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Volume 17, numéro 2, fall 2001

The New Early Modern Newfoundland: Part One

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/nflds17_2rn02

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Éditeur(s)

Faculty of Arts, Memorial University

ISSN

1198-8614 (imprimé)

1715-1430 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cette note

Martijn, C. A. & Dorais, L.-J. (2001). Eighteenth-Century Innu (Montagnais) and Inuit Toponyms in the Northern Peninsula of Newfoundland. *Newfoundland Studies*, 17(2), 319–330.

Eighteenth-Century Innu (Montagnais) and Inuit Toponyms in the Northern Peninsula of Newfoundland

CHARLES A. MARTIJN and LOUIS-JACQUES DORAIS¹

IT HAS LONG BEEN A RECEIVED BELIEF that the Beothuk were the sole aboriginal inhabitants of Newfoundland when Europeans first landed there (Marshall 1996). Although the Mi'kmaq are now increasingly gaining recognition from scholars as having been a second Native occupant group at contact time, the additional historical presence of Innu (Montagnais) and Inuit on this island remain today mostly forgotten episodes, to which hardly any reference is ever made (Martijn 1990, 1996, 2002). Until recently, it was thought that the only recorded Native place names in Newfoundland were either Mi'kmaq or Beothuk in origin (Hewson 1978a; 1978b: 19-28, Kirwin and Story 1992 :123-124, Martijn 1996 :24, Pacifique de Valigny 1934, Seary 1971: 21-26).

A re-examination of published eighteenth-century documents has allowed us to identify two Innu and two Inuit place names, each of them connected with the Northern Peninsula. These toponyms constitute a supplemental category of ethnohistorical data, that is to say "named territory", which can be used to demonstrate the historical presence in Newfoundland of Native groups other than the Beothuk and the Mi'kmaq.

It should be noted that E.R. Seary provides a second, less specific, category of place-names which can be associated with a Native presence in the Northern Peninsula (2000: 157). They consist of general designations such as Savage Bay, Savage Cove, Savage Island, and Savage Point — presumably eighteenth-century English translations of the French term "sauvage". Some of these may well have been a reference to Inuit or to Innu. In addition, on the Delisle map of 1700 the name *Esquimaux* is split into two segments, with "*Esqui*" shown in Labrador and "*maux*"

in Northern Newfoundland, as an indication of historic Inuit traverses to the island. In his 1763 map, Captain Cook has the name "*Esquemeaux Head*" written along a narrow headland separating Quirpon and Noddy Bay (Searly 1960: 93). Cook's 1764 map displays a forty mile long "*Path of the Indians*" which Searly supposes would have been "used by the Montagnais in their incursions into Newfoundland to avoid the harbourless stretch of the Straight Coast" (1971: 21).

INNU (MONTAGNAIS) TOPONYMS

There is ample evidence to show that the Innu frequented western Newfoundland during the post-contact period and that their immediate ancestors likewise did so in prehistoric times (Martijn 1990, Marshall 1996: 55-60, Pinal 1998: 211-212, Hull 1999: 15-19). From the sixteenth century onwards, Breton and Basque cod fishermen began visiting the Northern Peninsula on a seasonal basis (Barkham 1989; de la Morandière 1962). The earliest archival records contain occasional references to contact with Native groups in that region, often involving the Inuit. As for Amerindians, the details are mostly too sparse to distinguish between Beothuk and Innu. Towards the end of the seventeenth century this situation changed, however, when French merchants and concessionaires from Quebec began to expand their activities into the lower North Shore, the Strait of Belle Isle, southern Labrador and northern Newfoundland (Trudel 1991: 361-369). An increasing number of seigneuries and concessions were granted for the fur trade and local seal and salmon fisheries (Niellon 1996: 154-174, Privy Council 1927: 3186-3187, 3716-3718). These developments augmented the production of official government reports, exploration accounts and legal documents, which often contain information about local Native groups, including the Innu, who served as hunters, trappers, guides, helpers, as well as allies against the Inuit (Trudel 1991: 361-363). Between 1694 and 1704, Louis Jolliet and the Sieur de Courtemanche recorded some 30 Innu toponyms along the middle and lower North Shore of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, primarily rivers and bays. French cartographers inscribed many of these Native place names on the new maps produced in this period (e.g. Bellin 1744).

