RAMAH BAY QUARRY ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH PROJECT

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The Ramah Bay area is the source location for a unique variety of stone that was widely used by Aboriginal peoples over thousands of years. Artifacts made of Ramah chert have been found on archaeological sites as far south as New England and as far north as the Canadian Arctic (Erwin 2009; Loring 2002). Ramah chert may have had a special symbolic significance related to its distinctive visual qualities – a translucent, ice-like appearance (see Loring 2002:184). As part of Parks Canada's New Commemorations Initiative this area has been identified as a potential nominee for national significance. In 2009 archaeologists from Parks Canada, Torngâsok Cultural Centre (Nunatsiavut), and Avataq Cultural Institute (Nunavik), along with the Université de Montréal, began a collaborative research project to collect information that could be used towards a nomination to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada.

The objectives of this field project were to verify the location and boundaries of known archaeological sites, to document the spatial and geological characteristics of the chert outcrops, to explore the characteristics of each archaeological site by identifying quarrying and manufacturing locations as well as associated habitation areas, and to explore the possibilities of developing a long-term research project. We conducted four days of fieldwork in the Ramah Bay area in July. During that time we re-visited five known archaeological sites and identified seven new sites including at least

Figure 1 Chert outcropping at Ramah Bay (Curtis)

three chert quarry sites and two workshop sites.

History of Research

Archaeologists first recognized artifacts, made of what we now know as Ramah chert, in lithic assemblages more than 100 years ago (see Loring 2002 for more details). Though suggestions of its Labrador origins were made early on, it was not until 1964 that the archaeological finds were connected with a specific source location in Ramah Bay by Elmer Harp (1964; Erwin 2008:6; Loring 2002:169). Richard Gramly (1978) conducted fieldwork focusing on quarry sites as part of William Fitzhugh's Smithsonian expedition in 1976. This research was continued by Colleen Lazenby (1980, 1984) who collected and analyzed geological samples along the length of the outcrops and considered the role of Ramah chert in Maritime Archaic culture. Archaeologists and geologists have continued to make occasional, brief visits to the quarry sites since the 1970's.

Research Methods

We used the recorded geographical coordinates and descriptions to relocate known sites. Geological maps were also used to identify and follow the chert outcrops both within and beyond the known archaeological sites. At each site we mapped the extent of the chert outcrops, cultural features and artifacts visible on the surface using handheld GPS units and a Total Station. As these sites are located within Torngat Mountains National Park and comprise a potential candidate for national historic site designation, our goal was to document the sites in as much detail as possible, while leaving all cultural material *in situ*. We thus relied on GPS mapping combined with photography and field note observations to document the sites. In the process of relocating the known sites, exploring their boundaries, and following the chert outcrops, we encountered several additional sites. These were recorded in a similar manner, as time permitted.

Preliminary Results

Ramah Bay 1 (also known as the Quarry Bowl; IfCt-1) is the most well-known of the chert quarrying locations. Here we documented three areas of chert outcrops with associated loose chert pieces and artifacts. Cultural material is concentrated around the chert outcrops and declines in frequency between them. Scattered artifacts and pieces of chert are, nonetheless, present between the outcrop areas and extending beyond them. Several additional quarrying loci were identified on the slopes both within and outside the cirque that forms the "Quarry Bowl". Each of these is characterized by a chert outcrop in association with cultural materials. Artifacts include flakes, blades, cores and bifacial preforms along with the hammerstones that were used to extract and begin working the raw material. It was

Figure 2 Refitted Ramah Chert preform found in two pieces adjacent to an outcrop (Curtis)

Figure 3 Hammerstone among slabs of Ramah chert (Burke)

possible to refit some of the broken preforms found on the site (Figure 2). The hammerstones are readily identifiable as coarse-grained stone cobbles that exhibit signs of battering on one or both ends. A wide range of shapes and sizes of hammerstones are present (Figure 3). Several natural post-depositional phenomena seem to have been significantly affecting the site and are deserving of future research. The refitting of preforms indicates that at least part of the site remains relatively intact.

Between the Ramah Bay 1 quarry site and the coast, several workshop sites were identified based on the presence of Ramah chert debitage, and in some cases hammerstones, but lacking chert outcrops. These include two previously recorded sites (Hilda Creek 1 and 2) and at least two new sites. These sites are characterized by lithic scatters in exposed areas and eroding bank edges (Figure 4).

Figure 4 Chert flake next to a hammerstone at a workshop site (Curtis)

Hilda Creek 1 (IfCt-2) is a large, multi-component site with conspicuous evidence of historic Inuit occupation visible on the surface. Ramah chert was observed coming out of the bank all along the shore and about half of one of the tent rings has slumped down towards the active beach. Since this is an historic Inuit tent ring (Table 1:F2), the site must be washing away relatively quickly.

Similar, multi-component cultural deposits continue along the coast and inland along Hilda Creek. Further analysis is needed to determine how many sites are present and which of them may correspond with the previously recorded Hilda Creek 2 site (IfCt-11). A summary of the features recorded in this area is presented in Table 1. The majority of the features appear to relate to historic Inuit use of the area and the Ramah chert must relate to earlier exploitation of the quarries. One particularly interesting feature is a small, approximately 1 m by 1 m pile of stones, some of which are Ramah chert nodules. It could be some sort of cache; however, the cultural affiliation remains unclear.

Analyses of the information that we collected at each of these sites is ongoing and will form the basis for future presentations and reports.

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Figure 5 Looking northeast towards Hilda Creek on July 27th, 2009 (Brake)

Table 1Summary of sites and features recorded by the "Hilda Creek 1 crew" on July 26th, 2009

Site Name	Feature Number	Description
Hilda Creek 1	F1	Roughly circular tent ring without visible internal features (665 cm n-s x 570 cm e-w)
Hilda Creek 1	F2	Historic Inuit tent ring with rear sleeping platform (540 cm n-s x 450 cm e-w . This feature is eroding.
Hilda Creek 1	F3	Small tent ring with reused stones
Hilda Creek 1	F4	Tent ring adjacent to F3 with possible sleeping platform (490 cm n-s x 450 e-w).
Hilda Creek 1	F5	Tent ring with rear sleeping platform (480 cm n-s x 530 e-w)
Hilda Creek 1	F6	Small cluster of boulders (180 cm e-w x 120 cm n-s)
Hilda Creek 1	F7	Small cluster of stones (190 cm e-w x 160 cm n-s)
Hilda Creek 1	F8	Tent ring with possible internal feature (490 cm n-s x 440 cm e-w)
Hilda Creek 1	F9	Small pile of stones
Hilda Creek 1	F10	Boulder cache (110 cm x 65 cm)
Hilda Creek 1	F11	Boulder cache (210cm x 240 cm)
Hilda Creek ?	F1	Historic Inuit tent ring with sleeping platform
Hilda Creek ?	F2	Tent ring with some stones that had been reused as a cache
Hilda Creek ?	F3	Circular tent ring
Hilda Creek ?	F4	Cache
Hilda Creek ?	F5	Cache
Hilda Creek ?	F1	Small pile of stones, some of which are Ramah chert nodules

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