

THE BEOTHUK ON THE EVE OF THEIR EXTINCTION

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Abstract The Beothuk Indians of Newfoundland faced increasing European hostilities, expansion and the loss of access to resources during the historic period. Ultimately these conditions would compel the Beothuk to retreat into the interior of the island where they dwindled into extinction in 1829. The fact of the Beothuk's extinction, combined with the existence of a rich and colorful historical narrative has created a tendency to portray the Beothuk as a doomed people, without agency or adaptation en route to extinction. This paper conceptualizes the Beothuk as active players pursuing social objectives within this malevolent historical context. The Beothuk employed strategies such as settlement and subsistence reorganization, the avoidance of Europeans, an emphasis on ideology and identity, and the harassment of settlers as a means of coping with the cultural and social turmoil of the historic period.

Introduction

The Beothuk Indians of Newfoundland are known primarily to the anthropological community and the public at large through the story of their extinction. It is a tale that has been told many times, to many audiences and in many ways—in scholarly works, in fiction, in film and on stage (Beckel 1999; Bourinot 1868a, 1868b; Budgel 1992; Dalton 1992; Howley 1915; Jenness 1934; Macdougall 1891; Marshall 1996; Patterson 1891; Rowe 1977). The story includes a colorful cast of characters: John Peyton Senior, an infamous "Indian killer," William Cormack, a concerned intellectual, and of course Shanawdithit, the *last* of the Beothuk. It is also a moving tale with a tragic climax: Lieutenant Buchan's unsuccessful attempt at establishing peaceful relations in the winter of 1811, Peyton's violent capture of the Indian Demasduit eight years later, her untimely passing while being delivered back to her people, Shanawdithit's desperate surrender in April, 1823 and, with her death in 1829, the extinction of the Beothuk. It is a compelling story and one that has

dominated narratives of the Beothuk. As a consequence, the extinction of the Beothuk has become *the story of the Beothuk*.

Inherent, perhaps, to any extinction story is a sense of inevitability or inertia. Thus, because the Beothuk are ultimately "doomed," they often emerge as people swept up in a historical trajectory out of their control. Yet a careful reading of historical documents and the archaeological record suggests that the Beothuk were actively seeking a means of adaptation throughout the historic period. At times, the Beothuk may have actually lived in relative ease. Drawing on his excavations at the Boyd's Cove site, Pastore (1983, 1984, 1986a) for instance, has suggested a period of Beothuk "florescence," that lasted for about 200 years following first contact (1992a). During this period, Pastore argues that the Beothuk forged an adaptation that thrived on European iron and other materials. Sharing Pastore's emphasis on the ability of the Beothuk to adapt to the European presence (1992a:1), I attempt to further illuminate Beothuk agency and coping strategies in the historic period. My aim is to

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demonstrate that, at all times, the Beothuk were active players in the unfolding of their history.

Setting

The Beothuk were the historically encountered aboriginal inhabitants of Newfoundland (Fig. 1). Archaeologically, their occupation of the island can be traced back at least a thousand years, from the historic Beothuk (A.D. 1500–1829) through the Little Passage complex (A.D. 1200–1500), the Beaches complex (A.D. 800–1200) and perhaps into the Cow Head complex as well (A.D. 100–800) (Austin 1984; Pastore 1992b; Penney 1984; Tuck 1982, n.d.). These complexes make up what archaeologists working in the province call the Recent Indian period. Delineating the geographical and historical dimensions of these complexes, however, has proven problematic. The Beaches and Little Passage complexes, for example, share similarities with material from Labrador and the lower north shore of Quebec (Fitzhugh 1978:171; Hull 1998; Pastore 1989, 1992b; Pintal 1989; Renouf 1999:414–415; Robbins 1989). In addition, the historical relationship of the Cow Head complex to earlier and later Indian periods has yet to be resolved (Marshall 1996; Tuck n.d.). Finally, it seems likely that, at times, the Beothuk and their ancestors shared the island with other groups, namely Innu from Southern Labrador and Mi'kmaq from Atlantic Canada (Hull 1999; Jackson 1993; Martijn 1989, 1990, 1996, pers. comm., 1997).

The early historical record of the Beothuk is unfortunately just as murky and complex as the archaeological one. The first Europeans to set foot in Newfoundland, the Norse (Ingstad 1977), left an ambiguous historical record of their visit. Exactly who the "Skraelings" they encountered were is a matter of debate. It is possible, however, that they were the ancestors of the Beothuk or nearby Labrador Indians (Fitzhugh 1978:170, 1985; McGhee 1984:13; Tuck n.d.:159).

Possible Norse encounters aside, the Beothuk were certainly one of the first Native American groups to have come in contact with Europeans in the post-Columbus era. Soon after John Cabot's travels through the region in 1497, the seas off Newfoundland became the favored fishing and whaling grounds of Portuguese, Basque, English and French sailors (Barkham 1980; Innis 1940; Turgeon 1990). Unfortunately, contact between Beothuk and Europeans during this early period appears to have been poorly documented (Marshall 1996: 14).

European expansion into the seas and onto the coasts of Newfoundland did not impact the Beothuk uniformly in time or space. Initially, European interests in Newfoundland were focused on rich offshore resources, such as cod, that had the effect of limiting activity to the island's outer coastal edge. Early

on, Europeans had little need, or desire, to venture deep into the island's sheltered bays and inlets. Beothuk use of these protected areas, accordingly, continued until relatively late in the historic period (McLean 1994; Pastore 1992b). European activity along the outer coast, nonetheless, did have consequences for the Beothuk.

Archaeological evidence for utilization of the outer coastal edge by the Beothuk is paltry. In contrast to the preceding Paleo-Eskimo occupation of the island, the Beothuk and their "prehistoric" ancestors do not appear to have intensively settled or utilized the resources of this area (Holly 1997; Pastore 1986b; Rast 1999; Schwarz 1992, 1994). A recent archaeological survey of Fogo Island, in outer Notre Dame Bay, for instance, failed to unearth material evidence for intensive Beothuk use (Holly 1998a). Nevertheless, the resources of the outer coast would have likely held an important position in the Beothuk economy. References to the Beothuk on and around Fogo Island during the historic period (Marshall 1989: 121, 1996: 121, 137, 275–6), for example, suggest that this region was regularly harvested for birds, bird eggs and seals. The presence of some archaeological material in these outer coastal areas, mostly dating to the "prehistoric" period, also indicates forays to the outer coast in the past (Austin 1980, 1984; Carignan 1977; Erwin 1999a, 1999b; Penney 1984; Reader 1998a; Renouf 1992; Rast 1999).

