

Archaeology at Anse à Bertrand, Saint-Pierre et Miquelon 2019

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Figure 1: Field Director, Catherine Losier, closely monitoring the backhoe removing sod and emptying out Sector 5 which was excavated during the previous season

The small French islands of Saint-Pierre et Miquelon (SPM) are situated just 25 kilometres off Newfoundland's Burin Peninsula. Made up of three main islands, this archipelago is the last remaining part of colonial *Nouvelle-France* to remain under French governance today. This unique bit of history prompted Dr. Losier to establish a long-term archaeological research project there, which aims to better understand SPM's role within the region's historic salt cod fishery, as well as its place within the trade networks that operated throughout the French Atlantic World between the 17th-19th centuries. The 2019 field season marked the third year of excavations at the project's study area, Anse à Bertrand, which is located on the south-eastern edge of the Saint-Pierre harbour.

Prior to the establishment of any permanent settlements, the islands were seasonally occupied by a number of different groups, both Indigenous and European (Leblanc 2008). By 1536, when Jacques Cartier stopped by the archipelago on his way back to France, he found Basque and Breton fishing crews were already making good use of its shores (Ribault 1968). Saint-Pierre's naturally sheltered harbour paired with the archipelago's overall proximity to rich

fishing grounds made SPM an ideal location for shore-based activities associated with the migratory fishery. Permanent residents were established on the islands by 1670 and French colonists continued to settle there until the beginning of the 18th century when the Treaty of Utrecht (1713) made Newfoundland and SPM strictly British territory (La Morandière 1962-66). Newfoundland's French Shore was established to support

France's migratory fishery, and most of the permanent residents at Plaisance (Placentia, NL) and SPM were sent to the French fishing colony, Ile Royale (Cape Breton, NS) where they helped establish its new capital, Louisbourg (La Morandière 1962-66). France went on to lose Ile Royale with the end of the Seven Years War and was retroceded SPM in its place with the Treaty of Paris in 1763. This settlement did not last long however, and possession of the islands proceeded to pass back and forth between French and British empires several more times until 1815.

Though SPM has previously been studied by historians, its tumultuous history did result in a serious shortage of surviving archival materials, especially those pertaining to years prior to 1815. Without many relevant historical documents, many questions remained unanswered. Archaeological investigations therefore present a unique opportunity to begin addressing some of the questions relating to SPM's early colonial past and its initial period of French permanent settlement. As well, archaeology acts as a means to uncover the material past associated with SPM's 19th and 20th century history. This material culture creates an interesting portrait of the past when analyzed in conjunction to the well-known 19th and 20th

century written record. In addition to the project's overarching objective of helping to fill in gaps identified within SPM's historiography, the 2019 field season had three specific research goals: 1) to locate and document the extent of the potential stage feature identified in the NW corner of Sector 5 (excavated in 2018), 2) to locate and document the extent of the potential stone feature originally uncovered in *Sondage 2* (excavated in 2017), and 3) to locate and document the extent of the *saline* feature identified in the SW corner of Sector 5.

While the project's 2017 and 2018 excavations each took place under one of Memorial University's Department of Archaeology Field Schools, Anse à Bertrand's 2019 excavations were tackled by a smaller but experienced field crew. Under the direction of Dr. Catherine Losier, Mallory Champagne, Meghann Livingston, Jess Munkittrick, Aubrey O'Toole, Jon LeDrew, and Adam Van De Spiegle undertook 4 weeks of formal excavations. The 2019 excavation area was divided into 2 sectors (7 and 8) which were located directly next to the previous year's Sector 5. The adjacent Sectors 7 and 8 each spanned 5m x 4m and extended the western border of the team's 2018 excavation area. The western border of Sector 8 stopped just 1m away from the eastern border of *Sondage 2* which had been excavated during the team's first field season in 2017. From the first year of excavations onward, it was evident the team had uncovered 3 distinct archaeological contexts at the site: one associated with its 17th-18th century occupations, one with its 19th century occupations, and one with its 20th century occupations. Together, these contexts represent over 300 years of more or less continual seasonal use, beginning around 1670 and carrying on until the site's abandonment in the late 1970's.

