

Avataq Archaeology Field School Qikirtajuaq 2013



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Institut culturel Avataq
Avataq Cultural Institute

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Cover page: one of the Inuit sod houses in Kangiakallak 1 site

On the left: a stone knife with wooden handle
that was found on the floor of the house

Summer school can be cool... when it is about archaeology!



left: Simon Makimak in 2011 during Avataq's field school.



Left: Boxes of food and equipment piled up at the camp in 2013



Left: Inukshuk on top of Kangiakallak; see our camp far away, down below.

Is anything cooler than summer school with Avataq? Avataq's summer field school returned to Akulivik in the summer of 2013. It was a 5-week camp with 12 students from the Akulivik community. The main archaeological excavation took place at the Kangiakallak-1 site (JeGn-2), located in the valley between Uigursiup Kangia and Kangiakallak where the ancient qarmait are located, on Qikirtajuaq (Smith Island). The main aim of our collaboration with Akulivik students is to encourage them to stay in school. Students learned about the local history, the basics of archaeological research and many other aspects such as geomorphology, palaeoenvironment, and preservation of artefacts, as well as participating in traditional hunting with our hunter-guide.

This picture album was prepared in memory of this amazing journey into the history of Qikirtajuaq! Akulivimiut have been significantly involved in supporting this project and the students actively participated in documenting and preserving the rich heritage of the island. The project aims to be a stepping stone for the involvement of the youth and next generation in the preservation of Nunavik culture. Akulivik students have clearly demonstrated that they can play a key role in keeping their culture alive. This is just the beginning, the future belongs to them!

We would like to dedicate this book to the memory of Simon Makimak who actively contributed to the documentation and preservation of the local history of Akulivik. His research contributions have been greatly appreciated and his teaching received attentive ears by Akulivik students who had the chance to interact with him and learn from him in the summer of 2011, as well as on other occasions.



2013 team on Qikirtajuaq

2010 A survey and the planning of a field school

Qikirtajuaq (also known as Cape Smith) is an island that was identified early on in the pursuit of Arctic archaeological research by Manning in 1940's and Wallrath in the 1950's. Since that period, little research has been conducted in the area. A team composed of Simon Makimak (hunter-guide), Davidee Makimak (assistant), and Andrew Papigatuk (assistant archaeologist), under the supervision of Pierre M. Desrosiers (archaeologist, Avataq), conducted an archaeological inventory in the area in 2010.

The central goal of the survey was to find a suitable archaeological site at which to hold a field school in the summer of 2011. The project was conducted in consultation with the local population and authorities in order to determine which areas and which sites would be of particular interest to Akulivimiut. The interviews revealed that Qikirtajuaq itself is of special interest, because the local elders had numerous stories to tell about their experiences on the island. In particular, Simon Makimak provided us with information about his place of birth and about the 1950's Hudson's Bay Company trading post located on the south coast of the island. Among the sites revisited, the Kangiakallak 1 site (JeGn-2) appeared to be a suitable location for a field school with Inuit students. The site includes a large number of semi-subterranean structures and archaeological features dating from both the Thule/Inuit and Palaeoeskimo periods. In addition to the known sites, many new sites were recorded and mapped during our visit, including sites from the Palaeoeskimo period. With the help of Simon Qinuajuak, attempts were also made to relocate a site on the north coast of the Island, but the search was ultimately unsuccessful.

(1) Simon Makimak explaining the tarqutik we found on the Mungialuk site (JeGo-5), his birth place. (2) The HBC trading post in 1950 (Avataq archives: IND-FK-127). (3) The HBC trading post in 2010. (4) A stone adze found on a new recorded site on the north shore of Qikirtajuaq. (5) Recording the qarmait of Kangiakallak 1 site (JeGn-2). (6) One of the tent structures at JeGn-50 site on Uiruksik Island.



