

TOPIC 2.2

Who Was Here

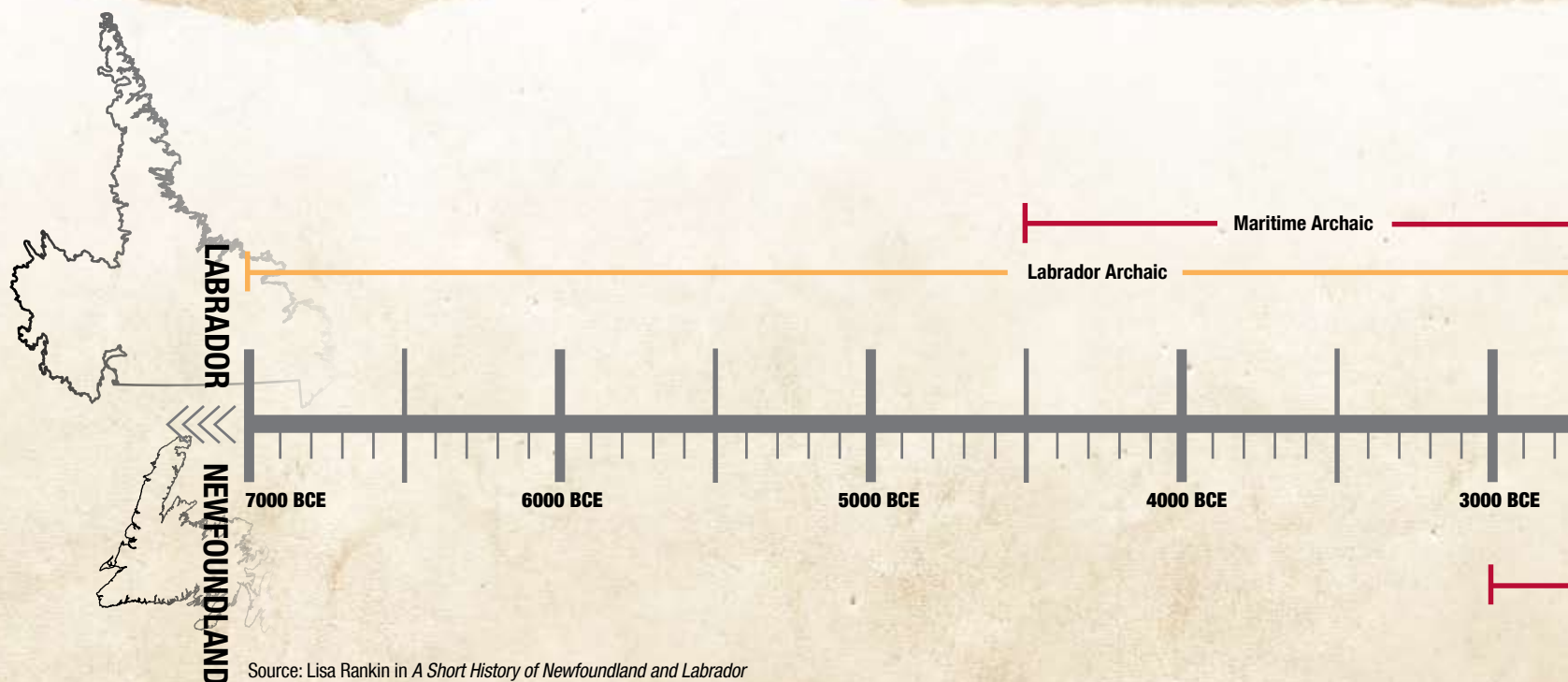
Were prehistoric technologies primitive?

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.



2.10

MEANWHILE ELSEWHERE IN THE WORLD ...