On the oldest known map of Saint-Pierre, Anse à Bertrand is depicted with two fishing rooms with *graves* (large areas of cobble and stone built up



Figure 2: Jess Munkittrick, Adam Van De Spiegle, Aubrey O'Toole, Mallory Champagne, and Jon LeDrew digging in the 2019 excavation area, Sectors 7 and 8

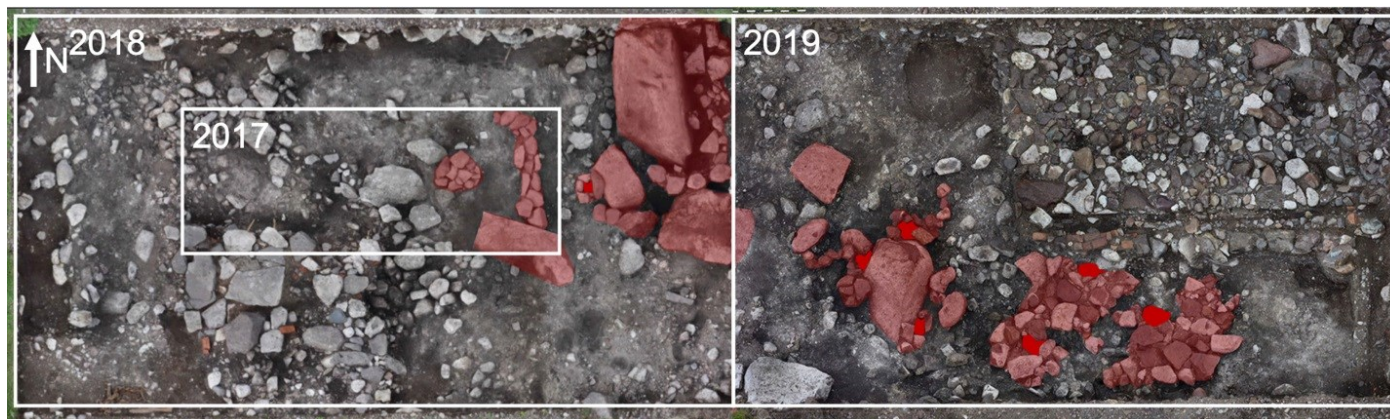
for drying cod on), some of which are still visible on the site's surface today (*Plan du port et de la colonie de l'isle de St Pierre, 1680-1700*). According to this map, the rooms belong to a "M. de Bellorme," who became Governor of Saint Pierre in 1693, and a "M. de la Hoguerie" (Ribault 1968). Accompanying these structures is a chapel and small fort. Although the islands shift from seasonal European use towards permanent settlement in the late 17th century, it was initially unclear whether or not the team had uncovered evidence of permanent settlement at Anse à Bertrand. In fact, following the 2017 and 2018 seasons, it was hypothesized that despite the presence of a small town within Saint-Pierre's inner harbour, the late 17th-18th century context at Anse à Bertrand actually represented a migratory fishery. The hypothesis was strongly supported by the fact the early material culture at the site bears striking resemblance to archaeological finds on the Petit Nord Project (Pope 2008). The objects are associated with a working environment, and within the ceramics, emphasis is placed on storage with only a few vessels being used for food preparation and/or cooking. Further archival research revealed that at least one of the two known individuals occupying Anse à Bertrand in the late 17th century was actually a *habitant-pêcheur* or "resident fishermen" who would occupy this coastal fishing site from about May-October and then retreat inland (to the interior of Fortune Bay, NL) each winter (Brouillan 1694). Bellorme was however employing

seasonal migratory fishing crews, which perhaps nicely explains Anse à Bertrand’s late 17th-18th century assemblage and proves the team’s hypothesis of early seasonal use of the site (Thibodeau, 1962).

