

REPORT OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS
AT THE FORT AU CHOIX AND
POINT RICHE PENINSULAS

by

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INTRODUCTION

On July 4, 1984, the greater part of the Port au Choix and Point Riche Peninsulas (Figure 1) was signed over to Parks Canada at an official ceremony which was held in Port au Choix and attended by representatives of the provincial and federal governments as well as the local council. Already underway was an archaeological survey of the area funded by Parks Canada and designed to locate and identify the historic resources within the park boundaries (cf. Figure 3) and assess their potential for archaeological research and park development. A crew of eight, consisting of graduate and undergraduate students from Memorial University of Newfoundland, under the direction of the author, carried out this work from 13 June to 18 August, 1984.

The summer's research in this archaeologically rich area had three main aims: 1) to assess the large Dorset Eskimo site of Phillip's Garden for potential for future excavations. 2) to survey the area within the park boundaries for historic and prehistoric archaeological sites thus providing the basis for a park development plan, and 3) to look for caves within the park which may have been suitable for Dorset burials.

HISTORY OF PREVIOUS ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN THE AREA

Near the present town of Port au Choix human bones along with bone and ivory artifacts were found in 1904 by James Billard, a local resident (cf. Howley 1915:328), and Tuck (1976:4) suggests that this material is very likely Dorset. W.J. Wintenberg also mentions these findings in his 1939 report of

his and D. Jenness' archaeological reconnaissance trip along the east and west coasts of Newfoundland. In addition Wintenberg reported that they found many artifacts at "What seemed to be an extensive site located on a flat area about five acres in extent, known locally as Phillip's Garden" (Wintenberg 1939:85). They also found many chert and quartz flakes at a location not far to the east of Phillip's Garden which is today a grassy field north and east of Mr. Harold Northcott's house.

In 1949 and 1959 and 1961 Elmer Harp Jr. investigated the Port au Choix area, describing a number of Dorset Eskimo sites as well as human and artifactual material belonging to what was then known as the Boreal Archaic culture (Harp 1951, 1963, 1964; Harp and Hughes 1968). Most of Harp's work in Port au Choix was directed at excavating large parts of Phillip's Garden, the object of which was to connect the Eskimo material in Newfoundland as represented at this site with Dorset Eskimo elsewhere in the Canadian north (Harp 1964, 1976).

In the fall of 1967 James Tuck was called to Port au Choix when the excavation of a foundation revealed skeletons and artifacts of a sort which had been a familiar sight to local residents for many years. Tuck returned the following summer and extensive and methodical testing revealed two other locations of Maritime Archaic Indian burials, one of which was particularly large with 55 burials containing 89 individuals (Tuck 1970, 1971, 1976). These excavations yielded numerous and elegant grave goods and the work stimulated interest in both the public and the archaeological communities. A portion of these finds, on loan from the Newfoundland Museum, comprises the basis for the display at the Parks Canada Interpretation Centre at the town of Port au Choix.

Further work was done on the excavated material by Brenda Kennedy who used the osteological data to suggest a pattern of exogamous marriage and virilocal or avunculocal post marriage residence in operation amongst the Maritime Archaic inhabitants of the area (Kennedy 1981).

In the summer of 1981 William Fitzhugh visited Port au Choix for a short period and identified a small Palaeo-Eskimo site on a terrace west of Phillip's Garden as well as an early French settlement at Barbace Cove on the Port au Choix Peninsula (Fitzhugh 1982).

INVESTIGATIONS AT PHILLIPS GARDEN

Phillip's Garden is a large and well known site which has been ascribed to Middle Dorset (Harp, 1964; Linnamae, 1975). The site extends over more than 20,000 m². Harp observed 36 house depressions spread over two of the three main terraces which run from 7.12 to 11.00 m above the high water mark. He excavated twenty of these and recovered a large number of stone and bone artifacts as well as an enormous amount of faunal material. In the field Harp identified the bones from House 4 and concluded that approximately 98% were bones of harp seal of various ages establishing that the site was occupied at least during the early spring. He also described what he considered to be two main forms of house construction, one being more substantial than the other and interpreted these as winter and summer dwellings (Harp 1976); thus the site appeared to have been occupied throughout most if not all of the year. Radiocarbon dates from ten house features and based on charcoal provide a range of 100 to 640 A.D. (Harp 1976).