2011 Field school

During the summer 2011, the Avataq Cultural Institute undertook archaeological excavations and a field survey on Qikirtajuaq, near the community of Akulivik. Nine students participated: Evie Aliqu, Illutak Anautak, Laura Aliqu, Lucassie Aullaluk, Lucy Alasuak, Maggie Irqumia, Okituk Amamatuak, Patric Qiluqi and Tukak Qinuajuak. The camp was run by Simon Makimak with the help of Laina Anauta, Louisa Nappatuk and Davidee Makimak. We were also fortunate to have the special involvement of Willie Kumarluk from Umiujaq. Two students from Laval University, Stéphanie Steelandt and Jonathan Pageau, conducted their graduate research on driftwood and the geomorphology of the island. The Avataq team consisted of Tommy Weetaluktuk, Andrew Papigatuk, David Howard and Pierre M. Desrosiers. The archaeological remains attest to the presence of two cultural groups, both of whom successively occupied the same site in winter. The Dorset occupants built shallow semi-subterranean houses here, followed later by Inuit inhabitants who constructed semi-subterranean sod houses (qarmait). Two structures were excavated: one Dorset and one Inuit. Through the excavations we recovered unusually well-preserved artefact assemblages and structural wood.

(1) the team, (2) Davidee and Willie excavating, (3) Patric looking at a little figurine, (4) Simon and Willie on their way to Qikirtajuaq, (5) Okituk showing the bow he found in the Dorset structure during an exhibit in Akulivik NV, (6) nice Inuit wooden bowl, (7) details of the same bowl, (8) Lucy showing a tarqutik, and (9) Evie and Lucassie excavating.



Akulivik students at the field school 2013



Ittuvik Anautak



Louisa Aullaluk



Sandy Qungisiruk



Maggie Irqumia



Simonie Damon Qinuajuaq



Jeannie Qinuajuaq



Thomas Alayco



Laura Aliqu



Lucassie Aullaluk



Timangiak Novalinga



Illutak Anautak



Nancy Alayco





This page: Akulivik team

Our camp leader, responsible of our safety and comfort, was (1) Juanasi Qaqutuk (with his daughter Solange on this picture), assisted by (4) Simon Echalook, the man who can fix everything! Our kitchen was run initially by (9) Eva Audlaluk, then by (7) Laina Anautak, our chef, who prepared great meals every day. Our bear watcher was (2) Taqulik. (3) Our menu that day, fried Arctic char and vegetables. (5) Juanasi's boat on a quiet day. (6) Simon and Juanasi catching fish and starfish. (8) Juanasi making misiraq in a puurtaq.



Left page: Avataq staff and some of the collaborators

Left: (1) Our last day on the island. Four archaeologists were supervising the dig: (2) Pierre Desrosiers, (3) Elsa Cencig and Ruth Mienert, and (4) Tommy Weetaluktuk (all Avataq employees except Ruth (Bâle University, Switzerland). Jrène Rahm (professor at Université de Montréal) was also leading a side project with the youth. Jessica Kotierk (Canadian Conservation Institute) from Nunavut also joined the team as a specialist in artefact preservation.



