

Lake Champlain Voyages of Discovery: Bringing History Home
Summary of Archaeology
November 21, 2007

This document constitutes a preliminary summary of the archaeological aspects of the Lake Champlain Voyages of Discovery: Bringing History Home Project conducted by the University of Maine at Farmington Archaeology Research Center (UMF ARC). The UMF ARC's role during this field season encompassed three overlapping components including field work, field laboratory work and walkover survey. This letter discusses the field work and field laboratory work conducted from July 16 – August 3, 2007. The walkover survey was initiated and the preliminary results thus far are presented.

Introduction and Brief Historical Background/Context

Farming was very likely the chief occupation of the inhabitants north and south of Chimney Point in addition to the responsibilities that early French settlers may have had at Fort St. Frederic (Crown Point). Farmsteads contained barns (some of which may have been earth fast or first-period dwellings), outbuildings, wells, fields, orchards, gardens and associated landscape features, fence lines/hedgerows, dumps and other cultural resources. Cellar holes in the general vicinity may be evidence of the oldest European-derived farming communities in Vermont. While it is true that the focal point of French settlement was concentrated within and around the fortifications of Fort St. Frederic, which itself contained a parish church, gristmill and storehouse, the building of roads, establishing lake and river crossings, natural resource extraction and the settling of outlying farms were elements vital for a permanent French settlement.

In 1759, the French evacuated Fort St. Frederic in response to pressure from the British. Settlers within the Hocquart Seigniory left for Canada at the same time. Seigniories, or land grants, were issued by the King of France to encourage settlement and cultivation and to maintain a strong presence against British encroachment. Sieur Gilles Hocquart, Intendant of New France, was granted one of the largest Seigniories in 1743-1745, which included about 115,000 acres that included the Chimney Point area in the southern portion of the grant. Historic accounts suggest that the dwellings were burned when the settlers left for northern areas where the French were still defending their territories. The archaeological record of the French occupation may be obscured, to an extent yet to be determined, by English-Euroamerican settlement in the same area after 1760. Local historic accounts, for example assert that John Strong built his cabin over a former French dwelling site in the mid-1760s. Others may have done the same thing.

All these known and potential cultural resources combine to form a highly significant historic landscape which holds a great potential to be explored and better understood through the archaeological efforts of the Voyages of Discovery Project.

Field Work

One of the primary research goals of the field work was to test the hypothesis that two cellar holes in the DAR State Park were former dwelling sites occupied by the French, ca. 1740s-1759. A total of 71, 0.5 m x 0.5 m test pits and five test units were hand excavated representing a combined total of 27 square meters in the immediate vicinity of two cellar holes, designated in the Vermont Archaeological Inventory as VT-AD-424 - Cellar 1, or the former John Strong cabin site, and VT-AD-423 - Cellar 2. The cellar holes are of early English origin, and may have been built as early as the 1760's, with no conclusive evidence of earlier French habitation. Although the results of the field work were not what we expected, they are nonetheless exciting and informative, and indicate great potential for ongoing future research.

The field work was conducted with a small staff of professional archaeologists from UMF, teacher participants, and volunteers. UMF ARC was pleased to have had the opportunity to meet and work with so many people interested in the early history of Vermont and Lake Champlain. Many people visited the site, and the project was very well received by the public as attested to through the various media attention. Attesting to the success of the public outreach aspect of this project, about 116 people spent more than 1,200 hours volunteering at the excavation site, and almost 100 other people stopped by to see the dig and to participate in site tours.

The cellar holes are near the margins of a steeply sloped bluff, which rises about 40 ft above the lake. The two cellar holes are about 100 m apart and appear as stone-lined depressions encircled on three sides by a low earthwork berm.

The central, stone-lined depression of Cellar 1, VT-AD-424, measures approximately, 7.5 m x 6.0 m and is 1.3-1.4 m in depth. Two 1.0 x 2.0 m units were excavated within the cellar hole. Cellar 2 at VT-AD-423 is a stone-lined depression that measures approximately 6.0 m x 5.0 m, which is about 90 cm deep. Two 1.0 x 2.0 test units were excavated within the cellar hole and a test unit, measuring 1.0 m x 1.0 m, was excavated near the cellar hole's eastern margin. A few 0.5 m x 0.5 m test pits were selectively placed in close proximity to each of the cellar holes and in areas containing other possible cultural features.

