

Repatriation and Community Anthropology

The Smithsonian Institution's Arctic Studies Center¹

STEPHEN LORING

COMMUNITY ANTHROPOLOGY AT THE SMITHSONIAN

As a museum anthropologist with the Smithsonian's Arctic Studies Center (ASC) I have been humbled by the collecting zeal of the nineteenth-century anthropologists who ranged the world to fill their respective institutions with the curiosities and trash from distant lands and distant epochs. Such things were once daily household objects but have, through the alchemy of time and the miracle of preservation, become the treasures of today. Much of the world's patrimony that hasn't been scattered and shorn of its history and provenance has found shelter in museums. Once the purview of a few scholars and a small cadre of museum professionals charged with the curation and care of these collections, the museum world has been transformed within the last decade or so by the enthusiasm and interest of Native groups, artists, and scholars who have, and are in the process of, rediscovering their cultural patrimony.

In part this awareness has emerged as a consequence of the passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) that finds museums throughout the United States and Canada reconsidering their roles vis-à-vis Native Americans. Concurrently, many Native communities are experiencing a burgeoning awareness of their cultural heritage as evidenced by the construction of local and regional cultural centers and by the growth of initiatives like Keepers of the Treasure. These new laws, new concerns, and new initiatives have the potential of realigning relations between Native Americans, museum professionals, and others concerned with the preservation of the physical patrimony and intellectual heritage of Native American and First Nations peoples.

As an anthropologist (archaeologist, ethnohistorian, ethnographer) working in the North (Labrador, Alaska, the Aleutian Islands), it has been my privilege to experience something of the drama, intensity, and integrity of community life in Arctic villages. In the North, many Native villages still retain a strong community identity based on hunting and fishing subsistence economies and an ideology that includes a special reverence for elders who retain their cultures' traditional ecological knowledge and spiritual reverence for the land and for the animals on

which life depends. These shared sentiments are leading communities throughout the Canadian Arctic and Alaska to develop cultural preservation programs that include an appreciation of archaeological and ethnological collections, many of which now reside in museums throughout the world.

Yet in the North today the distinction between past and present—and the dichotomy between archaeology and ethnography—is frequently blurred. For Native American and Inuit families, the cyclical nature of subsistence resources and the strong inter-generational bonds instill a profound recognition of cultural continuity and land tenure that is pervasive, spiritual, ideological and often at variance with the perceptions of archaeologists and other non-Native interpreters of culture. Northerners fear the loss of their culture, land, and language, and they recognize that knowledge of the past is critical for determining group identity and land tenure. Partly because of the Smithsonian's long involvement in the North (and the resulting outstanding collections and archives), and partly because my colleagues and I recognize a responsibility to facilitate and nurture an awareness and appreciation for museum collections (as well as for archaeological and historical research) we have made a commitment to what we have taken to calling "community anthropology".

As part of the Arctic Studies Center mandate, we have sought to develop programs that combine the knowledge and experience of program personnel, the archival resources and objects in the Smithsonian's collections, and the needs, interests, and expertise of Northern communities. The goals of the community anthropology initiatives at the Smithsonian include 1) providing training for Native land managers and community cultural affairs administrators who are able to articulate community needs with governmental bureaucracies and administration; 2) providing an opportunity for community scholars, artisans, elders, and young people to discuss the use and significance of museum collections; and 3) instilling in young people knowledge about the accomplishments of their ancestors. The integration of museum professionals' knowledge of archaeological, ethnographic, and photographic collections housed in the museum with the knowledge, wisdom, and skills of participating community representatives and elders is arguably among the most interesting developments in the field of Northern anthropology today.

What I refer to as "community archaeology" differs from institutional academic initiatives primarily because of its commitment to addressing community agendas, interests, and needs. The approach combines the expertise and training of professional archaeologists with the insight and knowledge of community leaders and educators. The principal goal of community archaeology is to provide experiences and training for Indian and Inuit young people. The participation of and reliance on elders is a critical component of such endeavors. Throughout the North, communities revere and honor their elders recognizing them as the principal authority on matters of history and heritage. Elders provide interpretations of archaeological features and assemblages, while the knowledge and beliefs they convey in interviews and stories reaffirm community values and testify to the validity and significance of traditional knowledge. Community archaeology hopes to stimulate and empower cultural, historical and community values. In

In addition to the products of traditional archaeology, that is, publications, community archaeology projects often result in local exhibits and school programs. In some cases, the collections resulting from the collaborative endeavors remain in the North.

