Torngat Mountains National Park Archaeology 2018: Assessment for Installation and Operation of Intershelter Domes/Hiking Routes

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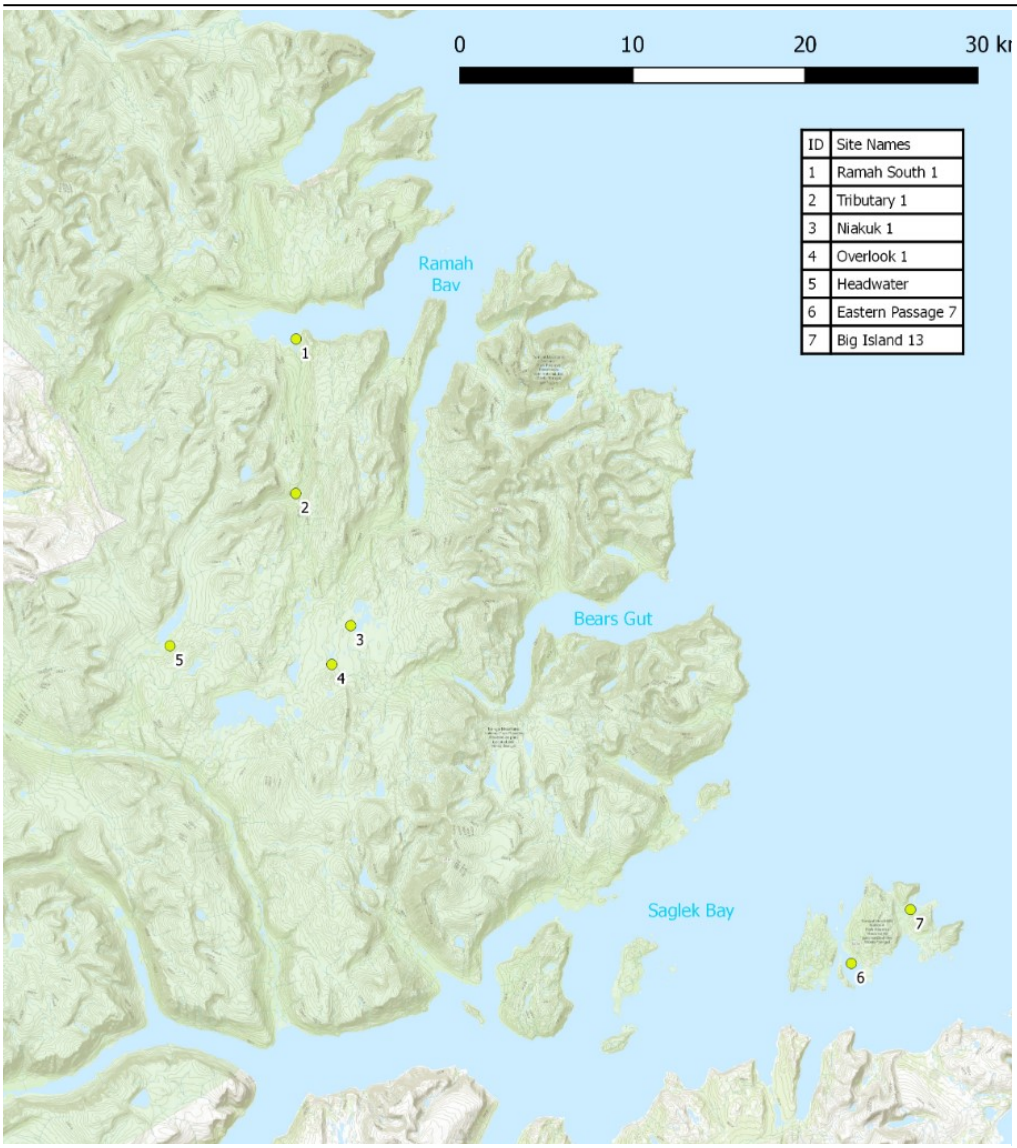


Figure 1: Site locations discussed in text.

