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IN PROFILE: GRADUATE STUDENTS



Paul Mayne, Western News

Master's student John Moody works his way through thousands of animal bones to learn about early Inuit and their migration from Alaska to the Canadian Arctic.

Animal bones become the Inuit storyteller

BY PAUL MAYNE

As a master's student in Western's Department of Anthropology, John Moody's work area has been covered with bones; nothing odd about that.

But while Anthropology is a science of humankind, the bones cluttering Moody's desk belong to ring seals, caribou, arctic foxes and bearded seals – and date back some 800 years.

In an attempt to learn more about the how, when and why of early Inuit migration from modern-day Alaska to the Canadian Arctic, Moody is conducting research on archaeological collections from a long-abandoned Inuit settlement — called the Tiktalik site — northeast of Inuvik in the Northwest Territories. The site dates from about 1250 AD.

Returning earlier this year with more than 8,000 bones to continue his research, Moody has been hard at work collecting data,

and hopes to start analyzing his findings in the New Year.

"I love history and learning about the past," says Moody, in the second year of his master's. "To be able to hold something in your hand that is more than 800 years old - and then to be able to study it - is pretty cool."

By studying animal bones from the settlement, Moody is able to determine the hunting needs, social structure and population of the area. He can even determine the age of the animals and thus when they were hunted, spring or fall.

"When you look at the ratio of the number of animals we found, and compare this to others in the area, it presents evidence of colonization and that indeed it was a settlement," he says. "The more you learn, it allows you to ask more questions."

One question Moody didn't need to answer this year was availability of funding for his research.

Earlier this year he was

awarded the William E. Taylor Research Award (\$5,000), established by the Canadian Museum of Civilization, to recognize and encourage excellence in human history research in the Canadian Arctic.

The award is named in memory of the renowned archaeologist and Arctic scholar who had a long and distinguished career with the National Museum of Man, a forerunner of the Canadian Museum of Civilization.

In fact, the Tiktalik site Moody is working on was first identified in 1989 by Taylor himself, and later excavated by archaeologists from the Museum of Civilization.

Looking forward, Moody admits he would like to teach, but doesn't want to lose the thrill of "getting out into the field" to conduct his work.

"I would love to teach after school is done, but I still want to be able to have a hand in research as well."