Anse à Bertrand’s 2018 excavations revealed a peculiar stone feature centered around a large flat rock that extended into the natural soil (Figure 3). This rock was surrounded by a thick black silty layer with a high artifact concentration throughout, and a linear arrangement of smaller rocks which seemed to be intentionally positioned around it. The working hypothesis for this feature is that it marks the terrestrial end of the fishing stage, which could have been built over top of the large rock, using it as a founda-

Thanks to historical maps, it is known that Anse à Bertrand becomes the property of other *habitants-pêcheurs* (e.g., Bertrand, Philibert, and Dalair) in the late 18th century (*Plan de la partie du port et emplacement de la ville de St Pierre et Miquelon*, 1783). According to local historians, however, SPM’s 19th century fishery is characterized by *négociants*, who were traders of cod that owned and operated large properties and establishments primarily located along the harbour’s southside (Claireaux 2013). Sometime after French settlers’ final return to the islands in 1816, it seems *négociants* also come to settle at Anse à Bertrand or *La Pointe* in general. Thanks to additional digging at the local archives, the team recently learned the name of

Figure 3: A 3D model of the site’s 18th century context (with 19th and 20th century features left intact wherever possible). The 18th century features are outlined in red. The features within the 2017 and 2018 excavation area are hypothesized to mark the terrestrial end of a fishing stage while the features uncovered during 2019 may represent the remains of a nearby structure. Opaque red indicates the presence of postholes



tion. The first goal of the 2019 season was to locate and document the extent of this feature. To the team’s surprise, the 2019 excavations revealed that all of what remained of this feature had already been excavated the previous year. Instead, the new late 17th-18th century context revealed even more puzzling rock features. What is known, is that the 2019 excavation area revealed at least six postholes, which together could represent the remains of a structure adjacent to the stage, such as a small cabin or shed, much like the ones documented in 19th century photographs on Newfoundland’s French Shore (namely those of Paul-Émile Miot, 1857-1861). Interesting late 17th-18th century finds included a number of different French ceramics (e.g., Saintonge, faïence, Norman stonewares, and Breton coarse earthenware), many more smoking pipe fragments, and even a small cannonball.

one of these *négociants*, Thomazeau, who obtained a property at “the Pointe” in 1834 (Claireaux 2013).

The second goal of the 2019 season was to investigate a large 19th century rock feature first located in one of the trenches (*Sondage 2*) during the team’s 2017 field season. At the time, the feature spanned over the entire 5m x 2m trench, making it difficult to gather much insight. It had been suggested by locals that this feature could be the remains of an old *grave*, however, due to the compaction of rocks and the feature’s overall proximity to the shoreline, it was agreed this seemed unlikely. With a little more digging in 2019, the team was able to confirm this feature was not a *grave* but rather, the foundational remains of a 19th century structure (Figure 6). This building is potentially associated with the *negociants*’ occupations at Anse à Bertrand. Notable 19th century artefacts un-



Figure 4: Saintonge coarse earthenware rim sherds uncovered from the site's rich 18th century context

Figure 5: A 3D model of the site's 19th century context excavated during Summer 2019. The archaeological feature outlined in blue marks the foundation of a 19th century structure. The blue dotted line denotes the presence of wooden blanks within this feature





Figure 6: Field Director, Catherine Losier, standing by as the 19th century building feature is thoroughly documented



Figure 7: The remains of a cast iron stove uncovered in the site’s 19th-20th century context. According to a local informant, this stove was likely made by the Richmond Stove Company. The company (est. 1851) was one of the United States’ largest stove manufacturers from approximately 1871-1920’s.

centuries-old tradition of seasonal use of the site. In the 2017 and 2018 excavations, the team uncovered a flat and almost circular rock feature which seemed to mark the base of something (perhaps a *cabestan* which would have been used by *petits-pêcheurs* to haul up dories loaded down with cod at the end of the day). Another rock feature identified in 2018 was the foundation of a 20th century *saline*, essentially a shed used to store the family’s fishing gear. As previously noted, the third and final goal of the 2019 season was to locate and document the extent of

covered in 2019 included many colourful and decorated whitewares, a number of different glass bottles types, and even a small ceramic “frozen Charlie” doll.

