the legends of the Tunit refer to a previous and now alien-seeming episode of Inuit history. Others, on the other hand, have interpreted tales of conflicts between the ancestral Inuit and the ‘Tunit’ to mean that the Tunit were not the Inuit or their ancestors, but a different group of people entirely, namely the Dorset people who inhabited the Canadian Arctic and Greenland prior to the Inuit arrival. The allure of this interpretation is that it may provide a tantalizing first-hand glimpse of the far-off, and often considered ‘mysterious’, Dorset people, retained in the collective Inuit consciousness. Unfortunately, tales of the Tunit often seem contradictory, or at least ambiguous, and it seems most likely that the real identity of the Tunit, assuming that they have one, may not be the same in every case; and

in some cases a tale may not refer to a historical reality at all. We may be cautioned, for example, by the fact that tales of very large (or very small) people who live in the ground or in holes in the hills (as the 'Tunit' are supposed to have done) are part of the folklore in many parts of the world, and they may tell us more about the universal human psyche than about local histories. What this means for archaeology is that the tales of the Tunit are very unreliable as historical documents, and probably of virtually no value in helping us to interpret the past. They can only tell us what we already know; for if they tell us something that we don't know, we simply have no way of evaluating it, and therefore cannot consider it as information.

The issue of an *in situ* origin for all Labrador Inuit from Labrador Thule ancestors now seems rather too obvious to be considered a research question. This is not necessarily to say that it has been conclusively demonstrated, but rather that it has become almost universally accepted, and no serious challenge to it has been mounted. Certainly one could still pose the question of whether only one movement (perhaps over some time) of Thule people from the eastern Arctic into northern Labrador accounts for the totality of Thule and Inuit presence in Labrador, or whether there may have been several discrete movements into Labrador at different times, including into quite recent times. But it seems doubtful that the evidence exists, or could be collected, to test the second scenario *archaeologically*. Convincing evidence of post-Thule movements of Inuit from the eastern Arctic into Labrador would almost certainly have to be of a documentary nature to be recognisable, and to be convincing.

Possible Thule contact with late Dorset people in northern Labrador, and with Point Revenge Amerindians further south, is, unlike the Norse issue, a legitimate question, since ample evidence for both groups of people on the coast of Labrador exists, and both may have been there when the Thule people began to arrive. The case of Dorset contact has been extensively discussed in the literature, and the arguments surrounding it are conflicting and complex. It will thus be given consideration below as a current research question. The issue of possible Thule contact or interaction with Point Revenge Amerindians is obviously intriguing, not least because the descendants of both groups still inhabit the area, and the question may have considerable meaning for them. It also has significant implications for the processes and dynamics involved in the Thule/Inuit spread southwards along the Labrador coast, since on the surface it seems that the Thule would have had to encounter the Point Revenge Amerindians along the way. In spite of that seeming necessity, however, there is no archaeological data that would permit any sort of interpretation of the relationship between the two groups. Indeed, there is no 'smoking gun' evidence that the two groups actually met at all. While Point Revenge sites occur in central coastal areas at around the same time as the Thule/Inuit, there is not sufficiently refined data on such things as seasonality to tell whether the two groups used the same areas at the same time, or purposely avoided doing so; nor is there any convincing instance of tools of both groups occurring in the same context (Personal communication from Scott Neilsen, 2009). So, while the question of Thule-Amerindian interaction is an intriguing one, it must be left aside for the time being, as the data to deal with it are simply not available.

Finally, the question of the role of Europeans in motivating Thule expansion is actually part of several of the other issues, and is not conveniently considered in isolation. It will therefore emerge during the following consideration of other questions.

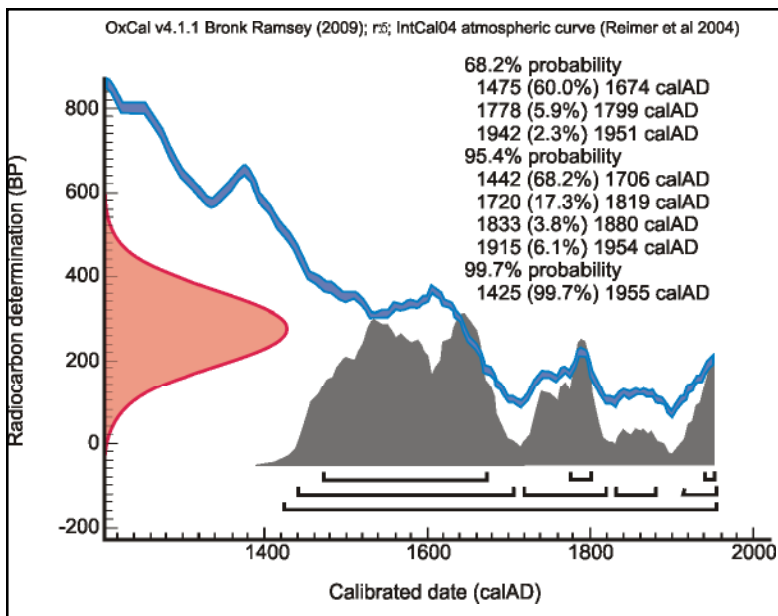
The questions that remain to be investigated, then, as some of them might be re-phrased in a modern context, are these: 1. the date and geographical origin of the Thule migration into Labrador; 2. the chronology and nature of the southward expansion; 3. the issue of Dorset-Thule contact; 4. the reasons for the adoption of communal houses; and 5. the importance and roles of various components of Inuit society in the cultural changes of the historic era.

## 1. The Date and Origin of the Thule Movement into Labrador

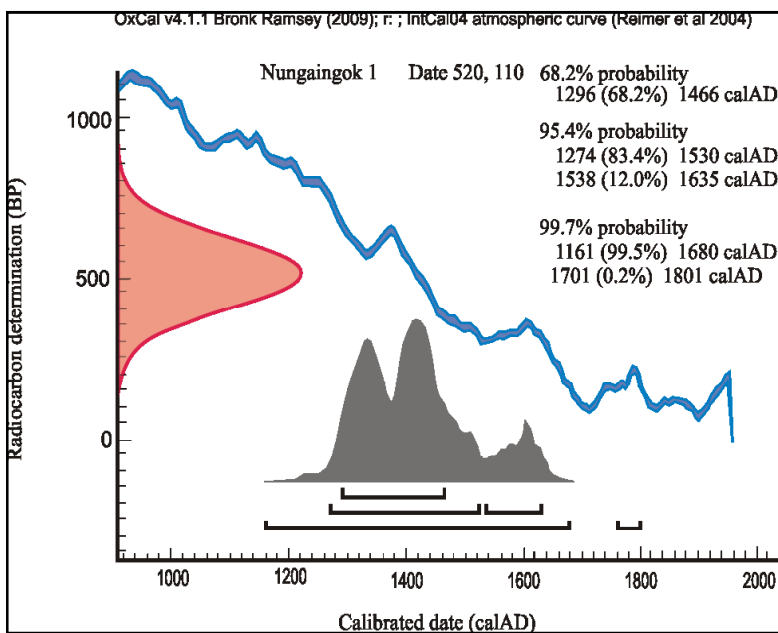
Dating the arrival of the Thule in Labrador is beset with problems. As a result of recent re-assessments of carbon dating in Arctic contexts, many previously accepted dates are now considered suspect for a variety of reasons (see Friesen and Arnold 2008; McGhee 2000, 2009; Nelson and McGhee 2002). In the case of Labrador, there are probably no radiocarbon dates on Thule material that should be considered acceptable, even though the dates themselves might appear reasonable. Dates run on sea mammal materials are unacceptable due to the marine reservoir effect; tree wood dates are unacceptable because the source is likely to be driftwood which can pre-date the archaeological context by hundreds of years; or it may be from structural elements of houses, which might be pirated from earlier structures or curated; even small local shrubs like willow have been shown to produce erratic dates compared to samples of terrestrial mammal bone from the same contexts and thus are suspect. The only materials which can be dated with any confidence are terrestrial mammal bone, from species that do not ingest any marine material. Caribou bone is thus considered safe, whereas fox bone would not be, since foxes often scavenge dead seals. Even terrestrial mammal bone, however, must be treated with caution, particularly in a Thule/Inuit context. Thule houses are often frozen, and contain abundant seal fat; a caribou bone deposited in such a context may become contaminated. Also, caribou bone, and particularly antler, is a raw material for Arctic people, and the material itself and artifacts made from it may be curated for generations before being used or discarded. Additionally, organic materials like caribou antler can last on the surface of the ground for a very long time in Arctic regions even before being found and collected. So any artifactual bone must be considered undatable, and even unmodified bone or antler may turn out to be much older than the context in which it is found (see Nelson and McGhee 2002).

Almost all dates claimed for Thule or Inuit sites in Labrador, that are in the archaeological literature or in the Canadian Archaeological Radiocarbon Database, have been run on seal or other sea mammal products, tree wood or charcoal, or unspecified wood or charcoal. All of those dates must simply be disregarded as valueless, in spite of the fact that many of them agree with the archaeologist's notion of what the date should be. There are no Labrador Thule dates on terrestrial mammal bone. There are, however, two dates that, out of desperation, we might consider as indicative of the date of the early Thule presence in Labrador. Unfortunately, again, both are of questionable acceptability, and neither one tells us very much.

One possibly acceptable Thule date in Labrador is from the site of Ikkusik, on Rose Island in Saglek Bay (Buckley and Willis 1972: 129; Morrison 1989:71; Schledermann 1971:35). The dated material was originally reported as being willow (Schledermann 1971: 35), but subsequently elsewhere identified as alder twigs (Morrison 1989: 71). Some dates on willow or other local wood samples from the Arctic produce dates that are far too old, while others are in close agreement with samples run on other materials (McGhee 2009). The confusion over the precise material dated is worrying, and the dating of willow or alder may be suspect in any case. However, the resulting date itself,  $275 \pm 90$ , is certainly not erroneously older than would be expected, and may therefore be acceptable. Unfortunately, however, the date itself, even if acceptable, is not terribly informative. It happens to intersect a particularly nasty segment of the radiocarbon calibration curve (Figure 6), with the result that even one standard deviation gives a wide range of probable dates, from the late 15th century to the present day. However, the assemblage being dated is Classic Thule, and is therefore extremely unlikely to date to anything but the earliest part of the range. At the one sigma level, the most probable range for this date (60% probability) is AD 1475 to 1674 (Figure 6), which might be consistent with a



**Figure 6.** Calibration of carbon date from *Ikksuk*, using the *OxCal* calibration programme, and the *IntCal04* curve.