Since its establishment 10 years ago, the Torngat Mountains National Park (TMNP) has been primarily focused on experiences in the coastal areas of the park. In an effort to open up the interior of the Park to visitors and communicate a more complete version of the Inuit story on Inuit homeland, TMNP developed a plan to facilitate more inland travel highlighting the interior mountains and waterways. This plan includes the placement of eight bear-proof Intershelter Domes at regular intervals approximately a day-hike apart along routes between Saglek Fiord and Ramah Bay. Each proposed camp will be large enough for one or two Intershelter Domes mounted on platforms, a dozen individual tents, and an approximately 25 m x 25 m solar-powered electrified bear fence, for a total camp footprint of 625 m^2 (Parks Canada 2018:1).

Aligning with Parks Canada's Cultural Resource Management Policy to ensure that all cultural resources in and from the national park are managed and protected, the following work was conducted as part of Parks Canada commitment to document, preserve and present the cultural and natural resources for future generations. The impact assessment for the installation of these backcountry domes fell into three headings: 1) Assessment of the dome

Figure 2: Ramah South 1, site is located on point before river mouth.

locations for unknown archaeological resources, 2) Survey of the proposed hiking routes between the domes, and finally 3) Access points that will serve as the start and ending points for the hikes.

Based out of the Torngat Mountains Base Camp and Research Station, located at the head of St. John's Harbour (kANGIDLUASUk), the field season ran for the first two weeks of August with financial, logistical and other support provided by the TMNP. TMNP and Western Newfoundland and Labrador Field Unit staff, as well as Memorial University researchers Deirdre Elliott and Nancy Nochasak provided assistance in field activities.

Access Locations

The Access Points were selected for ease of landing people and equipment from boats and for the ability to connect with the proposed hiking routes. Four access points were proposed: Ramah Bay, Bear's Gut, Branagin Cove, and North Arm. Two of these locations had seen earlier archaeological survey and multiple undocumented sites and features were recorded at unsurveyed locations.

North Arm Access

North Arm had been previously surveyed and mapped by Parks Canada (Higdon 2015, Stopp 2014, and Whitridge 2014) and has an in-depth cultural integrity plan in place. The site was revisited but no new features were recorded during this assessment and the existing maps will allow the hiking trail to avoid culturally sensitive areas.

Branagin Cove

Areas along the eastern and, to a lesser extent, the western extent of Branagin Cove were surveyed in 2015 and 2016 as part of Branagin Cove / Aggigiak Satellite Base Camp Archaeological Impact Assessment (Higdon 2015, Higdon and Whitehouse 2015). Additional mapping work was also completed this season by Elliott (this volume) and will be incorporated into site mitigation planning when available. Previous assessments revealed multiple documented archaeological sites, including Maritime Archaic sites at higher elevations, Palaeoeskimo and undetermined lithic scatters and potential knapping locations near the mouth of the river, as well as an Inuit habitation site (tent rings, caches, and sod houses) and foundations of the Hudson's Bay Post Fort Lampson. This survey confirmed the location of these sites but concluded that the impact of the hiking trail on the sites could be mitigated by having the trail run along the edge of the active beach.

Figure 3: Bear's Gut Access, View South, grassy terrace to right of frame is the location for features discussed.

Figure 4: Large cache in Bear's Gut marked by collection of boulders, many of the caches in the area appear to use natural boulders to highlight location.

Figure 5: Tributary 1, tightly laid stone border of a large cache is situated on high terrace overlooking river which drains into Ramah Bay.

Ramah Access

Located within 3.5km southwest of Ramah Moravian Mission, 5km west of Ramah Quarries NHS (Loci 2 and 3) and associated archaeological sites, the southern shores of Ramah Bay, along the mouth of a river / river delta had not been surveyed archaeologically. A single previously undocumented site was recorded at this location.

South Ramah 1: Located 400m SW of the proposed trailhead, the site is located on the edge of a terrace overlooking Ramah Bay (Figure 2). It was identified through the presence of a scatter of solely Ramah Chert flakes with no formal tools visible. A number of large stones (35-50 cm) were associated with the flakes but no structure could be identified. Fifteen metres from the edge of the scatter, a single small cache pit was identified. No cultural affiliation could be determined for the site.