Setting up the camp



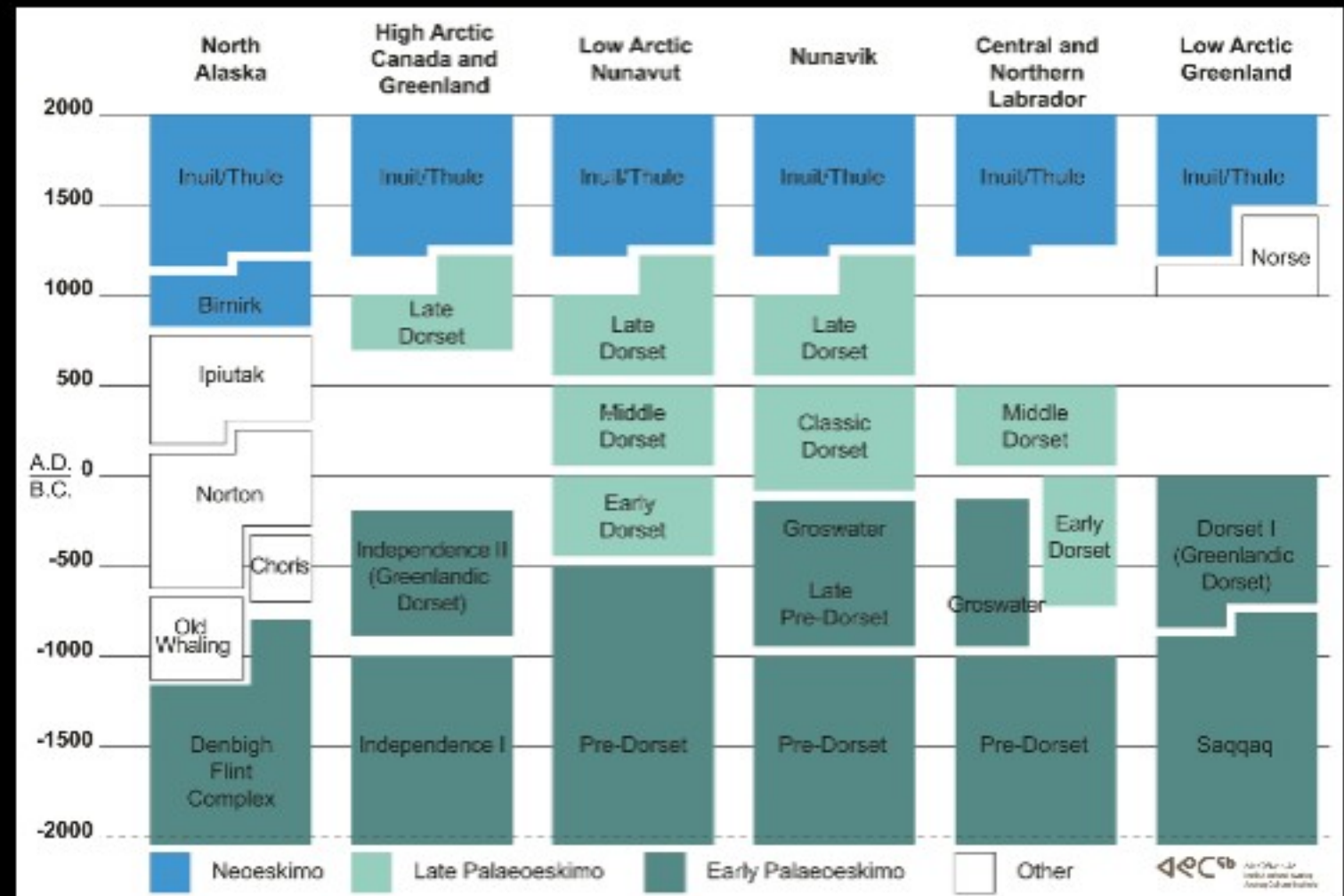
Our tents are old, as some were used for the first time in 2007 during another field school near Inukjuak. We were expecting the tents to be leaking, so we added some plastic tarp on top. We have a large kitchen tent that can seat 20 people around three tables. To get the tent roof high enough to walk around inside comfortably, we had to excavate the floor by 30cm. Recycled pressboard from the dump was used to make a nice floor. The field toilet was a small tent, with a hole dug up and two pieces of wood on each side to stand on - Turkish style - or to be used with a toilet seat on legs if you like luxury. Some preferred to take a walk or use the automatic flush toilet - nature's version - at the tip of the island.