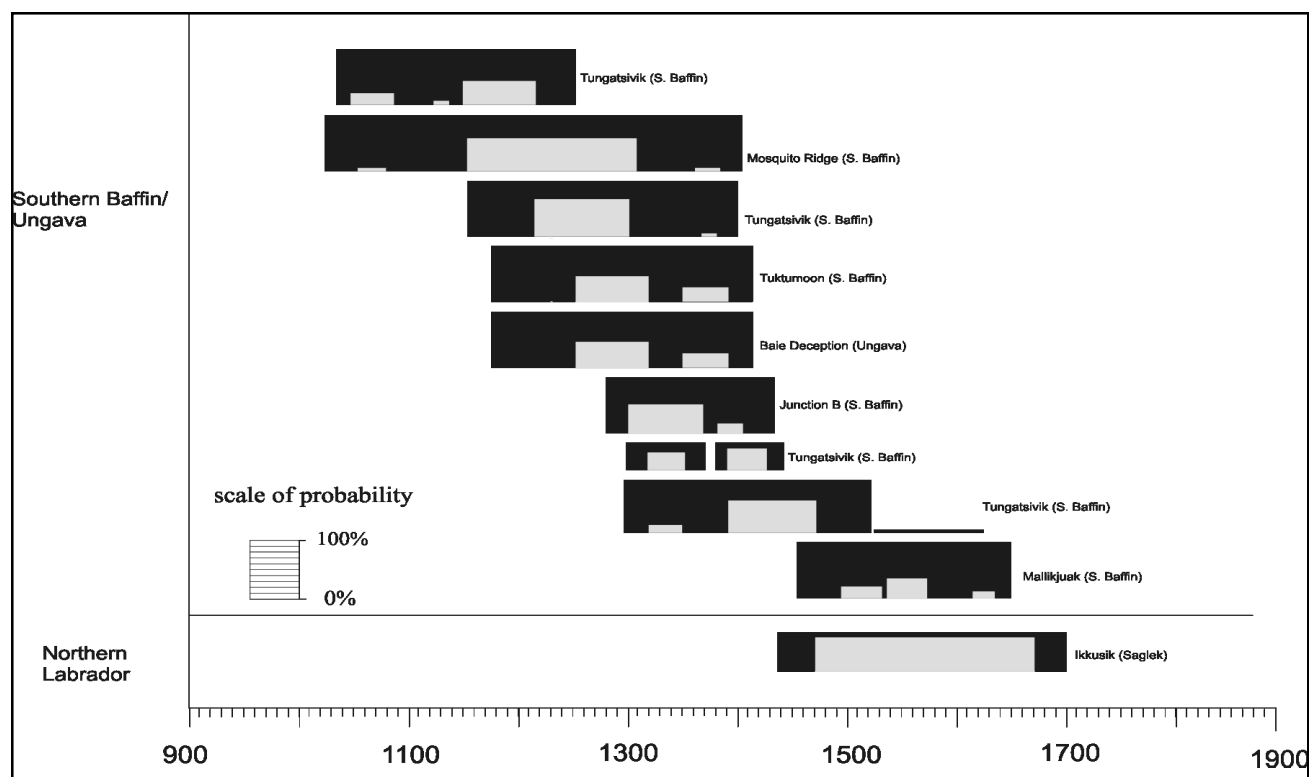
**Figure 7.** Calibration of carbon date from *Nunaingok 1*, using the *OxCal* calibration programme, and the *IntCal04* curve.

late Classic Thule or perhaps ‘modified’ Thule context. Unfortunately, this adds nothing to what can be inferred from the assemblage itself.

A second date we might consider is from the site of *Nunaingok 1*, near the very northern tip of Labrador (Kaplan 1983: 809). The sample dated is preserved moss from a stratified midden between two semi-subterranean houses. The lower layer of the midden contains Paleoeskimo materials, and the upper layer contains historic period Inuit materials. Between them was a layer of baleen containing what are probably Thule artifacts of the pre-contact era. The moss sample was recovered just below the baleen layer, and yielded a date of  $520 \pm 110$  BP (SI-3365). The calibration results for this date are shown in Figure 7. At the 68% probability level the range of possible dates is AD 1296-1466. Since the sample is from *below* the Thule layer, the date tells us only that the Thule occupation at this site, which might well be one of the earliest in Labrador, most probably dates sometime after AD 1296. Once again, this tells us nothing that we did not already know.

To date the arrival of the Thule in Labrador, we are therefore forced to rely on inferences from the consideration of Thule sequences in adjacent regions. Among the pre-contact Thule material that has been recovered in Labrador, there is no known occurrence of Early Thule, as might be indicated

by the occurrence of Sicco or Natchuk type harpoon heads, for example. Furthermore, the few Classic Thule harpoon heads that are known from Labrador all have features that are generally late in the Thule sequence, such as lashing holes rather than slots (P. Whitridge, pers. comm. 2009). This suggests that the Thule colonization of Labrador was not part of the initial Thule migration across the Canadian Arctic, now considered to date to the 13th Century (Friesen and Arnold 2008; McGhee 2000, 2009), but must have occurred some time later, and was probably the result of a movement from an already-settled area. The most logical source for the Thule population of northern Labrador would be



**Figure 8.** Calibrated radiocarbon dates from Thule sites in southern Baffin Island, Ungava and Northern Labrador. Black rectangles represent 95% probability distribution; grey rectangles represent 68.2% probability distribution.

the adjacent region of southern Baffin Island, to which artifactual similarities have been noted, (e.g. Bird 1945; Taylor 1964; Schledermann 1971), or perhaps Ungava.

Figure 8 presents the currently acceptable radiocarbon dates from Thule sites in southern Baffin Island, Ungava and northern Labrador (accepting the Ikkusik date for the time being), indicating the distributions of the 68.2% and 95% probabilities for each sample. The dates are derived from the Canadian Archaeological Radiocarbon Database (URL: <http://www.canadianarchaeology.ca/localc14/c14search.htm>), with reference to McGhee 2009. If we accept that this series of dates is reflective of Thule history in the region, then it appears that Thule people arrived on southern Baffin Island, as represented at the Tungatsivvik site, in the early 13th century, and remained there continuously until the early 16th century.

The Ikkusik date is comparable to the latest Thule dates on southern Baffin, suggesting that the Thule movement into northern Labrador may have occurred at the end of the Thule period, just prior to the transformation of Thule culture into the regional Inuit cultures of the historic period. In support of this is the lack of any artifactual evidence for a Thule presence in Labrador prior to the late 15th century (Whitridge pers. comm. 2009). Given that European whalers and cod fishers were active in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and southern Labrador in the late 15th to early 16th centuries (e.g. De L. Barkham 1980; McGhee 2009; Ramsden 1976), it seems reasonable, in the absence of other compelling arguments, to suggest that the Thule movement onto the Labrador coast was in some measure motivated by the quest to obtain European metal and other items, either by trade or by scavenging from seasonal fishing and whaling stations. Such a scenario may be supported by the Thule occupation associated with the Basque whaling station at Red Bay in southern Labrador (Tuck 1985, pers. comm. 2009). This Thule material is not dated, and it is not clear what its connection might have been to the Basque site; but just on purely historical grounds, the Thule and Basque occupations at Red Bay

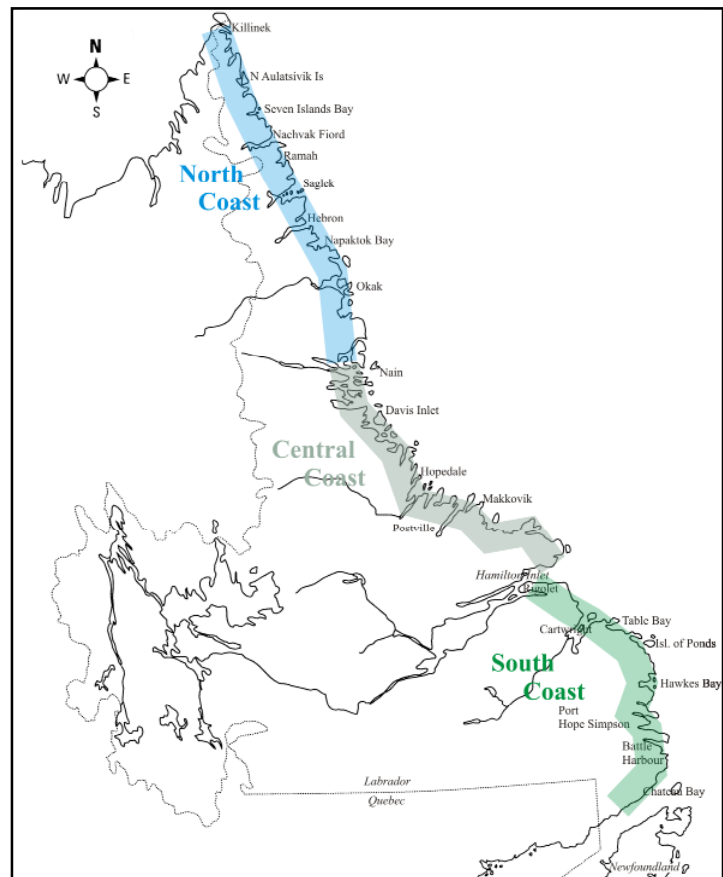


must have occurred very close together in time. This in turn might suggest that the spread of the Thule southward along the Labrador coast was not a gradual expansion through a new territory, but rather a rapid and motivated journey to a new source of desirable tools and raw materials (see Fitzhugh 1972a: 128; McGhee 2009).

