Gendered Inuinnait (Copper Inuit) landscapes of Banks Island’s northern interior, Arctic Canada, 17th–20th centuries A.D.

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Archaeological survey data from the northern interior of Banks Island in Canada’s western Arctic builds upon traditional interpretations of past land use to explore the ways in which this landscape was perceived by different groups. The data confirm earlier archaeological, ethnographic, and oral history work which suggest that the area was occupied primarily in the summer months at two separate times in the past: the Palaeoeskimo period and the Inuinnait (Copper Inuit) period. The earlier occupation was less intensive than the latter and both were focused on muskox hunting. Drawing on ethnographic studies of the Inuit in both the early and late 20th centuries, and on the distribution of archaeological camp sites versus hunting sites, a reconstruction is made of the different ways in which men and women experienced and understood the survey area during Inuinnait times. It suggests that the main drainages formed important travel routes, and that while women’s knowledge of the region was concentrated along these corridors and in favorite camping places, men’s knowledge extended into hunting areas beyond their peripheries.

Keywords: Arctic, pedestrian survey, landscape archaeology, land use, gendered landscapes

Introduction
Recent approaches to landscape in archaeology supplement traditional studies of land use by exploring the ways in which past people experienced their worlds and how these experiences contributed to their sense of self and community (Ashmore and Knapp 1999; David and Thomas 2008; Oetelaar and Oetelaar 2006; Oliver 2007, 2010; Potter 2004; Stewart et al. 2004; Whitridge 2004). Drawing on concepts from geography and anthropology, these studies view landscape not as a passive backdrop for human activity, but as part of a complex series of interactions between people and their surroundings, at once physically tangible and socially constructed. People and landscapes help to create each other. Communities create landscapes as people link memories and stories with particular places, or build structures on the terrain. At the same time, landscapes create communities, as young people learn a particular set of meanings attached to particular places (Basso 1996a, 1996b). The incorporation of these ideas into archaeological research builds on previous settlement pattern studies pioneered by Willey (1953), and like this earlier work, it requires a foundation of solid survey data on site location, use, and chronology. Here, the results of the first phase of an ongoing investigation of the cultural landscape of Banks Island’s northern interior in the western Canadian Arctic are presented (FIG. 1). The survey data illustrate temporal changes in land use, as typically documented in more traditional archaeological investigations of landscape. They also permit an exploration of the gendered experience of this landscape during the Inuinnait (or Copper Inuit) period (17th–20th centuries A.D.).

Archaeologists working in the Canadian Arctic archipelago have traditionally focused their attention on coastal areas and those within easy reach of the coast, often neglecting the vast interior of the Arctic islands (Bielawski 1988; Dyke et al. 2011; Helmer 1992; Schledermann and McCullough 2003). Ethnographic records indicate that interior areas were primarily used by Inuit groups in the summer and autumn (Boas 1888; Jenness 1922; Mathiassen 1929, 1931; Stefansson 1913, 1921) and the limited available archaeological data suggest a considerable time depth for this pattern of exploitation, which dates back as far as Palaeoeskimo times (4500–500 B.P.) (Baffin Island: Milne 2003, 2005; Stenton 1989, 1991; Banks Island: Müller-Beck 1977; Münz 1983, 1987). Ellesmere Island appears to be an exception to this trend, where Palaeoeskimo groups occupied the interior in both summer and winter (Sutherland 1996). The traditional
focus on coastal sites means that our archaeological reconstructions of the Arctic past are biased towards cold season activities. In an attempt to redress this imbalance, a team from the University of Western Ontario partnered with Parks Canada to conduct an archaeological survey in Aulavik National Park in north-central Banks Island in 2008 and 2009 (FIG. 2). In addition to our general aim to better understand the use of interior regions by past Arctic groups, we hoped to acquire a better understanding of long-term trends in land use in the interior of Banks Island and a more nuanced understanding of how the area was conceptualized by its past occupants.

Previous Archaeological Work on Banks Island

The archaeological work done previously on Banks Island suggests that it has been alternately occupied and abandoned by human groups since approximately 3400 B.P. (FIG. 3). The earliest known sites on the island are Pre-Dorset Palaeoeskimo, and their distribution clusters around Shoran Lake in the northern interior. The best known is Umingmak (PjRa-2) (FIG. 1), a large muskox hunting camp that was excavated first by Taylor (1967) and later by a team from the University of Tübingen (Müller-Beck et al. 1971; Müller-Beck 1977). The site dates to approximately 3400 B.P. (or 1750 CAL B.C.; 2-sigma range is 1970–1560 CAL B.C.) (Müller-Beck et al. 1971).

The next evidence for human occupation on the island dates later in Palaeoeskimo times. The Lagoon Site (ObRl-3), on the island’s south coast, dates to approximately 2400 B.P., placing it chronologically within the early Dorset period. However, its strongest typological affinities are with the Pre-Dorset, and its artifact assemblage suggests cultural influences from both Alaska and the eastern Canadian Arctic (Arnold 1980, 1981). It is the type site for the “Lagoon Complex,” believed to represent an in situ development from Pre-Dorset groups in the western Canadian Arctic, which was influenced by sustained inter-group contact with Dorset groups to the east and to a lesser degree by Norton Tradition groups to the west (Arnold 1980, 1981; LeBlanc 1994a, 1994b).

