Some Recent Archaeological Discoveries from Prince Edward Island

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RÉSUMÉ

Il s'agit ici d'une expédition archéologique dans l'Ile du Prince-Edouard. Organisée par le Musée National du Canada, l'expédition était dirigée par l'Auteur lui-même, assisté du Docteur J. Maloney et de monsieur B. Burns de Charlottetown. On explora et localisa exactement dix-huit sites, collectionnant en surface et creusant de petits puits là où la chose était possible. Les quelques pages de cet article décrivent les sites, la nature des artifaits collectionnés, ainsi que les relations des différents sites avec d'autres sites ou complexes de la région environnante.

One of the areas of Canada most poorly known archaeologically has been Prince Edward Island. Despite the fact that so much of the island's acreage has been cleared and cultivated, archaeological specimens have been rather rare and are only slowly coming to the attention of archaeologists. The only public collection of artifacts in the province is a collection of Nova Scotia artifacts, largely of unknown provenience, loaned to the Montague Museum from the Nova Scotia Museum of Science in Halifax. Recently, interested amateurs have been surface collecting and recording site locations. Extensive excavation has not, however, been attempted.

In 1961 and 1962, a field party which the author directed, from the National Museum of Canada, spent 23 days in Prince Edward Island, and, with the help of Dr. J. Maloney and Mr. B. Burns of Charlottetown, located and explored 18 sites, making surface collections and small test pits where possible. Our strategy was first to pinpoint all the locally known sites, and then to check likely areas near good water sources and rich clam and oyster beds. In this short paper the location of the sites and the

nature of the artifacts are noted briefly, and relations to other sites and complexes in the surrounding area are explored.

All of the sites were relatively small and in most cases badly eroded. Generally we can say that they are shallow, and, in cases where the shell deposits are indisputably aboriginal, they usually consist of very poorly preserved shells. The sites which have been recorded thus far are almost exclusively from the Gulf coast of the island, where the artifacts are usually found washed out of the sites, on the beach, at low tide. The locations are usually quite similar — on salt water, but not on the exposed areas of the immediate coast, and near a reliable supply of fresh water. Bays whose mouths are protected by sand bars are favourable locations. On sites where we have been able to discover undisturbed deposits, these are usually several feet above the high tide mark. From the position of surface finds on the beaches, the sites appear to have been a series of houses spread along the shore. Test pitting has revealed that settlement did not occur more than a few yards back from the high water mark; there was probably a single row of structures along the water front.

In locating and describing the sites, we move from the eastern part of the island to the north-west.

Sites have been located at South Lake, at the very eastern end of Prince Edward Island. South Lake is a brackish salt water lagoon, separated from the sea by extensive sand dunes. At the extreme western end of the lake there is a deep narrow channel to the sea. Behind South Lake, the land rises to almost 100 feet elevation. At intervals along the shore, there are springs — four of which run in the summer, even though all forest cover has been removed from the area immediately behind them. At each one of these springs, a site is located. According to the National Museum site designation system, these sites are coded CcCml, CcCm2, CcCm3, and CcCm4, from east to west along the shore of the lagoon. Of the four sites, only the third, CcCm3, was not completely washed out. In a private collection in Charlottetown, there is a long, thin, finely chipped knife of yellow-brown quartzite from CcCm1. At that site we found many quartz and quartzite flakes. From CcCm2 we found more flakes and the tip of a chert knife, 3.25 cm long. Site CcCm3 yielded flakes of quartz, quart-

zite and schist, and a quartz knife. There was also a rough chopper made of a quartz pebble, 7 cm long, 5 cm wide, and 2 cm thick (see plate 1, top centre), and a small (2.6 cm long) chalcedony corner-notched point. CcCm4 yielded only a few chips. South Lake, with its shallow, warm water, must have provided abundant fowl, fish, and shellfish for the prehistoric inhabitants, and a place of shelter for travel around the eastern end of the island. One would suspect that other lagoon-like bays in eastern Prince Edward Island also supported communities of Indians.