## 2. Chronology and Nature of the Southward Expansion

The question of when, why and how the Thule/Inuit moved southward from northern Labrador onto the central and, particularly, southern coasts has been a very contentious one for some decades (see for example Auger 1991a, Brewster 2006, Gosling 1910, Hawkes 1916, Martijn 1990b, Packard 1885, Stopp 2002, Taylor 1980, Trudel 1980). This devolves into two basic questions: first, whether the initial Thule movement southward along the northern and central coast occurred prior to contact with Europeans; and second, whether the Inuit presence in southern Labrador ever constituted what might be termed a permanent settlement or occupation, or consisted only of seasonal visits for the purpose of trade or raiding. For purposes of this discussion, I will consider the coast of Labrador to be arbitrarily divisible into southern, central and northern sections with the hazy boundaries being in the vicinities of Hamilton Inlet and Nain (Figure 9).

**a. The Initial Southward Movement.** Conventional wisdom has it that the Thule arrived in northern Labrador, and then spread along the northern coast of Labrador, from Killinek in the north to at least as far as Hebron (Jordan 1978: 176; Fitzhugh 1980: 601; Jordan and Kaplan 1980: 38), perhaps as far as Okak (Jordan and Kaplan 1980: 38) or Nain (Kaplan 1983: 216), prior to having any contact with Europeans. The first Thule/Inuit occupation of Hamilton Inlet and southward is generally accepted as having been after contact with Europeans (Jordan 1977: 43, 1978: 176; Jordan and Kaplan 1980: 38; Kaplan 1983: 420-426; Woollett 2003), and the same is generally true for the sites in the Hopedale region (Bird 1945; Kaplan 1983; Schledermann 1971). There seems to be no reason to doubt the assertion that the first Inuit to settle in the regions of Hopedale and Hamilton Inlet were already experiencing some form of contact with Europeans, perhaps consisting of forays into southern Labrador to pilfer or scavenge European camps or caches, or to trade (e.g. Jordan and Kaplan 1980: 41). What might bear re-



*Figure 9. Arbitrary divisions of North, Central and South coast of Labrador, with some place names mentioned in the text.*

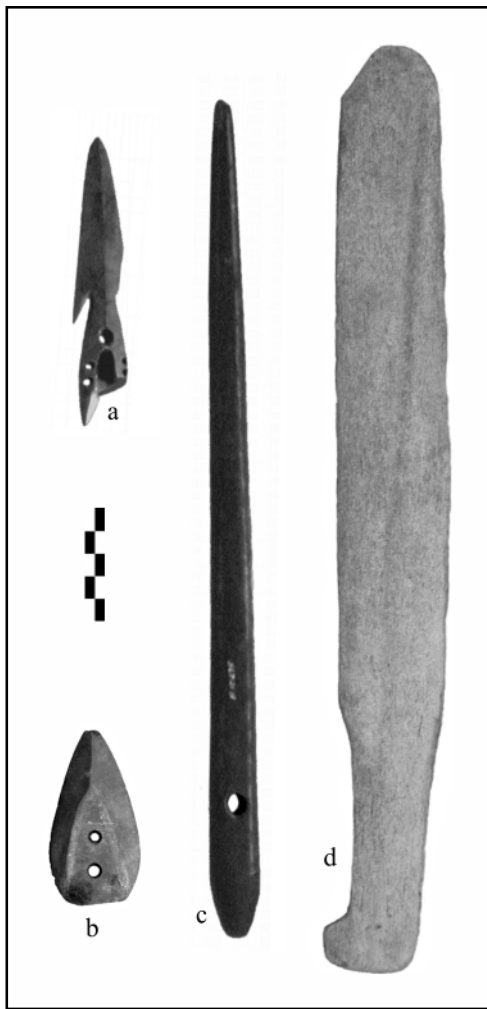
examination, however, is the acceptance of a pre-contact period of Thule/Inuit occupation on the coast north of Hopedale.

Kaplan (1983) and others refer to three sites in the Nain and Okak regions that represent an 'early' period of Thule occupation pre-dating European contact: Iglosiatik 1 in the Nain region, and Green Island 6 and Okak 1 in the Okak region. Iglosiatik 1 contains 15 semi-subterranean sod house ruins representing several occupation phases, as indicated by the disturbance of several houses by the construction of later ones (Kaplan 1983: 462). A series of small, D-shaped houses appear to be the earliest at the site, and resemble early phase Thule houses elsewhere in Labrador. Kaplan (1983) originally interpreted the site as a pre-contact Neo-Eskimo settlement of the 16th to 17th centuries. Particularly intriguing was the presence at the site of some large, rectangular houses elsewhere dated to the contact period, which raised the possibility that these communal structures developed in some cases prior to European contact. However, more recent work has been conducted at the site, both by Kaplan and by Whitridge and Woollett. The most recent excavations (Whitridge and Woollett 2008: 60) recovered iron nails along with a traditional Thule slate end blade, indicating that at least at some point during the site's occupation, the inhabitants were in some form of contact with Europeans, presumably further south on the Labrador coast.

Green Island 6 was investigated by Cox as part of the Okak Archaeological Project of 1974-75 (Cox 1977: 123). Cox reported 10 Inuit semi-subterranean houses clustered in three groups of two, two and six. The houses were square to rectangular with entrance passages, and varied between 3 x 4m and 4 x 6m in size. No artifacts were found in the test pits, but Cox suggested that the lack of preserved faunal material was unusual and might indicate considerable antiquity, possibly a pre-contact date. The site has been recently re-visited by Woollett in 2002, on behalf of Susan Kaplan (Kaplan 2008: 2-3), and by Whitridge and Woollett in 2008 (Whitridge and Woollett 2009: 174). Tests in one house and the almost complete excavation of another, the largest house at the site, produced some slate flakes, some ground slate knife blades and triangular end blades of typical Thule form, and a soapstone fragment. No European material of any kind was recovered. On that basis, Cox's original suggestion that Green Island 6 might be a pre-contact site appears safe, supporting the suggestion that Thule people did in fact settle at least as far south as Okak prior to European contact. There are, however, theoretical reasons for some caution, which will be considered below.

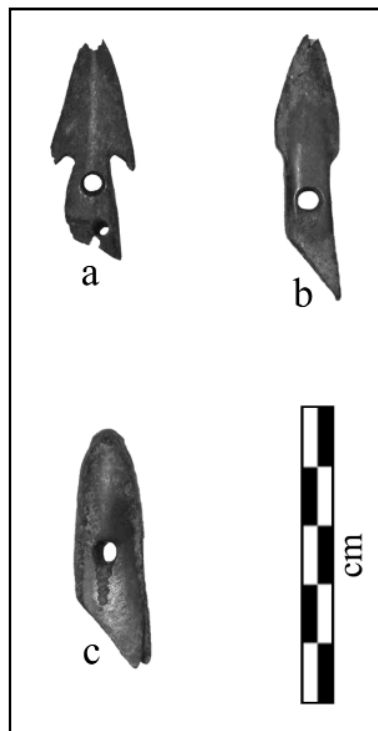
Moving further north, into the area of undisputed pre-contact Thule occupation, the following sites were listed by Kaplan (1983: 216-218) as providing archaeological evidence of such occupation: Johannes Point 1 and Hebron 1, in the Hebron area; Ikkusik and Shuldham Is. 9, in Saglek Fiord; Nachvak Village in Nachvak Fiord; Komaktorvik 1 and Big Head 1 in Seven Islands Bay; and Staffe Island 1, Nunaingok 1 and Akulialuk 1 in the area of McLellan Strait. For some of these, there was very little information in 1983, and little or no additional information has come to light since. In these cases, the possibility of a pre-contact Thule occupation is best left aside for the time being. Sites that are more informative are discussed briefly below.

Johannes Point 1 contains 14 visible sod houses, and some other probable houses, middens, tent rings and graves. Here also, several periods of occupation appear to be represented, from Thule to 19th century. The earliest occupation is considered to be the deeper layers of a midden deposit in front of House 12 (Kaplan 1983: 592), which produced Thule slate, nephrite and soapstone artifacts and no European material. The excavation of House 12 itself produced similar Thule ground stone artifacts, as well as a blue glass bead (Kaplan 1983: 584). So while there may well be a pre-contact Thule occupation here, it seems possible that European material began to be acquired by those Thule people while they still lived here.



**Figure 10.** Early period artifacts from Ikkusik, Saglek Fiord. a: Thule type 2 harpoon head; b: slate blade for lance, knife or whaling harpoon; c: harpoon foreshaft; d: whale bone snow knife. a and c, photo courtesy of Jim Tuck; b and d, from the Collection of The Rooms Provincial Museum, photo by P. Ramsden..

The site of Ikkusik in Saglek Fiord might be considered the cornerstone of Labrador Thule studies, since it stood for a long time as the principal, or only, site with evidence of a pre-European Thule occupation. While working on large communal sod houses at the site, Schledermann (1971: 34) noticed several faint depressions with low sod walls, which he then tested. They turned out to be small, one-roomed or multi-roomed houses of variable outline, with entrance passages. The artifacts found in them were typical of the later Classic Thule culture of the eastern Arctic (Figure 10). Based on the available evidence and the accepted wisdom of the day, Schledermann (1971: 67) estimated the Thule occupation at Ikkusik to have occurred around A.D. 1500. For whatever combination of reasons, it is an estimate that has weathered fairly well (see previous section, 1), and is probably reasonably accurate. Schledermann speculated that European trade goods had in fact reached Saglek Bay during this early phase Thule occupation; in support of this he noted that Thule occupations south of Saglek (that were then known) had European material, and he seems to be arguing that this access to European goods may have been established before the Thule actually moved south (1971: 68).