Following an apparent abandonment of Banks Island during Dorset times (ca. 2200–850 B.P.) a limited number of sites, many of them along the south coast, indicate reoccupation during the Thule period. The Nelson River Site (OhRh-1) on the south coast has produced some of the earliest Thule radiocarbon dates in Arctic Canada, indicating an occupation period during the 13th century A.D. (Friesen and Arnold 2008). Recent test excavations at another southern coast site, Agvik (OkRn-1), indicate that it was occupied in the 14th and/or 15th century A.D. (C. Arnold personal communication, 2010). There are also clear indications that the island was occupied by Inuinnait (Copper Inuit) groups in the late 19th century A.D. to exploit wood and metal from the British naval vessel, HMS Investigator, which was abandoned in Mercy Bay in 1853 (Hickey 1979, 1984). “Copper Eskimo” is a term originally given by Stefansson (1913) to the Inuit occupants of a large area of the west-central Canadian Arctic, including parts of Banks and Victoria Islands and adjacent areas of the mainland, based on their traditional use of native copper. Since the 1980s, some authors have replaced it with “Copper Inuit” (Condon 1996; Hickey 1984; Morrison 1987), but it remains a label imposed on these Inuit by others. Collignon (2006b: 5, 25) argues that “Inuinuit” is a more appropriate name for these groups, and it is used throughout this paper. The term is a dialectical variant of Inuktitut, meaning “the people.” While in earlier usage it referred to all Inuit, in recent years it has been used to...
identify only those groups that others have termed “Copper Eskimo/Inuit.”

The extensive periods of abandonment of Banks Island suggested in Figure 3 may be somewhat exaggerated. They may in part be a product of the limited geographical coverage of previous archaeological surveys, which have concentrated on the south coast and northeastern parts of the island. In addition, the Thule/Inuit occupation of the island may well be more continuous than it appears, since a number of known Thule sites have yet to be radiocarbon dated. The Inuinnait occupation of the island may also have extended both before and after the late 19th-century occupation documented by Hickey (1984).

Existing Evidence for Land Use Patterns in the Northern Interior of Banks Island

Archaeological evidence

The available archaeological data from Banks Island’s northern interior suggest that it was not exploited during all of the known episodes of human occupation on the island. It appears to have been used during two main periods: Pre-Dorset and Inuinnait. As noted above, the Pre-Dorset occupation occurred around 3400 B.P. and concentrated near Shoran Lake. The large volume of muskox remains recovered at Umingmak suggests large scale and/or repeated muskox hunting at the site (Müller-Beck et al. 1971; Müller-Beck 1977; Taylor 1967). Faunal analysis indicates that this hunting took place in summer and autumn, and that caribou, snow goose, white fox, Arctic hare, and fish were also exploited at the site (von Koenigswald and Kubiak 1979; Münzel 1983, 1987). In addition to the Shoran Lake sites, a handful of Pre-Dorset lithic scatters have been identified within Aulavik National Park along the Thomsen River corridor and near another large interior lake. Recent work on the north coast of the island has produced Lagoon Complex (ca. 2500–2300 B.P.) dates from two sites (Cary 2012a, 2012b), but there remains no clear evidence of interior occupation during the Late Palaeoeskimo period.

Previous archaeological work has documented Inuinnait sites along the northeastern coast of Banks Island and into its northern interior. Some of these sites include materials scavenged from the HMS Investigator and the associated depot of goods, and Hickey (1984) has argued that they all represent Inuinnait activity from shortly after 1853, when the ship was abandoned, until the late 19th century when the supply of desirable materials was exhausted. However, unpublished work by Christopher Shank, William Barr, and Charles Arnold (C. Arnold personal communication, 2010) suggests that there may be greater time depth to the Inuinnait occupation of the island. They used multiple radiocarbon dates from Head Hill, a very large muskox kill site with numerous associated tent rings, to argue that the site was occupied from the 17th through the 19th century. The known Inuinnait sites suggest spring, summer, and fall use of the island’s northern interior based on dental annuli in muskox molars and the presence of juvenile muskox remains at several sites (Will 1985). Muskox bones dominate the faunal remains at all three interior Inuinnait sites where faunal analysis has been undertaken, indicating that muskox hunting was the main subsistence pursuit undertaken by Inuinnait in this region (Will 1985).

Thus, it appears that at two different times in the human history of Banks Island, the northern interior was used for intensive exploitation of muskox during the warm season. Both periods are represented by one or a few large muskox kill sites and larger numbers of more ephemeral sites, e.g., lithic scatters in the Pre-Dorset period and smaller camp sites and cache sites for the Inuinnait. The Inuinnait occupation has produced a much higher density and wider distribution of sites than the earlier Pre-Dorset one, which may be linked to a larger population size, a longer period of occupation, better site visibility because of their more recent age, or some combination of these factors.

Ethnographic evidence

Ethnographers from the Canadian Arctic Expedition (1913–1918) visited with several different regional groups of Inuinnait and documented their seasonal
land use practices. Diamond Jenness, who served as ethnologist with the expedition's southern party, outlines the following general pattern (Jenness 1922: 110–111, 119–125). In summer and early fall (July to October), individual families dispersed to various fishing and hunting territories in the interior, where they pursued a wide variety of fish, birds, and mammals. In November, as fall turned to winter, the families comprising each territorial group (named for the place where they traditionally congregated in fall and spring and indicated by the Inuktitut suffix “-miut”) gathered at meeting places on the coast. There the women made clothes for the winter, and the men made and repaired sealing equipment and collected the food they had cached on the land since spring. In early December, they moved onto the sea ice to begin their winter sealing, occupying relatively large winter snow house settlements. With the approach of spring, these large communities began to disperse again. By April or early May, most families had cached their winter gear and a supply of blubber on shore and had gone inland to fish and hunt, with some lingering on the coast for several weeks before moving into the interior.