The first thing that we did at Phillips' Garden was map the surface features (Figure 2). The spring vegetation was in its first stages of growth thus enhancing rather than obscuring small differences in elevation and soil composition. The outlines of Harp's excavations and backdirt piles were quite clear and identifying and mapping these was an interesting exercise in the archaeology of previous archaeological work. The depressions which Harp noted but did not excavate were identified and located and an additional twelve depressions were observed and included in the map.

We excavated at Phillip's Garden one metre squares which were chosen randomly within sampling strata, part of a sampling strategy designed to give us an idea of the nature and complexity of the site and provide us with information which could be used as the basis for decisions regarding future work at the site. However, soon after excavation of some of the sample units commenced, it was apparent that the richness of the finds precluded working at a pace that would uncover even a small sample. Nevertheless we continued working in the arbitrarily assigned one metre squares since it allowed us to "peek" at features in many areas of the site and get an idea of its

characteristics. As a result of the excavation of only 34 m² a number of observations could be made which can best be summarized as follows: 1) although Harp excavated a significant portion of the site a large area is left undisturbed, 2) the site consists of numerous and often overlapping features, 3) activity areas can be found external to the house features, 4) although we did not test any mound features since we assumed that all or most of them were Harp's backdirt piles, and we did not test for middens directly to the northeast of the house features where Harp suggests they are located, we did observe that the highest concentration of faunal material came from areas where there were no observable surface features, which suggests the possibility of midden material infilling and obscuring older structures, 5) although the dates and much of the artifactual material from the site correspond with Middle Dorset it is apparent from both Harp's collection and the material which we collected this summer that Phillip's Garden had an earlier Eskimo occupation. Figure 5 shows a range of end blades found at Phillip's Garden, which includes the triangular, concave based tip-fluted forms typical of Middle Dorset in Newfoundland, as well as bifacially worked plano-convex, side notched specimens considered characteristic of Groswater Eskimo. Thus the time span of the site's occupation can be extended back in time for perhaps another 300-800 years, 6) this earlier Eskimo material is found throughout the site, but a single Groswater component has been isolated at the eastern extreme of Phillip's Garden on the second terrace where side-notched points, whole and broken, are to be found in amongst non-structured hearth features (Figure 6). Radiocarbon dates associated with this component will be forthcoming.

Future directions at the site will be 1) to excavate a single "winter" and a single "summer" house feature in order to understand more about their construction, 2) to infer activity areas in the spatial arrangement of the material both outside and within these houses, 3) to reconstruct the seasonal pattern of the site's occupation through the careful excavation of the midden deposits aimed at, if possible, separating out the various components, and at recovery of a representative sample of the faunal remains, including the smallest as well as the larger bones, and 4) to focus on the earlier Paleo-Eskimo occupation of the site in order to define and understand better the Groswater

Eskimo occupation of this area.

SURVEY

Survey Design

At the same time that test squares were being excavated at Phillip's Garden the survey of the park progressed. Although the area of the park is relatively small at 833.24 hectares, the search for archaeological sites was made difficult by the almost complete lack of surface indications of sites. This was because much of the area is overlain by a thick layer of largely uneroded peat. In addition, tucamore, or stunted forest, occurs in many places, often forming a dense barrier to penetration. Yet we knew that we had to look in these overgrown areas since the Maritime Archaic cemetery had been covered with this growth before the historic fishing population cleared the area of trees.

The vegetation zones on the peninsula were broken down into 1) tucamore, 2) grassy areas, 3) heath, 4) heath and bog, and 5) areas without vegetation. In order to investigate all these areas and not just limit ourselves to the coast we divided the Point Riche and Port au Choix Peninsulas into 41 north-south transects 150 m wide crosscutting the various vegetation zones. Half of every fourth transect was walked with a crew spaced out 20 m apart digging test pits every 40 m (Figure 3). The town was not included in this particular sample since we could not dig in any systematic way in people's backyards. The transects covered areas outside the park boundaries since it was logical to treat the two peninsulas as a discrete study region. In reality it is unlikely that this area would have been so isolated. Rather, it is more likely that the peninsulas were used along with coastal and interior regions of the mainland northwest coast.