Nachvak Village is a large settlement of sod house ruins, middens, caches and burial cairns deep within Nachvak Fiord. The number of sod house ruins is variously estimated between 13 and 17 (Kaplan 1983:678; Swinarton 2008: 36; Whitridge 2004: 14), and the 'real' number is probably difficult to estimate with accuracy due to house re-building and vegetation. The Torngat Archaeological Project tested several houses and a midden, recovering typical Thule material as well as one piece of iron of uncertain origin on the paved floor of House 1 (Kaplan 1983: 678). Whitridge has recently undertaken more extensive excavations at the site, and has almost completely excavated a number of houses and sampled middens (Whitridge 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007). His excavations have likewise recovered a large assemblage of Thule material (Figure 11), probably dating to the late part of the 'Classic' Thule period, that is consistent with a pre-contact Thule occupation (Whitridge 2004: 14, 2005: 16). In addition, however, most of the houses that Whitridge has tested or excavated have also produced

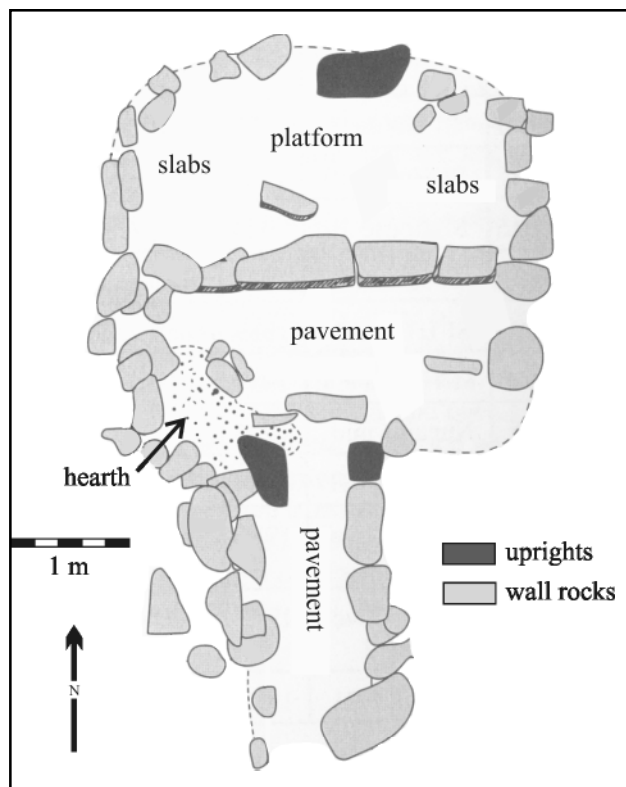
**Figure 11.** Three miniature Thule harpoon heads from House 2 at Nachvak Village. Photo courtesy P. Whitridge.

small quantities of European material, including blue glass beads, bottle glass and iron fragments, mostly nails. The site is estimated on the basis of the styles of the Thule implements and the types of European materials to date between A.D. 1500 and 1700 (Swinarton 2008: 36). Certainly, the harpoon heads would be consistent with a date after the late 15th century, and historic documentation suggests that the site had been abandoned in favour of another location in the fiord before the late 18th century (Kaplan 1983: 703). Whitridge (2005: 16) identifies the site as a “predominantly pre-contact Thule” occupation that continued long enough to experience the influx of European material. This presumably is the situation that Schledermann had imagined on the basis of his Ikkusik experience.

Komaktorvik 1 is located about one-third of the way up Komaktorvik Fiord, on the south side of Seven Islands Bay (Kaplan 1983: Figure 160). It contains numerous sod houses and tent rings relating to Dorset, Thule and later Inuit occupations (Kaplan 1983: 708). Most of the houses tested by the Torngat Archaeological Project (Kaplan 1983) appear to be 18th to 19th century Inuit structures. However, one of the houses, House 7, relates to a Thule occupation, and the same may be true of House 12, which was not tested. House 7 is a small oval structure, measuring 4m by 5m, constructed of sod, stone, wood and whale bone (Kaplan 1983: 732). It appears to have originally been a late Dorset structure that was re-excavated and occupied by Thule people. The Thule assemblage consists of a variety of ground slate blades for harpoons, knives, lances and ulus. Also recovered alongside the Thule artifacts was a fragment of iron. Neither its origin nor its function was identifiable, but it is not meteoric (Kaplan 1983: 739), and is therefore of European origin (possibly including Norse). The situation here seems similar to Nachvak Village, in which small amounts of European material occur within an otherwise pre-contact Thule assemblage.

Staffe Island 1 is located just south of McLellan Strait, near the northern tip of mainland Labrador

(Fitzhugh 1994: Figure 2; Kaplan 1983: Figure 184). The site consists of two or three clusters of semi-subterranean sod houses totalling about 15 in number, as well as tent rings and caches. Some of the houses are of Dorset origin, others are Thule. In addition to the testing of several houses by the Torngat Archaeological Project (Kaplan 1983), one Thule house (Figure 12) was excavated entirely by Fitzhugh in 1989 (Fitzhugh 1994). The Thule assemblage from House 10, as in the case of the other houses tested, was dominated by ground stone artifacts, primarily blades for harpoons and knives (Fitzhugh 1994: 251) that are consistent with a pre-contact Thule date, and no European material was found in association with it. Of particular interest is the fact that the ground stone artifacts are made from varieties of stone that are exotic to Labrador, and probably of a northern origin (Fitzhugh 1994: 250; Kaplan 1983: 796-797), in contrast to the materials used at Thule sites even slightly further south, at Nachvak and Seven Islands Bay, which are of local origin. The clear implication is that the Thule inhabitants of Staffe Island 1 were only recently arrived in northern Labrador, and had



**Figure 12.** Plan of House 10 at Staffe Island 1. After Fitzhugh 1994: Figure 7.

brought their ground stone tools with them from the eastern Arctic. At a slightly later time, perhaps only a few years, by the time they had established settlements just to the south, the Thule people had learned the local Torngat sources of raw material, and had begun to use them (Kaplan 1983: 797). The likelihood is, then, that the Thule people at Staffe Island 1 were among the very first Thule arrivals in Labrador. Carbon dates were run on two samples from House 10 (Fitzhugh 1994: 253), but since they were charred conifer wood they are likely to be from driftwood, either collected locally or even brought from the eastern Arctic. In either case, they are almost certainly older than the Thule occupation of House 10, and therefore of no value in estimating the date of that occupation. The dates from Staffe Island 1 are discussed further below, under Dorset-Thule contact. The significance of Staffe Island 1 is that it presents a glimpse of the first Thule migrants, the people who actually moved from the eastern Arctic to begin the Thule/Inuit occupation of Labrador.

The site of Nunaingok is located near the very tip of Labrador, on the south side of McLelan Strait. There is a Thule occupation there, although it is visible only in a thin layer of baleen between Paleo-Eskimo and historic Inuit layers (Kaplan 1983: 808-816). The artifact assemblage includes fragments of ground stone, ground stone harpoon and knife blades, soapstone sherds, whale bone fore-shaft fragments, knife handles, a bone sled runner and a harpoon finger rest. As was the case at Staffe Island 1, the slates used were not local, and may have been brought from the eastern Arctic when the first Thule people migrated to the northern tip of Labrador. One of the Thule artifacts, a fragment of a lance head, bears traces of having had a metal blade. It is unfortunate that it is not clear just where in the site this artifact comes from, because it might indicate that the Thule immigrants to Labrador also brought European metal with them.

These sites are evidence of a small, late 15th- to early 16th-century Thule population occupying the northern Labrador coast, between Hebron and Killinek. The two most northerly sites, Staffe Island 1 and Nunaingok, are likely also to be the earliest ones, since they contain slate that is exotic to Labrador, and is probably a remnant of artifacts or raw material that these very first Thule migrants brought with them from the eastern Arctic, before they became familiar with local sources. The other sites, south of the region of McLelan Strait, have predominantly local lithic materials, and therefore probably represent a slightly later phase of occupation, although the uniformity of artifact styles suggests that the time difference was not great, perhaps on the order of a decade or two. Along with the thinness of the deposits on these northern sites, this might suggest that the first Thule arrivals in northern Labrador did not stay put in one place very long, but headed south very rapidly, learning the landscape as they went. No doubt they were aided in this by the obvious remnants of Late Dorset settlements, which would guide them in assessing resource availability (Kaplan 1985: 50).

An obvious question to ask is why new immigrants to an unfamiliar region would travel through it so rapidly, and a plausible answer to this is found in the timing of the migration, and the contents of the northern Labrador Thule assemblages. As indicated above, the Thule migration to northern Labrador appears to have occurred in the late 15th century or perhaps a bit later, and its origin seems to have been southern Baffin Island. The evidence from southern Baffin is that the Thule people there were in some kind of contact, either direct or indirect, with the Norse settlements in Greenland, from the 13th century arrival of the Thule in the eastern Arctic until the collapse of the Greenland colonies in the mid to late 15th century (e.g. McGhee 2009; Sabo and Sabo 1978). The collapse of those colonies would mean that Norse iron and other materials would begin to become progressively scarcer, and progressively more restricted in distribution. Inuit in Greenland and the Canadian high Arctic would still have access to the abandoned settlements, but those who lived farther away might find themselves deprived of a source of iron. In that situation, it would be reasonable for them to search around for an alternate supply, as Jordan (1978: 181) has suggested. It may or may not be coincidence, but this was the time

when western European whalers and cod fishers began to frequent the western north Atlantic, and to make visits to the coasts of Labrador. One chance encounter, or the report of one chance encounter, with Europeans who were visiting southern Labrador might very well have been sufficient to compel a group of Baffin Island Thule to pick up and move south, in hopes of being the first to exploit the newly discovered source of iron.

Support for this is found in the fact that most of the early north coast Thule sites have in fact produced fragments of European metal. Staffe Island 1 and Ikkusik have not, as yet. And the context of the iron in some other cases is ambiguous. But at Nachvak Village, for example, the Thule occupants had access to iron nails and glass, at least during the later phases of the site's occupation. Johannes Point 1 produced a blue glass bead in the house excavation, although the midden deposits produced no European material. Most tantalizing is Komaktorvik 1, where the excavation of what appears to be a very early Thule house produced a small collection of typical Thule objects, and a small, unidentifiable scrap of iron. The iron was not meteoric, and therefore almost certainly of European origin. It is entirely speculative, but the fact that it was a single, small scrap which could not be identified either to function or source raises a small possibility that it may have been Norse iron, obtained in trade before the Thule left Baffin Island, and carefully curated for many years as it was used up bit by bit.

There is also a question of why, if these first Thule explorers were in Labrador for the purpose of trade with Europeans, there are sites that do not have European material on them. There are two factors to consider in connection with that, one purely technical, and the other more related to economic processes. No doubt initially the access these Thule people had to European goods was via forays to southern Labrador to raid or scavenge European camps or caches, as the historical records suggest they did periodically in the 17th century. In that case, the quantities of material being recovered would probably have been comparatively small. And since these newly acquired articles and materials were scarce, and had been acquired at great investment of time and energy, it is highly likely that they would have been conserved, curated and protected with great care, and not casually discarded. The quantity of European material being discarded on an early 16th century Thule site in northern Labrador would thus be very small, and probably the result of accidental loss. In a settlement of two or three houses occupied for five years, this might be one or two fragments, or none. In other words, the probability of finding such evidence is very small, even if a site is completely excavated. If the investigation is limited to a few test pits, as has often been the case, the probability becomes close to zero.