The leader of the expedition, ethnographer Vilhjalmur Stefansson, provides more detailed information about Inuinnait use of Banks Island in the 19th and early 20th centuries. In May of 1911, he met the Kangiryuarmiut people of northwestern Victoria Island at their spring camp on the ice of Prince Albert Sound (Stefansson 1913). At that time, he interviewed an elder called Pamiungittok who recalled that from the mid-to-late 19th century numerous people hunted on Banks Island in the summer and on the neighboring ice in the winter. Stefansson recounts the story as follows: “Pamiungittok tells: The Banks Island people used to be well off. They killed so many deer and [musk] oxen that their dried meat sometimes lasted the year round. They got to killing each other. One man killed had relatives in the Sound. For this reason (i.e. because of witchcraft practiced by the dead man’s relatives in the Sound) food became scarce [in Banks Island]; there were no seals for food or fuel and the people died of hunger—those that had not been murdered in the feuds” (Stefansson 1913: 289–290; brackets and parentheses in original). This summer hunting appears to have occurred in conjunction with visits to the abandoned HMS Investigator to collect metal and wood. Stefansson records that the Kangiryuarmiut discovered the Investigator within a few years of its abandonment in Mercy Bay, making regular summer journeys to collect exotic goods from the ship until the 1890s (Stefansson 1914: 17, 1921: 240–241, 360–361).

Summer exploitation of northern Banks Island was far less common by 1911 when Stefansson visited the Kangiryuarmiut. He was given the following account of their seasonal movements at that time (Stefansson 1913: 284–285, 288–289; 1914: 6, 16–17). They summered primarily in the interior of Victoria Island, where the Kangiryuarmiut fished and hunted caribou. Some families occasionally travelled as far as the Thelon River, also known as the Akilinik River, near Chesterfield Inlet (Stefansson 1913: 288) or McTavish Bay on Great Bear Lake (Stefansson 1914: 21; 1921). In both cases, while people engaged in trade and hunting, the main objective was to obtain wood. Although Hickey (1984) and Will (1985) have suggested, based on Stefansson’s work, that by the early 20th century the Inuinnait no longer hunted on Banks Island in the summer, Stefansson (1921: 241) reported that a few families occasionally summered in the interior, where they hunted muskox. In the autumn, family groups assembled in Prince Albert Sound to await the arrival of winter. Once the sea ice was firm enough, some families crossed to Banks Island. There they spent the winter hunting polar bears along the southeastern coast between DeSalis Bay and Nelson Head or hunting seals on the ice off the coast. In March they headed east to rejoin the other family groups in Prince Albert Sound, where they continued to hunt seals before returning to their summer hunting grounds.

**Oral history evidence**

The Inuinnait oral history, recorded in 1996 as part of the Aulavik Oral History Project (M. Nagy personal communication, 1999), also indicates that the Inuinnait moved seasonally between Victoria Island and Banks Island, and that Banks Island was used both in summer and winter. Elder Mark Emerak remembers that Inuinnit (the “deceased”; the ancestors) used to go to Innakuyuak (Nelson Head, which is located on the southern tip of Banks Island) to hunt seals and polar bears on the ice. When the warm weather came, they would move onto the land to hunt geese and muskoxen and to collect goose eggs (M. Nagy personal communication, 1999). Edith Haogak also tells of caribou hunting and fishing in the northern interior of Banks Island: “My father-in-law used to tell us there’s a lake up there (northeastern Banks Island) and they would go up there to wait for the caribou to get good. They would cache food there at the lake. Preparing food and getting fish. He said the name of it was Upinnivik (‘spring place’)” (M. Nagy personal communication, 1999). These accounts likely relate to the practices of the early 20th century. The winter activities outlined correspond with those related to Stefansson in 1911 (Stefansson 1913). However, Stefansson suggested only limited use of the interior in the summer months, with a strong focus on muskox hunting (Stefansson
1921: 241). The narratives above suggest a greater diversity in warm season use of the interior, which also included goose and caribou hunting, goose egg collecting, and fishing.

Many of the elders who were interviewed tell of a time when caribou were scarce, and muskoxen abundant on Banks Island. People would hunt large numbers of muskoxen, driving them near their camps before killing them with bows and arrows, then making large amounts of dried meat (M. Nagy personal communication, 1999). These accounts are similar to the one Pamiungittok gave to Stefansson (1913), although Pamiungittok talked of a time when people hunted large numbers of both caribou and muskoxen on Banks Island. Like Pamiungittok’s account, they may refer to the second half of the 19th century.

The Aulavik Archaeology Project Survey

Aims

A team from the University of Western Ontario and Parks Canada conducted two field seasons of archaeological survey in an area in the southern part of Aulavik National Park in 2008 and 2009 (FIG. 1). Our aim was to provide a better understanding of temporal trends in land use in the northern interior of Banks Island. We wanted to test the suggestion that Inuinnait use of the area might precede the HMS Investigator period. Ultimately, we hoped to provide a basis from which to reconstruct changes in the ways people understood and experienced this landscape through time. Towards this end, we sought to expand the surveyed area in the interior beyond the Thomsen River corridor, along which sites were previously documented by Hickey (1979, 1984) as part of his Copper Inuit Research Project and by Parks Canada archaeologists during surveys of the Thomsen River valley.