Superimposed on this systematic sample was a judgemental sample designed specifically to locate the historic and prehistoric sites at the coast rather than provide a representative sample of sites. Thus virtually all the perimeter of the peninsulas was surveyed with intensive test pitting.

A third part of the survey consisted of visiting those areas where caves were known or were likely to be found in order to locate any caves that might

have been suitable for Dorset burials.

Survey Results

The results of the survey can best be summarized in Figure 4, and the pattern which emerges is the primarily coastal focus of occupation. This is to be expected, yet it is also expected that small non-coastal sites or activity areas should be present, and our sample indicated at least one such activity area high on the raised beaches (Figure 4, site #16). With the exception of Phillip's Garden (Figure 4, site #4) and the Point Riche site (Figure 4, site #10) all the Palaeo-Eskimo sites are quite small. No Maritime Archaic settlement sites were found, and the only indication we have of these occupations, aside from the cemetery site, is the Maritime Archaic-looking biface found at site 7A151 (Figure 4, site #16), a similar preform found at 7A53 (Figure 4, site #3), and a number of characteristically Maritime Archaic artifacts which local residents showed us, and which came from the area of the town. The bulldozer operator claimed that he had seen more Indian skeletons and artifacts than I ever would, and unfortunately he is right. Both the 4th millennium and the historic inhabitants of the area chose to live on the sheltered shores of the isthmus which connects the two peninsulas with each other as well as with the main northwest coast.

For those interested in understanding aspects of early European occupation of Newfoundland, the historic settlements in this and other areas on the island are of interest and importance. The French set up summer fishing stations in the Port au Choix region which was part of the French Shore of 1713 to 1904, and during the same period English fishermen settled in the area (Rowe 1980). As can be seen from Figure 4, sites #1,9,25,26, and 27, a number of 18th and 19th century French and English sites were identified, the most interesting of which is Barbace Cove (#27), a small sheltered cove which was used by the French during this period and possibly even earlier.

Two of the more interesting sites deserve mention beyond the list accompanying Figure 4. One is a multi-component Palaeo-Eskimo site near what is today the property of Mr. Harold Northcott. This is the area east of Phillip's Garden where Jenness and Wintenberg found a number of flakes, and which Harp called Sites 5 and 7: because of the original separation of what I

prefer to consider a single site, the division is maintained (Figure 4, site # 23, 24). The site lies outside the park boundary and covers about 1/2 acre, much of which has been built on, thereby destroying much if not most of it. The locals know of this spot and a number of local residents told us how they dug up large numbers of arrowheads there when they were children. Both Dorset and Groswater material was found (Figure 7) and we were able to define six activity areas. What is particularly interesting about the site is that there appear to be at least three Groswater components and one Dorset component, each spatially separated to a certain extent. Thus this site is potentially important for understanding the development of the Groswater Eskimo occupations of Newfoundland.

The second site of particular interest is the Point Riche site which is located well within the park boundary a few hundred metres to the south of the Point Riche lighthouse. This is a Middle Dorset site with at least 12 possible house depressions reminiscent of Phillips' Garden. Although we could not estimate the size of the site with any degree of certainty, it seems to be 1500 m² at a minimum. Test trenches in what I believe to be two house depressions yielded bone material as well as large quantities of flakes and quite a few triangular, tip fluted end blades. This site is of particular interest since it is undisturbed.