But there is a more substantive reason why settlements that had access to European goods might not leave any evidence of that fact. As a result of the linear arrangement of Inuit settlements along the Labrador coast, and the situation of European whaling and fishing stations at one end of them, the access to European goods on the coast of Labrador took the form of a 'down-the-line' sort of exchange network, in which the most southerly settlements made the trips to procure the desired items, and then passed them by trade to the communities to the north of them, who in turn traded some of them to communities further north, and so on (see Kaplan 1985). In this kind of system, the real value of European goods, for those close to the source, would be not so much their inherent worth, although that might be considerable, but their value as trade commodities - what could be bought with them. For the communities that are 'down the line', who have no further communities to pass the items on to, their value is strictly utilitarian. This type of system leaves a somewhat counter-intuitive archaeological fingerprint, in which the settlements closest to the source have few or no trade goods, while those at the distant end of the chain have more (e.g. Townsend 1978). It means that communities that are in contact with Europeans might have no European material on them, while those that are more distant, and have never seen a European, may have a considerable amount. This might explain, for

example, why early phase Thule sites such as Ikkusik in Saglek Fiord, or Green Island 6 in Okak Bay, that have been extensively excavated, produced no European material. If they were at the southerly limit of Thule settlement at that time, then they may have been procuring and passing-on European material rather than discarding it in houses and middens. To suggest that those communities in closest contact with Europeans would have no European goods while those further away would have them, is admittedly what those in politics might term a 'courageous' position to take. But we know that this is in fact the case in similar situations where there is also ethnographic documentation. Perhaps the most important point to take from that is that the presence or amounts of European trade goods cannot be used as an indication of the presence or intensity of contact with Europeans.

To summarize this discussion, I have suggested that Thule people first moved to Northern Labrador in the late 15th to early 16th century from southern Baffin Island. They made this move as a result of a decrease in their access to European metal and other items following the collapse of the Norse colonies in Greenland, and the coincidental beginning of the availability of such items on the southern coast of Labrador. Their move southward along the north coast was rapid, and they established settlements at several localities along the coast. From one or more of these settlements, they made seasonal trips to southern Labrador to obtain European items, either by directly trading with European fishers and whalers, or by scavenging the camps and caches that they left behind each year.

Over the course of the 16th century, the number of Europeans visiting the south coast increased, as did the frequency, distribution and duration of their visits. As more Thule people moved to Labrador to avail themselves of the new economic possibilities, competition for prime positions in the trading network no doubt became more intense. This in turn prompted further southward movement of some communities, so as to be in the forefront of the activity. There may in fact have been a leapfrogging kind of process as communities vied for the most southerly location, and thus the highest rate of access. This would not have been without risk, as rushing southward along the coast might well have entailed encroaching on the territory of Amerindians already living there, and proximity to the European camps no doubt brought its own dangers.

But the archaeological evidence seems quite clear that Thule visits to European outposts in southern Labrador were common in the 16th century, as indicated, for example, by Thule material at the Basque whaling station at Red Bay (J. Tuck 1985, pers. comm. 2009). And during the 16th and 17th centuries, winter settlements were established further and further south, at Okak, Nain, Hopedale, and eventually at Hamilton Inlet. Each step involved the establishment of a southern 'front', from which trips were made further south to obtain European goods. There is ample evidence of continued visits to the Basque stations at Red Bay in the form of fragments of Basque roofing tiles and other probable Basque items found on northern sites (Kaplan 1985: 56), and perhaps in the fragment of late Woodland pottery found at Avertok: Late Woodland pottery has also been recovered from Red Bay (Tuck 1985: 233). By the time the 'front' of Inuit settlement had reached as far south as Eskimo Island in Hamilton Inlet, the intensity, geographic breadth and frequency of contact with Europeans had increased to the point where no community was without direct access to the Europeans on the south coast, and the archaeological evidence of trade with them is abundant on all sites from that time onward. At that point, if there was competition or rivalry between Inuit communities for access to, or control of access to, Europeans, it would have to have taken on new forms other than simply being at the front of the line.

**b. The Inuit Presence in Southern Labrador.** Stopp has very comprehensively summarized the arguments surrounding the timing and nature of the Thule/Inuit presence on the coast of Labrador south

of Hamilton Inlet (Stopp 2002). We can take advantage of her work to summarize the issue even more succinctly here. There are a few things that can be added, as well as some more recent information.

The issue essentially is whether the Inuit ever had settlements south of Hamilton Inlet, or whether they visited southern Labrador only seasonally for the limited purpose of meeting and trading with European fishermen, or perhaps of stealing from them or pilfering their camps (Stopp 2002: 72). The question was debated as long ago as 1885 in an article by the entomologist and paleontologist A. S. Packard, who presented the documentary evidence that the Inuit had once been very numerous in southern Labrador and the Gulf of St. Lawrence (Packard 1885). The early opposing view was presented by Gosling in his 1910 history of Labrador, in which he claimed that the Inuit were not present at all in the Strait of Belle Isle region before the appearance of Europeans, and after that only on a seasonal basis for the sole purpose of trade (Gosling 1910).

The more modern debate of the issue tended until fairly recently to favour the view presented by Gosling. Perhaps the most formative figure in this was J. Garth Taylor, who used Moravian archives and archaeological field survey to examine certain facets of the 18th century Labrador Inuit (Taylor 1974). In 1974 he indicated that there was insufficient evidence to judge whether Inuit who were encountered in southern Labrador in the 17th century were permanent residents, or simply seasonal visitors. In the 18th century, however, he noted that while very few Inuit wintered south of Hamilton Inlet, there were a few families who resided in Table Bay (1974: 6-7). With regard to the possibility of a pre-European Inuit presence in southern Labrador, Taylor stated in 1980 that there was little evidence for any Inuit activity in southern Labrador prior to European contact (Taylor 1980: 193). This view seemed to be echoed by most archaeologists of the time as typified by Jordan, who pointed to a lack of Thule or Inuit winter houses in the Strait of Belle Isle as evidence that the Inuit ventured south of Hamilton Inlet only in the summer (Jordan 1977: 43, 1978: 176).

In her reconsideration of the problem, Stopp noted that the documentary evidence suggested an Inuit presence in southern Labrador from the mid 17th century that was comparable to that in northern Labrador (Stopp 2002), a year-round, multi-activity use of the area rather than seasonal, special purpose visits. And the archaeological evidence, while not plentiful, also indicated year-round occupation. In Stopp's opinion, the combination of archival and archaeological evidence made "a good case" for year-round Inuit residence in southern Labrador and along the Quebec North Shore from the



**Figure 13.** Excavated 17th century Inuit sod house at Snack Cove 3.

mid 1500s to the mid 1700s (Stopp 2002: 96). Although this is somewhat at odds with Auger's conclusion that there is no archaeological evidence for Inuit settlement in the Strait of Belle Isle prior to the 1700s, his excavation of a sod house at Chateau Bay does provide evidence of Inuit winter residence in the 1760s (Auger 1991).

As Stopp's article was being published, new information was beginning to come to light at Snack Cove, near Sandwich Bay (Brewster 2006; Rankin 2004, 2006, 2007). Excavations of Inuit sod houses at Snack Cove 3 (Fig-



ure 13) and a nearby tent ring at Snack Cove 1 provide evidence of multi-season occupation during the mid 17th century (Brewster 2006, 2008). Occupation of the tent sites in summer and of the sod houses in the fall is indicated by faunal analyses, while winter occupation of the sod houses can be inferred from the presence of cold trap entrance passages (Brewster 2006: 33-34). European items at both sites, found along with traditional Inuit artifacts, are items that might have been scavenged from abandoned or unattended European camp sites, and are not present in anything like the same variety or abundance as they are in 18th century sites in Labrador (Brewster 2006: 32).

The Snack Cove sites, and other survey data from the same Porcupine Strand Archaeology Project, indicate a year-round mid 17th century occupation by Inuit who had access to European camps or caches, and were incorporating some European items, often modified, into their traditional material culture. This is an occupation comparable to that at Eskimo Island 3 in Hamilton Inlet, which has long served as the exemplar of early contact Inuit settlement (e.g. Jordan 1978; Jordan and Kaplan 1980). It thus seems that emerging archaeological data support the notion advanced by Stopp, and others, that the Inuit presence in southern Labrador may be comparable in nature to that further north, and that Hamilton Inlet was not the southern boundary of Inuit settlement. In fact it is entirely possible that it was not in Hamilton Inlet where the establishment of 'front-of-the-line' settlements stopped, but somewhere further south.

### 3. Dorset-Thule Contact

The question of the possible relationship between the Thule immigrants and the Dorset people who had occupied the Canadian Arctic before them has been pondered and debated for decades (e.g. Bielawski 1979; Collins 1937, 1957; Fitzhugh 1967, 1994; Hood 1998; Maxwell 1985; McGhee 1997; Park 1993, 2000; Taylor 1959). The two essential possibilities are: that the Dorset people had already become extinct or left the area before the Thule moved in; or, that the Dorset were still there, and were in some way encountered by the Thule. The latter case potentially involves a variety of intriguing scenarios: the Dorset people moved to avoid the Thule, surviving in so-called 'refugia'; they were annihilated by the Thule; they were adopted or absorbed by the Thule; or there was some combination of these processes. The lack of evidence for any contact between the two groups made it seem most likely for a long time that the Dorset simply had vanished from the Arctic before the Thule people arrived, and indeed it seemed plausible that it was their disappearance that encouraged the eastward migration of the Thule in the first place.