In addition to archaeological subsurface testing within and close to the cellar holes proper, test pits were placed so as to survey areas between the cellar holes and beyond to both the

north and south. Ultimately, testing extended approximately 250 meters along the high bluff of the lake shore, from historic Scow Ferry Road, which forms the southern boundary of the park, northward to the area of a footpath leading to the lake, which is assumed to have been used for lake access during early colonial times. A cluster of test pits was placed near the Scow Ferry Road to test this historic location.

Field Lab

Concurrent with the field work, the UMF ARC ran a field lab, set up at Chimney Point State Historic Site. Teacher participants, volunteers and visitors were variably involved with ongoing artifact washing and processing. Over 130 people visited the archaeology lab for tours, as well as discussions on laboratory methods, material culture, and general prehistoric and historic information about the region, presented by UMF ARC staff. Some people also brought in finds from the area for identification and to share their knowledge with the archaeologists, which is an important component for this project, involving the sharing of information between the public- people who are most familiar with the area, and other participants.

What We Learned So Far

Although a full analysis of the material has yet to be completed, preliminary assessment of the artifact assemblage from this summer's excavation at the DAR State Park attests to its richness. Thousands of artifacts were recovered that reflect the range of activities that have taken place in the area through time. For example lithic debitage, or stone chips associated with tool manufacture during the Precontact period (before 1609) were recovered at Cellar 2 affirming the generally high sensitivity for Native American cultural resources in the study area. Most of the artifacts are associated with domestic dwellings as represented by the two cellar holes. The assemblage is comprised of artifacts primarily related to domestic activity and includes architectural or structural remnants (brick, mortar, daub, window glass, nails), ceramics, cutlery and vessel glass. More distinctive artifacts include those items related to personal adornment and clothing such as beads, buttons, and a possible glass inset for a ring. Some items are related to hunting or possibly warfare, such as gunflints and lead shot. There is also a large collection of faunal remains that will tell us much about the varied diets of the people that lived there.

It seems evident that the majority of items date to, ca. 1760-1850, along with a smaller sample of more modern debris from the past century. It seems clear that the majority of the eighteenth-early nineteenth century artifacts are related either to British occupation or trade (e.g., Staffordshire ceramics, British gunflint), or perhaps to domestic American manufacture (e.g.,

nails, brick, some of the redware ceramics). There are few specimens directly related to French manufacture (such as French gunflint or possible faience) but the pending analysis may bring potentially older, French material to light. Further study may also confirm several items related to French occupation or trade (e.g. some redware ceramics) but at this point we can only say for certain there does not seem to be a preponderance of early French goods as we expected.

Most of the artifacts from the cellar hole areas are brick and mortar. Some of the bricks exhibit characteristics not necessarily found with mass-produced, local brick, of the nineteenth century and later, so they may well be related to the early structures or perhaps to fire hearth or chimneys associated with the cellar holes. In particular, several brick specimens recovered from test unit N903 E975 in Cellar 2 may be related to chimney or hearth construction (Figure 1). After the fortifications were abandoned by the British at nearby Crown Point, it is supposed that many settlers on the Vermont side of Lake Champlain took advantage of the building materials there and scavenged brick and other materials for their own building projects. A comparative analysis of the brick from the DAR State Park excavations would be interesting as it may establish a connection between these sites and building materials from Crown Point.

Some of the mortar fragments recovered from Cellar 2, both large and small, contain evidence of a pinkish tint that may indeed be the coloring applied to an interior wall of an early dwelling. Pending analysis may shed light on the composition and intent of this tinting. Many of the nails recovered are hand wrought (likely pre-1800) while less are cut (ca. 1790-1900), with few, if any, wire nails (ca. 1890-present) evident. By looking at the various forms of nails it may be possible to determine their age, use and purpose.

Interestingly, the lead shot assemblage includes two large shot that have teeth marks, probably indicating some kind of medical procedure took place and the patient resorted to “biting the bullet” as a means of controlling the pain. Other evidence of arms include at least two gunflint spalls of a grayish flint that is suggestive of British origin and one “honey-colored” flint possibly of French manufacture (Figure 2). These gunflints will be more fully analyzed to determine method of manufacture, use wear patterning and origin.