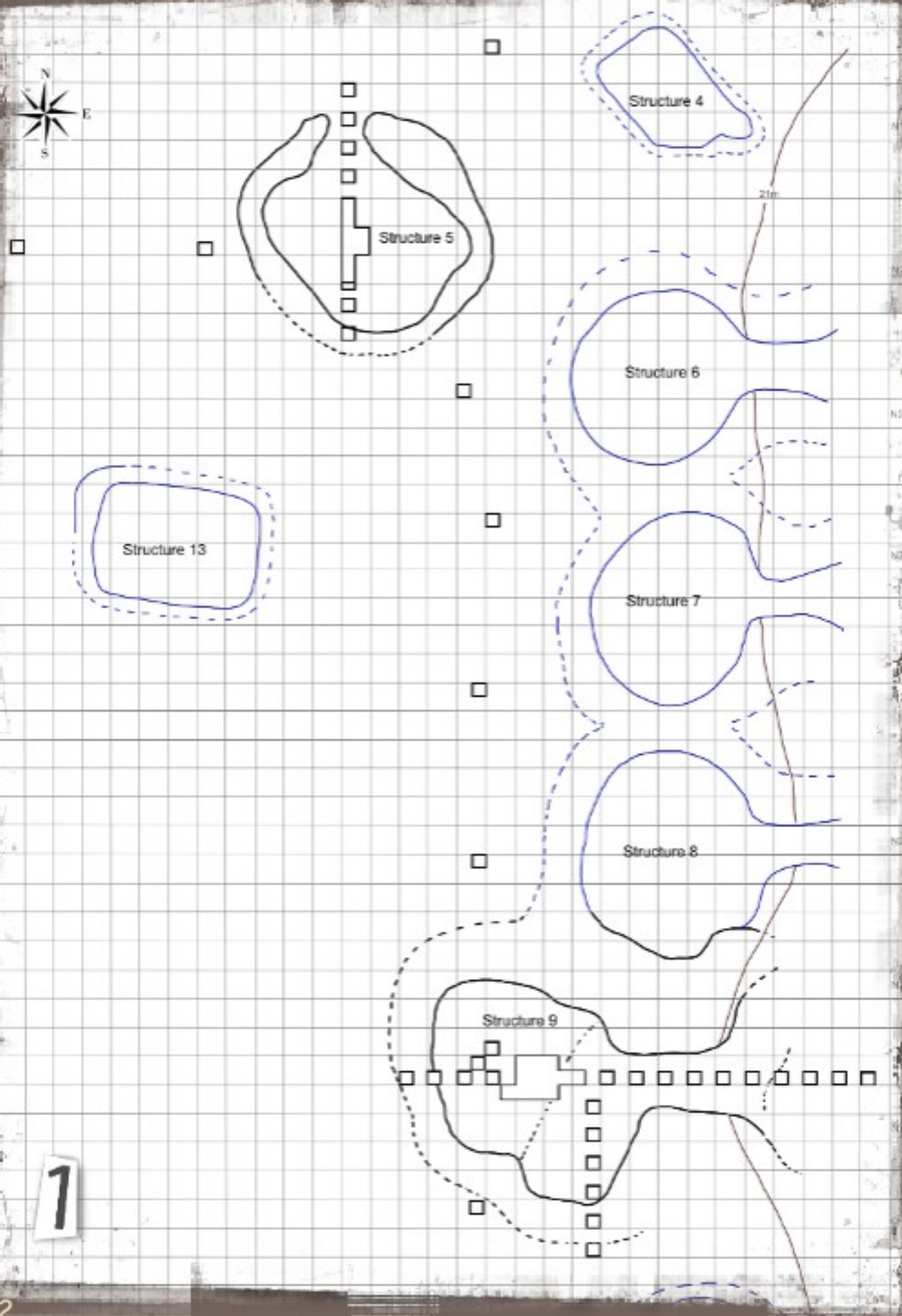
Structures and chronology

There are 2 main types of winter structures at the Kanagiakallak site. (1) The first one below is the Late Dorset sod house, rectangular in shape with a shallow depression. (2) The second type is the Inuit sod house (qarmaq), deeply dug into the ground with a tunnel at the entrance and a bed platform in the back. Inuit usually preferred to dig their houses on the edge of a slope while Dorset people installed their houses on a flat area.