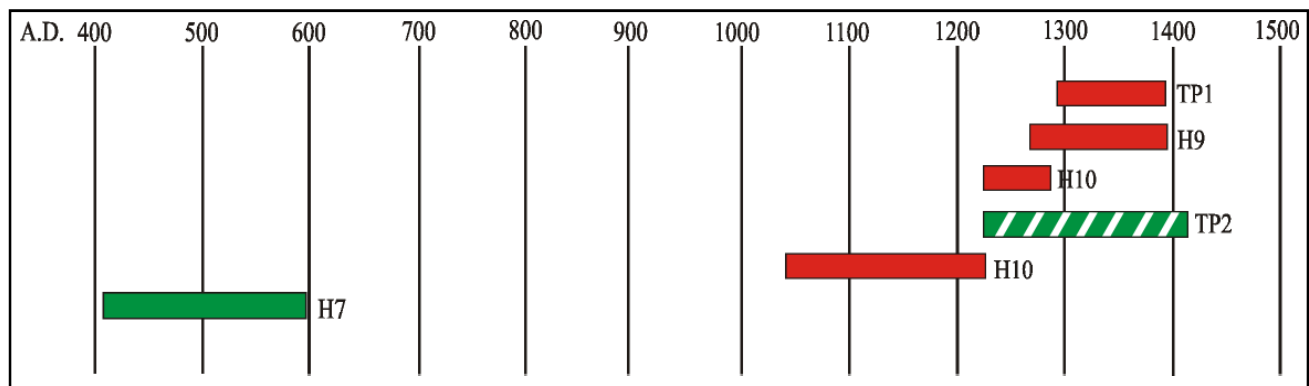
The question began to take on more interest, however, with the accumulation of what seemed to be anomalously 'late' radiocarbon dates on Late Dorset sites, particularly in the eastern part of the Arctic, that raised the real possibility that Dorset people had still been there when the Thule began their eastward movement. With that, the whole question seemed poised to become one of not *if* the Thule and Dorset people encountered one another, but rather of where, when and, most interestingly, how they encountered one another. But then the whole issue of radiocarbon dating, particularly in Arctic contexts, began to come under much closer scrutiny, with the result that claims for Dorset-Thule contemporaneity, and even more so of contact, once again had to be viewed with great caution, if not scepticism.

Claims have been made that late Dorset people were still inhabiting northern Labrador when the Thule people arrived there, and that the Dorset presence may account for the relatively late movement of Thule people into Labrador (e.g. Kaplan 1983: 219). The claims were based in part on radiocarbon dates, which seemed to show a late Dorset survival in the areas of Ungava and Labrador until A.D. 1350, or even as late as A.D. 1500 (Fitzhugh 1994: 241). Even though the Thule were acknowl-

edge to have arrived in Labrador later than in other parts of their territory, and even though the ‘late’ Dorset dates were considered surprising, Fitzhugh in 1994 still asserted that “...Dorset-Thule contacts must have been a factor in local Dorset-Thule succession” in Labrador, and that “...these cultures shared regions of northern Labrador for several hundred years before the Dorset culture disappeared archaeologically” (Fitzhugh 1994: 259). These statements were made in an article presenting data from Staffe Island 1, a site in extreme northern Labrador that according to Fitzhugh was investigated because it promised to yield information that would shed light on the possibility of Dorset-Thule contact. In that context it is worth considering some of the data from that site.

Staffe Island 1 contains at least 15 semi-subterranean house structures, as well as tent rings and caches (Kaplan 1983: 789-795). The Torngat Archaeological Project tested several structures in 1977-78, and in 1989 Fitzhugh excavated a Thule house (House 10) and tested a stratified midden (Fitzhugh 1994: 247). The site had been occupied extensively by Late Dorset and Thule people, and both Dorset and Thule artifacts were encountered in the houses tested. Although there were two types of houses, a small shallow form lacking entrance passage and a larger, deeper form with entrance passage, it was not readily apparent whether the smaller houses had been originally constructed by the Dorset and later re-used by the Thule, or whether the mixed assemblages in all the houses resulted from “contact and acculturation” (Fitzhugh 1994: 240). The excavation of House 10 in 1989 revealed a thin Thule deposit, which may have contained a very few Dorset items (although this is a bit unclear), above the floor of the house, and an intact Dorset deposit underlying the floor paving stones. The source of any Dorset items that may have been in the Thule layer was almost certainly a Dorset midden disturbed by the excavation of the house (Fitzhugh 1994: 249) or the Dorset deposit underlying the house, or both. The tests in the midden revealed an upper Thule layer and a clearly distinct lower Dorset layer, that in one test were separated by a sterile layer of peat 1cm thick (Fitzhugh 1994: 248).

Of most interest here is the series of carbon dates from the site, on samples from both Dorset and Thule deposits (Figure 14). All of the samples were run on conifer wood or conifer charcoal, except for the sample from one of the midden test pits (TP2), which was unidentified wood. Fitzhugh (1994: 248) specifically cites the Thule date from midden test pit 1 (TP1) and the Dorset date from midden test pit 2 (TP2) as indicating the closeness in time of the Dorset and Thule occupations of the site. It must be noted, however, that the TP2 sample is contaminated by blubber (Fitzhugh 1994: 253), and thus cannot be considered a usable date. Without that date, there is really no evidence of chronological overlap at all. This is even without considering the fact that in all likelihood all the samples are driftwood, and therefore probably don’t date the occupation of the site by either group.



**Figure 14.** Calibrated ranges of carbon dates from Staffe Island 1. Dorset dates are green, Thule dates in red. The Dorset sample from TP2 is contaminated by blubber (Fitzhugh 1994: 253), and is therefore not usable. Dates were taken from Fitzhugh 1994 Table 3, and calibrated using the OxCal calibration programme.

Robert Park has addressed the issue of Dorset-Thule contact repeatedly, and in one paper with particular reference to Labrador (Park 2000). He observes that several authors have noted a hiatus in the Dorset occupation of Labrador, and the regions adjacent to it, after about A.D. 800. In Newfoundland this was not a hiatus, but a final end to the Dorset occupation on that island. In other regions, including Labrador, however, radiocarbon dates have been assigned to very late Dorset occupations, and have been interpreted as indicating a late Dorset re-occupation of those regions from elsewhere (Park 2000: 200). Park argues that these dates actually relate to sporadic Thule re-occupations of abandoned late Dorset sites, on which the Dorset occupations date from several centuries earlier. In many cases this may go unrecognized, since organic preservation on many Labrador sites is very poor, except for charcoal, and Thule assemblages do not generally have a large lithic component. Moreover, with the exception of winter houses, Thule sites often produce very little material of any sort. So Park's point is that a Thule re-occupation, or other use, of a Dorset house might leave very little evidence that is recognizable except charcoal, which the excavator of the Dorset house might well collect and use to date the Dorset occupation.

There is also the question of just when the Thule actually arrived in Labrador, and as has already been discussed, this was probably later than many people have generally accepted - most probably not until the late 15th or early 16th century. This means that even if one were to accept the very late Dorset dates, they are probably still too early to intercept the Thule migration. In fact, the most recent attempt to argue for a late Dorset-early Thule co-existence (Friesen 2004) has relied on recently run Dorset dates extending up to the end of the 12th century. In that article, Friesen confidently asserted that these dates overlapped the Thule occupation in the same region by a couple of centuries. Ironically, perhaps, the same author has more recently gone on to present a revised view of Early Thule radiocarbon dates which indicates that in fact the Thule occupation of the Canadian Arctic did not begin until the 13th century (Friesen and Arnold 2008).

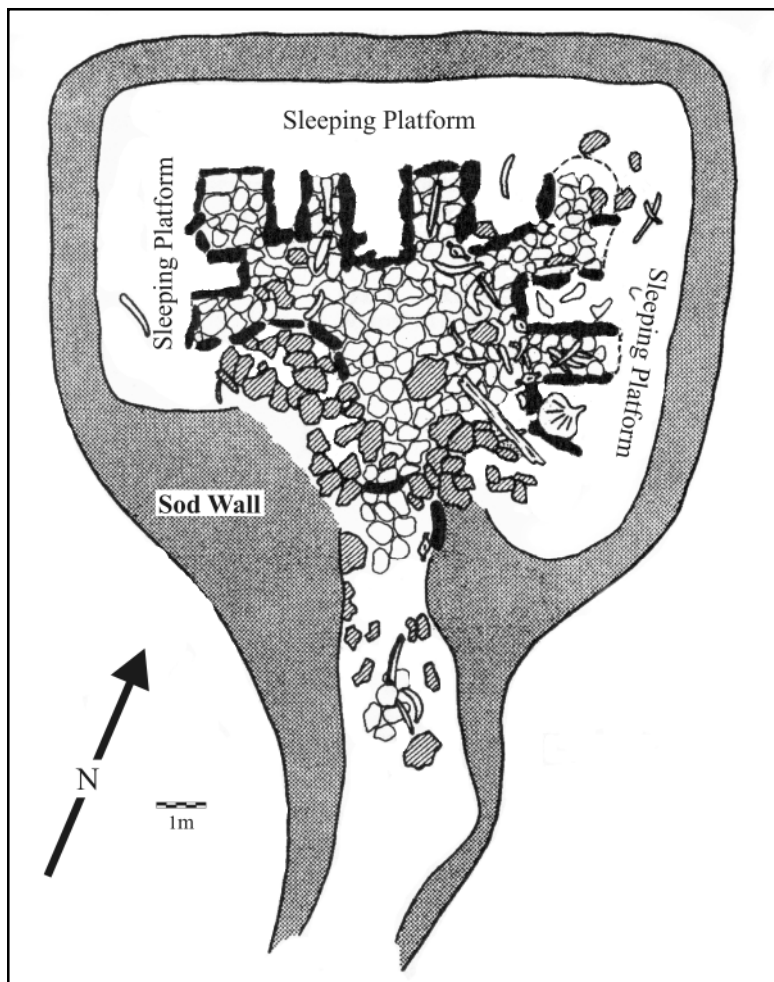
What all of this boils down to is that suggestions of Dorset-Thule contemporaneity in northern Labrador have been based on erroneous interpretations of the lateness of the Dorset occupation on the one hand, and the earliness of the Thule occupation on the other. The fact of the matter is that because of the problems inherent in carbon-dating sites in this region, and particularly at that time level, we simply don't have a very solid foundation for dating the end of Dorset or the beginning of Thule in northern Labrador. Circumstantial dating evidence, outlined above in discussing the timing of the Thule arrival, makes it seem likely that the Thule first got to northern Labrador a few decades either side of A.D. 1500. While it is possible that there were still Dorset people there at the time, there is no archaeological evidence that there were, and comparable circumstantial dating evidence makes it seem fairly unlikely.