Another extensive artifact type includes ceramics. Domestic archaeological sites from this time often contain many ceramic sherds related to food preparation, processing and storage. Many sherds from refined tablewares were recovered, representing mostly eighteenth and nineteenth century ceramics classified as tin enameled wares, creamware, pearlware, whiteware, certain redwares as well as later ironstones or granite wares (Figure 3). Perhaps even more prevalent are the more functional ceramic vessels sherds characterized by stoneware and other redware (Figure 4). While ceramics can be an indicator of time they can also give us insight into

social and economic patterns such as trade, status and consumerism. Further analysis of the ceramic assemblage will undoubtedly give us much more information pertaining to these factors as well as to origin. Also related to food preparation and consumption are cutlery goods, such as knife and other utensil handles made of bone and metal, as well as a few spoon and fork fragments (Figure 5).

Numerous kaolin tobacco pipe fragments were recovered which indicates the habits and leisure activities of the occupants of the site and after analysis it should be possible to determine origin and even dates from some of the pipe fragments that were collected.

Many metal buttons, mostly disc-type, have been recovered and can likely be dated to the mid-eighteenth- early nineteenth centuries. It may well be possible to type some of these buttons more fully and determine if they are French or English or used on early American military clothing. Another metal item associated with Cellar 1 (VT-AD-424) is a coin, which sparked much interest and speculation by visitors and volunteers at the site as well as by the archaeologists. The coin is very worn and difficult to identify but one of the volunteers has identified the coin as possibly a British Hibernia King George penny that dates to 1717 or 1718, or it may be a Hibernia Voce Populi halfpenny that was minted in 1760 and deceptively stamped “1700”. In either case its presence adds an element of wonder and one cannot help but imagine who the last person who had that coin in their pocket.

Walkover

In the latter part of August, UMF ARC returned to the DAR State Park and with State Archaeologist, Giovanna Peebles conducted a week of interviews, walkover survey and visits to the town clerks of Panton, Addison and Bridport. Interviews with Bud Bodette and Julie Howlett were especially productive. Bud has located two previously unrecorded cellar holes between Chimney Point and the DAR State Park. Near one is a raised area with an associated scatter of stone and the depression of a small cellar hole, which had been filled in and partially destroyed by a modern well installation. Both cellar holes are located on the lakeshore at the edge of a relatively high lake terrace/bluff and appear very much like the cellar holes in the DAR State Park. Near both of the cellar holes were access roads to the lakeshore, as have also been noted at the DAR State Park. Old roads leading down to the lake are few along this stretch of shoreline.

During the walkover survey two additional roads of historic interest were noted. The “Winter Road”, on the old Burgey farm just north of the DAR State Park led to a road over the ice of Lake Champlain. Another “winter road” crossed the ice in Bridport, near the terminus of the Crown Point Road. Yvette Laroque, of the Chimney Point State Park Museum stated that

multiple cellar holes are located adjacent to an old road trace, she believes may be part of the Crown Point Road. Another road pointed out by Julie Howlett was the Williamson Ferry Road, which led to the ferry landing, known during the mid-nineteenth century as, Port Franklin. Along this road are the stone foundation remains of two structures. Further research is required to determine their dates of construction, cultural affiliation and function. On the Howlett farm is also the Shelf site, VT-AD-1130, a cellar hole investigated by the late James B. Petersen, John Crock and Vermont Archaeological Society members in recent years.

Cellar hole proximity to terrace margins means that the dwelling sites and other potential archaeological remains of the French and early English occupation, ca. 1740s-1770s are subject to erosion. Another threat to archaeological sites along the shoreline is residential construction. While the DHP has worked with landowners successfully to preserve two cellar holes immediately south of the DAR State Park, known but unrecorded sites and sites yet to be discovered are in danger of destruction.

Walkover survey was conducted on portions of the Watkins farm, adjacent to and north of Chimney Point State Park and along about 700 meters along the lakeshore between the public boat launch at the outlet of Wards Creek, and Willow Point.

