

## CONFERENCE REPORT

Report on the Symposium on Early Investigations of the Western Arctic, Canadian Archaeological Assoc., Calgary, Alberta. April 1987.

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In April of 1987 a symposium entitled "Early Investigations of the Western Arctic" was held at the 20th annual meeting of the Canadian Archaeological Association in Calgary, Alberta. This session brought together many of the leading scholars in the field of Arctic history and provided an opportunity to discuss openly the data, interpretations, and problems with which they deal.

The session was organized to provide a venue for current research in the Western Arctic by historians, geographers, anthropologists, and archaeologists - all working on overlapping but often quite distinct bodies of data. This was done because of a worrying trend in academia towards compartmentalization of disciplines. This ultimately limiting comity of disciplines is a product of specific historical events in academia, but it is not an irrevocable consequence.

The symposium on "Early Investigations of the Western Arctic" was held during the year which marked the 75th anniversary of the successful conclusion of the Stefansson-Anderson Expedition of 1908-1912, thus honouring the men and results of this significant segment of Arctic history. Vilhjalmur Stefansson and Rudolph Anderson for many years set the standard of scientific investigation in the Arctic.

The papers delivered at this symposium share several things in common. Geographically, they focus on the Western Arctic of North America, that is the Mackenzie Delta/Beaufort Sea area. Temporally, they deal with the protohistoric or historic period, approximately 1700 to 1900, and epistemologically, they all share a common belief in the use of historical data for the interpretation of events and processes. What these papers do is provide a palimpsest of current research by a number of scholars in a variety of disciplines concerned with the Western Arctic.

Ken Coates (University of Victoria) presented a paper detailing the political and economic reasons for the Hudson's Bay Company explorations along the Arctic Coast conducted in 1837 by

Thomas Simpson and Peter Warren Dease. Using documentary evidence of the period, Coates examined a calculated exercise in public relations carried out for corporate motives. This singular experiment in exploration, undertaken for promotional purposes, yielded quite unexpected commercial results in the discovery of the Yukon River.

William Barr's (University of Saskatchewan) contribution examined a specific incident in history: Kurt Faber's 1906 journey from Herschel Island to Fort McPherson in the company of Roxy, a Mackenzie Inuk, which provides many corroborative details of life in the Western Arctic at this time. Barr described the trip including Faber's meeting with the neophyte Arctic scientist, Vilhjalmur Stefansson, at Fort McPherson.

Richard Diubaldo (Concordia University) presented a comprehensive examination of the 1908-1912 expedition of Stefansson and Anderson, providing a background for the events and consequences of that expedition. The expedition was examined from conception to culmination in light of the forces, events, and personalities involved. Diubaldo gave a detailed sketch of Stefansson's changing goals during his involvement in the North.

Robert Christie's (Geological Survey of Canada) contribution addressed the specific involvement of the Geological Survey of Canada with Stefansson and especially its major role under R.W. Brock in sponsoring the Canadian Arctic Expedition of 1913-1918. This sponsorship developed out of recognition by Brock and Prime Minister Robert Borden of the potential political consequences of an expedition discovering new land while under the aegis of a foreign institution.

Barry Gough (Wilfred Laurier University) and John Greenhouse (Waterloo University) examined the question of supplying the Canadian Arctic Expedition. George Phillips was in charge of provisioning the expedition at Esquimault, B.C., Seattle, Wash., and Nome, Alaska. His competent handling of his duties did much to contribute to the success of the expedition. Moreover, his comments in diaries and correspondence of the time provide a unique outsider's view of the events, personalities, and controversies of the Canadian Arctic Expedition.

David Morrison's (Archaeological Survey of Canada) work on the interpretation of the Kugaluk site combined historical and archaeological investigations. This site, and the materials recovered from it, were analyzed and interpreted against the historical record for subsistence activities of the Mackenzie Inuit. The faunal analyses indicated a more flexible system of resource exploitation and may reflect social inequality or a period of culture change.

Larry Titus' (Simon Fraser University) paper looked at the

changes in Mackenzie Inuit culture during the early historic period. Specifically, it examined changes in material and behavioural culture with the advent of contact between the Inuit and some segments of Euro-American culture. While this process of acculturation in the Western Arctic involved the acceptance, adaptation, or reaction to many cultural traits, culture contact did not proceed along predetermined lines.

William Morrison (Brandon University) examined the processes whereby the Canadian Government was forced, by a combination of external forces and internal pressures, to accept responsibility for the Western Arctic. These forces and pressures were detailed and interpreted for both their historical and contemporary role in government involvement in the North. Morrison's case study may well be extrapolated to serve as a basis for understanding present-day concerns of hydrocarbon exploration and land claims.

Bryan Gordon's (Archaeological Survey of Canada) video presentation on his current work at the Nadlak site provided an examination of the site's excavation, interpretation, and reconstruction. Excavation indicated one of the fifteen dwellings at the site had five superimposed floors. At Nadlak, hundreds of kilometres from whalebone and trees, antler was the material used for tool-making and hut-building. The second part of the video offered an interpretation of some of the recovered artifacts in light of comparative materials and ethnographic descriptions.

The presentations delivered at the symposium on "Early Investigations of the Western Arctic" contributed an interdisciplinary body of data, interpretation, and explanation on the history of the Western Arctic. All the papers are currently being prepared for publication as a single volume, including several solicited papers from individuals who could not attend the conference but who were interested in the project. It is hoped that this collection of papers will be of use to those interested in the Arctic, will stimulate further research in the area, and will demonstrate the need for such interdisciplinary studies.

The organizer sincerely thanks all of the participants at the session in Calgary and all those who have shown an active interest in this project. Special thanks are due to Dr. Ross Mackay for his continued advice and encouragement during the course of this undertaking. As well, Lesley Nicholls and Sharon Hanna of the C.A.A. are to be commended for their help in organizing the session and their competent ministrations which were largely responsible for the success of those meetings.