Other arguments besides dating have been advanced as evidence of Late Dorset-Thule contact, including some similarities in housing styles, the possibility that the idea of the snow house may have diffused from one group to the other, the supposed echoing of Dorset harpoon head styles in later Inuit styles, etc. Suffice it to say that none of these things requires Dorset-Thule interaction in order to be understandable. The idea of building structures from snow blocks might very well occur independently to two groups of people in an Arctic environment. And it is not necessary even to co-exist with another group of people in order to copy elements of their material culture, particularly if one is re-using their abandoned settlements, as the Thule seem consistently to have done. It is possible that Dorset and Thule people co-existed, and were aware of each other, in some restricted regions of the Arctic, but on the evidence it is unlikely that Labrador / Ungava / southern Baffin was one of those regions (Park 2000).

Furthermore, the virtual lack of evidence for Dorset-Thule face-to-face contact is difficult to explain if such contact actually occurred. At best, it might point to mutual avoidance between the two groups where they may have co-existed. In fact, some have argued that the continued presence of Dorset populations on the northern coast of Labrador is precisely the reason why Thule people did not move there until very late in the Thule period (e.g. Fitzhugh 1980: 601). Curiously however, they appear to have waited until just about the time that the Norse settlements in Greenland were abandoned and that coincidentally other Europeans began to visit the Strait of Belle Isle (see McGhee 2009); the presence or absence of Dorset people appears to have had little to do with it. It seems that the most cogent interpretation of the evidence in this case is one that involves a reason for the Thule to move to Labrador when they did (i.e. access to European goods), rather than a reason for them not to before that (i.e. the presence of Dorset populations).

#### 4. The Adoption of Communal Houses

One of the most enduring issues in Labrador Inuit archaeology is that of the reasons for the adoption in the late 17th century of large, rectangular communal houses. Large communal houses in Greenland were discussed from the early 20th century on (e.g. Holtved 1944, Mathiasen 1934, Steensby



**Figure 15.** Plan of communal house (House C) at Ikkusik, Saglek Fiord. After Schledermann 1976.

1910), and in Labrador were described in detail by Bird at Hopedale (Bird 1945). But the issue of the reasons for the development of such structures among the Labrador Inuit was probably brought to prominence by Schledermann (1971), with his definition of a 'Communal House Phase' based on excavations of Thule sites in Saglek Fiord.

Bird (1945: 179) suggested that the large communal houses had replaced smaller one- or two-roomed structures in the Hopedale area in the latter half of the 18th century, partly as a result of the availability of larger roofing timbers, and partly as a defense measure against the increasing presence of Europeans on the Labrador coast. Although Fitzhugh noted the existence of large, rectangular sod houses on Inuit sites in the Narrows of Hamilton Inlet during his surveys there in the late 1960s (Fitzhugh 1972), it was Schledermann who advanced a cultural/ecological model for the adoption of communal houses (Schledermann 1971).

Schledermann documented a development from the small, rounded, single platform houses of the early Thule phase in Saglek Fiord, to the larger, rectangular houses of the Communal House Phase with multiple sleeping platforms and several lamp stands (Figure 15), that had probably accommodated several families totalling as many as 40 people (Schledermann 1976: 27). In his 1971 monograph and again more forcefully, if less eloquently, in a 1976 paper, Schledermann argued that the development of the communal houses had been a response to a period of deteriorating climate. The European material associated with the communal houses at Saglek indicated a period of occupation in the mid to late 18th century, and he noted, first, that this was within the Neo-Boreal cold period of A.D. 1550-1850 (Schledermann 1971: 111), and second, that the period from 1600 to 1730 was a period of prolonged, particularly cold weather. He suggested that this prolonged intense cold created conditions of increased and longer ice cover, as a result of which whales would no longer be accessible to hunters in near-shore leads. With a decrease in the reliability of whales as a prey species, Schledermann argued, the Inuit would have come to rely more heavily on various species of seals for meat, and particularly blubber for cooking and heating. He suggested that seals, unlike whales, were probably shared at a household level, rather than a community level, which meant that households with less successful hunters would now face a shortage of meat and blubber. His suggestion was that a move to larger, multi-family households would facilitate a wider sharing of scarce resources, and reduce the discrepancies in resource access between families (Schledermann 1971: 112; 1976: 35).

Richard Jordan rejected Schledermann's climatic hypothesis, and based a new interpretation on his extensive excavations at the Thule and Inuit sites on Eskimo Island in The Narrows, Hamilton Inlet (Jordan 1977, 1978). Jordan pointed out that documentary evidence had shown that seals were re-distributed beyond the household level in Labrador, and therefore a reliance on seals would not necessitate a consolidation into multi-family households. He further argued that the historical records did not, in fact, indicate that the 17th and 18th centuries were a time of particular economic hardship, and thus Schledermann's climatic argument had no real basis. His alternative explanation involved the emergence of powerful individuals who controlled the increasing European trade on the Labrador coast, as Taylor (1976) had documented in the 18th century Moravian records (Jordan 1978: 184). He argued that the trade between Inuit and Europeans, both in Labrador and Greenland, involved the exchange of whale products, and other items, for European manufactured goods. The 'big-men', suggested Jordan, would be those who were successful whalers, who were good at dealing with Europeans, and who were well connected within the inter-Inuit exchange networks. These individuals would have a very high access to European materials, and would therefore become prestigious and powerful within their communities. Jordan's argument regarding the development of communal houses is that, as in other 'big-men' situations around the globe, other people are keen to join the prominent individual's household in order to share in his economic success. And the addition of more and more people to his household increases the big-man's prestige, and also provides him with more labour or assistants for his trading and whaling activities.

Jordan's 'big-man' hypothesis found widespread acceptance, and became the predominant model for the development of large communal houses among the Labrador Inuit (e.g. Jordan and Kaplan 1980; Kaplan 1985). This was perhaps to be expected in an era when post-processual and other archaeologies were attempting to re-introduce human agency into archaeological explanation after the environmental excesses of the 1960s and 1970s. But also in keeping with that trend, modified or alternative explanations have been proposed in more recent years, that similarly focus on social developments in Labrador Inuit society.

Richling re-examined the whole issue of a 'communal house phase' in Labrador, and evaluated the merits of both Schledermann's environmental and Jordan's social explanations (Richling 1993).

He concluded by proposing a new explanation which, while focusing on European contact as a cause, also echoed Schledermann's reliance on the issue of scarce resources. In this case, however, the resources were not whales made scarce by environmental change, but European goods, made scarce by their difficulty of acquisition in the early phases of contact. He suggests that the housing of several related families in a single household was a way, not of facilitating the re-distribution of this scarce resource, but rather of restricting it. Richling argued that in a traditional kind of Inuit society in which people are essentially scattered in single family residences, each of which participates in several different interlocking social networks, ideals of sharing and reciprocity can create an essentially endless chain of obligations. In the case of plentiful resources this poses no problems, but when dealing with a resource that is very scarce it can become untenable. In essence, Richling argues that the communal house served to physically define and limit the kindred among which European goods had to be shared. In contrast to Schledermann's argument, Richling's view is that the purpose of the communal house was not to even out unequal access to scarce resources, but rather to define and signal it.

In the 1990s and early 2000s, Jim Woollett undertook a detailed examination of faunal evidence from communal house sites in the regions of Hamilton Inlet, Nain and Okak (Woollett 2003). His purpose was to evaluate the competing hypotheses for the explanation of the late 17th century adoption of communal houses, since he felt that all of them had implications that could be tested zoo-archaeologically. Based on modern paleoenvironmental data and his faunal analyses, he concluded that there was no evidence that the period of communal house use had been a time of economic hardship or stress. On the contrary, the paleoenvironmental evidence suggested that it had been a time of ameliorating climate and increased open water, and that it had been an environmentally stable period (Woollett 1999: 383). Woollett's conclusions are cautious, but he points out that open water sealing, which seems to have been the economic mainstay during this period, benefits from co-operative and communal hunting methods, as opposed to the winter hunting of ringed seal, which is generally a solitary pursuit. The use of communal households, argues Woollett, would have served as a mechanism for organising and controlling such communal hunting ventures. Although this seems on the face of it to be an environmentally based explanation, Woollett notes that the existence of communal households, in which household heads also had organizational and economic power, might also facilitate the extension of that power into broader contexts.

Perhaps the most comprehensive recent statements on this issue are found in analyses by Kaplan and Woollett that, in what might be considered a masterful post-processual style, integrate several forms of data to reveal the complex and unpredictable causality of the phenomenon of communal houses in 18th century Labrador (Kaplan and Woollett 2000; Woollett 2007). Citing recent paleoclimatic and faunal data, they emphasize that the Labrador Inuit of the 18th century lived in a comparatively mild climate and a benign environment, that allowed them considerable economic security. Further, the development of trade with Europeans and between local Inuit groups produced a new degree of economic complexity, and encouraged new social and economic roles. With the security of a varied and stable economy, that permitted the accumulation of surpluses, communities were able to engage in high-risk pursuits like whale hunting, of which the most beneficial harvests were prestige, self-esteem, and whale by-products valued by Europeans.

But along with the social and economic benefits came somewhat less visible costs and penalties. The Moravian missionaries were causing considerable disruption in the area of social relations among the Inuit, and in the reliability of traditional social and spiritual institutions. The missionaries publicly ridiculed and threatened the Inuit shamans, tried to undermine the influence of successful hunters by offering food to converts, and disrupted traditional alliances and networks by isolating christianized Inuit from unchristianized ones. It was a time of great social, spiritual and emotional

stress, in spite of unprecedented economic well-being. Kaplan and Woollett suggest that the establishment of communal households can be seen as part of a programme of resistance, making a show of solidarity and “Inuitness” (Kaplan and Woollett 2000: 357). Public shamanistic displays and the pursuit of ‘dangerous’ activities that were distinctly ‘Inuit’, like open water whale hunting, were other elements of the display of resistance.

There is no doubt that Kaplan’s and Woollett’s analyses, whatever the merits of their specific arguments (which are probably considerable), are more than anything a reminder that the causation of something as complex as a massive change in household architecture and composition through the length and breadth of an entire cultural system is not likely to be reducible to any single factor. Nor is it likely that any major variable such as climatic change, or the arrival of a large group of aliens, can be dismissed as having played no role. The Kaplan-Woollett approach is undoubtedly the right one, inasmuch as it eschews the attempt to isolate one variable as being primary, and concentrates instead on trying to unravel the incredibly complex interconnections between different processes and factors, some independent and some affecting each other, that happened for whatever historical reasons all to come to bear on the Inuit of the coast of Labrador in the 18th century.