Methods

Our survey area in 2008 included the valleys formed by two tributaries of the Thomsen River, Dissection Creek, and the first unnamed stream to its south, which was called the “Sarfarsuk River” by Hickey’s team (FIG. 4). The valleys were surveyed from their intersection with the Thomsen River eastwards. The eastern limit of the Dissection Creek survey was about 10 km east of its confluence with the Thomsen, at a point where the valley narrows dramatically and turns into steep cliffs on both sides. Sarfarsuk River was surveyed as far east as the Aulavik National Park boundary, beyond which our research permit was not valid. Both drainages are flanked by ridges to the north and south that define the edges of the valley. Our team of five systematically walked the terraces on both sides of each waterway, the tops of the main ridges to the north and south of each drainage, and all terraces in between, with transects spaced approximately 50 m apart. This interval was deemed appropriate given the high visibility of archaeological features in this treeless landscape, which has limited ground cover (FIG. 2). We did not survey steep hillsides (greater than approximately 40 degrees) or waterlogged ground, which were difficult to access and where sites were deemed unlikely. In 2009 we returned with a team of four to investigate a large area between the two valleys, from the Thomsen River eastwards for 6 kms. We also investigated an area on the west side of the river, between the river and the ridge top to its west, from just north of where Dissection Creek joins the Thomsen to 5 km south of the Sarfarsuk-Thomsen junction. A total of over 100 sq km were surveyed in both years. Because of the scarcity of vegetation, features and artifacts were highly visible on the surface of most sites. When artifacts and faunal remains were present, we recorded the types and taxa. Diagnostic artifacts were relatively rare, but a selection was surface-collected along with a representative sample of the range of faunal material from sites with large faunal assemblages. Neither shovel testing nor excavation was undertaken.

Results

Our work identified a total of 75 previously unrecorded sites comprised of stone-built features including tent rings, caches, hearths, structures for drying meat and skins, small numbers of graves, fox traps, hunting blinds, and several features of unknown function (FIG. 4). We also revisited 24 previously recorded sites. Faunal remains observed on the surface included, in decreasing order of
frequency, muskox, snow goose, caribou, ptarmigan, Arctic fox, and canid (wolf or dog).

The only conclusive evidence for pre-Inuinnait occupation was found at site 400X, a multi-component site on a terrace overlooking the junction of the Sarfarssuk River and the Thomsen River (FIG. 4). The site consists of four caches, of presumed though unconfirmed Inuinnait origin, and scattered bone and lithics. A muskox bone from the site produced a radiocarbon date of 20\(\pm\)40 B.P. (ca. CAL A.D. 1880–present) (see TABLE 1), indicating a relatively recent Inuinnait occupation, while the lithic scatter included diagnostic Palaeoeskimo tools (FIG. 5). The scrapers, particularly the quartz-arenite end scraper, have parallels among Lagoon Complex artifacts from the Lagoon site on Banks Island’s south coast and the Crane site on the Cape Bathurst Peninsula (Arnold 1981: 47; LeBlanc 1994a: 84–85). Palaeoeskimo occupation is also suggested by the presence of chert and quartz-arenite debitage at a second nearby site, 399X. Like 400X, this site was also occupied in the Inuinnait period, as evidenced by Inuinnait tent rings and three radiocarbon dates on terrestrial mammal bone, which all had 2-sigma calibrations placing them within the last 350 years (TABLE 1).

Most of the identified sites appear to date from the Inuinnait period based on the presence of diagnostic artifacts (FIG. 6) and/or strong similarities in the form of tent rings and other features to those on confirmed Inuinnait sites (FIG. 7). There are, however, a number of isolated features, primarily caches, which are difficult to date. Based on the dominance of Inuinnait sites among those that can be confidently dated, these undated sites are included in the Inuinnait category for the present purposes. While a small number of them may actually represent an earlier period of occupation, these outliers are unlikely to affect the broad trends discussed below.

Inuinnait occupation was confirmed by radiocarbon dates on terrestrial mammal bones from several sites (TABLE 1). The 2-sigma calibration for these dates provides relatively wide age ranges