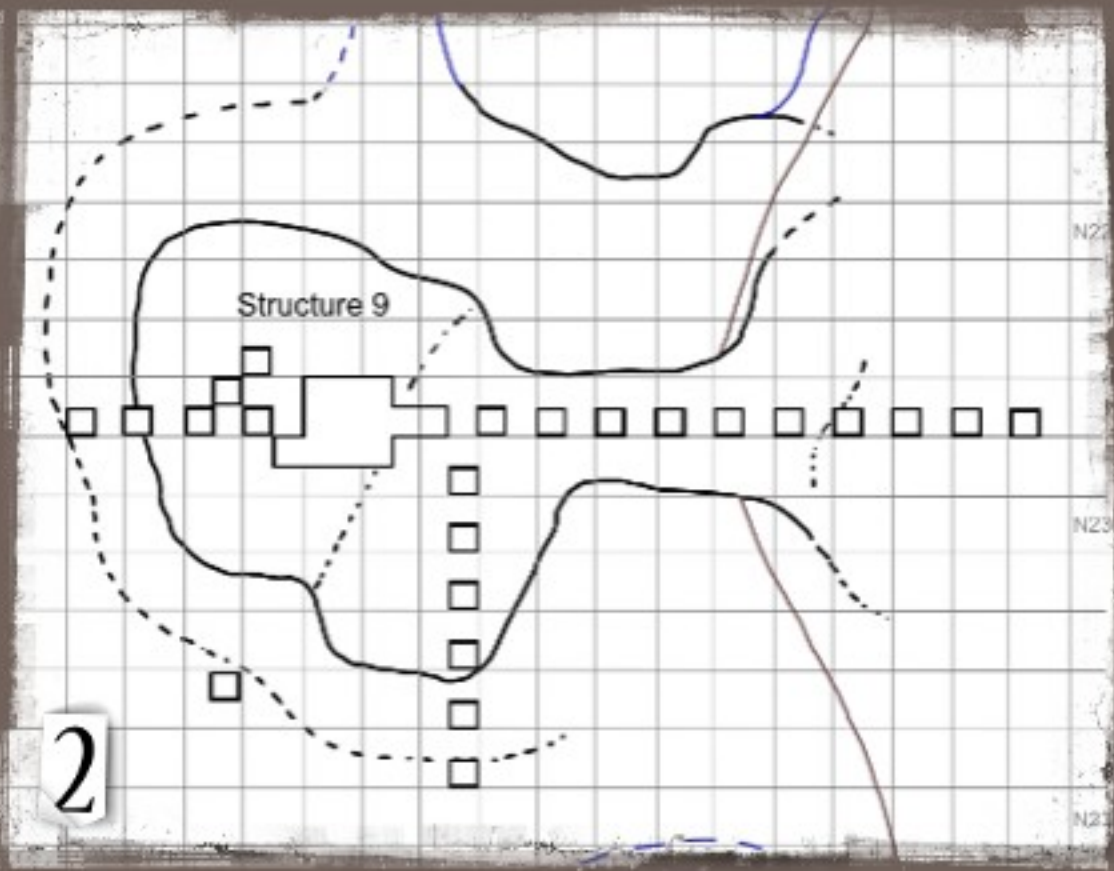
right:

Chronology of human occupation in Nunavik compared to other regions of Canada, Greenland, and Alaska.





1



2



3

Map and Structure 9

Structures 5 and 9 were excavated in 2011. In 2013 the excavation focused on Structure 9.

- (1) Map of the main area of Kangiakallak 1 site. Structures 4, 5 and 13 are Late Dorset while Structures 6, 7, 8 and 9 are Inuit sod houses with tunnel entrances located at the edges of the slope.
- (2) Details of the excavated squares area in Structure 9.
- (3) A view of Structure 9 during the excavation.

Digging into Qikirtajuaq's history

Archaeology is all about modestly kneeling, looking down below, into the past. The people who lived in this camp found ways to meet their needs by making their own tools and houses while keeping up a way of life marked by traditions and practices well adapted to the Arctic environment. After they left their house behind, the sod roof supported by a driftwood beam progressively collapsed. When they came back, they dug a new house beside and shoveled the earth into the hole of their previous house. It helped to preserve the ruins left behind that then remained frozen in the ground almost year-round. It is thus not surprising that they kept a fresh look, even after a few hundred years.

(1) The floor of the house with some remaining beams from the roof structure and a still standing pole, (2) details of the well preserved artefacts inside, and (3) the paved floor.

