

Mary Maisel
AIA Waldbaum Scholarship Final Report



The Pitsuilak

Being a member of The Gateways Project was an incredible opportunity and I have to thank the Archaeological Institute of America and the Jane C. Waldbaum Archaeological Field School Scholarship for their support. During my time in Canada I was able to expand my knowledge of practical archaeology, learn about a new geographic region, and connect with a strong community of locals and coworkers. During the course of the field season, lead by Dr. William Fitzhugh and our captain Perry Colbourn, we traversed the coast lines of Newfoundland, Labrador, and the Lower North Shore of Quebec. Surveys and excavations in Grand Isle, Lake Melville, Rigolet, and Bradore yielded finds that demonstrated the rich archaeological and complex social history of this subarctic region.



Sunrise with whales

It was common to see minke, locally known as grampus, and humpback whale blows while traveling between sites. One evening a gray seal lounged on a rock and watched us bring our speedboat to shore. On two occasions we were fortunate to see incredible displays of humpback whales feeding and playing.

Large pods of what seemed to be ten to twenty members breached, tail slapped, pec slapped, peduncle slapped, and fluke up dived. Seeing these magnificent animals made me appreciate just how deep the water we were on was in those moments.



Excavating in House 2 midden, Hart Chalet (wearing white and blue hat)

The economy of the Lower North Shore Inuit is dominated by caribou in the archaeological record. It can be safely estimated that only 10% of their economy was based in seal, which is in stark contrast to the economy of the Labrador Inuit; whose economy was 95% seal. The evidence we found to support this estimation came primarily from House 2 at the Hart Chalet (HC H2) site in middens where every scrape of a trowel turned up another caribou bone fragment. A partial caribou skull was also recovered in the HC H2 excavation and was noted as part of the stratigraphy for the west wall of the square it was protruding from.



Sunset on excavations at Grand Isle -3

The Gateways Project is an immersive archaeological experience. I was left wanting to know more and to explore further research opportunities in the area. After discovering the western most Inuit

house in Lake Melville during our several weeks based in Rigolet, Labrador, some of the lingering questions I was left with were: Where are the summer sites? Where are the tent rings? Could the Inuit have been living in subterranean ‘winter’ houses year round? If this is in fact what they were doing, then where are the grave sites? Perhaps they were only in the area during the winter, taking advantage of the caribou herds while the Innu were away in the interior and Europeans had finished the whaling season. It is known that there were hostilities between the Inuit and the Innu. The Innu had alliances with the Europeans in the area at times and would try to drive the Inuit away. Although, the Inuit had some relations with the Europeans as well. Artifacts such as a small metal coin, a barbed iron harpoon and toggle, iron nails, red clay roof tiles, and a lead sounding weight were all excavated in the HC H2 site.



Fred, a local elder and Halcyon, a Gateways crew member

Meaningful archaeology is not possible in this region without the involvement of communities. While in Bonne Esperance, Quebec we worked closely with The Whately Museum to host a community archaeology meeting. Dr. Fitzhugh, another crew member and myself presented our findings from sites in the area and discussed artifacts locals brought in from their private collections. Casual conversations with locals provided valuable information for our work. We were given recommendations for possible sites by locals in all of our base locations. These recommendations were sometimes fruitful and sometimes frustrating, but always informative because even when a survey does not turn anything up, at least you know you can narrow that area out of later searches.