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Table 1 Radiocarbon dates from the 2008 survey (indicated by *) and from Nasogaluak (130X4). Dates B.P. are uncalibrated radiocarbon years. Calibrated dates are 2-sigma calibrated years A.D. “Last 50 years” indicates a sample with \(^{14}C\) higher than the modern (A.D. 1950) reference standard. The source of this “extra” atmospheric \(^{14}C\) is thermo-nuclear bomb testing which began in the 1950s. Site no. is the Parks Canada designation and Borden no. is the Canada-wide system of naming archaeological sites.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site no.</th>
<th>Borden no.</th>
<th>Lab no.</th>
<th>(^{14}C) date</th>
<th>Calibrated date</th>
<th>Material</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*399X</td>
<td>PhPw-49</td>
<td>Beta-255828</td>
<td>210±40 B.P.</td>
<td>A.D. 1640 to 1690, A.D. 1730 to 1780, A.D. 1840 to 1850</td>
<td>Muskox scapula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beta-255829</td>
<td>150±40 B.P.</td>
<td>A.D. 1660 to 1710</td>
<td>Muskox metatarsus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beta-255830</td>
<td>140±40 B.P.</td>
<td>A.D. 1660 to 1710</td>
<td>Muskox metatarsus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*400X</td>
<td>PhPw-50</td>
<td>Beta-255831</td>
<td>20±40 B.P.</td>
<td>A.D. 1710 to 1760, A.D. 1880 to 1930, A.D. 1950 to beyond 1960</td>
<td>Muskox radius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*429X</td>
<td>PhPw-8</td>
<td>Beta-255833</td>
<td>210±40 B.P.</td>
<td>A.D. 1640 to 1690, A.D. 1730 to 1810, A.D. 1920 to 1950</td>
<td>Muskox radius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*439X</td>
<td>PhPw-76</td>
<td>Beta-255832</td>
<td>last 50 years</td>
<td>last 50 years</td>
<td>Muskox humerus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>130X4</td>
<td>PgPw-3</td>
<td>Beta-297317</td>
<td>60±30 B.P.</td>
<td>A.D. 1700 to 1720, A.D. 1820 to 1840, A.D. 1950 to 1960</td>
<td>Muskox humerus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beta-297318</td>
<td>20±30 B.P.</td>
<td>A.D. 1690 to 1730, A.D. 1810 to 1840, A.D. 1840 to 1850, A.D. 1860 to 1860, A.D. 1870 to 1920, A.D. Post 1950</td>
<td>Muskox mandible</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beta-308979</td>
<td>60±40 B.P.</td>
<td>A.D. 1690 to 1730, A.D. 1810 to 1840, A.D. 1840 to 1850, A.D. 1860 to 1860, A.D. 1870 to 1920, A.D. Post 1950</td>
<td>Caribou metatarsus</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Caribou antler</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
because radiocarbon dates between 300 and 0 radiocarbon years B.P. (ca. 1650–1950 CAL A.D.) have multiple intercepts with the calibration curve. As a result, the dates in Table 1, which include those from our survey and three others recently obtained from Nasogaluak (130X4), a large muskox hunting base camp just south of the study area (Will 1985) (FIG. 1), neither confirm nor refute Inuinnait occupation of northern Banks Island prior to the arrival of the HMS Investigator.

Land Use Patterns
As suggested by previous archaeological evidence for the whole of Banks Island's northern interior, the study area appears to have been used primarily during Palaeoeskimo and Inuinnait times. Palaeoeskimo groups appear to have made only very limited use of the area, while Inuinnait occupation was far more intensive.

Palaeoeskimo occupation
The only definitive Palaeoeskimo site identified in the study area, 400X, includes tools with strong similarities to those from Lagoon Complex sites. However, given the small number of diagnostic tools, it is difficult to be confident of its temporal placement within the Palaeoeskimo period. If it is a Lagoon Complex site, it represents the first evidence of this group's use of the northern interior of Banks Island, and indeed of any interior region. The ephemeral evidence for Palaeoeskimo occupation in the study area is perhaps not surprising since it lacks any large lakes, which appear to have been the main focus of Pre-Dorset activity elsewhere in the northern interior, and Lagoon Complex people appear to have preferred coastal locations. Of course, the low archaeological visibility of these early sites may mean that they are underrepresented in our survey data. We may have overlooked additional lithic scatters that were not associated with Inuinnait features. Even so, our results suggest that the study area was used only for brief hunting forays during Palaeoeskimo times.

Inuinnait occupation
All of the Inuinnait sites are characterized by a paucity—and in some cases a total absence—of artifacts and faunal remains, which suggests that they were occupied for only short periods by groups with a high degree of mobility. The fact that tent rings were the only identified dwelling remains and the frequency of snow goose bones (a summer migrant) both support earlier archaeological interpretations (Hickey 1984; Will 1985) as well as the ethnographic (Stefansson 1913) and oral history (M. Nagy personal communication, 1999) evidence that Banks Island's interior was used primarily during the warm season. The faunal evidence aligns with the oral histories in indicating not just big game hunting, but also goose hunting in the region. Though
faunal remains were unquantified during our surveys, muskox remains were clearly the most abundant. Like Hickey (1984), we noted pieces of barrel staves salvaged from HMS Investigator cached on several sites. Our evidence therefore supports Hickey’s (1984) interpretation that Inuinnait occupied Banks Island’s northern interior in the latter half of the 19th century to exploit both Investigator goods and the large muskox population in the area. As indicated above, however, there is nothing in our evidence to indicate that Inuinnait occupation of the study area was restricted to this period. Given the small population size of the Kangiryuarmiut, it seems unlikely that the very high density of sites in the study area was produced in just five decades.

The distribution of Inuinnait sites within the study area (FIG. 4) suggests that the two tributaries, the Sarfarssuk River in the south and Dissection Creek in the north, were used differently. Sites are distributed along the entire length of the surveyed area of the Sarfarssuk River, both close to the water and along the ridges that form the sides of the drainage. This suggests that the river and the ridges on either side of it were used as travel routes linking the large lakes between Prince of Wales Strait and the study area with the Thomsen River corridor in the interior (FIG. 1). Sites in the Dissection Creek Valley concentrate on the ridges and in the valley bottom on the south side of the creek close to its confluence with the Thomsen River. There is also a marked concentration of sites near a lake in the hills north of the confluence. The valley begins to narrow approximately 4.5 km east of the Thomsen, and site and feature density begins to drop off on both sides of the creek, petering out completely about 1.5 km farther upstream. This suggests that rather than serving as a travel corridor between the coast and interior, Dissection Creek was a base for hunting activities accessed from the Thomsen River Valley.

Our 2009 survey identified only a few sites in the surveyed area between Dissection Creek and the Sarfarssuk River (FIG. 4). This pattern suggests that drainages were the focus of Inuinnait occupation in the study area, with the surrounding areas visited only infrequently. Previous archaeological work in the Thomsen River Valley indicates that it was a major travel corridor for the Inuinnait (FIG. 4). Our data help to flesh out this picture, illustrating a connecting route between the east coast and the Thomsen, and conclusively demonstrating the scarcity of sites in areas between the major drainages, which had been previously assumed, but not properly documented.

