TOPIC 2.2

Who Was Here

Were prehistoric technologies primitive?
Were all residents of Newfoundland and Labrador originally immigrants?

Introduction
While Aboriginal people assert they have always been here, archaeologists estimate that the first human residents in our province arrived about 7000 BCE in Labrador. Several thousands of years later, they were followed by other groups – some of which lived here for only a few hundred years before disappearing. Who were these people? Where did they live? While we cannot answer all of these questions, we know that there were several waves of migrations in Newfoundland and Labrador by different groups of AmerIndians and Paleo-Eskimos. These groups were later followed by the Thule and the Norse. Some of the groups probably interacted and this may have affected where certain groups settled.
AmerIndians

According to many archaeologists, AmerIndians are the descendants of the people who migrated across the Beringia land bridge that connected Siberia to Alaska during the last ice age. There have been several different cultural groups of AmerIndians who settled in Newfoundland and Labrador prior to contact with Europeans. These include Labrador Archaic, Maritime Archaic, Intermediate Indians, and Recent Indians. It is not known what happened to cause the disappearance of each of these groups. In some cases, a group may have died out because of a lack of food resources. It is also possible that one group evolved into another.

2.11 These bird-shaped pebbles were found in a Maritime Archaic cemetery in Port au Choix. They may have had a religious function or have been used simply for decoration or as toys.

- Pre-Dorset Paleo-Eskimo
- Dorset Paleo-Eskimo
- Maritime Archaic
- Groswater Paleo-Eskimo
- Recent Indians
- Thule

2000 BCE 1000 BCE 1000 CE 1400 CE

Norse were here for a decade c. 1000 CE

- 776 BCE First Olympic Games held in Greece
- 51 BCE Cleopatra becomes the ruler of Egypt
- 0 Approximate date given as birth of Christ
- 225 CE Early form of gunpowder invented in China
- 868 CE First known printed book, the Diamond Sutra
2.12 Artist William B. Ritchie's conception of House 55, a Dorset Paleo-Eskimo structure located at Phillip's Garden, Port au Choix. The reconstructed archaeological site of this Dorset house can be seen at Port au Choix National Historic Site.

2.13 Migration patterns in eastern North America

Based on information from Historical Atlas of Canada - From the Beginning to 1800, Vol. 1 by Cole R. Harris

Paleo-Eskimos

About 2100 BCE a new people, Paleo-Eskimos, moved into northern Labrador – perhaps from Greenland or the high Arctic. ("Paleo-Eskimo" literally means "old Eskimo.") These people were culturally different from the AmerIndians. The first group of Paleo-Eskimos, known as "Pre-Dorset," tended to live in sheltered inner areas along the north Labrador coast. This group seems to have experienced a population decline starting around 1500 BCE. By 800 BCE, a new group called the "Groswater Paleo-Eskimo" was living at various sites throughout our province. They resided here until about 100 BCE in Labrador and 100 CE in Newfoundland. About 500 BCE a new culture, the Dorset Paleo-Eskimo, arrived in Labrador from the north. At the beginning of the Common Era, Dorset sites were distributed along the entire Labrador coast and on the island of Newfoundland. By 900 CE the Dorset had disappeared from the island of Newfoundland, and by 1300 CE had mostly disappeared from Labrador. As with the early AmerIndians, we can only hypothesize why the different groups disappeared.

Experiencing The Arts

Learn about another side of artist William B. Ritchie on page 642 and look for other images of early peoples in this chapter by this artist.
This painting entitled *We Filled 'Em To The Gunnells* by Sheila Hollander shows what life possibly may have been like in XXX circa XXX.

Fig. 3.4

Thule

About 800 years ago, a people known as Thule reached northern Labrador and began their migration south along the Labrador coast. This group originally came from northern Alaska and ultimately spread across the Canadian Arctic and Greenland. As Thule adapted their lifestyle to fit the Labrador environment, they became a distinct cultural group known as “Labrador Inuit.” (Archaeologists tend to use the term “Thule” for this group until about 1550 CE.) Thus, Thule are the direct ancestors of Inuit in Labrador today.
Prehistoric technologies

The early peoples of Newfoundland and Labrador developed technologies, some quite sophisticated, to be able to survive in their environment. The tools they developed were made with materials they found at hand—stone, wood, or animal products. When animals were killed, there was little waste. In addition to eating the meat from an animal, needles and other tools were made from the bones, and clothing was made from the hide.

Maritime Archaic toggling harpoon

This was the ultimate in sea-mammal hunting technology. A line would attach the tip to the shaft. Once the tip entered the animal, it separated from the shaft and twisted, or “toggled,” in the wound as the line tightened, making it virtually impossible for the animal to escape. Thousands of years after the Maritime Archaic used these, American whalers reinvented the same technology.

Maritime Archaic needles in carrying case

These bird-bone needles have eyes of less than one millimetre wide, indicating they were probably used for fine needlework. Eight such needles were found in this needle case, made from a caribou bone, at a Maritime Archaic cemetery in Port au Choix.

Dorset soapstone pots

These were used both for heat and for cooking. The replica set up below shows how the pots were used.

THE PROCESS FOR MAKING SOAPSTONE POTS

1. The weathered surface of the soapstone cliff was removed by pounding it with large cobble hammerstones.

2. The outside of the pot was shaped by carving a groove in the cliff face.

3. The pot shape was then removed from the cliff by chiselling and prying.

4. The inside was hollowed out and finished with scrapers and smoothing tools.

*A major soapstone quarry was found at Fleur de Lys on the Baie Verte Peninsula. It has been designated a National Historic Site.*
Groswater Paleo-Eskimo knives and scrapers
These tools were shaped from chert. The scrapers had a converse edge for scraping hides and other materials. The ridges on the edges were probably used to make grooves in bones and antler. The knives were attached to wooden handles with sinew. While it is rare for wooden artifacts to survive from this far back, wooden handles could be preserved by permafrost conditions.

Questions:

1. Between 7000 BCE and 1000 CE, Newfoundland and Labrador was inhabited by several groups of people.
   a. How many groups inhabited Labrador?
   b. How many groups inhabited the island of Newfoundland?
   c. Give two reasons that might explain this difference.
   d. What might be some implications of multiple groups inhabiting the same area at the same time?

2. Considering site and situation, what would have been three advantages and three challenges of:
   a. living in Labrador c. 100 CE?
   b. living on the island of Newfoundland c. 100 CE?

3. Which of the prehistoric technologies illustrated do you think shows the most ingenuity? Explain.

FIRST EUROPEANS IN THE NEW WORLD: THE NORSE

According to a thirteenth century Norse saga, the first person from the “Old World” to reach North America was Leif Eriksson, a Viking explorer who lived from 975-1020 CE. Five centuries before Columbus made his historic voyage, Eriksson sailed west from Greenland and reached a new land that he called “Vinland.” Soon other Norse explorers followed. On one of these voyages, the explorers settled for a time at a site on the tip of Newfoundland’s Northern Peninsula.

This place, now called L’Anse aux Meadows, was discovered in 1960 and radiocarbon dated to 1014 CE. The first authentic Norse site discovered in North America, it was declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1977. Artifacts found at the site include a spindle whorl (used in spinning) and a copper alloy dress pin. Although the Norse were traditionally farmers, the evidence at L’Anse aux Meadows points to the site being used for ship repair and possibly as a gathering point for goods going north. Archaeologists tell us the site was occupied for short periods for over a decade and then abandoned.