On 19 January 1689, the Quebec merchant Denis Riverin and a number of associates were granted the Belle Isle seigneurie, which included a tract of land with six leagues fronting along the coast, at the tip of the Northern Peninsula, facing Belle Isle itself, in the eastern entrance of the Strait. (A land league is 3 miles or 4.8 km). The seigneurs were empowered to erect fishing and trading establishments and were given exclusive right of trade with Native peoples, presumably Amerindians as well as Inuit. On 14 April of that same year, 1689, another Quebec merchant Charles Aubert de la Chesnaye and his associates were granted the neighbouring Blanc Sablon seigneurie and concession, which included a tract in northern Newfoundland of three leagues fronting along the coast by three leagues in depth,

situated between latitude 49 degrees north and the western boundary of the Riverin concession, with the exclusive right to trade or fish within a radius of one-quarter league surrounding their hunting and trading establishments (Roy 1940: 10-16, Privy Council 1927: 3186, 3717-3718). No details regarding the exploitation of these two concessions have come to light thus far but it can only be presumed that Innu were involved in those activities, either as fur trappers or as assistants, as was the case with Jean-Baptiste Jolliet who had a sealing establishment at Anchor Point (St. Barbe) in 1738 (Martijn 1990: 234).

The two eighteenth-century Innu toponyms under discussion occur in the concession document of the Port aux Choix seigneurie, which was granted, on 20 April 1705 by de Vaudreuil, the governor of New France, and de Beauharnois, the intendant, to the Quebec merchant, François Hazeur (Roy 1940: 18-20). This seigneurie stretched about ten leagues to the northeast of Port aux Choix, twenty leagues to the southwest, and ten leagues inland, with the right of hunting, fishing and trading with the Natives ("sauvages") within the limits of the seigneurie. Its northern boundary was the *Chach8mayk8sispy* River, in French called "rivière aux Saumons" (Salmon River). Its southern boundary was a locality initially referred to as *8abaskanapa8e*, in French called "l'ours blanc qui est debout", that is "white bear standing upright". Polar bears are, in fact, regularly carried on the spring pack-ice into the Straits of Belle Isle and the Gulf of St. Lawrence (Banfield 1974: 313 and map 137). Elsewhere in the concession document, however, the name is given as *A8abaskanapa8é*, with the locality designated as a river. As we shall see below, this may have been a lapse on the part of the government clerk who drew up the deed.

The etymology of these toponyms appears to be fairly straightforward and confirms the meanings attached to them in the concession document (José Mailhot, pers. comm. 2000). This suggests that the person who originally noted them down must have been a Frenchman who was fairly well-acquainted with the Innu language. *Chach8mayk8sispy* is a compound name whose modern form, as pronounced in the western Innu communities of Pointe Bleue, Betsiamites, Seven Islands-Maliotenan, and Schefferville, corresponds to *utshâshumêk* = "salmon" + *shipi* (or *shipu*) = "river". The historical Innu form, found in dictionaries, gives the word for "river" as *sipi8*, indicating that the place name reflects this earlier stage of the language, when the final *i* was still heard (Fabvre 1970: 340, Silvy 1974: 145). However, in the eastern Innu communities of Mingan, Natashquan, La Romaine and St. Augustin, along the lower North Shore the word for salmon is pronounced *ushâshameku*, which would appear to be the version closest to its eighteenth-century Newfoundland equivalent. As regards *8abaskanapa8e*, the general meaning of "white (polar) bear standing upright" is confirmed, but the word construction poses certain questions. (The variant *a8abaskanapa8é* would seem less exact.) One can recognize *uâpashku* = "white (polar) bear" + the changed form *nâpau-* of the verb radical *nîpau-*, which means "to stand upright". But the final *e*

ending is somewhat puzzling. The place name would probably be best transcribed as two separate words: *uâpashku nâpaue*.²

These place names were almost certainly obtained from Innu informants by Pierre Constantin, an experienced voyageur, who was very familiar with summer and winter trading sites in the Strait of Belle Isle region and the various Native populations to be found there. Constantin had been hired in 1700 by Augustin Legardeur de Courtemanche to establish a trading post at St. Paul's River (Rivière aux Esquimaux) on the lower North Shore. While continuing to work for Courtemanche, Constantin also approached Hazeur and convinced him to apply for the Port aux Choix concession, which the two of them subsequently exploited under the terms of a joint ownership (Pritchard 1974: 134, Privy Council 1927: 3175).