European traffic and settlement along the outer coast would have made Beothuk expeditions to bird islands and sealing areas difficult in the early historic period. As early as the sixteenth century, explorers, fishermen and settlers had already begun to harvest the abundant bird life on Funk Island, competing with the Beothuk for access to its rookeries (Howley 1915: 47). Eventually the indiscriminate exploitation of Funk Island's bird life by Europeans would culminate in the extinction of the great auk in Newfoundland by A.D. 1800. Seals were similarly targeted. During the eighteenth century, seal hunting escalated from a land-based net procurement strategy to a large-scale, ship-based enterprise (Head 1976: 223).

Shortly after their arrival in Newfoundland, Europeans pursuing cod, seals, and birds, would have constrained Beothuk access, and especially settlement, in the outer coastal region. Although documents suggest that the Beothuk never completely avoided this area (Howley 1915: 88–9, 268; Marshall 1989: 120, 127), intensive European presence in the region certainly would have made voyages to the outer coastal region an increasingly difficult and dangerous endeavor (Howley 1915: 89; Marshall 1989: 120). As a consequence, expeditions by the Beothuk to this area were likely limited to opportunistic forays for marine resources, the pilfering of nails, sails, and other goods, and the harassment of settlers.

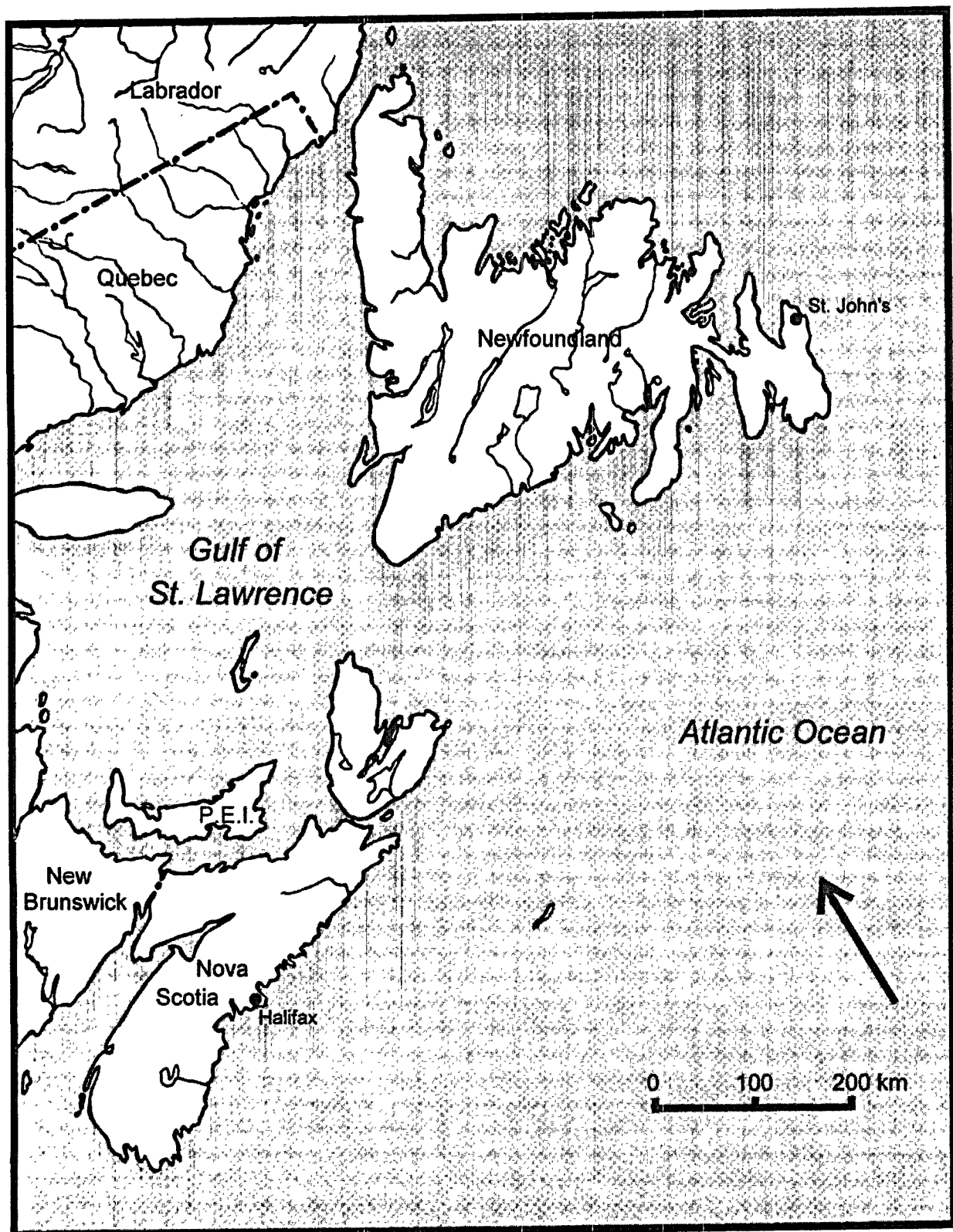


Figure 1. Map of the Island of Newfoundland and vicinity. Illustration by Niko Silvester.

More devastating to the Beothuk than the loss of the outer coast was the gradual expansion of Europeans into the inner reaches of the island's bays and inlets. As European populations settled and grew in Newfoundland during the eighteenth century, their economy became increasingly diversified. Eighteenth century settlers not only fished for cod during the spring, as they had always done, but they also took up salmon fishing, trapping and hunting (Head 1976; Howley 1915; Marshall 1989, 1996; Smith 1987a, 1987b). This new diversification would have seriously constrained Beothuk economic options. The Beothuk depended on procuring salmon as they ascended rivers and streams in late summer. Once salmon fishermen like George Skeffington set up large fishing stations, however, the Beothuk were increasingly denied this major food resource. It was at this point—the early eighteenth century—that the Beothuk escalated their resistance campaigns. Skeffington reported that the Beothuk obstructed his fishery, destroyed his equipment, stole his nets, tore down his dams and killed some of his men (Head 1976: 75–6). Skeffington retaliated by arming his employees (Marshall 1996: 64) yet Beothuk attacks on salmon fisheries continued. In 1724 Skeffington again complained of harassment and reported that another man had been killed (Marshall 1996: 64). The Beothuk did not limit attacks to Skeffington. A salmon fisherman was killed in Ragged Harbour in 1780 (Marshall 1989: 140) and another was shot down with arrows and beheaded at his weir in 1789 (Marshall 1989: 130). Elsewhere the Beothuk continued to steal and destroy equip-

ment whenever and wherever they could (Howley 1915; Marshall 1989, 1996: 66).