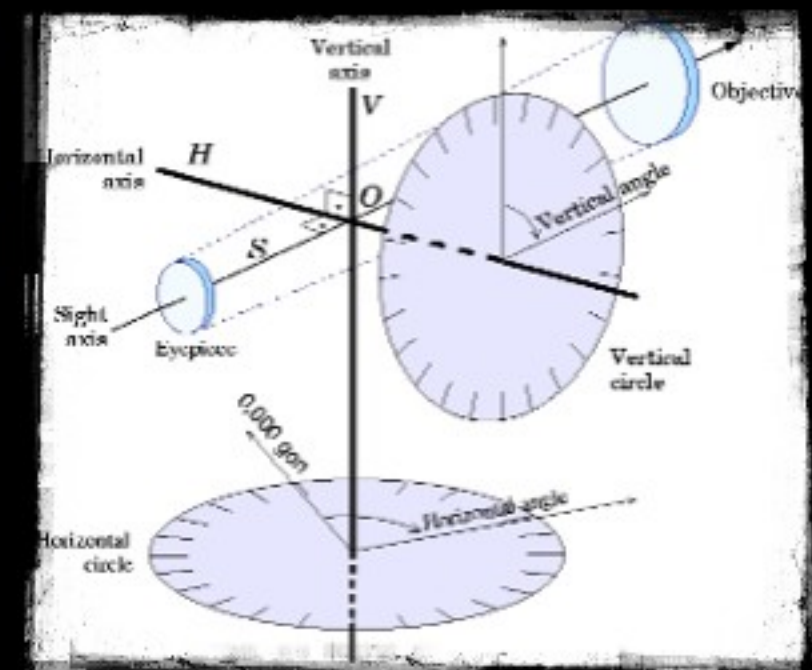




Theodolite: what for?

A theodolite is an instrument for measuring horizontal and vertical angles. It is used to set up a meter square grid and to map archaeological sites (see page 12). For the excavation, we set up the horizontal axis at an angle of 90 degree. The top of a large rock was selected as a "reference point" for measuring the elevation.

Using an altimetry barometer (part of some GPS), the elevation of the rock above sea level was measured. Before being removed, the height above sea level of each artefact was measured by reading the elevation using the theodolite. The difference between the height of the reference point and the height of the artefact helps us calculate the height of the artefact above sea level.



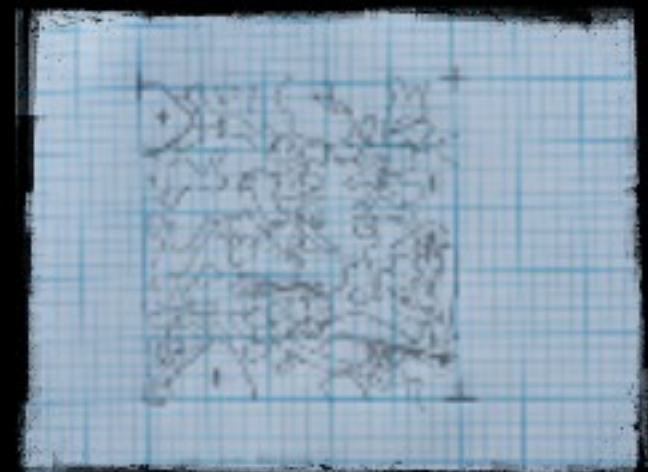
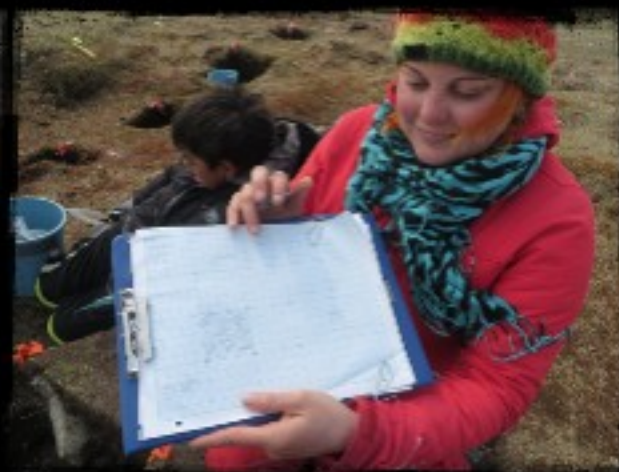
Source: English Wikipedia, original upload 16 June 2004 by Vermeer

Water sieving... nothing to lose!

For each square and each level, soil is collected during the excavation. By mixing soil with water in a sieve and some stirring, we could recover all kind of very small artefacts that were otherwise difficult to see during the excavation. The artefacts recovered through this process are then dried and later sorted in the field laboratory.



Drawing and collecting the artefacts



After unearthing the artefacts, they are drawn on a grid of the excavation square (scale 1:10) and then labeled and packaged individually, per square meter and archaeological level, with notes about their exact coordinates and elevation.



With only trowel as weapon

Archaeology is an outdoor research activity. It is thus the duty of an archaeologist to survive in whatever conditions they find themselves in. As an adversary that can locate your position from very far and approach you using great tactical skill, the polar bear is one of the main dangers and must be watched out for. Most Arctic archaeologists would consider a cold wind blowing in your face, maybe filling your eyes with sand and making your field notes fly all around, as idyllic and relaxing. As soon as the wind goes down and the heat goes up, hordes of mosquitoes take the opportunity to launch their bloody assault to feed their mighty armies. Guess who the foolish people are that they find kneeling in trenches in the middle of the tundra with only trowels as weapons?