Eight caves of various sizes were found and located on the site location map, including the locally well known Crow Head Cave from which a local resident found human bones along with incised ivory and bone objects. No evidence of human activity was found at these caves, aside from a chert core found at Crow Head. However, the constant infilling of these limestone caves with fallen rubble means that any burials will be well hidden and will require a great deal of labour to discover.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The Port au Choix and Point Riche Peninsulas provide an ideal opportunity for archaeological research on a number of fronts. The separable Groswater Eskimo components could provide useful data on the definition of this complex in Newfoundland and could provide insights into the development within

the category itself. The excellent bone preservation at many of the sites in this area would allow a detailed reconstruction of the season(s) of occupation and subsistence base represented at them. This would do more than provide substantiation for the obvious and generalized conclusions regarding a maritime based economy but, in its detailed focus is also a means by which intra-site differences can be examined. The results of a detailed study of Dorset settlement and subsistence in this area, based on large sites such as Phillip's Garden and the Point Riche Site as well as smaller Dorset sites would also be pertinent to more general studies of coastal occupation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The project itself was initiated by Charles Lindsay of the Archaeology Division of Parks Canada, Atlantic Division, and Jim Tuck of Memorial University of Newfoundland, and I would like to thank them for encouragement and advice. I would also like to thank Brian Gallant, Restoration Officer with Parks Canada's Halifax office who set up the large Phillip's Garden grid and drew the control map of site locations.