In response to growing European encroachment and escalating violence, the Beothuk appear to have increasingly removed themselves from the coast, settling instead in the deep interior of the island. Mi'kmaq occupation of Newfoundland's Southern Coast and Innu use of the Northern Peninsula (Marshall 1988, 1996; Martijn 1990; Pastore 1989) may have also encouraged the Beothuk to vacate portions of the island (Marshall 1996), although this is still unclear. What is clear, archaeologically at least, is that the Beothuk gradually surrendered coastal settlements (Holly 1997; Wynn, Pastore and Hoffman 1987). European encroachment, beginning first in Trinity Bay around the middle to late seventeenth century, and later in Bonavista and Notre Dame Bay in the early eighteenth century, pushed the Beothuk deep into the sheltered bays, inlets and interior portions of the island. Eventually coastal habitation sites such as the Beaches site in Bonavista Bay and Boyd's Cove in Notre Dame Bay were abandoned (McLean 1994; Pastore 1992b).

It is at this point that interior sites such as Wigwam Brook (LeBlanc 1973) and Indian Point (Devereux 1970) may have become the primary loci of Beothuk activities. At Wigwam Brook (Fig. 2), for instance, faunal evidence indicated a heavy reliance on caribou and a nearly year-round occupation (Stewart 1973; cf. Rowley-Conwy 1990). Such intensive dependence on caribou and other interior resources is viewed by many, however, as an ecologically unsustainable adaptation in Newfound-

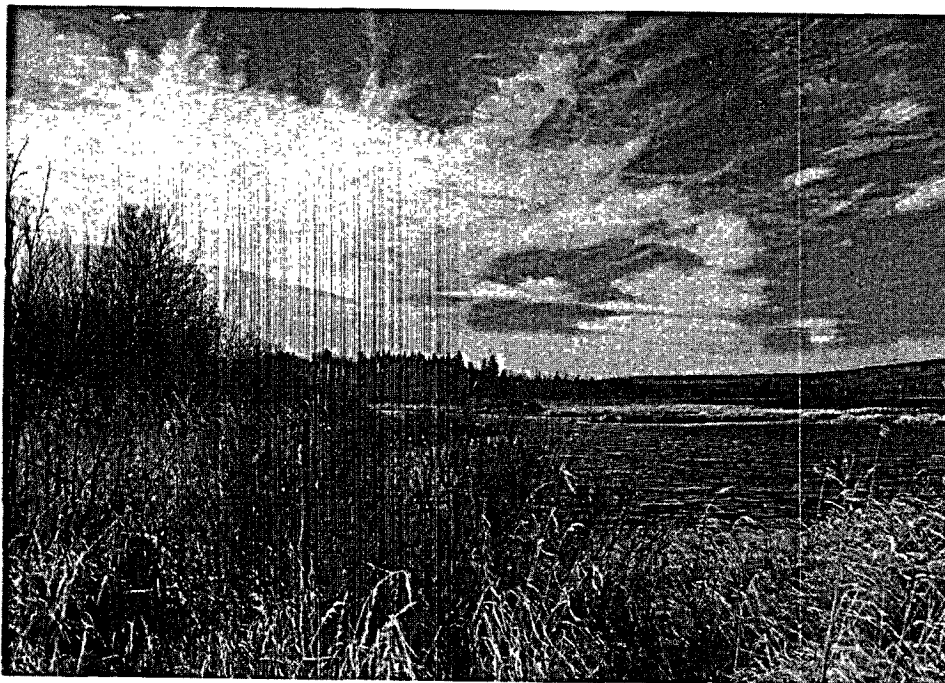


Figure 2. Wigwam Point: one of the interior sites the Beothuk retreated to in the late historic period. Photo by author.

land's marginal environment (Tuck and Pastore 1985; Tuck 1976: 75, n.d.:168). Thus in the epic's final chapter the Beothuk, confined to the island's marginal interior, and suffering from disease, starvation, and hostile attacks by Europeans, dwindled into extinction.

Conceptualizing the Beothuk in the Era of Extinction

The collapse and eventual extinction of the Beothuk under the onslaught of conditions mentioned above is the all-too-familiar story of the Beothuk. It is the tale of a people swept by historical events beyond their control to an inevitable extinction. Yet the Beothuk could and did pursue their own objectives. Adaptations and social strategies were actively employed as day-to-day means of resisting and coping with the turbulent historical circumstances of the times. These strategies included avoiding interaction with Europeans, moving from the coast to the interior of the island, physically challenging European expansion and settlement, and constructing internal cohesiveness via identity and ideology in the face of a hostile "other."

Avoidance

Understanding why the Beothuk avoided interaction with Europeans rather than establishing a sustained trading relationship as did other Native American groups in the Northeast, poses a perplexing problem for Beothuk scholars. In a classic article, Pastore (1987) tackles the question of Beothuk and European non-interaction from a historically situated economic perspective (see also Pastore 1993). Pastore views the failure of the Beothuk and Europeans to set up a formalized trading system as a consequence of their differing economic objectives. The Beothuk, he argues, had little incentive to engage in a trading relationship that would have required dependency on Europeans and the reorganization of subsistence activities around less productive fur-bearing animals. Importantly, Pastore (1987) posits, the Beothuk did not have to trade since they could easily obtain the products they would have traded for, namely iron, through theft as well as salvaging European goods from abandoned fishing stations, stages, or shipwrecked boats. Likewise, Europeans did not need the Beothuk to obtain the resources they desired. European economic interests were largely directed offshore, for cod, and not toward the relatively poor resources on land (Pastore 1987: 48). When sought, terrestrial resources were hunted or trapped by Europeans themselves (Smith 1987a, 1987b), not obtained through trade with the Beothuk (Pastore 1987:50).

Pastore's economic avoidance model is coun-

tered by Marshall (1996) who argues, for the most part, that ideology and cultural tradition were more important in shaping Beothuk avoidance than economics. Marshall essentially gives Beothuk agency primacy in explanation. She argues, contra Pastore, that European trading interests were initially high (see also Gilbert 1992) and that it was instead the Beothuk's lack of interest in trade that forced Europeans to engage in trapping themselves: "the development of a fur business by English trappers was the result of the Indians' failure to trade, and not the cause" (Marshall 1996:74). Marshall's perspective on European avoidance stems from what she sees as an early and conscious choice by the Beothuk not to interact: "... their strong adherence to traditional values and behavior, combined with an early rejection of Europeans and their culture, was salient to the Beothuk's failure to engage in trade" (Marshall 1996:74, 441). This contrasts with Pastore's position favoring economic conditions instead of ideology as the primary catalyst for Beothuk-European non-interaction.

