



Southwest Arm, Random Sound 2016

In 2015 the [Provincial Archaeology Office](#) was approached by members of the [Southwest Arm Historical Society](#) with regard to learning more about archaeological sites in their area and perhaps, with the help of the PAO, recording more sites.

PAO staff returned to the area in 2016 for a more extensive survey (Figure 1). We started by traveling in a small cabin cruiser to Long Island which is east of Heart's Ease Beach. Having examined air photos of the island during the spring we realized the island had archaeological potential in two or three spots on the west side of the island. We stopped at the first small peninsula on the North West side of the island. Very quickly we recognized the remains of a possible structure as evidenced by a large square shape with low earthen mound walls near the beach. Test pits were negative for historic resources inside the mounded area. Proceeding north we walked to the end of the peninsula where we found another smaller square structure (3.90m x 3.7m) again as evidenced by a low mound. A test pit in the centre of the structure uncovered a single square nail. We returned to our zodiac and tested another small peninsula on the west side of the island and a grass covered area on the south end of the island. Both areas were negative for historic resources.



Figure 1 Southwest Arm, Random Sound survey area. Purple line is the track log for two days of survey.

We returned to the zodiac and then to the cabin cruiser which took us to the southern shore of Random

Island and to a cove called Salmon Cove. This appears to be the only place for about 10 kilometres along this side of Random Island where a boat could safely land because of rocks and the sheer cliffs in the area. On either side of Salmon Cove the cliffs are more than 500 feet high and just over one kilometre to the east they are more than 650 feet high (Figure 2).

Our local informant, guide and boatman, Lester Green told us that this cove was used to build fishing schooners in the winter likely in the late 19th or early 20th century. At the back end of the cove at low tide you can still see the footings for the wooden posts used to support the wharfs and piers that at one time would have lined this area of Salmon Cove. Along the shoreline and amongst the footings we found numerous 19th and 20th century European artifacts. We were surprised to also find a large grey Conception Bay Formation (Trinity Bay) chert flake (Figure 3).



Figure 2 The Salmon Cove site is on the light green coloured terrace at the back of the cove.

Climbing more than 50 feet up from the beach to the only inhabitable land in the cove we were greeted by a series of mostly grass and small bush covered ridges. We dug four test pits in randomly placed areas and recovered a mixed deposit of precontact lithic and European artifacts including whitewares and glass. Most of the precontact material was of Conception Bay Formation chert, some Cow Head chert flakes and there were one or two Ramah chert flakes. There were also plenty of slate flakes. The soil cover in the area was very thin and as a result neither test pit was more than 15 centimetres deep before hitting bedrock. With our testing complete we returned to the cabin cruiser and then to Little Heart's Ease for the night.



Figure 3 Artifacts found on the beach at Salmon Cove. Ceramics on the left, Conception Bay Formation (Trinity Bay) chert flake in the centre and a ceramic Bears head on the right.

The next morning we hiked along a well-worn path that was once used to go from Little Heart's Ease to communities to the north such as the now abandoned communities of Batt's Cove and Claypitts as well as the current Gooseberry Cove and perhaps even Southport. Along this pathway is a red slate bedrock outcrop known locally as 'Halfway Rock'. This rock has been carved by locals for more than 130 years. As such, an area of about 1 metre wide by 1.2 metres high is covered in graffiti including numerous initials, dates, full names, small illustrations and at least one cross (Figure 4). Virtually anywhere there was an open space someone has carved something.



Figure 4 Top: Halfway rock in situ. Middle: Cross & initials. Bottom: Date 1880 & church (?).

Once we had finished recording the rock we walked to a small and now abandoned (Except for cabins) community known as Claypitts or Claytids. The first thing we did was visit the former communities' graveyard. We suspect there are at least 18 to 20 burials in the area based on undulations in the ground and small unmarked slate & sandstone grave markers. There are five formal headstones, the oldest being that of George Vardy dating to 1880, the others are for members of the Benson family and date to the early 1900s (Figure 5).



Figure 5 Claypitts graveyard.

Exploring the area around the graveyard we found a former cellar pit just over 30 metres to the North West. It measured approximately 1.5 metres wide by 1.5 metres deep.

Walking to the east we came across the base of a rectangular multi-tiered dry-laid stone structure. It measured approximately 5.2 x 4.8 metres and the walls ranged from 1 metre to 50 centimetres wide. There was a clear door way which was 50 centimetres wide and faced to the north. The exact function of this structure is unknown (Figure 6).



Figure 6 Stone structure at Claypitts.

At numerous other places along the walking trail we came across small openings in the underbrush which were clearly used as gardens in the past. In fact some of the clearings were still being used for this purpose.

We also found the remains for a mid-19th century house that likely belong to the Benson family. Fragments of ceramic, brick and a slate fire place were clearly visible in the middle of the trail and under a large spruce tree.

The final stop on our walk was to another small and now abandoned community known as Batts Cove. Testing in a former garden and possible structure uncovered a few small ceramic fragments and two square nails. Once again we also visited the former communities' graveyard (Figure 7). This graveyard was slightly earlier and somewhat smaller than Claypitts. There were 15 or 16 burials based on undulations in the ground as well as formal headstones and the typical unmarked slate head/foot markers. The earliest headstone dated to 1875 and all were related to the Shaw family. Having recorded this cultural material at Batts Cove we returned to Little Heart's Ease and I drove back to St. John's.



Figure 7 Claypitts graveyard.