Disappointingly, one cannot determine precise Innu dialectical (*n*, *l* or *r*) affiliation from the two Newfoundland toponyms in question (Gerald McNulty, pers. comm. 2000). This rules out any hope of establishing whether the Native informants who provided them were local lower North Shore Innu, or happened to belong to the 30 Innu families which Courtemanche had brought to Brador from elsewhere at the beginning of the eighteenth century (Trudel 1991: 366-369). The Native place names collected by Jolliet and Courtemanche between Mingan and Blanc Sablon during the period 1694-1704, apparently from local Natives frequenting the coast during the summer, suggest the presence of an Innu *r* dialect extending along the lower North Shore (Trudel 1991: 364 n. 3-5).

The use of the Newfoundland Native toponyms turned out to be ephemeral. Two years later, in a second document of confirmation by the King dated 17 June 1707, these Innu place names are simply omitted in relation to the Port aux Choix seigneurie and only their French equivalents are provided (Roy 1940: 23-24).

Is it possible to identify the contemporary localities to which those eighteenth-century toponyms were applied? An attempt to do so was made in the *Historical Atlas of Canada*, by taking the dimensions given for the Port aux Choix seigneurie and plotting them on a modern map (Lalancette 1987). The results suggest that the southern boundary, or "*8abaskanapa8e*", corresponds with St. Paul's Inlet (Figure 1). This is interesting, in view of the fact that the 1705 concession document did not initially speak of a river. It is therefore possible that the designation of "river" was erroneously interpolated in a later paragraph of the deed. The *Historical Atlas* places the northern boundary at St. Barbe Bay. In our opinion, a more likely candidate for the *Chach8mayk8sispy* River would be the Ste. Genevieve River just to the south, which is known as the principal salmon stream in the upper part of the Northern Peninsula and serves as the outlet for the drainage basin of Ten Mile Lake, the largest body of water in that region (*Canadian Geographical Journal* 1968, Ullah 1992: 28-29).³

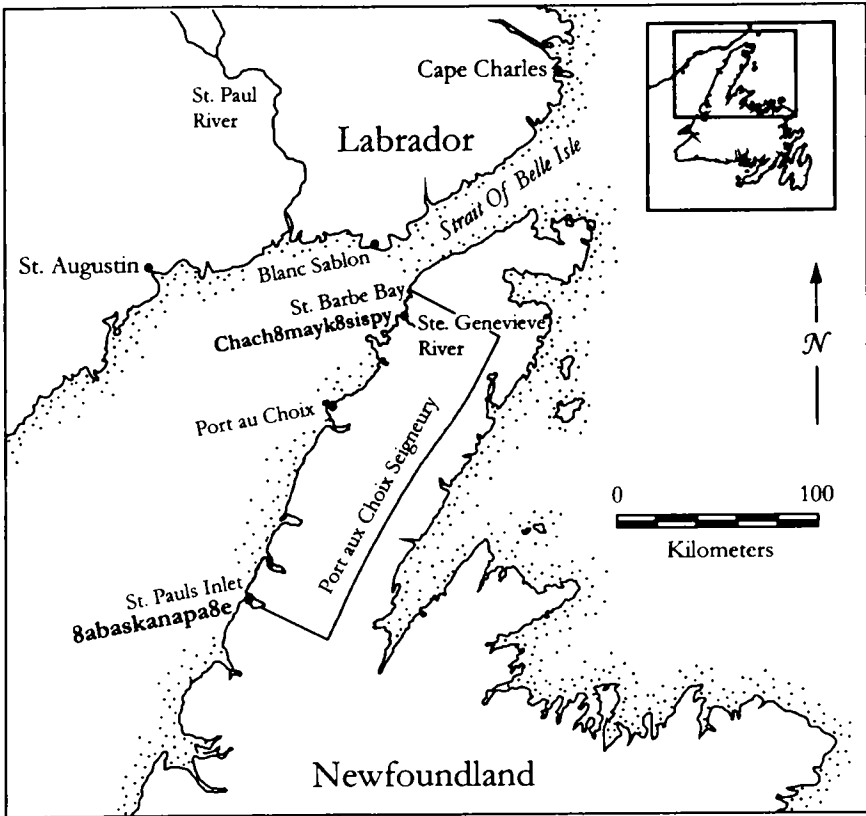


Figure 1. The proposed identification of the Innu (Montagnais) toponyms *8abaskanapa8e* and *Chach8mayk8sispy*, near the limits of the Port au Choix seigneurie, Newfoundland.