Sites have been reported at the head of St. Peter's Bay. However, the nearby Savage Harbour seems to be one of the areas richest in archaeological materials in the province. It is possible to cross Prince Edward Island with a short canoe portage, into the headwaters of a stream flowing into Savage Harbour, from the Hillsborough River, which is a long arm of Charlottetown Harbour. The major site, on the western shore of Savage Harbour, CcCq1, extends for several hundred yards along the shore. From the eroded bank, about 12 feet above the high water mark, artifacts have been collected for the past several decades. A series of shallow shell deposits, not more than a few inches deep, can be seen at the top of the bank. From this site, adzes, of white limestone-chert (see plate 1, upper right) and schist were found. These are about 13.3 cm long and 5.3 cm wide and the thickness varies from 1.8 cm to 2.7 cm. One axe or wedge of basalt was also found. It is 6.4 cm long, 3.8 cm wide, and 1.8 cm thick.

The predominant material for artifacts at this site and others in Prince Edward Island is brown or yellow quartzite. Erskine (1960:358) mentions that this material also occurs in Nova Scotia. The most common artifacts are thick, disk-like bifaces made from quartzite pebbles which have undergone rough primary flaking (see plate 1, top row, extreme left). They may have been used as all purpose knives — perhaps even as shell-fish-openers. They measure about 6 cm in length, 3.8 cm in width, and 2 cm in thickness. Two types of points were found, although there is only one specimen of each. The first is a thick-cross-sectioned, stemmed point 5.6 cm long, 1.6 cm wide, and 1.2 cm thick, made from a quartzite pebble (see plate 1, bottom row, third from left), and the other is a small, green, flint corner-notched point about 3 cm long (see plate 1, bottom row, fourth from left). Also

found were retouched flake knives with single cutting edges (see plate 1, top row, extreme right). Although the shapes of these are more irregular than that of the usual semi-lunar knife, they would appear to have been hafted in a similar manner. They are thickest in cross-section opposite the cutting edge, and in this sense, have the same appearance as backed blades. Also, a broken quartz knife, 4.3 cm long, was found.

From three points on the western shore of Savage Harbour, similar flakes and artifacts were found, though the sites are smaller and the flakes less abundant (see plate 1, bottom row, extreme left). Two of these sites, CcCr1 and CcCr2 both yielded tapered-stemmed points of quartzite (see plate 1, bottom row, extreme right). From CcCr4, on Savage Island, which is actually a sand spit covered with eel grass but exposed at low tide, the tip of a point was found, and local inhabitants stated that prehistoric burials have been found here many years ago.

Local collectors have material from Winter Bay (site CcCs2); however, we found the site unproductive.

From the outer dunes at Tracadie, historic period burials with iron grave goods have been exposed by the wind and sea.

Two sites on Rustico Bay are of considerable size. At least one of these sites (CcCt1) was visited by W.J. Wintemberg according to local sources. This site, on Rustico or Robinson's Island, has been well protected by being within the Prince Edward Island National Park and having a dense cover of poison ivy and high-bush cranberries. Here we were able to locate an undisturbed layer of shells consisting of quahogs (*Mercenaria mercenaria*), oyster (*Crassostrea virginica*), and slipper shell (*Crepidula fornicata*). Oyster was the most abundant. In the shell mound, at about 3" below the surface, was the foreleg of a caribou. The deposit was only about 6" deep and yielded no artifacts. From the shore edge of the site we found flakes of chert, quartzite, and quartz, and the lower portion of a stemmed point 3 cm long and 2.7 cm wide. Mr. J.W. Fewkes (1898) found a single copper head from this site, as well as an ivory detachable harpoon point.

At Oyster Bed Bridge, also on Rustico Bay, there is an extensive shell mound, deeper than those mentioned above, but

badly disturbed by a road intersection and an old farmhouse site. A test pit into the disturbed area did, however, yield one very small, undecorated, uniform brown coloured, grit-tempered pot sherd.

From North Rustico, artifacts have been collected from the surface by several amateur archaeologists. Several artifact forms are represented in the collection of W. Gauthier. Of 27 specimens, 5 are laurel leaf-shaped knives, rather thick and crude; 1 is a short basalt adze; another a stone for abrading fine points like those of awls; 4 are ovate blades; 6 are tapered-stemmed points; 3 are parallel sided points or knives; 4 are corner-notched points; and 3 are trianguloid, straight-based knives.