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Figure 1

Port au Choix and Point Riche Peninsulas

PORT AU CHOIX AND
POINT RICHE PENINSULAS

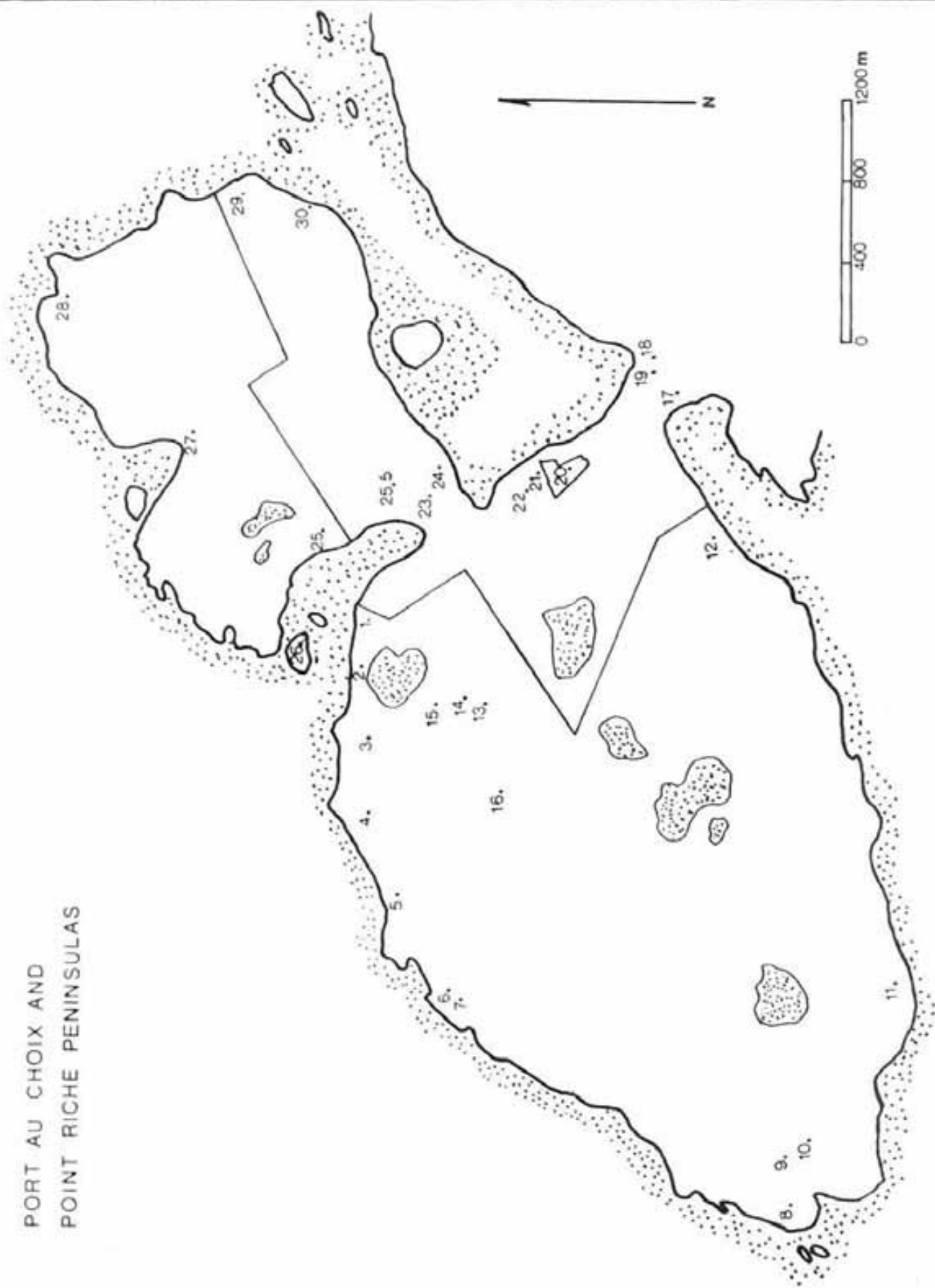


Figure 2

Surface map of Phillip's Garden

*Harp's elevations are used on this map; however, they appear from our own readings to be too low if taken from the high water mark.