INUIT TOPONYMS

Inuit place names of the Northern Peninsula must be understood in the broader context of linguistic and commercial relations between the Labrador Inuit and Basque, French and later British merchants and fishermen around the Strait of Belle Isle. References to historic Inuit in Newfoundland, notably at Quirpon, occur as far back as 1588 (de la Morandière 1962 I: 19). Although access to local subsistence resources probably constituted one attraction, the Inuit seem to have been drawn initially to the Northern Peninsula primarily by opportunities to engage in bartering activities with the French and Basque fishermen who frequented this region, also known as the *Petit Nord*, during the summer season (Barkham 1989: 15-18; de la Morandière 1962 I: 17-25, 385-391; Martijn 1980:107-109). These temporary fishing communities were, generally, lawless. Recurrent Inuit attempts to acquire de-

sired goods through stealth and pilfering, by ambushing sailing crews when they came ashore and in some cases even by attacking European vessels, often ended up in murderous brawls, with both sides committing atrocities. These turbulent conditions continued well into the eighteenth century. In 1756, a Captain Galiot of St. Malo managed to establish a commercial *entente* between the French and the Inuit (de la Morandière 1962 I: 19). In 1765, Governor Hugh Palliser arrived at a similar peaceful understanding between the English and the Inuit, with the help of the Moravian missionaries (Hiller 1971: 75-77, Whiteley 1964: 29-35).

The earlier "arms length" nature of brief commercial contact episodes offered little scope for broader mutual understanding. From the sixteenth century onward, minimal intercommunication needs in the area were met by the development of a trade pidgin, *i.e.* a simplified language allowing for a basic level of comprehension among people speaking different idioms (Bakker 1991: 7-10; 1996: 273-277; Dorais 1980, 1996). It included Basque, French, Inuit and Innu words, used within a very simple grammatical framework, without verbal or nominal endings. Such a hybrid linguistic mix is not apparent, however, in the two Inuit toponyms discussed in this paper. The social context in which they were collected differed markedly from that of the prevailing exchanges held in trade pidgin. Due to the fact that they were terms devised by the Inuit for communication amongst themselves, these two designations are quite similar in linguistic structure to place names found elsewhere in the Arctic.

After his appointment as governor of Newfoundland in 1764, Hugh Palliser set out to affirm British control over the Labrador coast and to develop an English migratory fishery there (Whiteley 1969: 29-35). To do so, he had to ensure its security by establishing friendly relations with the Inuit. It so happened that the Moravian Brethren (*Unitas Fratrum*) applied for permission around that time to set up missions along the Labrador coast. Palliser seized on this opportunity to use them as intermediaries in the ensuing peace negotiations. A number of these Moravians, notably Jens Haven, were conversant with the West Greenlandic dialect, which was closely related to Labrador Inuktitut. This fact helped immeasurably in establishing more fluid communication and in creating a climate of trust. However, the Moravians were not trained linguists and as a result their descriptions of Labrador Inuktitut orthography and grammar contain many inadequacies and errors (Nowak 1999).

As a first step, Palliser supplied the missionaries with a list of questions about the Labrador Inuit and their way of life. The answers to these, including the two Inuit place names under discussion, were obtained in the late summer of 1765 by a Moravian brother, Christian Drachard, from members of a band camped at Chateau Bay in Southern Labrador, some of whom had been to northern Newfoundland in the previous year. The information provided on that occasion was recorded in a Moravian document, which was subsequently translated from the German, although no etymological analysis of the Inuit place names was attempted (Hill *et al.*

1765, Taylor 1972). The two toponyms are to be found under Question No.28. "How do they call Newfoundland?" Answer : *Ikkarumiklua*. "How do they call Quirpon?" Answer : *Ikkereitsock* (Taylor 1972: 138).