Such initiatives start with the recognition that the goals and interests of Native communities may not coincide *exactly* with those of the academy and the museum. This is especially apparent in matters of archaeology where the distant past, so dear to archaeologists, carries considerably less allure for Northerners than the stories and trails of more recent ancestors with whom the bonds of land, kinship, and animals are more tangible and more meaningful.

THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION IN LABRADOR

The Smithsonian Institution's grandest passion has always been its collections. Under the inspired leadership of Secretary Spencer Baird, mid-nineteenth century naturalists scoured the continent for specimens shipping boxcars full of rocks, minerals, fossils, bird eggs, plants, shells, mammals, bones, antiquities, curiosities, and ethnographic objects back to the nation's capital. These collections provided tangible evidence of the wealth and breadth of the North American continent and offered scientific vindication of the idea of manifest destiny as the United States took its place as a world power. This acquisitive fervor was especially prevalent within the young discipline of anthropology whose practitioners were driven by the assumption that Native American cultures were rapidly disappearing and might soon be gone altogether. Anticipating by less than a decade the subsequent "rush" to acquire traditional Native materials, Smithsonian collectors made the first large, systematic ethnographic collections. In this pursuit, literally thousands of objects were acquired, from the mundane to the sacred, from Florida to British Columbia, and Alaska to Labrador.

Smithsonian collectors were especially successful in the North, where Western economic and religious systems had not yet made severe inroads. These intrepid pioneer naturalist-ethnographers included James Swan, George Gibbs, T. D. Bolles, and F. M. Ring, among others on the Northwest Coast; P. Henry Ray and John Murdoch at Point Barrow, Alaska; Edward Nelson along the Bering Straits; and Lucien Turner in northern Quebec and Labrador. Together these men and their contemporaries constructed what is now one of the world's most important repositories of traditional material culture pertaining to Northern Native peoples.

The Smithsonian's interest and research in Labrador dates back to the winters of 1882-1884 when the Museum representatives, together with the U.S. Signal Corps, participated in the First International Polar Year in which more than a dozen expeditions were sent to remote northern stations across the Arctic (Barr 1985). The Smithsonian participated in two of these expeditions, one to Point Barrow, Alaska, and a second to the Hudson's Bay Company post at Fort Chimo (Kuujuuaq) in northern Quebec. In charge of the northern Quebec station was Lucien M. Turner, a trained meteorologist and one of America's most gifted field naturalists. While his atmospheric observations kept him close to his instruments at the Hudson's Bay Company post, Turner nevertheless was able to assemble impressive collections of birds, mammals, plants, crustacea, mollusca and fish for

the Smithsonian. During Turner's stay at Ft. Chimo, he cultivated the friendship of the Innu and Inuit families who visited the HBC post and camped nearby. This association enabled him to assemble the earliest and most complete collection of ethnographic material from northern Quebec and adjacent Labrador ever made (Turner 1890). When the collection was finally shipped to the Smithsonian in 1884, it contained well over 500 objects (fig. 13-1).

While a tiny portion of the Turner collection has long been on display in the North American Indian Hall at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History, there have been few opportunities for Innu, Quebec Inuit, or Labrador Inuit community members to examine the collection and little discussion on how it might be used to address contemporary Native issues and concerns. With a burgeoning interest in and knowledge of museum collections, material culture studies, and cultural patrimony, Native people in Labrador, as throughout the North, have begun to show considerably more interest in the Turner collection. At a very basic level, nineteenth-century material culture provides a tangible link with the past, with community traditions, and with one's own cultural identity.

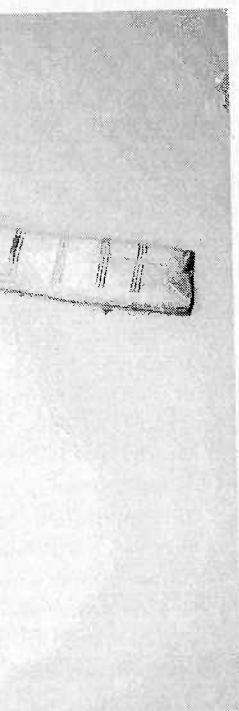


Figure 13-1. Innu coat collected by Lucien Turner in Kuujjuaq (Ft. Chimo), northern Quebec, 1883, (cat no. E74457). The painted design was the symbolic rendition of an individual hunter's quest for game. Photograph courtesy of the National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution/SI 74457.

