

2017

Provincial Archaeology Office Annual Review

Provincial Archaeology Office
Department of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation
Government of Newfoundland and Labrador
March 2018 Volume 16



A brief survey of Bull Arm 1 and Backside Beach 1, Trinity Bay, Newfoundland

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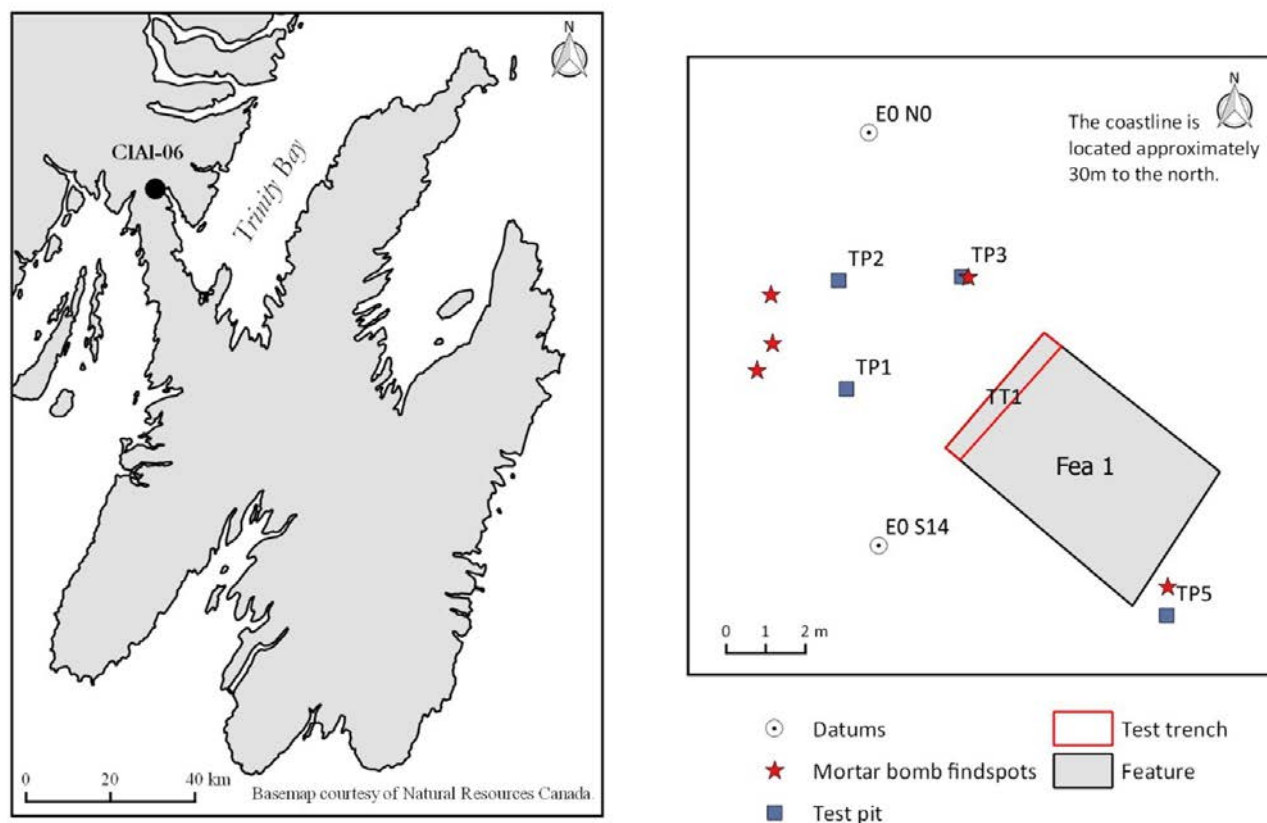


Figure 1: Location and site plan for CIAI-06 (Bull Arm 1).

The following report presents a brief overview of survey work on two sites in Trinity Bay: Bull Arm 1 in Sunnyside (CIAI-06) and Backside Beach 1 in Green's Harbour (CjAj-10). Both sites were investigated in June 2017 for the purpose of assessing the nature, extent and date of occupation.