At this remove in time, comprehending the exact sense of these names and the reason they were chosen is not necessarily an easy task. The first toponym, *Ikkarumiklua*, for Newfoundland, is probably a rendering of the word *ikkaruvigsuaq* (in the Canadian Inuit standard Roman orthography), meaning "enormous shoal", from *ikkaru-* = "shoal" and *-vigsuaq* = "huge". The Moravian interviewer who transcribed the name *Ikkarumiklua* did not, however, indicate its terminal consonant, either a *q* (singular) or a *t* (plural). If indeed plural, as we may surmise, it may have been a reference to the extensive stretches of shoal reefs, rock ledges and submerged boulders around Quirpon Harbour and Sacred Bay immediately to the west (Figure 2). This general area appears to have been a favourite destination for the Inuit when crossing the Strait of Belle Isle, with Quirpon and Noddy Harbour offering convenient landing and camping places. These harbours, as well as places such as Cape Noir, the Sacred Islands and Cape Onion are all mentioned in reports dealing with Inuit-European encounters (de la Morandière 1962 I: 19, Haven 1764: 61v).⁴ Cook and Lane provide the following description :

In turning up towards Quirpon and Noddy Harbour, you may stand pretty near to the Gull Rock and Maria Ledge, which are above water, and both of them about half a league from the land of Quirpon; the passage between them is also half a league wide, and very safe, taking care only to keep near to Gull Rock to avoid the N.W. ledge, which ledge does not appear but in bad weather; in the passage between the N.W. ledge and the main, are many rocks and shallow water.... to the S.W. is Sacred Bay, which is pretty large, wherein are a great number of small islands and rocks above water. (Cook and Lane 1794 :38)

In its singular form, the toponym *Ikkarumiklua*, from *ikkaruvigsuaq* = "enormous shoal", might have been a general Inuit designation for an indeterminate land mass south of the Strait of Belle Isle. This kind of construction is not unknown. The Mi'kmaq on the mainland refer to Newfoundland as *Ktaqamkuk* or "land across the water". The present day Labrador Sheshatshit Innu name for Newfoundland is the diminutive form *Akami-assiss*, meaning "small land on the other side", while Europe is referred to by the non-diminutive form *Akami-assi*, or "land on the other side" (José Mailhot, pers. comm. 2000). One doubts, however, whether the eighteenth-century Inuit were aware that Newfoundland was an insular entity. Between 1580 and ca. 1800, their known range extended only as far southward as St. George's Bay, on the west coast, and to Fogo Island, on the north-east coast (Martijn, n. d.). It is only recently that Inuit toponyms applying to vast areas such as *Nunavut* (the western Arctic), *Nunavik* (arctic Quebec), Hudson Bay, Baffin Island, etc., have come into use, as a result of negotiations relating to territorial rights. Traditionally, place names usually referred to locations more limited in size — such as

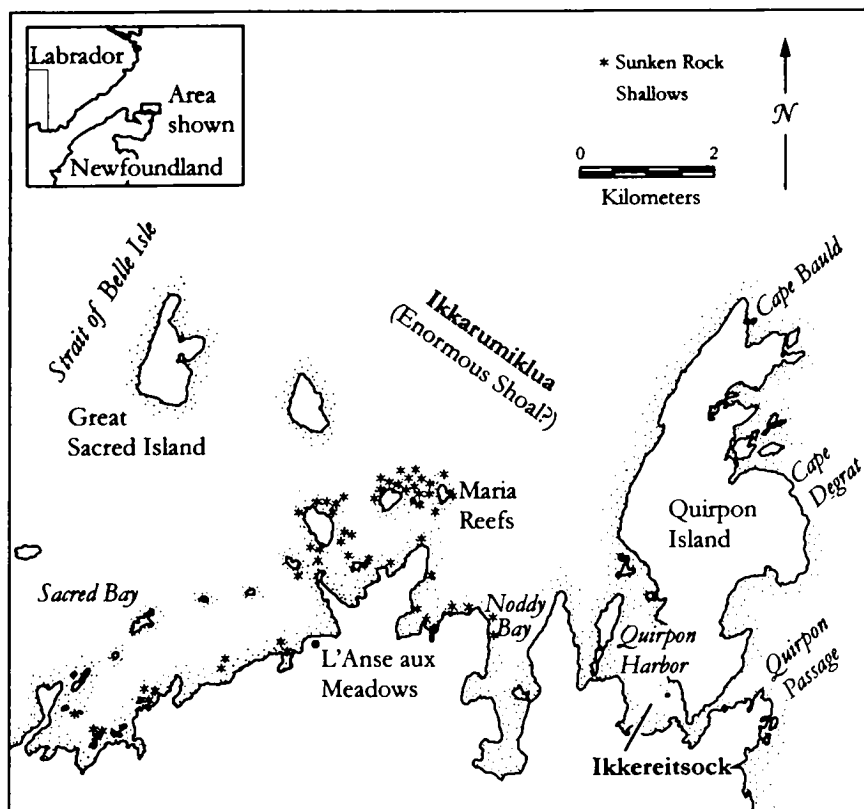


Figure 2. The proposed identification of the Inuit toponyms *Ikkarumiklua* and *Ikkereitsock*, near Quirpon, Newfoundland.

a bay, a river, a small or middle-sized island, a lake, a cape, a hill, etc. (Mason 1985, Müller-Wille 1987).