Beyond Land Use: The Gendered Inuinnait Landscape

Since the 1990s, many anthropologists and archaeologists have considered the concept of landscape as intimately connected with that of “place” (Basso 1996a; Ingold 1993; Potter 2004; Thomas 2001; Tilley 1994; Whitridge 2004). Places are locales that people imbue with special meaning; they are centers of human action and significance. They are grounded in the physical reality of a particular space and thus exist in the external world, but also incorporate the physical activities, meanings, and associations that people connect with them. Landscapes are constructed in the same way, but on a broader scale, as people move through and experience their worlds. They link places and travel routes across a region. This understanding of landscape emphasizes the importance of movement and embodied practice. It is linked with Bourdieu’s (1977) concept of habitus, the implicit rules of behavior and categories of perception internalized in the course of everyday activities, and Heidegger’s (1962) notion of dwelling, which emphasizes the unity of thought and physical experience and undermines the Cartesian divide between mind and body, nature and culture. Many authors (Basso 1996a; Casey 1996; Collignon 2006a, 2006b; Nuttall 1992; Potter 2004) recognize that landscapes play a role in actively creating and are at the same time created by both individuals and communities, and they are therefore linked with personal and collective identities. At any moment, the same landscape may be experienced and understood differently by different people based on their age, gender, family relationships, personal history, etc. (Bender 1998, 2002, 2006). Bender argues that archaeologists should therefore talk of multiple communities and multiple landscapes, a concept she terms “nested landscapes” (Bender 1998: 60).

Work by geographer Béatrice Collignon (2006b) among the Inuinnait of Ulukhaktok on western Victoria Island suggests that men and women have different experiences of the landscape and therefore conceive of it differently. All Inuit groups have a traditional division of labor along gender lines, with men primarily responsible for hunting and women for working hides, sewing clothes, and preparing food. These categories are neither rigid nor exclusive, but do govern who does what kind of work in most situations (Boas 1888; Condon 1996; Jenness 1922, 1946; Rasmussen 1929, 1931; Stefansson 1913, 1919, 1921). Men travel widely and regularly as part of hunting activities. Women also engage in activities that take them away from base camps, such as fishing and egg collecting, but they generally spend far more of their time in camp than men and travel less widely and less regularly overall. Collignon argues that the women’s conception of the landscape is organized around a series of fixed points: seasonal base camps about which they have detailed knowledge. “The territory of women appears as a loose collection of...
points quite poorly linked to one another. On an abstract level, they know those points are connected, but on a practical level, then [sic] don’t know how they are connected” (Collignon 2006b: 147). Men tend to travel more widely and more frequently while hunting and they conceive of the landscape as an interconnected web of places, the trails that connect them, and surfaces in between. “Their view of the territory is more complete than that of women, because men do not know only the collections of points… they also know the ‘filled lines of travel’ and they know a great deal about the surface areas of the whole territory” (Collignon 2006b: 147). In a similar vein, Claudio Aporta’s ethnographic work on way-finding among the Igloolik Inuit is conducted largely with men, since they are the primary navigators when traveling. Aporta (2004, 2009) likewise suggests that these men conceive of their landscape, which includes both land and sea ice, as a vast network of interconnected trails.

The archaeological evidence for gendered landscapes

While archaeological evidence is not fine-grained enough to allow us to reconstruct past landscapes as experienced by individual people, it does permit us to see the ways in which landscapes were used and understood by different groups. The ethnographic work on Inuit geographical knowledge outlined above suggests that gender is a useful axis along which to explore the “nestedness” of Inuinnaqt landsca pes in the study area. It is proposed that gendered experiences of the landscape should be visible in the distribution of different archaeological feature types. Camp sites, as indicated by the presence of one or more tent rings, often accompanied by other features including caches, structures for drying meat and skins, and outdoor hearths, represent places inhabited by both men and women. Hunting sites, represented by single caches, groups of caches, and hunting blinds represent places created and used primarily by men. This proposition is, of course, founded on the assumption that the gender division of labor recorded in early ethnographies of the Inuit extends back in time. Naturally, there are limitations to this approach. Both men and women could have engaged in activities, for example egg gathering, that took them away from their camp sites but leave no trace in the archaeological record. Archaeological invisibility is a problem not just in attempting to reconstruct past nested landscapes, but also in more traditional studies of land use and indeed any archaeological interpretation. As outlined above, ethnographic studies of a wide range of Inuit groups suggest that, on the whole, men tended to travel farther and more frequently from their base camps than did women. The ensuing discussion therefore deals with degrees of knowledge and familiarity with particular locales within the study area. It is not meant to suggest that men and women spent time and therefore had knowledge of only those areas that are highlighted. Rather, it explores the relative frequencies with which they utilized particular spaces and identifies areas with which men and women were more or less familiar.