The Future of the Past

ivated the friendship
l camped nearby. This
and most complete
and adjacent Labrador
shipped to the Smith-

been on display in the
l Museum of Natural
pec Inuit, or Labrador
ttle discussion on how
l concerns. With a bur-
material culture stud-
throughout the North,
er collection. At a very
tangible link with the
ural identity.



Kuujuuaq (Ft. Chimo),
sign was the symbolic
otograph courtesy of the
SI 74457.

In addition to its collections of Innu and Inuit material culture, the Smithsonian also houses four very important archival collections pertinent to Labrador Native history. These include (1) Lucien Turner's photographs of Innu and Inuit people and camps in the vicinity of Ft. Chimo (1883–1884); (2) William Brooks Cabot's collection of photographs, journals, and maps pertaining to his extensive travels with the Innu between 1899 and 1923 (Loring 1986/1987, 1987); (3) the notebooks and journals of William Duncan Strong from the winter of 1927–1928, when he camped with the Innu near Davis Inlet and Nain (Leacock and Rothschild 1994); and (4) the photographs, journals, and notes of E. Pep Wheeler (Morse 1977), the pioneering geologist who worked in Labrador from 1927 to 1974.

Although some incidental archaeological research had been conducted in Labrador prior to about 1950 (Bird 1945, Leechman 1943, Strong 1930), it wasn't until William Fitzhugh began his sustained archaeological and paleoecological research in Hamilton Inlet and later along the central and northern Labrador coasts that the prehistoric cultural sequence of the region was revealed (Fitzhugh 1972, 1976a, 1976b, 1978a, 1978b, 1980). After more than two decades of sustained archaeological and ethnohistorical research in Labrador by Fitzhugh and his colleagues and students (e.g. Kaplan 1983, Jordan 1978, Nagle 1978, 1984; Cox 1977, 1978; and Loring 1988, 1992), the Smithsonian has become indelibly associated with studies and interpretations of Labrador prehistory and paleoecology.

One of the attractions of archaeological research in Labrador for me was the opportunity it provided to meet and travel with members of the region's three indigenous communities: the Inuit, Innu and Settler. Local hunters and fishermen invariably provided hospitality and information about resources, settlement and subsistence strategies, weather, and game-related phenomena. They often conveyed this information in stories, weaving a rich tapestry of history and experience. Family members would occasionally guide us to archaeological sites, and over the years a number of young people worked with us as crew members. For all intents and purposes, however, archaeology in Labrador prior to 1990 was largely conducted as an independent enterprise with little community involvement or participation.

By the early 1990s, the framework of Labrador's fascinating prehistory had been well established. Archaeologists had revealed nearly 8,000 years of alternating and sometimes overlapping Indian and Inuit cultures. I myself had devoted nearly a decade to working out the late prehistoric sequence of Indian cultures in Labrador ancestral to the Innu (Loring 1992). While this research mainly addressed academically-minded questions about the boundedness of hunter-gatherer societies and the emergence and maintenance of ethnic identities, I was mindful of its political ramifications. In other words, I recognized that the demonstration of cultural continuity and past land-use had implications for on-going land-claim negotiations. Through community visits and slide presentations, I endeavored to convey something of my research results to the Innu. While my images of familiar landscapes and stone projectile points were reviewed with little comment, the slides I had made of the Smithsonian's collection of nineteenth and early twentieth-century photographs of Innu people fascinated the modern

residents as they had no idea that such archival materials existed. Slide shows in Utshimassit, a small Innu village on the central coast of Labrador, would last long into the night. Having surrendered control over the projector to one of the village elders, animated conversation—in Inueimun—greeted each image. The projector's light shining through a nearly opaque cloud of cigarette smoke, was like a time machine carrying everyone present back to the past.

Such experiences convinced me that while native Labradorians might appreciate knowledge of the far-past it was the near-past, which included the landscape of myth and memory, that appealed most to them. Archaeologists in Labrador, as throughout much of the North, had designed research programs, for the most part, without input or participation of host community members. It is not surprising that this resulted in the alienation of Native communities and the hardening of their attitudes toward archaeology. At the least archaeologists were guilty of benign neglect, at the worst their actions amounted to a blatant continuation of postcolonial scientific attitudes that divorced research from any form of community (social) interaction and obligation. In effect, the past in Labrador had become dichotomized. Scientific practitioners had their materialist view of the past based on radiocarbon dates, artifacts, and old sites while local community members held title to a past that was based on oral traditions, place names, myths, genealogy and stories.