From a somewhat different perspective, McLean and Gilbert stress the complexity of Beothuk-European relations, avoiding blanket notions of avoidance all together. McLean's work is based largely on material evidence that may hint at on-again, off-again trade with Europeans. He points to trade beads recovered from Boyd's Cove, that Pastore attributes to Beothuk-Montagnais (Innu) exchange (1987:58), a high percentage of fur-bearing remains recovered at Boyd's Cove, and evidence of heat-modified iron implements as suggestive of trade and/or peaceful interaction between Beothuk and Europeans (McLean 1990, 1993; see also Rowley-Conwy 1990: 16). In a similar vein, Gilbert cites historical evidence from seventeenth century Trinity Bay as evidence for peaceful relations, at least initially. His analysis of seventeenth century documents reveal that early settlers were very interested in trading with the Beothuk (see also Marshall 1996: 73-4), that trading did in fact occur on several occasions, and that the Beothuk were, at the time of contact, already familiar with the trading enterprise (Gilbert 1990, 1992). Together, McLean and Gilbert present a formidable case for a more complex, and at times more amicable, history of European-Beothuk relations.

Of course, any attempt to generalize socioeconomic relations between the two groups is destined to be problematic. Gilbert and McLean's research has exposed the frailty of generalization with illustrations of Beothuk-European interaction in the historic period. Their challenge to the dominant model of avoidance however, is largely a critique of resolution. Neither Pastore nor Marshall, it seems, would deny particular regional and historical trajectories in European-Beothuk relations (Marshall 1996:28-31, 67; Pastore 1987:49-50, 1992b:51). Instead both

Pastore and Marshall appear to be interested in the larger process and pattern of Beothuk avoidance, one that is ubiquitous throughout the historic period. There is little question that Pastore and Marshall are on target with this orientation; the Beothuk went extinct as a consequence of avoidance rather than assimilation.

Similar to Gilbert and McLean's challenge to the generalized avoidance model, Pastore and Marshall's seemingly dichotomous positions on the reasons for avoidance can also be thought of as one of resolution. Neither perspective is inherently incompatible with the other. It is likely that the Beothuk avoidance pattern, if culturally driven as Marshall argues, was tied to and derived in part from economic conditions (e.g., Pastore 1987). Accordingly, Marshall's emphasis on Beothuk ideology emerging largely within an economic vacuum, where avoidance is entirely internally conceived, probably pays too little attention to the historic-economic environment of the historic era. Pastore's economic emphasis similarly may unfairly minimize a cultural component in avoidance. While it is likely that Beothuk avoidance was tied, especially early on, to different economic strategies, in the late historic period, encroaching Europeans and escalating violence might have led the Beothuk to adopt a cultural rationale for avoidance.

Pastore is undoubtedly correct in emphasizing an economic framework as the basis for understanding the absence of Beothuk-European interaction. The European focus on offshore resources, together with the relatively easy access the Beothuk had to European goods, as Pastore (1987, 1992b) notes, certainly would not have required sustained relations between the two groups. In addition, European interests in Newfoundland were largely seasonal, a fact that, together with the absence of missionaries (Rowe 1977: 22) and a permanent settler community, would also have discouraged intensive Beothuk-European contact (Pastore 1987, 1993). The absence of relations in itself, however, does not require conflict. Rather, it was the actual conditions of European expansion and resource exploitation (see Marshall 1996: 442–3), working on a framework of divergent economic objectives (Pastore 1987), that fueled hostilities and may have helped solidify an avoidance and resistance ideology.

European expansion, first along the outer coastal edge and later into the bottoms of deep bays and inlets, pushed the Beothuk into marginal areas and restricted their mobility. Coupled with this expansion, European exploitation of staple resources, such as the great auk, seals, and salmon, denied the Beothuk critical foodstuffs (Marshall 1996: 61–8, 78–9). At the same time, the Beothuk continued to steal and salvage iron and other goods from increasingly permanent European settlements. Both groups, accordingly, were pursuing mutually

incompatible economic strategies of exploitation. Without an extant system of social relations in place to fall back upon, as would have been the case had the two parties been involved in an interdependent economic relationship (e.g. Pastore 1987), it was impossible for either group to reconcile their differences. Thus mutual exploitation continued, with Europeans achieving success in reaching their economic objectives—exploiting resources and seizing space—at the expense of the Beothuk. Beothuk cultural strategies of avoidance (e.g., Marshall 1996), resistance, and solidarity did not develop independent of these events. These strategies grew out of a context of economic and spatial subjugation and a history of non-relations (i.e. Pastore 1987).

Place

The Beothuk's retreat into the island's interior was certainly a response to the growth of European settlements along the coast and to the threat of violence that they faced from settlers. At the same time, however, interior settlement may have also been used to serve social objectives within a malevolent historical climate (Holly 1998b). The Beothuk would have found the interior, especially the deep interior, to be a relatively safe location where religious ceremonies could be celebrated, and where solidarity could be fostered. Importantly, interior settlement would have enabled the Beothuk to continue to live as Beothuk, distanced, both physically and culturally, from the chaos on the coast. I have argued elsewhere that a more intensive interior adaptation might have been facilitated through the extension of 'deer fences,' built for channeling caribou into a hunter's ambush, and the intensification of storage facilities (Holly 1998b). The intensification of these caribou procurement and preservation strategies, in addition to solving the environmental and resource constraints of the interior, could have also served to enable Beothuk social objectives such as social life, safety and ceremony (Holly 1998b). There is some evidence, for example, to suggest that the Beothuk continued to enact ritual once confined to the interior of the island.

Concentrated caribou bone mash, usually associated with elongated hearth features, has been interpreted at Beothuk sites as ritual activities analogous to *mokoshans*, held among the Innu of neighboring Labrador and Quebec (Armitage 1991; Henriksen 1989; Loring 1996, 1997). Pastore was the first archaeologist in Newfoundland to draw the analogy between long linear hearths on the island and those recognized in Labrador as related to Innu *mokoshan* ceremonies (1986a; 1992b). After Pastore's identification of a linear hearth at Boyd's Cove (Fig. 3), archaeologists soon found evidence of similar features at their excavations elsewhere on the is-