Look what I found!

(1) Ruth showing a chipped stone point, (2) Sandy showing a wooden doll, (3) details of the wooden doll, (4) chipped stone knife with wooden handle, (5) piece of fur found on top of the floor, (6) handle of a big knife or panak, (7) Ittuvik showing a Dorset harpoon head, and (8) Tommy savouring a moment of satisfaction, a minute after unearthing an Inuit harpoon head.





The field laboratory

Jessica is an Inuk expert in artefact preservation and conservation from Nunavut. Her presence was made possible through a collaboration between the Canadian Conservation Institute and Avataq. She showed Akulivik students how to clean artefacts and store them properly in the field laboratory. She also had to go on the site several times to collect fragile artefacts that needed special care, i.e. the skin in one of our squares, wood in a pond nearby, etc.. The field laboratory was also used to dry and sort the remains collected during water sieving.

The Geographers

A team of geographers affiliated with the Centre for Northern Studies (Laval University) are collaborating on this project. They are documenting the land formation process, the past environment of the island and formation of the archaeological sites. They participated in the field school by sharing with Akulivik students some of their knowledge about the geography of the island.

(1) Dominique Todisco, Simionie Qinuajuaq, and Najat Bhiry, (2) Annie-pier Trottier collecting shells to document the ancient beach levels, (3) Sébastien Lafrance, Dominique Todisco and Annie-pier Trottier, (4) Najat looking at the stratigraphy of Kangiakallak 2 (Je6n-56) site. (5) An excavated trench showing the deeply buried Dorset occupation of the Kangiakallak 2 site in sand. (6) Akulivik students looking at glacial striation, scratches left by rocks moved under moving ice sheets during the last ice age around 10 000 years ago. (7) Details of glacial striation, their orientation indicate the direction in which the ice moved. (8) Mapping the valley using a Total station (an electronic theodolite combined with an electronic distance meter).



Photography Project: Sivunitsatinnut ilinniapunga (For our future, I go to school)

Directed by Jrène Rahm, Université de Montréal;
Funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council

In collaboration with Kativik School Board,
Municipality of Akulivik, Qekeirriq Landholding, Air
Inuit, Makivik Corporation, and Avataq Cultural
Institute.

Through pictures and film, the twelve youth
participants documented the daily activities in camp,
the archaeological fieldwork, the landscape, and the
work of the geographers. Some of the pictures were
shared through the Avataq Archaeology Facebook
Page and also through a slide show to the community
at the end of the archaeology field school.

A follow-up visit at the Tukisiniarvik School in
Akulivik by the team in November 2013 (Jrène Rahm,
Pierre Desrosiers, Tommy Weetaluktuk) made
possible the selection of pictures for the Youth
Photography Exhibit to be launched later, at the
McCord Museum in Montreal in April 2014 with some
youths visiting during the Archaeology Week at
Avataq. The Photo Exhibit will then travel North
back to the community.





Left: The "living room" of the Inuit qarmaq

Right: Visitors inside the Dorset house excavated in 2011

Right: Tommy Weetaluktuk explaining to the visitors what we understand so far about the main area of the Inuit qarmaq