Bull Arm 1 is located on the south side of Sunnyside harbour and was discovered by local residents Roger Snook and Pat Farrell using metal detectors. In June, Mr. Snook brought the authors to the site so we could record visible features, plot the distribution of a series of mortar bomb fragments that had been previously removed, and excavate several small test pits (Figure 1). The site is situated approximately

30m from the coastline in a large clearing bordered by a long but low rock outcrop running southeast by northwest; centred within the clearing is a large fir tree growing up from a slightly-sunken, rectangular, moss-lined feature (Figure 2). Test pits to the east and west of this rectangular feature revealed a shallow amorphous deposit containing late 19th-to early 20th-century domestic refuse including wire nails, white-ware plate and bowl fragments, window glass and bottle sherds. A test trench dug (more moss removal than excavation) along the western end of the sunken rectangular feature exposed a 5.5m (18ft) long linear stone footing terminating north at the low rock outcrop (Figure 3). Toward the southern end of the test trench was an accumulation of large rocks that con-



Figure 2: Bull Arm 1, looking southeast. Note at bottom of image, a low rock outcrop running along the north end of site.

tinued east into the feature, evidently the remains of a stone chimney collapse. An examination of the eastern end of the rectangular feature showed traces of another linear stone footing of the same orientation as at the west end and butting up against the same natural rock outcrop toward the north.

The architectural evidence and the nearby domestic refuse clearly point to a late 19th- to early 20th-century domestic occupation. This is further supported by small parcels of cleared land to the east and west of the feature, possibly for agricultural purposes and/or outbuildings. The footprint of what was once a timber-framed house, as evidenced by the rectangular feature, measures 5.5m (18ft) wide by 7.3m (24ft) long. A stone chimney was likely set in the western gable end.

The only remaining question at the Bull Arm 1 site had to do with the nearby mortar bomb fragments scattered in all directions, with several (unrecorded) pieces at some distance to the northwest, southwest and southeast of the late 19th-to early 20th-century homestead. The most parsimonious explanation is that these fragments are unrelated to the domestic occupation, instead representing an earlier military event – likely a skirmish or similarly small engagement – from Sunnyside's past. The mortar

bomb fragments recovered from the site (as interpreted from images of the artifacts only) are spherical case shot, a type typically used until around 1870, after which point the cylindrical shell became the dominant form. Their positioning in relation to the house further supports the theory of an unrelated episode that likely saw a military force firing into the woods at an enemy combatant. Whether this represented a real battle or military exercise may only be answered through further documentary research.

Backside Beach 1, in Green's Harbour, is situated in the woods approximately 100m from the coast behind a raised cobble beach of the same name. The site was first recorded by Mark Penney in 2006 and revisited by the authors in 2017 to ascertain its function and date of occupation, as well as to record in situ structural remains (Figure 4). As previously stated by Penney (2006), Backside Beach 1 is accessible from the beach via a small bog and situated within what was until recently a dense copse of trees, now rotting deadfalls.

After locating the previously-identified rock and earth mound, we cleared away some of the recent growth so it could be mapped and photographed (Figure 5). A rough outline of rocks were revealed at both the north and west ends but time did not permit



Figure 3: Stone footing delineating the western end of a late 19th- to early 20th- century house, looking west.

Figure 4: Location and site plan for CjAj-10 (Backside Beach 1).