Though the focus of the DAR State Park excavations and the walkover survey is early French occupation, other time periods and cultural contexts possessing great historical significance are known or are expected to be present along the shoreline of Panton, Addison and Bridport. All historic sites encountered during the walkover survey are considered potentially historically significant. Their compilation is necessary for understanding the evolution of the historic landscape. UMF ARC continues to conduct background research and is currently continuing the walkover survey. We have prepared a mailing list of landowners with property along the Panton-Addison-Bridport shoreline and sent a letter asking for permission to explore their land. Response has been great with permissions coming in daily. We are excited and encouraged by the results of the field excavations and anticipate a successful community based survey.



Figure 1. Brick samples recovered from fire hearth or chimney in Cellar 2 (VT-AD-423) at the D.A.R. State Park in Addison, Addison County, Vermont.

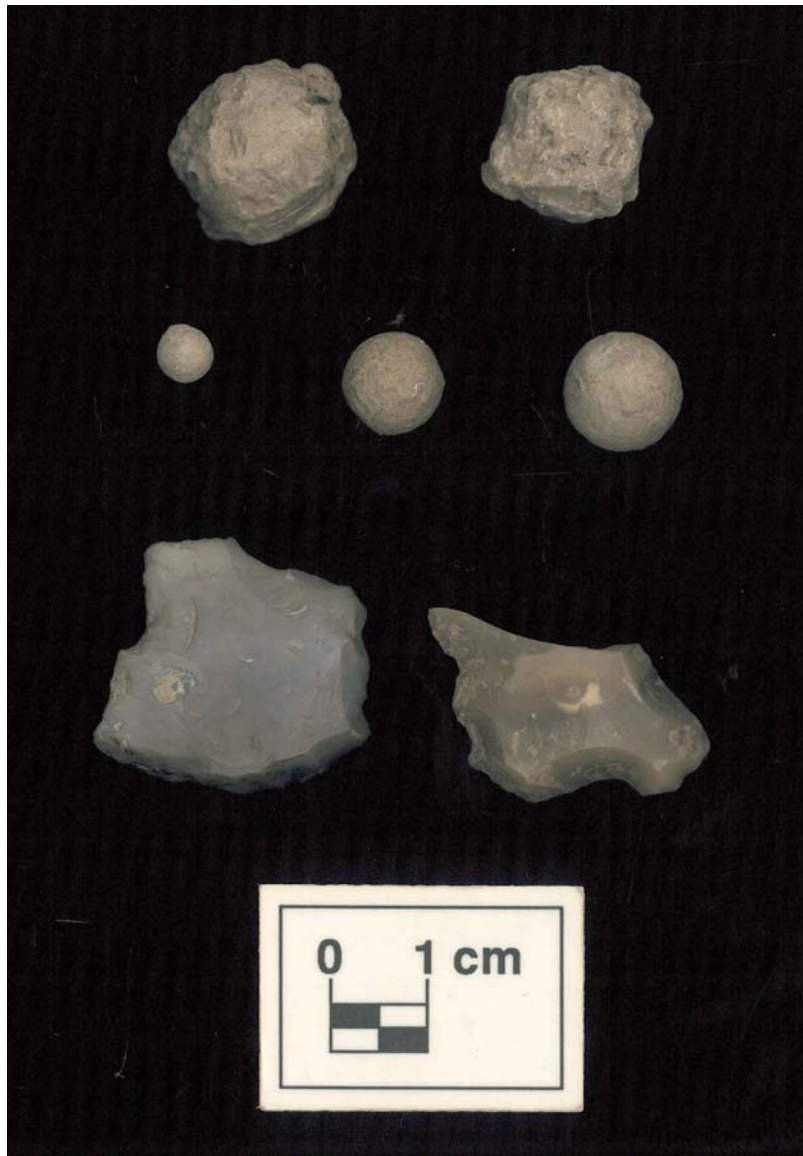


Figure 2. Select leadshot, including two with teethmarks, and gunflints (bottom left possibly British flint, bottom right possibly French flint) recovered from Cellar 1 (VT-AD-424) and Cellar 2 (VT-AD-423) at the D.A.R. State Park in Addison, Addison County, Vermont.



Figure 3. Select refined earthenware ceramic sherds, including: top and middle, pearlware; bottom left, creamware; bottom right, tin enameled, recovered at the D.A.R. State Park in Addison, Addison County, Vermont.