Bear's Gut

Located 30km northwest of Torngat Mountains Base Camp, the area had not been surveyed archaeologically. The north bank of the river is marked by large flat grassy terraces with multiple over-lapping caribou trails (Figure 3). Upon landing, a large number and variety of features were recorded in the area including multiple flake scatters, a collapsed Inuit stone fox trap, two large conjoined tent rings (Figure 4), a possible grave cairn, multiple clusters of tent rings, multiple large caches, and a temporary shelter or cache beneath a large boulder. These features were photographed and recorded with a handheld GPS but the number and density of features require far more time be spent at the site before the application of site numbers.

Trail Survey

To date, recorded interior sites in northern Labrador are quite rare, likely related to the lack of archaeological survey away from the coast. Recorded interior sites have become common on the Quebec side of the Ungava peninsula and there is no reason to think that this is unique. Given the overall size of the proposed hiking network, aerial survey was used for all trail routes with a sample of routes also surveyed on foot. Three previously undocumented sites were encountered during this pedestrian survey.

Tributary 1: Located in a grassy meadow at the center of a high point of land bordered on two sides by rivers above their confluence in a deep river

Figure 6: One of the heavily disturbed features from Niakuk 1, one of the intact, on edge flat stones is still visible in the foreground.

Figure 7: Piled flat stones with little remaining structure, disturbed soil where partially buried standing stones have been displaced.

valley that drains into Ramah Bay. The site is located 150m to the northeast of the proposed site for the Ramah Dome and 50m east of the suggested trail. The site consists of 25-30 stones laid in a rough oval 2m x 2m with one notably flat side (Figure 5). Sections of this stonewall are laid in two courses but no other features were visible suggesting it may be simply a large cache. No artifacts or other cultural materials were recovered and it is likely based on the limited vegetation growth over the stones that the site is from the modern period.

Niakuk 1: Located on the southwest corner of Niakuk Lake, 650 m north of the proposed location for Niakuk Dome on the trail from Ramah Dome to Niakuk Dome. The site is situated on a grass-covered hill, which gently slopes toward the water and consists of two separate 1m x 2m features, which are tentatively identified as cache pits (Figure 6). These features are constructed of flat stones, some of which appear to have been transported. A number of these stones have been placed on edge and buried in place while others that are currently lying flat appear to have been disturbed (Figure 7). No cultural material or artifacts were observed and no cultural affiliation can be suggested.

Overlook 1: This was the most substantial of the inland sites documented this summer. Located on the proposed trail midway between the Niakuk Dome and Possible Dome locations, it is situated on the lower scree-covered slopes of a large hill that over-

Figure 8: Small collapsed cairn of three white rocks on a larger boulder. Three stacked rocks have been previously identified as a signpost for marking safe travel (Brake and Larkham)

Figure 9: Heavily built cache built into in place boulders, note gravel base of the interior, which is not natural for area.

Figure 10: Stacked wall and associated tent ring seen to right of frame.

Figure 11: Location of Headwater Site with large boulders, which mark the cache location. Satellite imagery shows that these boulders are some of the only features in this valley that are visible above the snow in winter.

Figure 12: Cache constructed in space between the two large boulders. A number of flat stones were laid aside suggesting that there was an intention to re-use this cache at a later point.

looks a lake. The site consists of three features: a small cairn/inuksuk, a large opened cache, and a small tent ring with a two course rock wall. The site was initially identified by spotting the collapsed cairn, which was composed of three round, white stones that appear to have once been stacked on top of each other, and placed on top of a large angular boulder (Figure 8). The cache was constructed by stacking a series of angular stones in a long thin oval, incorporating a large boulder to serve as one side (Figure 9). The interior base is composed of a mix of gravel and small stones that look to have been purposely collected and placed. A number of stones that would have been part of the construction have been pulled upslope but stacked for future use. The tent ring is built with shallowly set stones visible on the surface but with the north wall of the ring being built out of two courses of stones, giving it the appearance of a hunting blind, which is oriented to look over the lake below the hill (Figure 10). The use of this short wall as a blind was supported by the bear monitor Ryan Merkuratsuk who thought that the site would be a perfect place to hunt for geese, as they would come in from overhead approaching the lake. No artifacts were recovered at the site but construction practices on the large cache are similar to those seen in Inuit sites elsewhere.