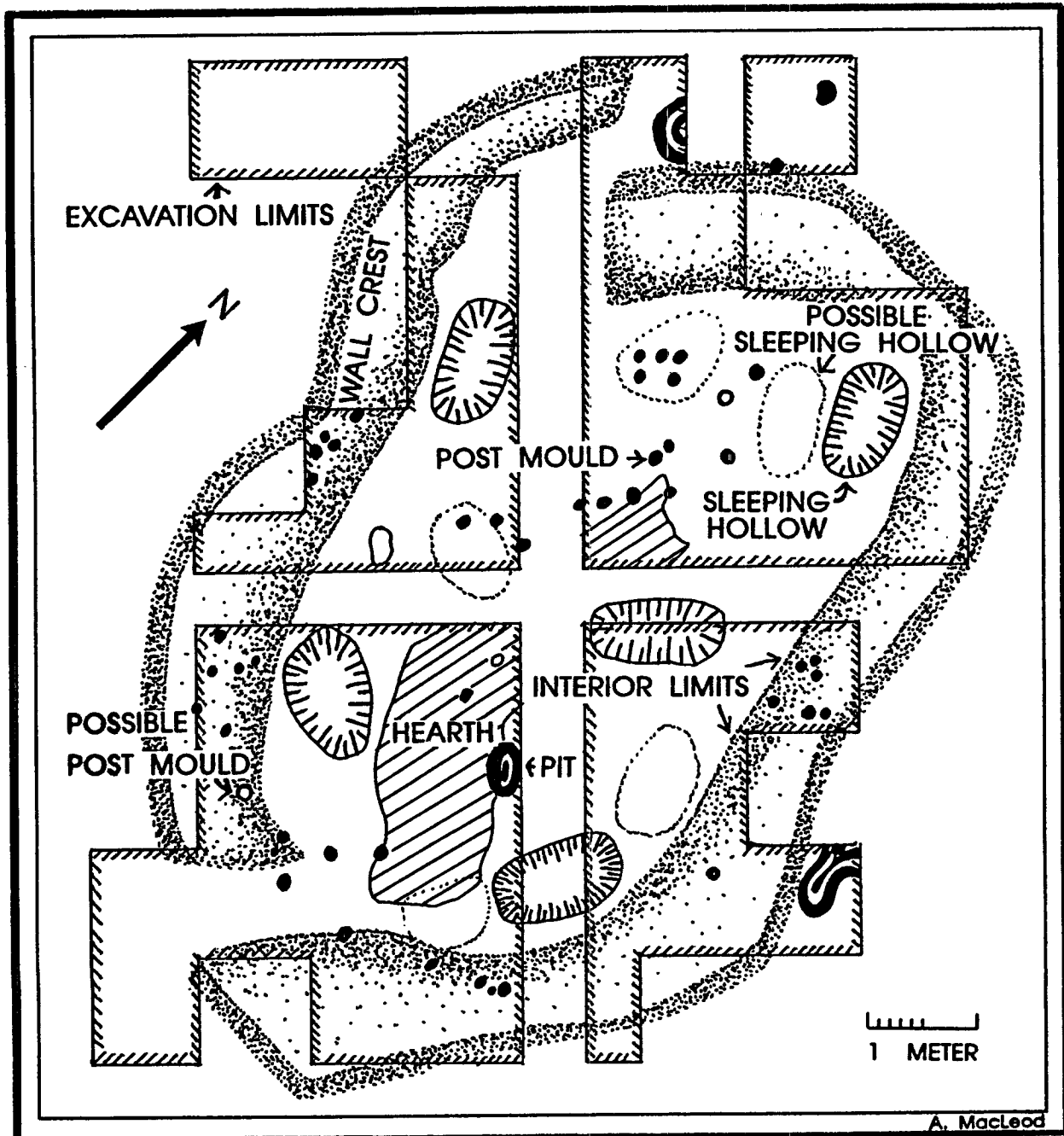


Figure 3. Plan of House 4 at Boyd's Cove (Drawn by Ann MacLeod in Pastore 1992b: 42).

land (Reader 1994, 1996, 1998b; Schwarz 1993). As of yet there is no definitive archaeological evidence of Beothuk ritual behavior in the interior during the late historic period. At the same time, professional archaeologists have not excavated interior Beothuk sites since Pastore made the *mokoshan* analogy at Boyd's cove. I think it is likely that the concentrated caribou bone mash deposits and linear hearth features unearthed at deep interior, late historic sites at Wigwam Brook (LeBlanc 1973:82–92)

and Indian Point (Devereux 1970:21–22) would have been identified as evidence of *mokoshans* if excavated today. Amateur excavations in the Newfoundland interior have also unearthed long linear heart features at presumably late historic Beothuk sites (Locke n.d.). Finally, there is also some historic evidence to support Beothuk ritual activities at this late date. During his trip up the Exploit's River in January, 1812 Buchan (Howley 1915:79) reported seeing "... a quantity of deers' leg

bones ranged on poles (in all three hundred)" in a Beothuk wigwam. Buchan noted that the marrow had been extracted from these bones, indicative of processing in preparation for a *mokoshan* ceremony. Although somewhat speculative, there seems to be evidence to suggest that the Beothuk continued to perform ritual ceremonies in the late historic period.

Relocation into the deep interior provided a historically appropriate context for the Beothuk to pursue social objectives. The deep interior, removed from European summer settlements on the coast and winter tilts (or cabins) in the near interior, would have been a relatively safe place for the Beothuk to aggregate and carry on social activities. The interior had also long been a historically familiar place for the Beothuk. Archaeological excavations have revealed evidence for utilization of the interior extending well into the precontact era (Dereux 1970; Penney 1987, 1988, 1990; Reader 1994, 1998b; Schwarz 1987, 1992, 1994). Use of the interior in "prehistory" was likely seasonal, extending from fall into early winter, and temporary, with primary settlement oriented more toward near coastal locations (Reader 1994, 1996:7; Rowley-Conwy 1990; Schwarz 1984, 1992, 1994). In contrast, interior occupation during the historic Beothuk era seems to have been more intensive and of longer duration (Holly 1998b; LeBlanc 1973; Marshall 1996; Pastore 1992b; Reader 1998b; Tuck 1976). In any case, it was not necessary for the Beothuk to carve new traditions into the interior landscape. The interior was already a place with historical significance, a place that could easily be translated into a focal point for Beothuk continuity in the historic era.

The coast, of course, would have also been a meaningful place for Beothuk. Archaeological evidence demonstrates an important coastal orientation before the arrival of Europeans (Holly 1997; Schwarz 1992, 1994). That the seizure of the coast and its resources by Europeans would have been devastating to local subsistence, and ultimately threatened Beothuk existence, is undisputed. Confiscation of the coast, however, would have done much more than merely deny the Beothuk vital marine resources. Loss of the coast would have also entailed the loss of *place*. Undeniably, the Beothuk had intimate associations with the coastal landscape, myths and narratives that were rooted there, and histories that tied them to these locations. The Beothuk, for instance, believed in a frightening sea monster, had an emblem that represented a whale's tail and returned to coastal sites year after year (Howley 1915:230, 249, 297; Marshall 1996: 379–384). For the Beothuk to have to abandon these places meant that they were not only denied key marine resources but also access to a sacred geography.