The 20th century context and final type of fishery observed in the ongoing investigations at Anse à Bertrand is associated with the *petits-pêcheurs*, who made up SPM’s small-scale family inshore fishery. According to locals, these independent fishing families would spend their winters in town and then move out to smaller neighbourhoods like this for the duration of each fishing season, thus continuing the

this *saline* feature. This last round of excavations revealed the structure had been approximately 3m in width (Figure 8). Interesting 20th century finds included shotgun shells, many different patterns and pieces of linoleum, and even some “old school” Lego bricks.

Overall, the later 19th and 20th century contexts represent a more “settled” nature in the site’s occupations. Though occupants were still living at Anse à Bertrand on a seasonal basis, during the 19th and 20th century, they became based on the archipelago permanently and could therefore access other

Figure 8: A 3D model of the site’s 20th century context with archaeological features outlined in green. The features to the west in the 2017 and 2018 excavations are hypothesized to be the base of an older style *cabestan* and a small stone wall. The feature in the middle of the excavation area marks the foundation of a 20th century *saline*. The green dotted line shows what appears to have been the limit of the *saline* itself.

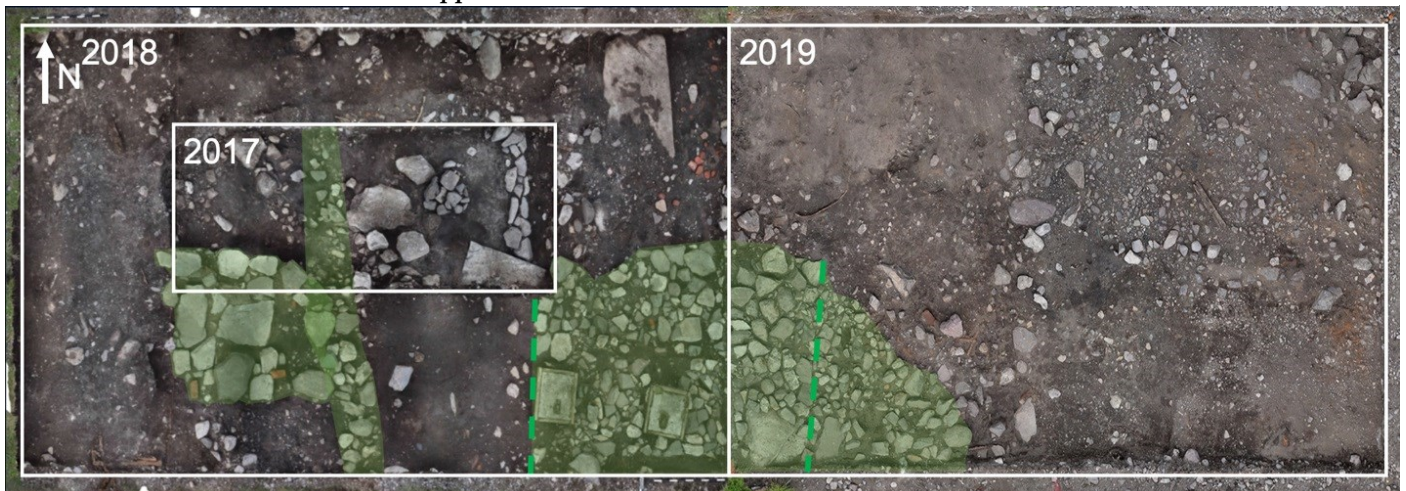




Figure 9: A 1930's Scotch whisky bottle base uncovered in the site's 20th century context, and reminiscent of the archipelago's role as a transshipment point for illegal alcohol during Prohibition.

types of materials and/or objects more easily. Over time, the team no longer observes just the work and occupations of fishermen but can also see evidence of activities and daily lives of entire fishing families. The 19th and 20th century contexts show not only there more people were present at the site, but also now women and children. The 2019 excavations really helped refine the team's understanding of the overall life history and changing fishing practices carried out at the site through time. Catherine, Mallory, and Meghann are very excited to be bringing back the MUN Archaeology Field School for their upcoming 2020 season. Entering the new decade, they are also looking forward to helping commemorate the islands' rich history of smuggling and the 100th anniversary of the Prohibition Era (1920-1933) with their friends and community partners in SPM.

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