

Archaeology: Studies of the Atlantic Region

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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Archaeology: Studies of the Atlantic Region

It is perhaps not widely recognized that some of Canada's first serious archaeological research took place in Atlantic Canada. This pioneer work stood virtually alone in the region for nearly half a century. The past two decades, however, have witnessed a renewed interest in archaeology throughout Canada. This trend stems not only from a heightened curiosity about our earliest heritage, but also from the perception of archaeological manifestations as a non-renewable resource which is rapidly disappearing in every part of the country. Initiation of archaeological programs has come from many levels: provincial and federal governments (it is noteworthy that New Brunswick appointed the first provincial archaeologist in Canada), universities, museums, and most recently through private consulting. Although the growth of archaeological programs has not been as rapid in Atlantic Canada as in other regions of Canada, major advances in archaeological research, exhibition and education programs have been made in recent years. A number of studies, both technical and popular, have added substantially to our understanding and appreciation of the considerable antiquity and complex interaction of pre-historic peoples and events in the Northeast and more particularly, the Atlantic region. Two comparatively recent contributions to this knowledge are Jim Tuck's *Ancient People of Port au Choix: The Excavation of an Archaic Indian Cemetery in Newfoundland* (St. John's, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1976), and Anne Ingstad's *The Discovery of a Norse Settlement in America: Excavations at L'Anse aux Meadows, Newfoundland 1961-68* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1977). Although very different in approach and presentation, both studies give us an exciting glimpse into our early Canadian past.

Ever since W.K. Moorehead's classic work nearly half a century ago,¹ the 'Red Paint Culture' has intrigued archaeologists working in the Northeast. For more than a century, archaeological evidence of this prehistoric 'culture' has sporadically appeared from Long Island to Labrador. One such site is Port au Choix, situated well north along the western coast of Newfoundland's Great Northern Peninsula. This important archaeological site provides our most complete record of an ancient maritime-adapted people living approximately 3,500 years ago and *Ancient People of Port au Choix* documents the results of archaeological salvage work by Dr. James Tuck at the site between 1967 and 1969. While this book gives a technical interpretation and analyses of archaeological remains, the material is clearly organized and the author's style very readable. The descriptive and methodical stages of analysis and interpretation are followed by reconstruction not only of the material remains of this long-since disappeared culture, but the recreation of an ancient people, their economic, social and religious lifeways and beliefs.

1 Warren K. Moorehead, *A Report on the Archaeology of Maine* (Andover, Mass., 1922).

Three appendices present the more technical data regarding biological aspects of the human remains found at Port au Choix. This was primarily a human burial site and most of the finds were burial inclusions, a wide variety of personal articles which had functional significance or special meaning to the person interred. These included hunting weapons, woodworking and bone carving tools, charms, musical instruments, needles, and combs. Excellent plan drawings and photographs in the book illustrate these finds as they were painstakingly uncovered in the field, the manner in which the people were interred and the placement of their personal effects. It is even possible from the location of particular finds to reconstruct the kinds of dress. The many beautifully preserved bone carvings of wildlife forms demonstrate a rare craftsmanship as well as a strong identity with the coastal marine way of life. Unfortunately the line drawings of some of the more delicately fashioned pieces do not do justice to the artistic and technological skills of these ancient artists. This material reveals that these people were no strangers to the marine environment, but possessed a sophisticated maritime-adapted technology "admirably suited to life in a coastal environment" (p. 84). This suggests a longstanding tradition of living by the sea — a tradition of much greater antiquity than previously thought by archaeologists. Research by Tuck and McGhee on the not too distant Labrador coast suggests that this maritime way of life may extend as far back as 7500 years ago.² *Ancient People of Port au Choix* is a thought-provoking, well presented and fascinating archaeological study — an imaginative reconstruction of an ancient maritime people which is sure to remain a classic in the archaeological literature of Atlantic Canada.³

The search for evidence of early European trans-atlantic contacts between the Old World and North America has been the subject of heated debate by archaeologists and avid non-professionals for more than a century. Much of this controversy has focussed on the existence and location of 'Vinland' mentioned in the Mediaeval Norse sagas. Runic stones, elaborate stone structures, Viking weapons and headgear: such was the variety of evidence put forward to substantiate claims of Norse occupation from Minnesota to Long Island. Until relatively recently, not a single one of some hundreds of these claims has ever been authenticated to the satisfaction of archaeologists. The first real break in this long search came in 1960, in conjunction with the explorations of Helge and Anne Ingstad along the northern Newfoundland coast. Drawing on their experience with Norse archaeological sites in Greenland, the Ingstads recognized, near the remote northern Newfoundland settlement of L'Anse aux

2 Robert McGhee and James A. Tuck, *An Archaic Sequence from the Strait of Belle Isle, Labrador* (Ottawa, National Museum of Man, 1975); Robert McGhee, *The Burial at L'Anse-Amour* (Ottawa, National Museum of Man, 1976).