It is quite possible then that the eighteenth-century Inuit used a plural form, *ikkaruvigsuat* = "enormous shoals", which only applied to a more restricted area, in northern Newfoundland, where they commonly landed. One wonders how the Moravian missionary Drachard actually phrased his question to the Inuit. Is it really reasonable to believe that the latter were familiar with the English name "Newfoundland"? He must have asked them something along the lines of "What do you call that land across from us?" (on the south side of the Strait of Belle Isle). In reply, they probably provided him with a descriptive term for the area where they customarily arrived after having crossed over, and hence of practical significance to them, namely, "where there are extensive shoals". We can only regret that the Moravians,

on that occasion in 1765, did not ask their informants to draw a map of whatever part of Newfoundland was known to them.⁵

The second place name, *Ikkereitsock*, for Quirpon Harbour, is more problematic. It could be the equivalent of *ikkaritsug* meaning, “that (place) which runs aground” or “that (place) which touches land”, from *ikkarit-* = “to run aground”, and *-sug* = “that which”.⁶ This form seems somewhat awkward for use as a toponym, and one would have expected instead *Ikkarivvi*, meaning “there where one runs aground”, from *ikkarit-* = “to run aground”, and *-vik* = “there where”. Another possible etymology would be *ikirasag*, meaning “passage”. Such an hypothesis is all the more plausible since here the Moravian interviewer wrote *ikke*, instead of *ikka-* as in the first toponym, suggesting that in the second instance the orthograph *ikke-* might well correspond to the *iki-* of *ikirasag* instead of the *ikka-* of *ikkaritsug*. It remains to be explained, however, why we were given *Ikkereitsock* and not *Ikkerasock*. The sound *ei* could well correspond to the first letter *a* of *ikirasag*, but why *ts* and not simply *s*? In ancient Inuit grammatical usage, irrespective of dialect, the dual of a word terminating in *-sag* was *-tsak*, for two entities, and the plural *-tsat*, for three entities or more. Thus we have the singular *ikirasag* = “an entry passage” or “strait”; the dual *ikiratsak* = “two entry passages”; and the plural *ikiratsat* = “several entry passages”. The name *Ikkereitsock* could therefore correspond to *ikiratsak*, “two entry passages”, or perhaps *ikiratsat*, “several entry passages”. We tend to favour the dual form *ikiratsak*, since *Ikkereitsock* was given a *ck* and not a *t*, for an ending. In fact, Quirpon Harbour has two entries, the main one from the northwest and the second one, Little Quirpon Harbour passage, from the east. This leads us to believe that the Inuit name *Ikkereitsock*, for Quirpon, meant “two entry passages”.

Unfortunately, the systematic inventory of Native toponyms in Eastern Canada has been a relatively late undertaking. The four eighteenth-century Innu and Inuit place names discussed here provide an inkling of the resultant loss to our understanding of aboriginal history in Newfoundland. Our archives contain stilled voices and forgotten names which merit reanimation, in order to break through that past silence, allowing us to hear and to comprehend anew.

Notes

¹The authors thank José Mailhot and Gerald E. McNulty for their collaboration in the research.

²If it is a changed form (*nāpau* < *nīpau*) there should be a different ending — *k* or *t*.

³We are indebted to Michel Gaumond for this suggestion.

⁴It might be noted too that l'Anse aux Meadows, where the Norse established a small settlement around A.D. 1010, is located in a cove just west of Noddy Harbour.

⁵According to O'Dea, "no...Newfoundland Eskimo maps appear to have survived" (1967: 238). For a discussion on Inuit mapmaking abilities and map content, see Lewis 1998 :154-170.

⁶In historical Labrador Inuktitut speech this word would actually be pronounced *ikkarittuq* (with a double *t* instead of a *ts* at the end). The *ts* variant *ikkaritsuq* is typical of Greenlandic and certain Central and Western Inuit dialects, but not of the Labrador dialect, at least not since the nineteenth century.

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