Ideology

The avoidance of Europeans and movement into the deep interior of the island were more than mere responses to the historical pressures of European expansion. I argue that these strategies can be considered components of an adaptive package that the Beothuk actively employed in the historic era. To this list ideology can also be added. I view Beothuk ideology as glimpsed through Shanawdithit's testimony and Beothuk hostilities as one unique to the historic era. This historic ideology ultimately formed out of a matrix of European expansion, resource exploitation and violence.

The notion that ideology could have played a role in Beothuk avoidance and resistance in the late historic period should not be viewed as a radical idea. The historic record documents a number of ideologically motivated revitalization or resistance episodes across North America (Abel 1993:128–130; Brown 1982; Francis and Morantz 1983:159–60; Hittman 1973; Mooney 1896; Nagel 1996:159; Ruby and Brown 1989; VanStone 1974:71–72; Wallace 1956). These movements often emerge out of a context of economic and cultural subjugation (Wallace 1956), in situations not unlike the Beothuk's. That the Beothuk may have similarly formulated an ideological strategy for coping with the malevolent historical climate of the era is possible, perhaps even expected. Evidence for an ideological component in resistance is supported by historical documents referring to Beothuk "warfare" tactics and Shanawdithit's testimony.

According to Shanawdithit, the last Beothuk known to Europeans, individuals who chose to live with white men would be sacrificed upon their return to the band (Howley 1915: 184; McGregor 1836: 322; Patterson 1891: 151). Even after death, it was thought that sacrificed individuals continued to be punished. Beothuk who had lived with the white man were apparently denied entry to the "happy island," an afterworld where one could hunt, fish, and feast (McGregor 1836: 322). From Shanawdithit's testimony it appears that Beothuk "traitors" were both socially and spiritually ostracized from their community. Such beliefs may have worked as a deterrent to cultural abandonment and as a glue for cohesiveness and resistance. Ideology thus perhaps served as a strategy of solidarity. Shanawdithit told Cormack that she was taught to "cherish animosity and revenge against all other people" and that this was "enforced by narrating, during the winter evenings, the innumerable wrongs inflicted on the Beothuks by the white men and by Mikmaks" (McGregor 1836: 322).

In the physical world, solidarity would have been strengthened by the always unpredictable and potentially dangerous nature of Beothuk-European interaction. European interests in Newfoundland

were initially seasonal and involved fishing fleets from a number of different countries: Portugal, Spain, England, and France. Consequently, encounters between the mobile Beothuk and the migratory European fisherman who frequented Newfoundland's shores were often socially unpredictable. The Beothuk would not have been able to count on continued relations with the same ship, the same crew, or even vessels from the same country from year to year. This variability would have translated into social anxiety and fear for both the Beothuk and Europeans when contact did occur. Certainly myths, stereotypes, and misconceptions would have flourished in this climate (see Duviols 1997; Hugh-Jones 1989). Historic references to the Beothuk as giants over 6 feet tall and possessing incredible strength (Howley 1915:257–8, 261, 266; Marshall 1989: 121–2; Marshall 1996:164), among other mythical associations (Rowe 1977:104–5), for instance, are likely the product of this social unfamiliarity. The Beothuk, for their part, undoubtedly constructed the Europeans in a similarly skewed way. For example, Shanawdithit's drawing of an evil, bearded man may derive from a negative Beothuk stereotype of Europeans (Ruth Whitehead, pers. Comm. in Marshall 1996:559).

The persistence of stereotypes and the absence of formalized social relationships would have made Beothuk-European encounters a stressful and always potentially dangerous affair. Rather than risk violence to acquire resources that the Beothuk could already obtain outside of trade (Pastore 1987), a safer strategy for the Beothuk during the historic period would have been to maintain and strengthen relations among one another. Therefore, in the context of social unpredictability, fellow Beothuk would have been categorized as safe and socially dependable in contrast to Europeans. Social anxiety associated with contact with Europeans—the unpredictable “other”—accordingly, may have intensified and reinforced cohesiveness among the Beothuk.

Beothuk resistance ideology did not emerge in a vacuum. It developed out of a myriad of conditions that included competitive economic objectives, threats of violence, and loss of space and resources. Ideology, however, was not merely a passive reflection of the historical climate. Ideology was actively constructed and actively employed by the Beothuk as a “tool” for coping with the historic era. That the Beothuk were *active* players, even in the midst of their extinction, is especially apparent in resistance.

Resistance

Incidents of violence by both Europeans and Beothuk have been well-documented (Howley 1915; Ly-saght 1971; Marshall 1989, 1996). European initiated hostilities were often instigated by the theft or destruction of their goods and equipment (Marshall

1996:95). The Beothuk responded similarly to deprivations against them—the seizure of their land and resources—with destruction and violence of their own. As such, both European and Beothuk violence can be thought of as retaliatory. Neither group was committed to a specifically offensive or defensive campaign. Both groups, as mentioned earlier, were merely pursuing different economic strategies of exploitation that were incompatible and inherently confrontational. At the crossroads of these two conflicting economic paths laid the inevitability of bloodshed. Violence, however, was much more than mere economic strategy. It is clear that Beothuk campaigns against settlers and fishermen involved more than the simple acquisition of desired goods (see Marshall 1996:111–112). A number of confrontations between settlers and Beothuk around Fogo Island, for instance, reveal a complex causality certainly rooted in part in resistance.

That the Beothuk were actively challenging European intrusion, rather than fleeing from it, is epitomized in the death of Michael Turpin in June, 1809 (Fig 4.). The story of Turpin's death is known to scholars primarily from Howley's (1915:268) short narrative of the event. However, Joe Kinsella (1994) has recently offered a more detailed version. Kinsella tells the tale as he heard it told by his grandmother, a longtime resident of Tilting, Fogo Island. As this version does not appear to be known to the academic community, I quote it here in its entirety.

Michael Turpin and Patrick Murray went to Sandy Cove to sow potatoes. While they worked in the garden, a group of Indians crept up on them. They noticed them in time to make an attempt at escape. Turpin, being a good swimmer, ran down the beach and into the water, hoping to swim to a schooner at anchor in Sandy Cove.

Murray ran toward Tilting which was about a mile away. Some of the Indians chased him, while others pursued Turpin. A widow woman (some accounts call her the widow Fowlow) was working in her garden on Sandy Cove Hill. Upon noticing the chase, she raised her spade to her shoulder, and the Indians, still some distance away, thought it was a gun, and turned back. Murray, however, was safe, but he had lost one of his boots in the mud at the muddy bridge (near Reardons Rocks) and he had an arrow stuck in his back.