3 See also *Port au Choix 3: A 16mm black and white film* (Media Unit, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's, 1968).

Meadows, house features reminiscent of Norse occupations. The following year a team of archaeologists under the direction of the Ingstads began excavating the site. The discovery of Norse-like houses, a 'smithy' for smelting bog iron, several diagnostic Norse artifacts, and radiocarbon dates on samples placing this occupation at approximately A.D. 900-1000 — these cumulative lines of evidence provided a strong argument for substantiating this site as the first Norse settlement in North America.

The Discovery of a Norse Settlement in America will be of considerable interest to all readers; however, it is primarily a scientific archaeological report of findings and supporting technical analyses. This first of what will apparently be a several volume study is divided into three parts. Part I describes the field-work excavations undertaken by the Ingstads between 1961 and 1968. Cultural features such as houses, cooking pits, fire hearths, boatsheds, a kiln, and a 'smithy' are described by various specialists who undertook the analysis and interpretation of selected areas of the site. Part II, by Anne Ingstad, presents a summary interpretation of the site in the context of the local aboriginal culture history and draws comparisons to known Norse habitations in Greenland, Iceland, and Scandinavia. The third and final section constitutes more of an appendix, providing analytical information on such topics as radiocarbon age determinations, plant pollen identifications and assays of mineralogical and organic remains. Technically, no costs have been spared in the production of this massive volume. There are numerous photographs including a number of colour plates, numerous line drawings and sketches of artifacts and house reconstructions. The text is generally well written and is comparatively free of typographical errors.

From an archaeological viewpoint there are several aspects to the study which deserved greater attention. Perhaps not fully appreciated by most readers is the fact that this is not solely a Norse site. At least three or four other groups of prehistoric people, indigenous to this part of Atlantic Canada, were also attracted to L'Anse aux Meadows, including Dorset Eskimo (earlier and contemporaneous with the brief Norse occupation), a much earlier 'Boreal Archaic' people, and several minor prehistoric visitors. Consequently, the archaeology of this site is extremely complex, making the identification and interpretation of many of the artifacts and cultural features very difficult and at times, conflicting. For example, many of the diagnostic Dorset artifacts were found within the 'Norse' houses. As well, age determinations from hearths inside the houses provided differing results. Without question, this was a popular living area for at least the last two thousand years. Moreover, in the chapter entitled "site interpretation and assessment" in Part II, which really forms the thesis of this study, a more convincing argument for Norse occupation of the site could have been given if less frequent use had been made of known Norse finds from Greenland, Iceland and Scandinavia. It is difficult at times to ascertain to which site illustrated material belongs. Nonetheless, while stronger use of the L'Anse aux

Meadows finds, letting them speak for themselves, would have strengthened this study, *The Discovery of a Norse Settlement in America* represents the culmination of years of archival and field research by the Ingstads and stands as a unique contribution to the history of Atlantic Canada. With the designation of L'Anse aux Meadows as a National Historic Site in 1968, investigations into the archaeology of this site have been continued by Parks Canada and one can look forward to significant future publications chronicling the earliest known European settlement in the New World.

DAVID L. KEENLYSIDE

Co-ops for Each and All of the Little People?

Recapturing the co-operative movement in English Canada generally and in the Maritimes specifically during its heyday as a vital social force has burgeoned of late. Three recent contributions will be discussed here. Interestingly enough, these contributions are products of three somewhat distinctive disciplinary backgrounds: history, the civil service, and sociology. Yet despite these differences, all three are complementary in their enthusiasm for formal co-operation as a way forward for petty producers and workers in local, regional and national communities. In this respect, these works share with the earliest analyses of the co-operative movement a commitment to the movement's self-help emphasis and its relatively democratic organizations.¹ This commitment gives all three contributions both their substantive strengths and their analytical blinders.

Of the three analyses, Ian MacPherson's *Each for All: A History of the Co-operative Movement in English Canada, 1900-1945* (Toronto, Macmillan of Canada, 1979) is by far the most comprehensive in spatial breadth, temporal scope, and documented detail, especially in relation to the leadership's struggle to mobilize national support and the movement's uneven organizational growth. MacPherson clearly establishes co-operation as one of many hinterland reform movements in the early part of this century in Canada, linking the movement to European reform traditions. For MacPherson, reforming idealism, or opposition to the dominant capitalist ethic through organizational principles of non-profit, one person one vote, tolerance, and surplus distribution on the basis of participation, distinguish co-operation from other reform movements, from the identified cause of the problems — capitalist victimization of petty producers

¹ For a taste of the early literature in Maritime co-operation see G. Boyle's *Democracy's Second Chance* (New York, 1944), M.M. Coady's *The Social Significance of the Co-operative Movement* (Antigonish, 1945) and J.T. Croteau's *Cradled in the Waves* (New York, 1951).