From a bank between 12 and 15 feet high on the shore of New London Bay opposite the village of New London Bridge, the usual quartzite flakes and the butt of an adze were found, as well as broken nodules of yellowish flint. Since such flint is very uncommon, it is difficult to rule out the possibility that it comes from ballast dumped from the early European ships. However, the occurrence of water-washed, ostensibly worked, chunks of similar flint from the peninsula opposite Seal Island in Grand Entry Harbour, Magdalen Islands — a place seldom frequented by ships because it is very shallow, makes the possibility of Indian deposition much more likely.

On Darnley Basin, an arm of the sea, a new bridge provides the southwestern approach to the community of Malpeque. In the construction of this bridge and adjacent buildings, human bones were discovered. Animal bones have also been noted eroding from the bank. The site now appears too scattered for further investigation.

Malpeque Bay, a large salt-water bay with many indentations and a protecting sand spit to shelter it from the Gulf storms appears to be an excellent area for early Indian settlement. While our investigations here did not reveal any deep or stratified sites, some unusual artifacts were collected, particularly from the shores of Grover and Bunbury Islands. From Grover Island, there is a point, perhaps for a harpoon or leister, of slate, 5.7 cm long and 2 cm wide (see plate 1, second row, right). From Bunbury Island, also found on the beach, is a large leaf-shaped knife with

a straight base (see plate 1, bottom row, second from the left). From the northeast shore of this small island, there were found several fragments of adzes. Rough sandstone adzes were recovered from the North Shore of March Water in 2 or 3 feet of water at low tide. Some of them have been chipped all over with only the bit polished, and have a slight concavity midway between the bit and the butt on the underside. From the southwest side of Lennox Island there is a shell mound which is reported to be shallow but undisturbed. It has not yet been thoroughly checked, but at present seems to offer the best prospect in the Malpeque area.

Two areas on the opposite shore of Prince Edward Island deserve mention. The first is around the shore of Peter's Pond at Mimenegash. Here, lithic material has been found in abundance, but the collections have been scattered, and no representative sample is available. The site is of particular interest because there does not seem to be any shell deposit, at least from surface indications and the area which has been extensively plowed. From local reports, projectile points were found, but no mention was made of pottery.

To the immediate south of Fort La Joie or Fort Amherst, on Rocky Point, opposite Charlottetown, shell deposits have been noted on the shore. There are no data on artifacts.

While the above finds are meagre, and the sites in no case fully documented, several trends in settlement, subsistence, and cultural affiliation are evident.

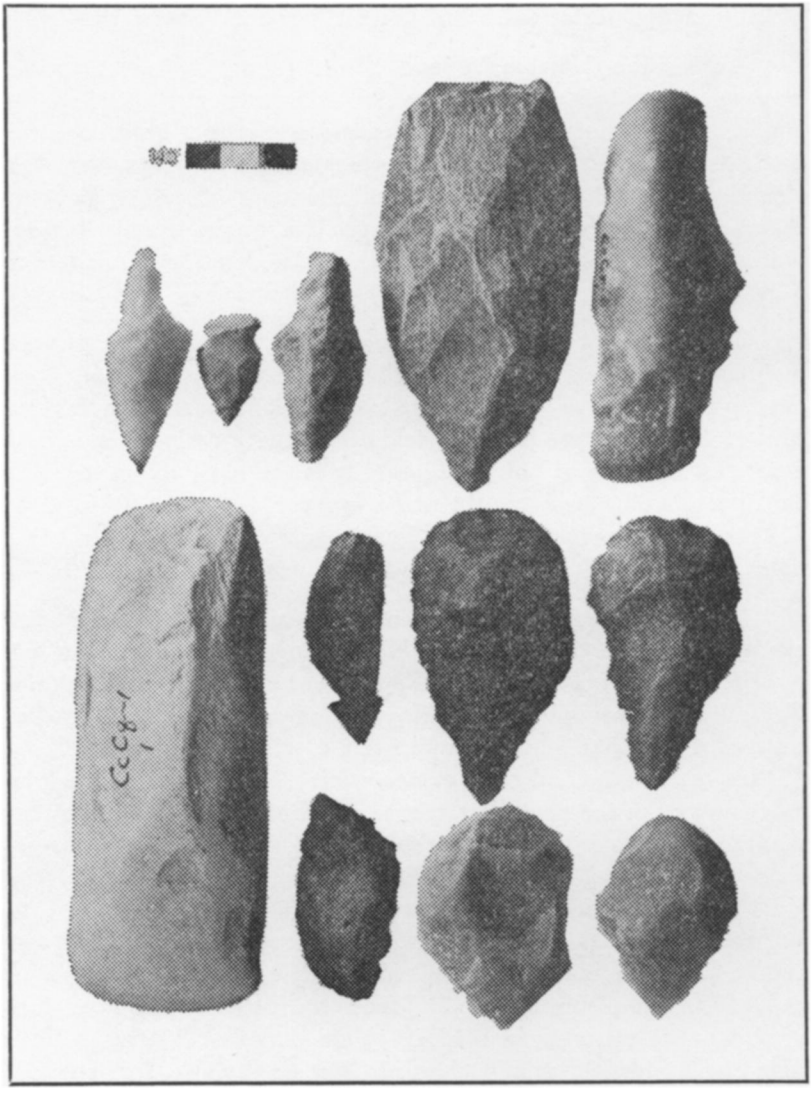
Shore settlements in protected areas, in almost all cases near rich beds of shellfish, are customary. There is no conclusive evidence of inland settlement, nor do we have direct evidence of agriculture. In the latter point, the subsistence would seem to resemble that of the prehistoric Indians of Nova Scotia. The extensive erosion of the sites may be due to the events of the subsequent geologic history of the island, or to the orginal settlement pattern. The sites may originally have been on higher ground, further removed from sea encroachment, or they may have been very hastily constructed right on the shore for summer use only. Local stories say that the Indians came to Prince Edward Island for the summer only. Of the early explorers, we