Meanwhile, Turpin swam for his life towards the schooner. Unfortunately for him, there was no one aboard the schooner to help him. The Indians launched a canoe and soon killed him. They killed and beheaded Turpin and took his head with them. Tradition has it that in the Spring of 1810, his head was found on a pole near High Point below the Exploits River.

As for Patrick Murray, he made his way to Tilting. My grandmother's grandfather was six years old at the time. She related that he could remember



Figure 4. Turpin's Rock, Fogo Island: where Michael Turpin was beheaded in 1809. Photo by author.

seeing Murray lying face down in the family porch on Murray's Island. A crowd of men and women were on the scene as they tried to remove the arrow from his back. Apparently they were successful. Patrick Murray lived to tell the tale! (Kinsella 1994: 11).

In another attack, the Beothuk skillfully employed a sea pigeon decoy to gather intelligence on the enemy. In the late 1700s a crew of nine men entered Shoal Bay, near the community of Fogo, to collect rock ballast. Upon nearing the coast, the crew anchored the schooner in which they were traveling and proceeded toward land in a small punt. Just as they were reaching shore, the crew was hit with a barrage of arrows from Indians perched on the cliffs above. The crew made a hasty retreat toward the schooner, while doing what they could to defend themselves from the volley of arrows. Five crewmembers were injured in the onslaught, three badly enough to require assistance out of the punt. The crew later reckoned that a decoy sea pigeon that they had encountered during their paddle to shore had been used by the Beothuk to determine whether or not the party had firearms (Marshall 1989:121–122). Presumably, if the crew had a weapon, they would have fired at the pigeon thus alarming the Beothuk of their offensive capabilities.

Whether or not the Beothuk had originally planned to use the decoy to draw Europeans or waterfowl is not known. What is clear however, is that on several occasions the Beothuk were actively preying upon Europeans rather than fleeing from them (see Marshall 1996:97). The Beothuk were not

merely stealing iron for arrowheads and axes. The Beothuk regularly destroyed equipment (Howley 1915:27–8; Marshall 1989:138) and firearms (Howley 1915:93), burned boats (Marshall 1996:40) or cut them loose (Howley 1915:13, 275; Marshall 1989: 138; Peyton 1987:34; Quinn 1979:65 Rowe 1977: 114), killed and wounded livestock (Lester 1798 in Rowe 1977:113), and even soiled laundry with human excrement (Kinsella 1994:8), obviously actions that reveal more than mere thievery.

Settlers, for their part, seem to have been aware of the very real threat that the Beothuk presented. A Breton sailor shipwrecked in Newfoundland in 1787 described armed guards in the town of Fogo and rumors of cannibalistic natives (Bakker and Drapeau 1994:42). There are tales of women afraid to stay in their houses alone and of children being brought to work with the adults for fear of being kidnapped (Kinsella 1994:8). Certainly many of these tales are embellished, yet the stories reveal a history of fear embedded in relations with the Beothuk, one that goes beyond the threat of losing iron nails.

We know little about how the Beothuk would have internalized their attacks on Europeans. It is likely that successful campaigns would have been situated within a larger context of resistance and celebrated. Shanawdithit describes, for example, festivities that ensued after the killing of two marines and the impaling of one of their heads upon a pole (Marshall 1996:426). Similar celebrations likely followed the beheading to two boys in Twillingate (Howley 1915:273), Michael Turpin's decapitation

in Sandy Cove, and many others (Howley 1915:27; Marshall 1996:426; Speck 1922:53).

These actions of resistance illustrate that the Beothuk were not fleeing in the face of European expansion, passive victims, defeated and disheveled. Rather, the Beothuk physically resisted intrusion into their land and the loss of their resources and livelihood. The Beothuk illustrate, through confrontation, that they were agents even within the historical context of extinction.

Identity

Identity is archaeologically problematic. There need not be any direct correlation between a group and the material culture that the group employs, nor will material boundaries necessarily mark group boundaries (Jones 1997). The symbols used to construct identity will change through time and take various forms (Barth 1970:14; Kennedy 1982), some of which may be materially expressed, while others are socially translated. Hodder (1979) has suggested that boundaries may become more apparent when different social entities are competing for resources or power (see also Fitzhugh 1987; McGuire 1982). His work among the Ishamus led him to suggest that calabashes served as a medium for expressing and manipulating power relations between men and women (Hodder 1985, 1986). Calabashes, in this sense, were viewed as a text for communicating information.

For the Beothuk, however, identity did not have to be materially expressed. If we employ Tilley's (1991) analogy between material culture and

language, for the Beothuk at least, artifacts did not have to serve as the chief vehicle for identity; actions in this case spoke louder than words. The Beothuk physically removed themselves from the domain of Europeans by settling in the deep interior; they denied sustained interaction through avoidance; they practiced a distinct economic strategy; and, at times, they openly confronted Europeans with violence, thievery and harassment. The distinction between the Beothuk and "the other" was already apparent at many levels, even at the most fundamental—language. For the Beothuk, there was little need to cleverly code identity into material culture.

If artifacts are assumed to provide an outlet (one among many) for identity expression, however, then Beothuk material culture was unambiguous. Material culture was immediately contextualized within an undeniably Beothuk realm. The Beothuk manufactured implements from local natural raw material, as they had always done, or transformed European items into their own forms (McLean 1989). They hammered nails and traps into arrowheads, spears, and scrapers, and they covered their dwellings with European sails (Fig 5). Significantly, the Beothuk appropriated these items for use in distinctively non-European contexts for distinctively non-European purposes (see Miller and Hammell 1986; Sharp 1952). They used European nails, for instance, to hunt and process game or even kill encroaching settlers.

Perhaps most importantly, they smeared red ochre over these implements, their clothing and their bodies—everything Beothuk. The importance