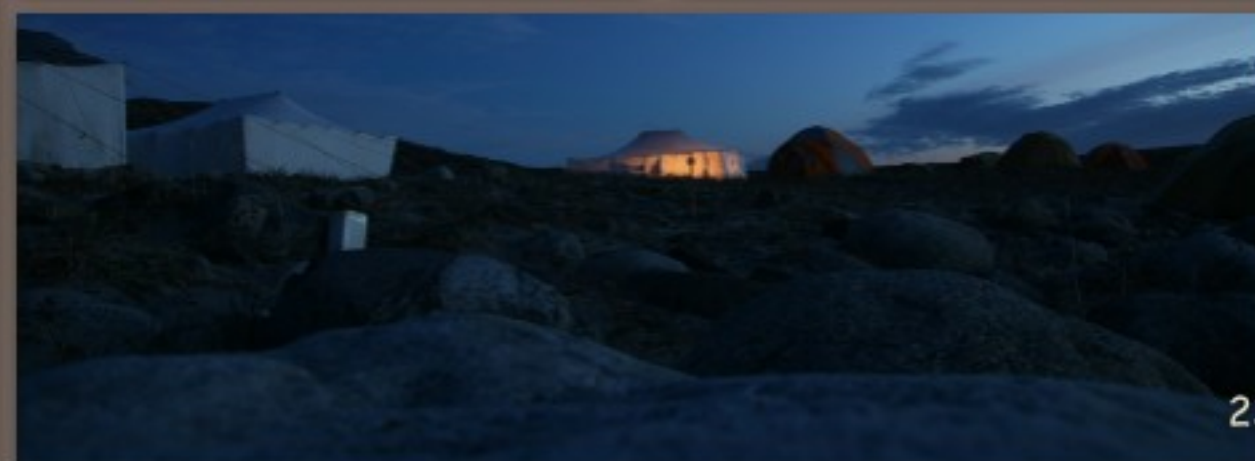
Right: Elsa Cencig with a visitor from Ivujivik: Mattiusi Iyaituk

Right: Visitors examining the artefacts on the surface of the Inuit qarmaq floor during the excavation



FUN AT THE CAMP!

Life in the camp was filled with laughter and fun. Burying people in the sand, Frisbee, soccer, traditional stick throwing, Jungle Speed, card games, video games, and picture-taking were the main activities after work. The camp was also a place to learn from presentations about archaeology and the local history.





Closing the site and the camp

(1) The Inuit house at the end of the excavation, (2) after refilling the excavated area, (3) (4) Ruth knocks down a hammer, (5) The kitchen all gone, (6) Sandy and Ittuviq are still smiling after a hard day of work, and (7) general view of Kangiakallak 1 site.

Exhibit of artefacts at Tukisiniarvik School

A presentation of the preliminary results from the excavation and an exhibit of artefacts were organized on Friday the 16th at the Tukisiniarvik School. The activity was attended by numerous people.

(1) Waiting to see the artefacts, (2) taking pictures of the artefacts, (3) Elsa and Simon, (4) the bottom of a wooden bowl, (5) harpoon head made of ivory, (6) stone chipped point, (7) maybe some future archaeologists?, (8) wearing gloves to manipulate the fragile artefacts, (9) rope with a knot made of baleen (suqqaq), (10) Eli Angiyou who translated the presentation into Inuktitut, (11) presentation of the preliminary results of the excavation by Pierre.





What is behind the organization of the field school?

This project would not have been possible without the support of the people in Akulivik! The goal of the project was to help Inuit youth and their community in conducting their own research and documenting their history. We are grateful for the support from the Qekeirriag Landholding Corporation, who provided us with transportation, and to the Kativik School Board, who provided us with a house and the opportunity to do a presentation at the Tukisiniarvik school. The support of the NV was also greatly appreciated.

The Akulivik students were employed thanks to the KRG summer job program.

The camp (food, equipment, etc.) and part of the transportation (cargo, plane) was made possible through financial support from a federal research grant to Avataq (<http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/>; see also <http://www.avataq.qc.ca/en/CURA/Le-projet-ARUC>), and a research grant from France (<http://www.institut-polaire.fr/>). The one-year photography project that we started in the field school with the students was financed by another federal grant (Sivunitsatinnut ilinniapunga, SSHRC).

The project also involved many in-kind and financial contributions, offered by Air Inuit, the Makivik Corporation, the Canadian Conservation Institute and the Centre for Northern Studies (Université Laval). Avataq also received financing from the Quebec and Federal Governments in support of this project



Documenting Qikirtajuaq's History

In 2010, through consultation with Qekeirriaq LHC, Akulivik NV and Simon Makimak, it was decided that the Kangiakallak 1 site (JeGn-2) was the most suitable place to conduct a field school with Akulivik students. The site is close to the community thus making it easy for setting up a summer camp for students. Also, Akulivimiut showed interest in learning more about who lived in those qarmait.

The goal of the project was to collaborate with Akulivimiut in the conduct of research and the documentation of their history. The Kangiakallaq 1 site is located on the northeastern part of Qikirtajuaq, a large island close to the Akulivik community. In the summer of 2013, 12 students from Akulivik participated in the field school and contributed to the documentation of the history of the island.