Figure 8 illustrates the distribution of camp sites and hunting sites within the survey area. Camp sites clearly concentrate along the three main waterways (Thomsen River, Dissection Creek, Sarfarssuk River) and along the ridges that overlook them, while cache sites tend to be found on higher ground where they can be seen from a distance, making them easier to relocate. Based on the feature distributions, graphic representations of women’s and men’s perceptions of this landscape are presented in the lower left and lower right portion of figure, respectively. Women had knowledge of the main travel routes along the Sarfarssuk and Thomsen Rivers and would have been particularly familiar with areas with concentrations of large camp sites. There are two such locales; one on the south side of Dissection Creek, just east of and its confluence with the Thomsen River, another on
the south side of Sarfarssuk River, in the southeastern part of the study area. Because these sites are palimpsests, it is difficult to determine whether sites with larger numbers of tent rings indicate concurrent occupation by larger numbers of residential groups, more frequent reuse of these locales, or some combination of the two. It should be noted, however, that sites with three to five tent rings are far more likely to contain external features such as skin and meat drying structures than those with only one or two tent rings, and all sites with six or more tent rings contain such external features. These features, along with higher densities of artifacts and faunal remains on larger sites, suggest that they were often occupied for longer periods, and were therefore home to a broader range of activities than sites with fewer tent rings. The concentrations of sites with multiple tent rings are therefore depicted as “hubs” in women’s perceptions of this landscape. These locales would have been central places where the women’s landscape knowledge was concentrated. The lower right portion of Figure 8 represents an average over multiple generations of women. For any individual woman, the size and number of these nodes would have increased over her lifetime depending on how frequently she returned to the area and how much time she spent there.

In contrast, men’s perceptions of the landscape would have encompassed a broader area, including kill sites and cache sites as nodes, and a large number of subsidiary trails in addition to the main travel routes. Men would, however, have had less intimate familiarity with the immediate environs of important camping places than women. Two areas stand out as being far more accessible to men than women because they include hunting sites in the absence, or near absence, of camping sites. The first is on the high ridges to the east of the Thomsen River, roughly midway between the Dissection Creek and Sarfarssuk River drainages, where a cluster of cache sites indicates that this was an important hunting area. The near absence of camp sites along the ridge suggests that it would not have featured prominently in the women’s knowledge and conception of the area. A similar situation is indicated on the west side of the Thomsen River where cache sites far outnumber camp sites, all of which have only one or two tent rings. This marked difference in site distribution on the west side of the Thomsen versus the east suggests that the river formed a boundary that was more permeable to men than women. Again, the graphic depiction in the lower right portion of Figure 8 represents an average over multiple generations of men. For any individual man, the number of nodes and interconnecting trails would have increased with repeated visits to the area over the course of his life, leading to a broad familiarity with the intervening surfaces.

The ethnographic approach to gendered landscapes

The use of ethnographic analogy has a long history in Arctic archaeology because of the richness of the Inuit ethnographic record and the clear evidence of cultural continuity from Thule times to the present. Wylie (1985) has argued that ethnographically based archaeological interpretations are most robust when they are attuned not just to the similarities, but also to the differences between the ethnographic source and the archaeological subject of the analogy. The distribution of camp sites and cache sites within the study area suggests, as we would expect based on the ethnographic work on Inuit geographical knowledge by Collignon (2006b) and Aporta (2004, 2009), that men had knowledge of larger areas of the landscape than women. Collignon (2006b: 112–119) further suggests, based on distributions of Inuinnaqtuna place names on northwestern Victoria Island and the mainland, that Inuinnaqtuna territory can be divided into three zones. The first she calls “zones of assembly.” These are dense concentrations of named places in coastal areas where “-miut” groups traditionally gathered each fall as they prepared to move to their winter camps on the ice. The second are “traveling zones” which are lines of named places that stretch from the coast into the interior and represent trails used during families’ seasonal migrations. Third are the “border zones” that mark the outer margins of their regularly traveled territories. The archaeological sites in the study area have strong parallels with Collignon’s traveling zones in their linear distribution along waterways (FIG. 8), their absence in the intervening areas, and the evidence for short-term camps in the summer months.

There are also important differences between Collignon’s ethnographic study and the archaeological data; the distribution of archaeological camp sites within the study area is far denser than that of Inuinnaqtuna place names recorded during her research. Within Collignon’s traveling zones, most place names designate camping places and “the usual distance between these named places is about 20 kilometres. This is the mean distance that would be covered in one day on a normal trip by dog team before snowmobiles were introduced in the 1970s” (Collignon 2006b: 119). Her data likely reflect land use practices since the advent of commercial trapping in the 1920s and 1930s, when inland areas began to be utilized in the winter months as opposed to the earlier summer pattern of use. In contrast, no camp site in the study area is more than about 2.5 km from its nearest neighbor, and in many cases the density is much higher (FIG. 8). There are several possible reasons for the higher density of archaeological camps in the study area than of named camping places recorded by Collignon along Inuinnaqtuna.
traveling routes. One of the most obvious relates to the longer time-frame represented by the archaeological evidence, which likely spans a period from the 18th century (and possibly even earlier) to the early 20th century. The archaeological site distributions may incorporate a greater amount of temporal variability than the place name data. Unfortunately, archaeological site density is impossible to calculate for a shorter time period because of the imprecision of radiocarbon and typological dating. The calculation is further complicated by the difficulties in establishing whether features at a given site are contemporaneous, and by the abundant evidence for reoccupation of sites as indicated by the reworking of features. For example, the presence on many sites of complete tent rings alongside partial ones suggests that stones from earlier tent rings were often incorporated into subsequent ones.