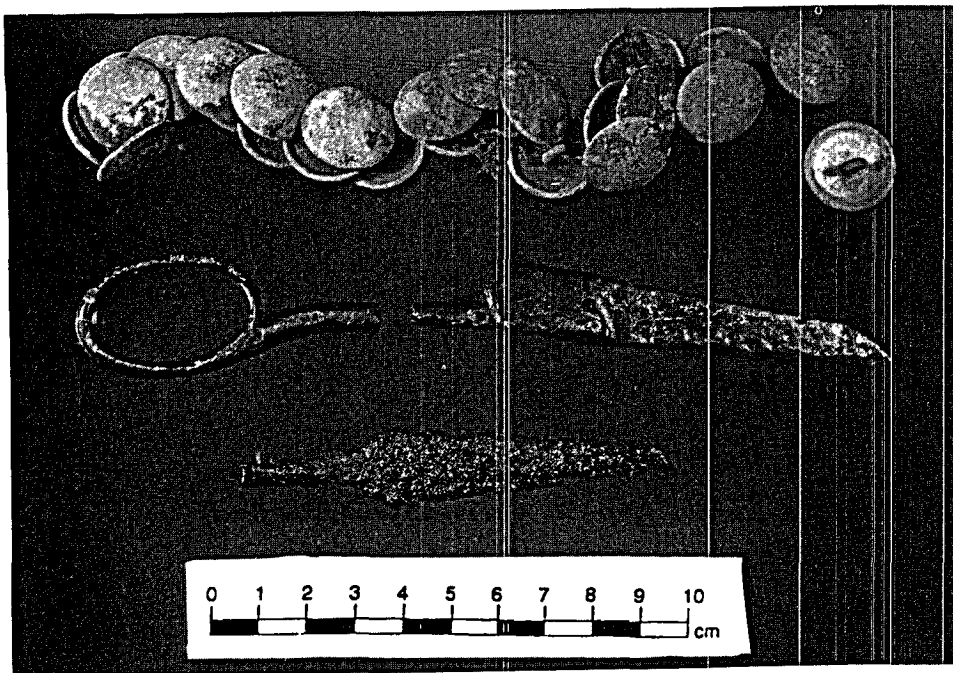


Figure 5. Necklace of buttons (DfAw-7), modified nail arrowhead (DfAv-1), disassembled scissor parts (DfAw-1). Courtesy of the Newfoundland museum.

of red ochre to the Beothuk is obvious. Before the Beothuk were known to the anthropological community as the Beothuk they were simply the Red Indians of Newfoundland. If Santu, an elderly woman who claimed descent from a Beothuk father and Mi'kmaq mother (Speck 1922:57), is to be believed, there were several rituals that the Beothuk celebrated that involved the application of red ochre (Speck 1922:58, 62–3). Conversely the de-ochering of an individual was apparently a form of punishment (Speck 1992:64). Santu's testimony, however, must be carefully considered. Speck was not always careful in his collection of ethnographic data (Feit 1991:126–127; Fenton 1991:14; Siebert 1982:91–92). Regardless, the importance of red ochre to the Beothuk is apparent by its presence in numerous burials, archaeological contexts and ethnographic descriptions (Howley 1915; Marshall 1996). It would seem that the Beothuk were intimately associated with red ochre, in perhaps the way the "pre-historic" Innu of Labrador used Ramah chert as a medium of identity (Loring 1992). In both cases—through artifacts and action—Beothuk identity was clearly conveyed.

Identity is also socially problematic. Identity is a dynamic phenomenon constantly in flux in time and space (Hill 1996). I do not deny a Beothuk identity in the precontact era, of course, or a dynamic one. Stephen Loring's (1992) research into the prehistoric Recent Indian period in Labrador, for instance, suggests an intimate association between Ramah chert and the identities of prehistoric populations (1992). His data demonstrates unabated interest in obtaining Ramah chert, even at high costs, over the length of an environmentally challenging and historically complex stretch of time (Loring 1988, 1992, n.d.). Recent Indian populations in Labrador constantly had to operate within a changing "historical" climate in order to obtain Ramah chert. Acquisition of Ramah chert during the Daniel Rattle period (A.D. 200 to A.D. 1000), for example, likely involved exchange relations with Paleo-Eskimo populations on the coast, while later acquisition, during the Point Revenge period (A.D. 1000 to A.D. 1500), suggests direct procurement, as Paleo-Eskimo populations in the area declined (Loring 1988, 1992). Identity manifestation among the prehistoric populations of Labrador, accordingly, would likely have been a dynamic process—continually constituting itself vis-à-vis other cultural entities and within different historical contexts. I envision Beothuk identity as similarly malleable and historically situated.

In any given time and place identity is socially and strategically situated. Individuals actively construct and employ identities in vastly different ways in vastly different contexts (see Plaice 1990). Thus it is difficult to determine the boundaries of a group's "identity," or even an individual's, at any given point in time and place. This problem is magnified

in studies of past identities. Archaeologists and even ethnohistorians rarely have access to the fine-grained situational data needed to properly contextualize identity in time and place. As a consequence, our pictures of past identities are always rough sketches.

The difficulty of delineating a Beothuk "identity" for the historic period is clear. We know, for example, that during the late eighteenth century—at about the same time the Beothuk were shooting arrows at fishermen in Shoal Bay—there was a young Beothuk man, "June," living and prospering in the nearby town of Fogo. After being captured as a boy in 1758, June grew up among Europeans, but between two worlds. He continued to maintain contact with relatives in the interior while becoming successful in the fishery at Fogo (Howley 1915:59, 288; Patterson 1891:133). June's ability to navigate within a changing historical climate and vastly different cultural contexts illustrates the complexity of putting parameters around identity.

Undeniably, there were more arrows shot at settlers than there were Beothuk boys living as Europeans. For the most part, the Beothuk appear to have actively resisted the European presence in their land. Beothuk identity in the historic period emerged in this context. By constructing an identity, vis-à-vis the material, social and cultural differences between themselves and an "other," the Beothuk reinforced cohesiveness and group membership. Identity, along with settlement patterns, ideology and resistance, became a conglomerate "adaptive" strategy that the Beothuk employed within the historical context of their extinction.

Conclusion

The allure of the extinction epic, with the inevitable pull towards a tragic climax, all too often robs the Beothuk—the star characters of the tale—of agency or action. Yet the Beothuk were, throughout the historic period, actively pursuing their own social objectives. Even in the midst of great historical turmoil, they held feasts, they secretly stole or destroyed equipment, openly attacked settlers and celebrated successful campaigns around the decapitated heads of their slain foes, they reorganized subsistence and settlement strategies to enable refuge in the interior, and they employed ideology and identity in ways that reaffirmed and solidified their actions. This is not, of course, to downplay the tragedy of their extinction. Nor do I wish to suggest that the Beothuk were necessarily in control of their destiny. At the same time, the fact of extinction should not preclude Beothuk adaptation or agency en route to extinction. Neither adaptation nor agency should be contingent on success, on final outcomes.

Similarly, I share Brody's discomfort with terms like "impact" that have connotations of passivity (1998:247). It is certainly an understatement to say that the Beothuk were "impacted" by the arrival of Europeans in Newfoundland. Yet such "impacts" should not deny the Beothuk or other Native American groups from an active role in the negotiation of contact-history. Elsewhere, in the midst of disease, famine and war, Native Americans sought trade items and allies, became shrewd entrepreneurs or resisted outside influences. While the world collapsed in around them, the Beothuk seem to have made choices and sought adaptations. Regardless of the final outcome, the Beothuk were a people who were, at all times, actively negotiating within their historical situation—even on the eve of their extinction.

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