know that Cartier saw the inhabitants of the island near North Cape, in the summer, on his first voyage, but was not in the vicinity in the winter to record the settlement (Baxter, 1906:99).

Across the Northumberland Strait (about 10 miles to the nearest point in New Brunswick), the settlement pattern is similar, and in many cases the same materials have been used for artifacts — quartzite and grey speckled chert. However, the flaked pebble-knives are much more abundant in Prince Edward Island. There, the variety of material is exceptionally limited; water-worn pebbles, no doubt from glacial deposits, provide the only local stone of suitable quality.

The closest relation to archaeological assemblages on the mainland seems to be with the earlier and middle periods of Nova Scotia prehistory — Bear River and Indian Gardens (Erskine 1960). Sites of these periods yield about twice as many stemmed points as leaf-shaped points. Quartzite is the most common material, but rhyolite and quartz are relatively abundant (ibid.:356, 357). Erskine would date the lower Bear River materials some time before 800 A.D.

Several artifacts relevant to our discussion come from recent excavations near St. Andrews, New Brunswick. In excavations by the National Museum at Pagan Point, St. Andrews (site BgDs1) a brown quartzite knife with primary flaking was discovered (National Museum specimen catalogue number BgDs1-26, see plate 1, second row, extreme left). From BgDs10, a few miles away, on the southeast corner of Minister's Island, near St. Andrews, worked quartzite pebbles were found. Single carbon dates from each of these sites were selected for processing by the Yale Geochronometric Laboratory in 1963. For site BgDs1, a sample from 36"-39" below the surface yielded a date of 1880±80 years before 1950 (Yale sample Y-1291), and from BgDs10, a sample from 18"-21" from the surface yielded a date of 2690±80 years before 1950 (Yale sample Y-1293). Both sites also yielded bifacially chipped, flint or rhyolite, leaf-shaped, round-based knives — much thinner and better finished than the quartzite examples (see plate 1, second row, middle). Could it be that in the absence of better material, the quartzite examples are functional equivalents of the flint of rhyolite specimens known



from New Brunswick and Maine (Moorehead, 1922, Fig. 90-92)? In any case, it would appear that Prince Edward Island was inhabited for at least part of each year at about the same time as the St. Andrews sites were occupied.

This paper has shown how very little is actually known about the archaeology of Prince Edward Island. A search for further collections and richer, less disturbed sites is imperative. Without pottery or artifacts in quantity and settlement patterns from complete excavations, we can do little to supplement the bare bones of a chronology which is very far from being complete.

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