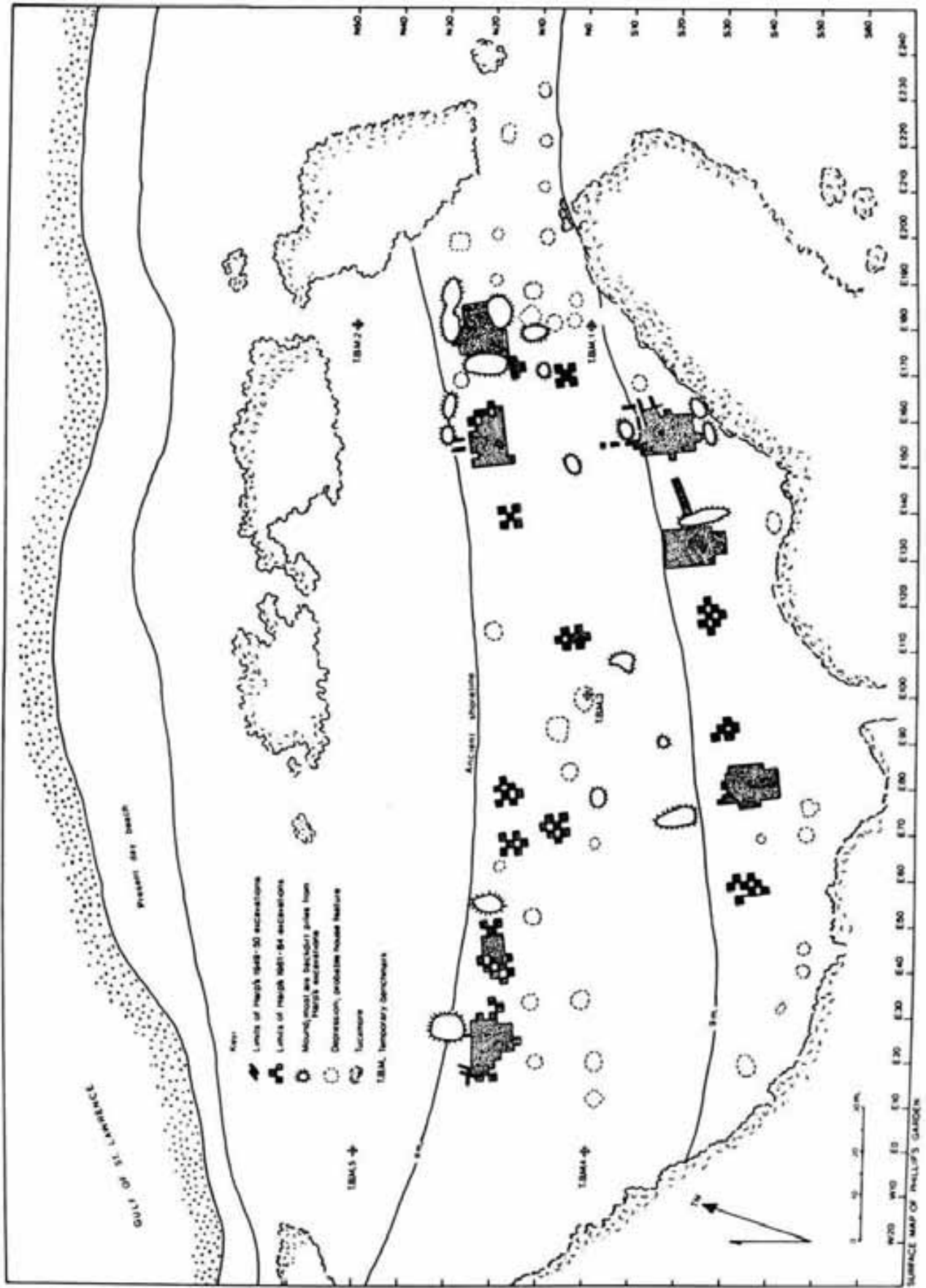


Figure 3

Areas surveyed

Areas Surveyed on
 on the
 Port au Choix
 and
 Point Riche
 Peninsulas

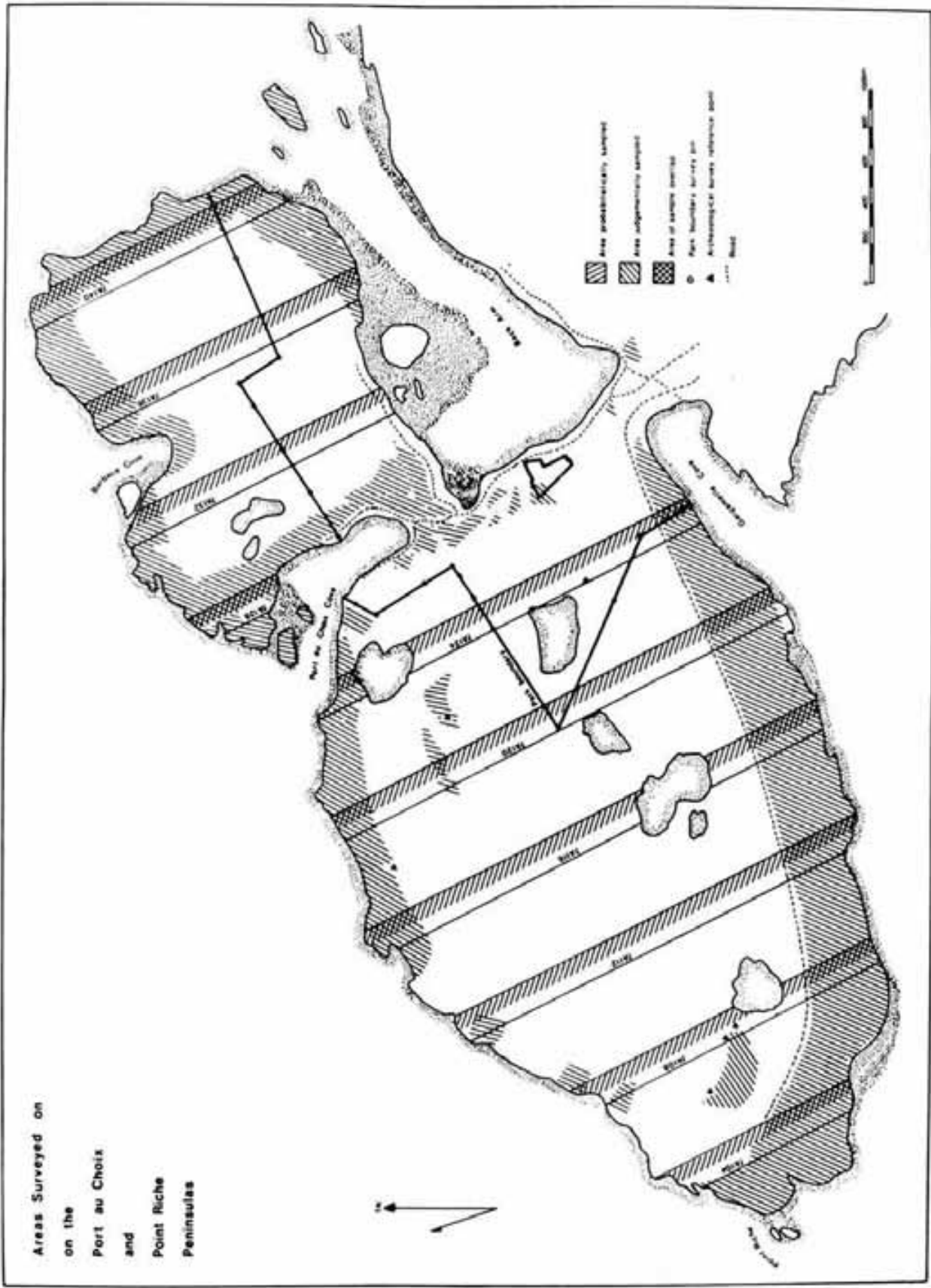


Figure 4Location of Sites and Isolated Finds on the Port au Choix and
Point Riche Peninsulas

Sites and isolated find locations include both those found during the 1984 field season and those located by Wintenberg and Jenness, Harp, Tuck and Fitzhugh. Following the site name and cultural affiliation is its Parks Canada designation, beginning with 7A, and its Borden number.

1. Old Port au Choix West, English livyers and French fishermen (7A1; EeBi-13).
2. Trike Path, isolated find of Groswater material (7A52; EeBi-16).
3. Bluff east of Phillip's Garden, scattered finds of Palaeo-Eskimo, and possibly Maritime Archaic (7A53; EeBi-17).
4. Phillip's Garden, Dorset and Groswater Eskimo (7A200-399; EeBi-1).
5. Phillip's Garden West, Palaeo-Eskimo (7A55; EeBi-11).
6. Cave location, potentially suitable for burial (7A66).
7. Cave location, potentially suitable for burial (7A67).
8. Lighthouse site, Palaeo-Eskimo and English livyer (7A57; EeBi-19).
9. Isolated find of Palaeo-Eskimo material (7A58; EeBi-20).
10. Point Riche Site, Dorset (7A58; EeBi-20).
11. First Site, scattering of flakes, unknown cultural affiliation (7A145; EeBi-23).
12. Gargamelle Cove Cave, potentially suitable for burial (7A65).
13. Cave location, potentially suitable for burial (7A60).