Dome locations

Six of the eight proposed dome locations for the hiking network were visited and surveyed while the remaining locations, which are located within Quebec's Parc National Kuurujuaq, will be surveyed as part of a separate project. Clearing of the domes consisted of a survey of the area surrounding the dome location and walking of 5m transects over the specific location for the dome. The footprint of the dome installation is small and there was leeway in the placement meaning there was no problem in ensuring there was no danger to cultural resources. Only one site was found in the general area of a proposed dome but was dis-

Figure 13: Continuous Ramah debitage scatter that was marked with pin flags. No structural elements are visible but the scatter shape, elevation of site, and material types suggest an Archaic longhouse.

Figure 14: Multiple cultures are represented on this part of Big Island making interpretation of features difficult, these parallel lines of stone and associated flat rocks have tentatively been suggested as a kayak cache but further investigation is required.

Figure 15: Northeastern point of Big Island, view north, previously identified Archaic longhouse sites are located to right of large pond in background.

tant enough to not require any further protection beyond reporting.

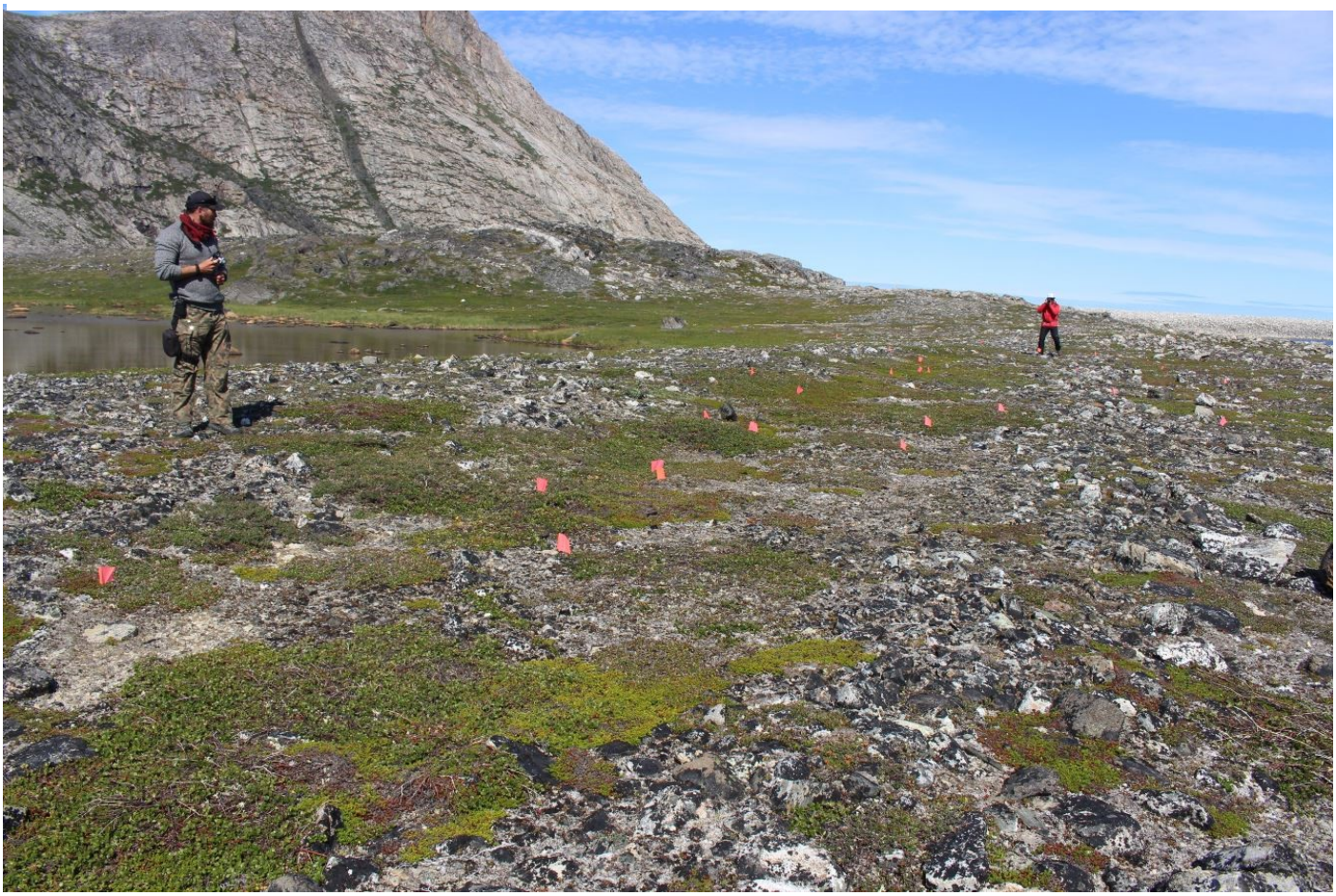
Headwater 1: is located 380 m east of the southern extent of Headwater Lake. The site is situated on the gentle slope that extends up from the lake edge to the tops of the large mountains located far to the east. Two 3m - 4m tall glacial erratic boulders mark the site and are the most prominent features in the general area and are what drew attention to the location (Figure 11). The single site feature is an opened stone cache 1.5 x 2m, oval in shape and with one of the large boulders serving as a wall (Figure 12). The cache walls, where still intact, are multiple layers high and a number of flat stones laid nearby are likely stones that once covered the cache. Overall, the cache has the same heavily built construction as seen in the cache associated with the above-discussed Overlook 1 site. Despite extensive survey and a revisit to the area, no additional artifacts or features were recorded. Cultural affiliation cannot be positively be determined but based on construction it is likely Inuit.