While difficult to ascertain, it would not be surprising to find that the density of archaeological camp sites within the study area was higher than that observed by Collignon, since her data appear to represent winter travel by dog team and the archaeological data appear to represent summer travel on foot. A higher density of archaeological camps would imply that differences between men’s and women's perceptions of the travel routes through the interior of Banks Island in the past were less pronounced than those recorded by Collignon for other Inuinnait regions in the 1990s. If women perceive their landscapes as a series of points, namely the camps where their activities focus, while men, who regularly travel and hunt away from these camps, perceive them as an interconnected web of places and the intervening surfaces, then the extent of men’s and women’s knowledge of a region will be most different where the points on that landscape are spread out. As the distance between camps decreases, women’s knowledge of the landscape comes to more closely resemble men’s, since the “blank areas” in women’s perception become less pronounced. Women traveling on foot would also have been more familiar with the travel routes between camping places than those traveling by dog sled. A woman walking, even if she was following a man rather than actively route-finding, is more intimately engaged with her surroundings, and passing through them more slowly than a passenger on a sled.

It would be interesting to explore the distribution of camp sites and hunting sites at other points along the Thomsen River. If the marked dominance of hunting sites over camp sites on the west side of the river were consistent, it would suggest that the Thomsen marked the western limit of Inuinnait territory on Banks Island, beyond which men made hunting forays, but family groups did not travel to any great degree. This trend could also be further investigated by examining feature distributions along tributaries on the west side of the Thomsen. Unpublished survey work was conducted in the 1970s along the Thomsen and one of its western tributaries, the Muskox River, by Peter Schederman, Charles Arnold, and Christopher Shank, and also by Clifford Hickey. Further surveys along the Thomsen were also conducted in the 1990s by Parks Canada teams led by Deborah Webster and Steven Toews. However, the site locations and feature counts and identifications from these surveys need to be confirmed before an investigation of camp site and hunting site distributions can take place. The existing site location data are unreliable because the initial work was done before the advent of hand-held GPS, and many of the Parks Canada GPS coordinates are inaccurate because of an error in converting them from latitude-longitude measurements to UTM readings. The recent survey work reported here has also demonstrated that many of Hickey’s feature counts and attributions are incorrect, which is understandable given the vast areas he surveyed in a limited time.

Conclusions

The Banks Island case study outlined above demonstrates that survey data can be used to explore both broad temporal trends in land use and the differing perceptions of a particular landscape within a single time period. A more traditional examination of site distribution and function by cultural period suggests that the study area was used for very limited hunting forays in Palaeoeskimo times, perhaps by Lagoon Complex groups, rather than earlier Pre-Dorset groups, who utilized the Shoran Lake area to the northwest. Following this early occupation, the study area appears to have been largely abandoned until the Inuinnait period (ca. 17th–20th centuries A.D.), when it was intensively occupied in the summer months to hunt muskox and to a lesser degree snow goose and caribou. At this time, occupation concentrated within 2 km of the main waterways, and the Sarfarssuk River was an important east-west travel route while only the lower (southwestern) section of Dissection Creek was utilized, accessed via the Thomsen River corridor. The site distribution data were subsequently used to reconstruct women’s and men’s landscape perceptions during Inuinnait times. Using ethnographic evidence to link certain archaeological feature types with gendered activities, specific areas were identified that were more familiar to women than to men and vice versa.

Reconstructing nested landscapes, whether gendered or otherwise, based on archaeological data requires representative survey results, good chronological control, and independent evidence linking particular archaeological remains with particular
groups in the past. Several aspects of the Banks Island case were particularly favorable in this regard.

In Arctic contexts the near absence of soil development and very limited vegetation mean that archaeological remains from all time periods are highly visible on the ground surface. At lower latitudes earlier occupations are often less well represented than subsequent ones, particularly in locales such as valley bottoms where sediment accumulates. This bias is widely recognized by archaeologists, and must be taken into account in more traditional land use studies as well as in attempts to reconstruct nested landscapes. The archaeological invisibility of certain activities must also be acknowledged and means that archaeological reconstructions of any aspect of the past can never be fully complete.

Chronological control is essential since nested landscapes must be examined within individual time periods. Within the study area in Aulavik National Park, the majority of dated archaeological features come from the Inuinnait period, making it possible to assume that undated features, such as caches, are also from that period. Though some caches may actually have been older, a few exceptions would not undermine the broad patterns observed in the distributions of camp sites versus hunting sites. The difficulty of dating certain types of sites or features without recourse to excavation is another challenge shared by survey-based studies of both land use and nested landscapes.

Reconstructing nested landscapes also requires the ability to link particular forms of archaeological evidence with particular subsets of a community. In this case, the rich ethnographic record for Inuit cultures suggests gendered activities that can be associated with archaeological features. The analogy is strengthened by the direct and recent historical connection between the archaeological and ethnographic cases and by the consideration of both similarities and differences between the two (Wylie 1985). Of course, any consideration of nested landscapes must bear in mind that both people’s identities and the meanings of things are mutable and context dependent, and broad patterns reflected in the archaeological record mask variability both over time and between individuals. We must recognize the limitations of our data, make them explicit, and attempt to interpret the data within those limitations.

While archaeologists will inevitably face challenges in reconstructing nested landscapes among past hunter-gatherers, many such difficulties apply equally to studies of hunter-gatherer land use, in which archaeologists have been engaged for decades. The Banks Island example indicates that under certain conditions the study of nested landscapes can prove fruitful in the Canadian Arctic. There are no doubt many other places and times in the past where critical use of the ethnographic record makes it possible to use archaeological survey data to explore different experiences of landscape along gender or other lines. Such studies should be encouraged because they complement traditional reconstructions of seasonal mobility, revealing the parallel existence of alternative patterns of use and perspectives on the same place, and shedding further light on the diversity of past experience.

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References