8000 BCE
Earliest permanent farming villages in Fertile Crescent



4500 BCE
Plow is introduced in Europe



3100 BCE
Work begins on earliest phase of Stonehenge



2150 BCE
Work begins on the first pyramid (the Step Pyramid at Saqqara)

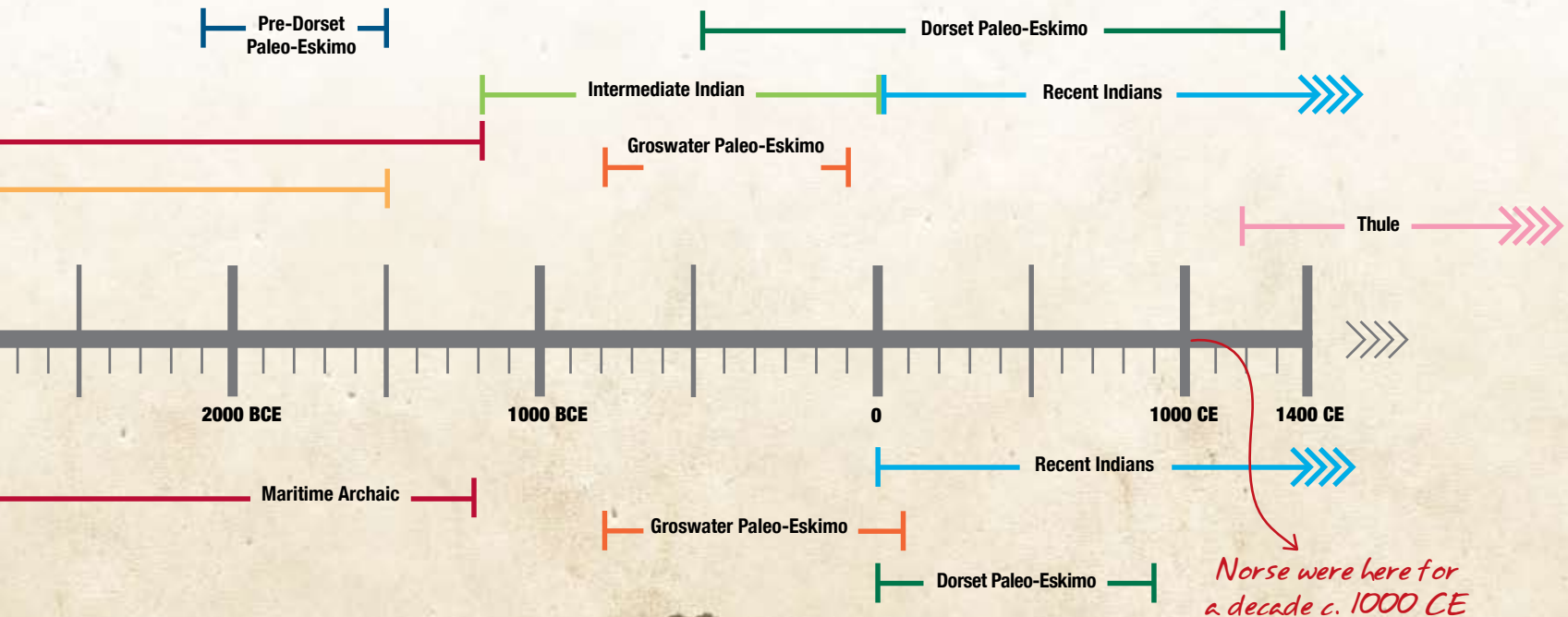
AmerIndians

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.



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.

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.



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

(((DIMENSIONS OF THINKING)))

EVIDENCE

In order to construct an understanding of the past, you need information. Information becomes evidence when used for a particular purpose, such as answering a question, supporting a position, or interpreting the past.

The degree to which a question can be answered, or a position supported by evidence, is a function of the quantity and quality of the information available. In order to construct an interpretation of a past event it is useful to have many sources. Each source needs to be examined in terms of its quality. For example, some sources may be biased and provide a limited or even distorted account of an event – intentionally or not.

Archaeology is the study of the past cultural behaviour of humans through the material remains, or artifacts, that people leave behind. Besides studying these artifacts, how objects were grouped when they were found can provide insight into their use. The oldest known grave in the Americas, and possibly the world, is a 7500-year-old Labrador Archaic burial mound located in L'Anse Amour, Labrador. A Labrador Archaic adolescent was buried at this site in a ceremonial manner. The body was wrapped and placed facedown in a pit and then a large flat stone was placed on the lower back. Archaeological evidence indicates that food was cooked on fires that were lit around the body. Weapons and tools were placed in the grave, possibly as offerings, and then it was covered with a large mound of rocks. The manner in which this youth was buried suggests that he or she may have had an important role within the tribe or that his or her death had a special significance.

2.14 Maritime Archaic stone axe head



2.16 Thule artifacts

(below left) A handle and circular blade from a Thule knife known as an ulu, c. 1550.
(below right) A polar bear tooth that was likely worn as a Thule amulet or for decoration.



2.15 Labrador Archaic artifacts

Shown above are some of the items found in the grave: a whistle made from bird bone; a whetstone used for sharpening tools; a worked walrus tusk; and an antler pestle, which was possibly used for grinding graphite to mix with red ochre to make paint.

Question:

Besides archaeological evidence, what other sources could you use to find evidence?

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.



2.17

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.



2.18

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.

2.20

THE PROCESS FOR MAKING SOAPSTONE* POTS



2.19

**A major soapstone quarry was found at Fleur de Lys on the Baie Verte Peninsula. It has been designated a National Historic Site.*



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



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.



2.21



2.22

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.

Questions:

- Between 7000 BCE and 1000 CE, Newfoundland and Labrador was inhabited by several groups of people.
 - How many groups inhabited Labrador?
 - How many groups inhabited the island of Newfoundland?
 - Give two reasons that might explain this difference.
 - What might be some implications of multiple groups inhabiting the same area at the same time?
- Considering site and situation, what would have been three advantages and three challenges of:
 - living in Labrador c. 100 CE?
 - living on the island of Newfoundland c.100 CE?
- Which of the prehistoric technologies illustrated do you think shows the most ingenuity? Explain.