Additional Survey within the TMNP

Eastern Harbour 7: While accompanying Deirdre Elliott and members of the kANGIDLUASUk student program as they completed drone-based mapping of Big Island Eastern Harbour 5. Eastern Harbour 7 was encountered while relocating the nearby Big Island West site (IdCq-53). The site consists of three distinct clusters of Ramah chert flakes, with one of these clusters associated with a disturbed tent ring. To the northeast of these smaller clusters, a 45m x 6m scatter of Ramah debitage was flagged (Figure 13) which from overhead photos is consistent in appearance with other Archaic longhouses. No structural elements of the longhouse are evident but three small external caches were found along the inland side of the structure. This organization is similar to that seen at other longhouse sites. An additional unknown feature was recorded north of the longhouse and con-

Figure 16: Archaic bifacial tool made of Ramah chert, one of the few tool fragments recorded in the area.

Figure17: 35 meter Archaic longhouse with debitage flagged, depressed floors and elevated walls are visible.



sists of two closely laid near-parallel lines of rocks over 3m in length. A number of large flat stones were found associated with this feature. Though disturbed, this feature may possibly represent a kayak cache associated with the historic Inuit camp described at IdCq-53 (Figure14).

Big Island East 13: This site was recorded during a hike and tour toward the northeastern-most point of land on Big Island by a group of TMNP staff and Park Visitors. As we were approaching a large pond, which marks the start of a series of reported Archaic longhouses (Thompson 1984), a thin scatter of Ramah flakes and some tool fragments were found (Figure 15). No features were found in association with these artifacts and there was little clustering of lithics. Closer to the ocean a number of possible stone features were encountered along with a mostly complete Archaic point (Figure 16). During the return hike, 150m meters from the original finds of the day, a dense scatter of lithic debitage and tool fragments were encountered on a flat high spot of land, which backed onto a small pond. Further investigation revealed a 35m x 5m Archaic longhouse with visible banked walls and sunken room pits (Figure 17). A small number of bifacial tool fragments were recorded from the interior of the structure but nothing to suggest a specific period or complex for the structure.

At present both the original scatter and the longhouse feature will be treated as a single site and it is likely that additional survey in the area will lead to the identification of additional archaeological remains.

Conclusions

The proposed establishment of a hiking trail system throughout the interior of TMNP required the placement of bear-proof Domes at regular intervals along routes between Saglek Fiord and Ramah Bay. The access points for these hikes, the hikes themselves, and the locations of the dome sites were surveyed with the goal of locating and protecting known and unknown sites. The activities at the TMNP and associated archaeology has primarily been focused on the coastal areas of the park with very few cultural sites identified more than a kilometer away from the ocean. This limited survey returned seven previously unidentified sites, four of these being high-elevation interior sites in areas that would have been typically excluded from surveys. The discovery of these sites as well as the implications of greater utilization of the interior, all help add to the history of the Torngats and the people who live(d) there.

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