With the completion of my dissertation (Loring 1992), I was eager to initiate new research conducted in a cooperative mode with the Native communities of Labrador. As envisioned, it would be research that sought not so much a concordance of the past as a means of empowering people with the relevance and authority that is conveyed by control over the past.

COMMUNITY ARCHAEOLOGY WITH THE INNU IN LABRADOR: PATHWAYS

The Pathways Project emerged as a cooperative initiative of the Innu Nation, the Innu Resource Centre and the Smithsonian's Arctic Studies Center. It sought to address the interests and needs of the Innu community and their notions of the past while exploring their ancient tenure of the land. It also sought to empower Innu youth with another perception of their history and heritage. In light of the usurpation of Innu control of their land by a government that first flooded their rivers then used the land as a military training ground, and finally implemented massive mineral development projects, this project seemed particularly poignant.

An essential feature of the Pathways Project was the integration of my training in archaeology and familiarity with Innu prehistory with the knowledge, wisdom and skills of participating elders. During the fall of 1993, Innu students from the community of Sheshatshit, a Native community on Lake Melville, participated in two weeks of classroom training and community interviewing followed by a month in the country to learn the methods and techniques of archaeological practice. The field site was located at Amitshuakant. This was the beginning point of an Innu portage route that led from Seal Lake to the now flooded Lake Michikamau; from there it ran north to Ungava, west to Hudson's Bay, and then south to the Quebec North Shore. Although unmarked in any printed atlas, Amit-

shuakant was a major crossroads for the Innu in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the point from which families departed to the furthest corners of Nitassinan (the Quebec-Labrador peninsula).

The Innu participants, selected by community leaders for their interest in heritage issues, included students, hunters and homemakers (fig. 13-2). The excavation of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century tent-rings at the beginning of the portage trail revealed an array of artifacts including hunting and fishing paraphernalia, tobacco related products, knives, cookware, medicinal containers, molasses jugs, combs, beads and coins. But our time in the country was much more than an exercise in how archaeologists practice their profession. It was an opportunity to incorporate Innu values and perspectives into a construction of history and a chance to expose Innu youth to life in the bush.

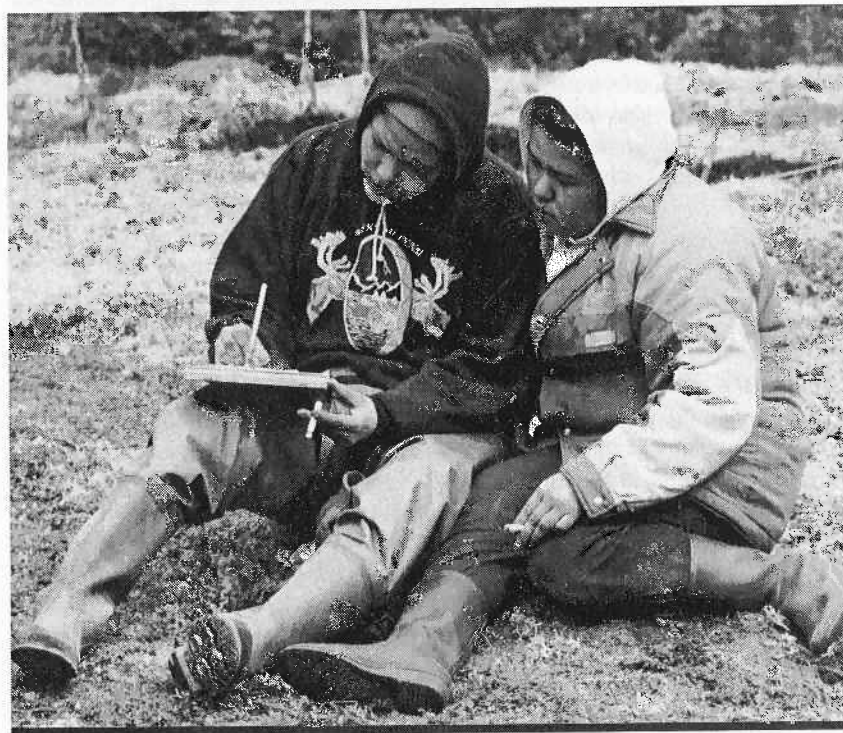


Figure 13-2. Kathleen Penashue and Edwina Jack working on field notes for their excavation unit at Amitshuakant (FICf-1) on the Naskapi river, Labrador.
Photograph courtesy of Stephen Loring.