## **5. The Internal Dynamics of Change in Inuit Society**

In recent years, archaeology (or perhaps more appropriately, a variety of archaeologies) has made advances both in recognizing the internal complexities of past societies, no matter how small, and in attempting to incorporate a recognition of those complexities into archaeological research questions and interpretation. This section will present just a brief consideration of some of the ways in which those developments have entered into the archaeological study of the Labrador Thule/Inuit.

The emergence of a feminist, or engendered, archaeology has led to a recognition of the roles of women in the formation of the archaeological record, and more importantly as agents of change in past societies. This has two aspects: first, archeologists are no longer content to view the dynamics of past societies as comprising the actions only of men; second, archaeologists are recognizing that no society, past or present, is a monolithic whole - it is composed of different, and sometimes opposed, elements, and gender is one dimension of this fact. Thule/Inuit archaeology has been a promising field for gender studies, since gender roles have been perceived as being clearly demarcated in traditional Inuit society, men’s and women’s tools have been considered to be readily identifiable, and thus gendered activities and roles, and changes in them, have been thought to be archaeologically visible.

An example of an archaeological examination of changing gender roles in Labrador Inuit society is Cabak’s study of the roles of Inuit women in the interaction between the Inuit and the Moravian mission in Nain in the 18th and 19th centuries (Cabak 1991). Cabak excavated an 18th and 19th century Inuit midden in Nain with the aims of investigating, first, what the roles of women might have been in the establishment and development of the Inuit-Moravian communities; and second, how the interaction with the Moravians might have affected the activities and status of women in Inuit society (Cabak 1991: 5). Using a combination of archaeological and documentary evidence, Cabak described the changes in women’s activities, and the impact this had on Nain Inuit society. She was able to infer that Inuit men and women had different kinds of relationships with the Mission, and experienced different kinds of changes in their activities and material culture. Whereas the European items that women incorporated into their daily activities served to make them more ‘domestic’ and more sedentary, those adopted by men served, on the other hand, to make them more mobile. The result, argues Cabak,

was an increasing dichotomy between the activities of men and women, and the resulting break-down of one of the traditional and enduring co-operative partnerships in Inuit society (Cabak 1991: 172).

A variety of other studies are helping to reveal the ways in which the contact experience varied from one Labrador Inuit group to another, and also the variety of ways in which the Labrador Inuit were active participants in this experience and used it to re-define and re-shape their own identities and societies (e.g. Arendt 2009; Cabak and Loring 2000; Jurakic 2007; Loring 1998; Whitridge 2008).

Cabak and Loring (2000) have documented the incorporation of European ceramics into Inuit daily activities, and have shown that some types of earthenware were adopted because they resembled traditional household items, such as bowls. On the other hand, items associated with tea drinking were also adopted, even though they had no formal counterparts in the pre-contact Inuit household. But in this case, the items were adopted as part of the tea-drinking ceremony, a highly social ritual which facilitated visiting and socializing between households, something that was very much a part of traditional Inuit values and daily practices. In both cases, the adoption of European material items was part of a subtle re-shaping by the Inuit of their own daily lives, for their own purposes and in keeping with their own views and values.

Both Loring (1998) and Jurakic (2007) have used archaeological assemblages to illustrate the choices that Inuit in northern Labrador made in their interactions with Europeans, and to show that they were actively transmitting and transforming their own cultures and societies, and using the flexibility of their relationships with Europeans to accomplish that. Both studies deal with the Inuit in far northern Labrador, who were relatively independent of the controlling influence of the missionaries. At the same time, they were also the object of competition between the missions and the Hudson's Bay Company, both of whom, for somewhat different reasons, were anxious to capture their attention and loyalty. Loring's study of a mid-nineteenth century household at Eskimo Hütte provides a glimpse of a remote group of Inuit who continued to pursue an essentially traditional lifestyle outside of the sphere of missionaries and traders. The limited sample of European goods found at the site is interpreted to indicate, on the one hand, a rejection of 'Europeanization' and an assertion of Inuit sovereignty. At the same time, European items indicate trade with both HBC and Moravians, and the ability to pick and choose items from both sources, and to be very selective in what kinds of items were acquired.

Jurakic has similarly analysed the European materials acquired by a remote Inuit group, in this case the late 18th and 19th century inhabitants of the village of Kongu in Nachvak Fiord (Jurakic 2007). Using a post-colonial perspective, she approached the issue with the view that the contact period provided the Inuit with opportunities for change, rather than the necessity of accepting imposed changes. Like Cabak and Loring (2000), she demonstrated that the incorporation of such things as ceramics and tobacco into Inuit daily life was not so much a matter of Inuit culture being changed from the outside, but rather a question of "the re-configuration of Inuit material culture" in keeping with pre-existing values (Jurakic 2007: 112). And like Loring (1998) she inferred from the presence of both HBC and Moravian goods that the Inuit were in a sense using both organizations as a means of keeping the other at bay. In the end, her analysis suggests that the Inuit themselves, or at least some elements in Inuit society, saw European contact as an opportunity to redefine themselves, to refine and re-negotiate what it meant to be 'Inuit'. And as Whitridge (2008: 304) has pointed out, this, too, was not a unique event or process for the Inuit, but something that they must surely have embraced throughout their history, both before and after arriving in Labrador, in their contacts with Innu, Norse, and perhaps Dorset. And we might add, based on the emerging picture of the vibrant dynamics of Inuit cultural change up and down the Labrador coast from the 16th century onwards, that such re-negotiation of values and identity must have constantly taken place in interactions between different groups of Inuit, and between different elements in Inuit society, as well.





#### IV. CONCLUSION

At this point we might ask what progress has been made in addressing the research issues that Fitzhugh outlined fifteen years ago. Have we found answers to any of those questions? Are any of the questions still as mysterious as they were then? Are there new questions? Are there signs of future directions?

I think it is fair to say that none of the questions remains just as mysterious as it might have seemed in 1994. While one might facetiously suggest that some questions are more mysterious now than they were then, this is really a way of saying that progress has definitely been made and new complexities within some of the issues have been revealed. At the same time it is probably also true that all of Fitzhugh's questions are still questions to some degree, which again is simply a way of saying "more work is needed". So we can certainly say with regard to any of these questions: yes, they are still questions; they have not gone away, nor have they been resolved once and for all. Indeed some of the questions now seem much more complicated, and a resolution more distant. But at the same time there is also no doubt that we know much more about all of these things than we did 15 years ago, and have a much better understanding of the issues involved and of what needs to be done.

The precise dating and details of the original Thule migration to northern Labrador, and the precise dating and nature of their movements southward are still only generally understood, even though the story is much more well-rounded now than it was. In large part this is a function of two problems: dating and field work. The problems of dating have been addressed more than once in the preceding discussion, but they cannot be overemphasized. Carbon dates on wood or charcoal cannot be considered acceptable, for a variety of reasons including driftwood source, curation, contamination with seal fat, and inherent dating anomalies in some Arctic shrubs. Dates on sea mammal bone or fat are inadmissible because of the marine reservoir effect, which has been extensively discussed in the literature. There are two partial solutions to the problem. One is to undertake a programme of dating terrestrial mammal bone samples from a large number of Thule and Inuit sites. This is not without its own problems, particularly in view of the extensive re-occupation of Dorset sites by early Thule people, and very exacting standards of provenience for the samples would need to be imposed. The second solution is to develop a tree-ring series for different parts of the Labrador coast, as Susan Kaplan is doing (e.g. Kaplan 2008).

The field work problem is not so easily solved. Thule/Inuit archaeology in Labrador needs to have much more field work done in order to adequately address most of the issues discussed here. Many more sites should be extensively investigated, and many more houses and other features should be completely excavated. For a variety of reasons, putting small tests in a couple of houses at a Thule or Inuit site is not likely to tell us anything we don't already know. Unfortunately, prolonged field work seasons in Labrador are expensive, and often impractical. Obviously the situation is improving, and one can only applaud the extensive and intensive field work programmes of people such as Susan Kaplan, Jim Woollett and Peter Whitridge, as well my own ongoing field programme in southern Labrador. And as an aside, I may note that the southern Labrador field work will be continued and amplified as a result of the recent awarding of a five-year CURA grant for the investigation of Labrador Métis history.

I think that great progress has been made in the understanding of issues relating to communal houses, and the nature and effects of European contact. At the risk of being repetitive, much of this is due to major field work programmes directed towards these questions. But equally important has been the willingness of researchers to accept and explore the tremendous complexities involved in these

processes, and in trying to understand them. Trying to work out the long-term and often convoluted interplay of environmental fluctuations, economic behaviour, social dynamics and historical accidents like the arrival of highly motivated foreigners is a long and sometimes tedious job. Moreover, it requires the application of both technical expertise and theoretical perspectives from a variety of disciplines, and it is a major undertaking to mount such an endeavour. Interpreting and synthesizing the results is another matter altogether, and it is perhaps not surprising that such detailed multi-faceted interpretations have really only recently begun to emerge. But there is no doubt that they have set the bar, and that future research projects will need to incorporate a comparable diversity of approaches and analyses. And to forestall any complacency, there is still a great need for more major field work projects directed towards these issues.

As for emerging and future directions, perhaps the most evident and exciting new trends are related to the recognition that past Inuit societies were as heterogeneous as present day ones, and had comparable experiences with social and ideological conflicts and issues involving gender, status differences, identity, youth, relations to other communities, and so on. It is even now probably not sufficient to speak in terms of 'the Labrador Inuit', for any but the most general of purposes. There are, and were, many communities of Labrador Inuit, each with its own history and traditions, its own concerns, and its own ambitions. And within each of those communities were sub-communities: women, men, youth, hunters, elders, children, shamans, etc., who also had unique and sometimes conflicting aims and values. While archaeology may not be a very precise tool for teasing out micro-processes taking place within a small community over a few decades, the theoretical developments within the discipline of archaeology, as well as some examples where this has been done successfully, have made us dissatisfied with anything less.

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