14. Cave location, potentially suitable for burial (7A61).
15. Crow Head Cave, Dorset burial (7A62; EeBi-21).
16. Isolated find of core and biface, latter possibly Maritime Archaic (7A151; EeBi-24).
17. Harp's Site 6, Dorset (EeBi-6).
18. Lab Site, isolated flakes, Paleo-Eskimo (EeBi-18).

19. Offrey Site, isolated find of flakes, unknown cultural affiliation
EeBi-14
20. Port au Choix cemetery, Maritime Archaic (7A146; EeBi-3).
21. Isolated finds of human skeletal material reported from site of new house
and also Jeannie's Beauty Salon, Maritime Archaic.
22. Isolated find of core at Catholic Church, Palaeo-Eskimo (EeBi-28).
23. Northcott Site, formerly Harp's Site 7, Dorset and Groswater (7A148;
EeBi-7).
24. Rumbolt Site, formerly Harp's Site 5, Dorset and Groswater (7A148;
EeBi-5).
25. Old Port au Choix East, English livyers and French fishermen (7A129;
EeBi-22).
26. Laignet Point, English livyers and French fishermen (7A126; EeBi-22).
27. Barbace Cove, English livyers and French fishermen (7A26; EeBi-12).
28. Cave location, potentially suitable for burial (7A63).
29. Cave location, potentially suitable for burial (7A64).
30. Isolated find of flakes of unknown cultural affiliation (EeBi-27).

Figure 5

Artifacts from Phillip's Garden,
showing range of end blades.



Figure 6

End blades from Phillip's Garden,
eastern extreme.

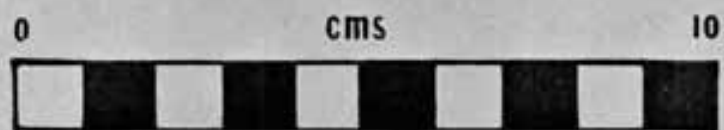


Figure 7

Artifacts from Harp's Site 5 (re-named
the Northcott Site) and Site 7 (now
the Rumbolt Site).