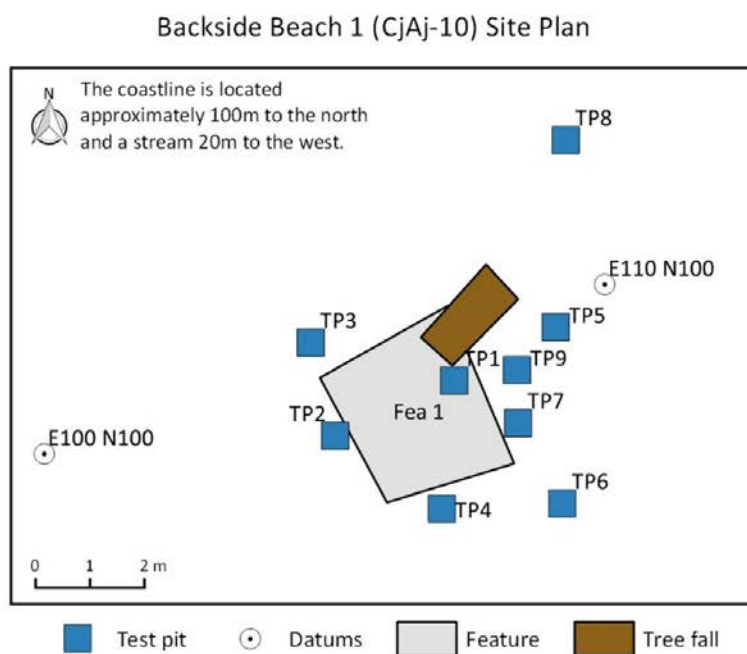
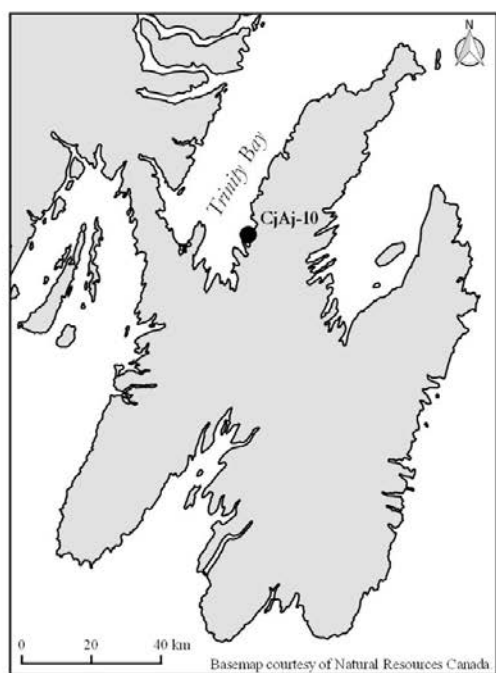




Figure 5: Rock and earth mound feature, looking east.

us to continue around the entire perimeter. These two 'sides' were measured against the southern and eastern ends of the mound, resulting in an approximate dimension of 2.5m (8ft) north-south by 3m (10ft) east-west for the feature. Based upon its size and approximate height in relation to the surrounding land, the overall volume of this feature is around 1.5m³

A recent treefall at the northeast end of the feature unearthed patches of charcoal, a number of large rocks – some of which were fire-spalled and reddened – and a variety of artifacts including brick fragments, wrought iron nails, transfer-printed and engine-turned earthenware, pipe stems and the top of a copper thimble. The remains of a stone hearth is undoubtedly in the immediate vicinity of the treefall. A series of test pits were dug in all directions out from the rectangular mound so as to identify the presence and extent of additional cultural deposits. None were found at the south, east and west sides, although testing was limited in scope. A test pit to the

Figure 6: Wrought iron nail fragments, a piece of leather boot heel with copper hobnails, and transfer-printed ceramic sherd recovered from test pit northeast of treefall, CjAj-10.



northeast, however, contained more wrought iron nails, transfer-printed earthenware and a leather boot heel fragment with copper hobnails (Figure 6). All artifacts were found in a dark brown loam directly below the moss. A brief metal detector sweep of the site produced further evidence for the presence of cultural deposits immediately north of the rock and earth feature. Metal detector hits were clustered within an approximately 3m (north-south) by 4m (east-west) area. No further subsurface testing was conducted. The rock and earth feature, treefall and test pits were mapped with a total station, and the distances from both the shoreline (100m) and a nearby stream (20m) were recorded.

Our preliminary interpretation is that of a domestic occupation dating to the first half of the 19th century. The low mound, possibly representing a chimney collapse, and associated artifact assemblage is strongly suggestive of a Euro-Newfoundland dwelling. However many questions remain. Was this a year-round dwelling or inhabited on a seasonal basis? If the latter, was it occupied during the summer fishery or only during the winter months? Definitive answers will have to await further excavation and analysis. That being said, if the current environment is any indication of past conditions, then a summer occupation seems unlikely. Between the adjacent bog, black-flies and distance from the shoreline, it is hard to envision CjAj-10 as a suitable summer habitation, particularly if the former occupants were involved in the fishery. The sheltered woodland location, on the other hand, would be advantageous for overwintering, as would the nearby presence of a large body of freshwater to the southeast (Backside Pond, located about 400m distant) in addition to the small stream just adjacent to the site. Backside Beach 1 is also a short boat ride from the fishing communities of Green's Harbour to the south or Whiteway to the north. Either community could have seen its former residents travel to 'winter quarters' in the fall of the year, as was common practice in many rural Newfoundland communities during the early 19th century (Smith 1987). If this site proves to be a 19th-century winter house, it would form a useful comparison with recent investigations at roughly contemporaneous winter house sites in St. Mary's Bay (Venovcevs 2017).

References

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