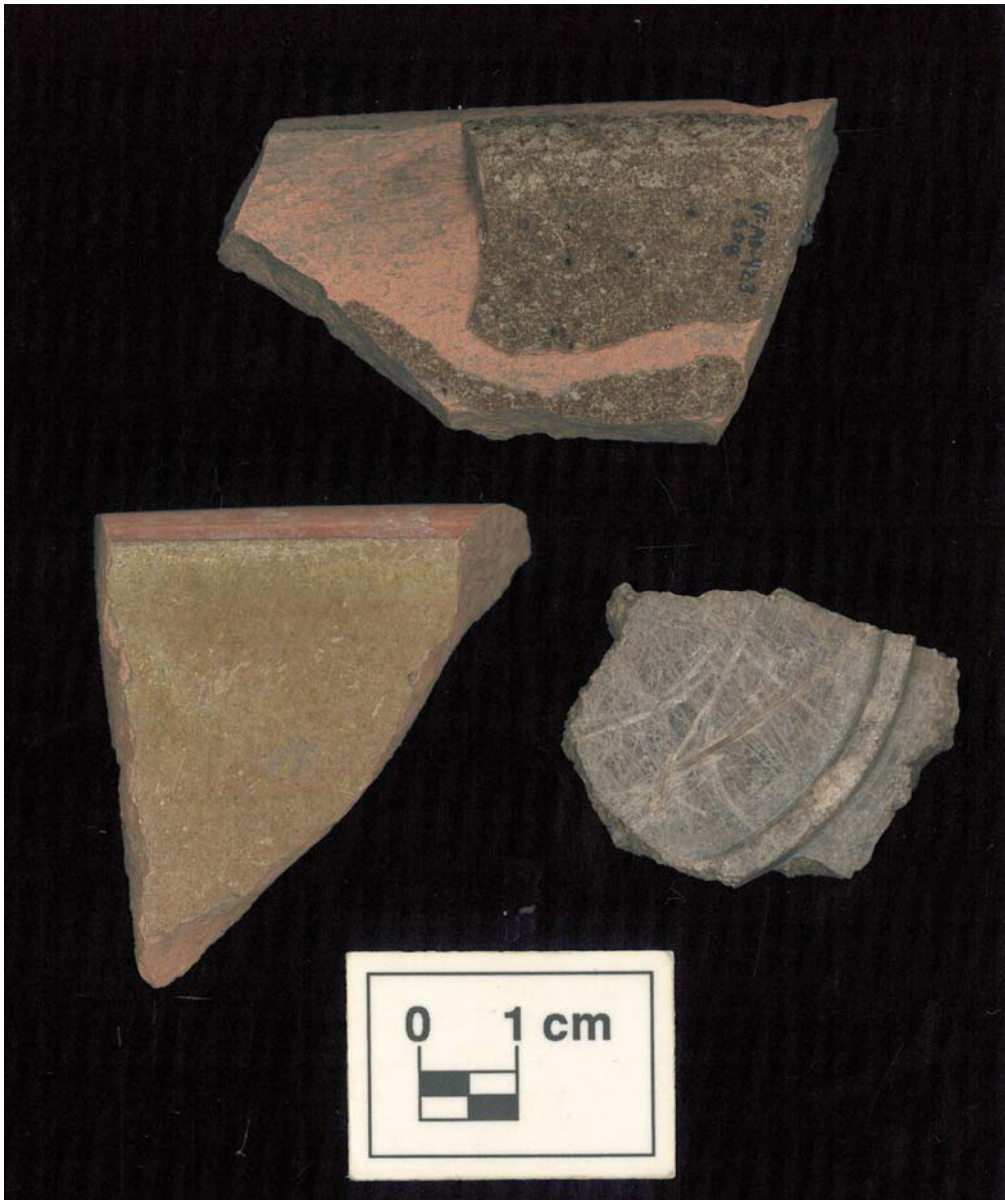


Figure 4. Select redware ceramic sherds, and an unidentified (possible stoneware or steatite) sherd, recovered at the D.A.R. State Park in Addison, Addison County, Vermont.



Figure 5. Select cutlery fragments, including bone knife handles (first and second rows), metal knife handles (third and fourth row) and two-tined metal fork (bottom), recovered at the D.A.R. State Park in Addison, Addison County, Vermont.