

¹ Previously, “Uumajuqsiurvik.”

Overview/Introduction

Over the course of one week (July 30th to August 5th, 2024) a small field crew consisting of Principal Investigator Sean Desjardins (University of Groningen), Justin Mikki (field assistant and guide, Igloodlik, NU), Shyong En Pan (Canadian Museum of Nature), Salomon Mikki (bear monitor and guide, Igloodlik, NU) carried out extensive archaeological survey/mapping work at the small island site Qaiqsut (NiHa-1), (in the vicinity of 69°28'07.7"N -80°18'32.8"W). The original goal of the 2024 fieldwork was to visit and survey four sites across the northern Foxe Basin region: Siuraq (NjHc-1), Kapuiviit (NjHa-1), Qaiqsut and Qalirusiq (NiHf-1) on Igloodlik Island, if time permitted. All travel was to be carried out by boat. Ultimately, heavy sea-ice conditions lasting well into the summer limited our ability to travel widely; this, in addition to advice from our guides and other locals regarding wildlife at Kapuiviit, led us to focus our limited field time to planned work at Qaiqsut, where our small field camp was established at one of two modern camping locales on the southwest portion of the island (see Figure 1).

The fieldwork carried out in 2024 was part of the larger project TRACES (Tracking Long-Term Resilience in Arctic Sociocultural-Ecological Systems), scheduled to run from 2024-2029. The project has several work packages designed to shed light on Amitturmiut subsistence harvesting from the 12th century AD to present. Nirjutiqarviulaqtut (ᑎᓯᔭᑦᑏᓐᒃᕈᑦᑏᓐᑦ), Work Package 2 of TRACES, deals specifically with the archaeology and traditional Inuit knowledge about past hunting practices. TRACES is funded through a Starting Grant from the European Research Council (ERC; grant no. 101116504), and led by PI Sean P. A. Desjardins, Assistant Professor at the Arctic Centre, University of Groningen, the Netherlands. TRACES has been supported by the Board of the Igloodik Hunters and Trappers Association, and permits/licenses for the 2024 archaeological fieldwork were obtained from the Nunavut Department of Culture and Heritage and Inuit Heritage Trust (Archaeology Class II), the Qikiqtani Inuit Association (Land Access Authorization Exemption Certificate), as well as the exemption received from NWB addressed here.

Setting and research background

The archaeological site Qaiqsut effectively covers the entirety of the small island of the same name, situated approx. 60km north/northeast of the Igloolik hamlet. The northern half of the island is well-elevated (max., approx. 23m), and much of the island features a mix of rocky outcrops, thick sod (especially at the southern end) and sandy beaches to the north and east.

The only recorded archaeological investigation of the island was by Danish researcher Jørgen Meldgaard, who visited a number of sites in northern Foxe Basin in 1954. At Qaiqsut, he recounts spending four days excavating three “Dorset” (Tuniit) houses completely out of a total of eight he identified². Notably, Meldgaard’s sketch map of the site is missing from available records, and he makes no mention of the significant Thule/historic Inuit features on the southern end of the island (see Figure 1). Meldgaard submitted two bone fragments from his excavations of the Tuniit features for radiocarbon testing; however, the resulting dates are likely unreliable: [K-1044](#) was a portion of walrus bone, and thus, subject to the marine reservoir effect, while [K-504](#) seems to have been a portion of caribou antler, which may have been retained for an indeterminate period after the animal’s death.

² Meldgaard, J. 1954. Report on the Archaeological Work Performed during the Investigations in the Igloodik Area. MS 601, v.1. Archaeology Archives, Canadian Museum of History, Ottawa.

In 2012, archaeologist Sylvie LeBlanc briefly visited the site with Iglulingmiut knowledge-holders; however, work at the site had not been planned, and poor weather prevented investigations, though much important traditional knowledge about recent-historic Inuit activity at the site was recorded³.

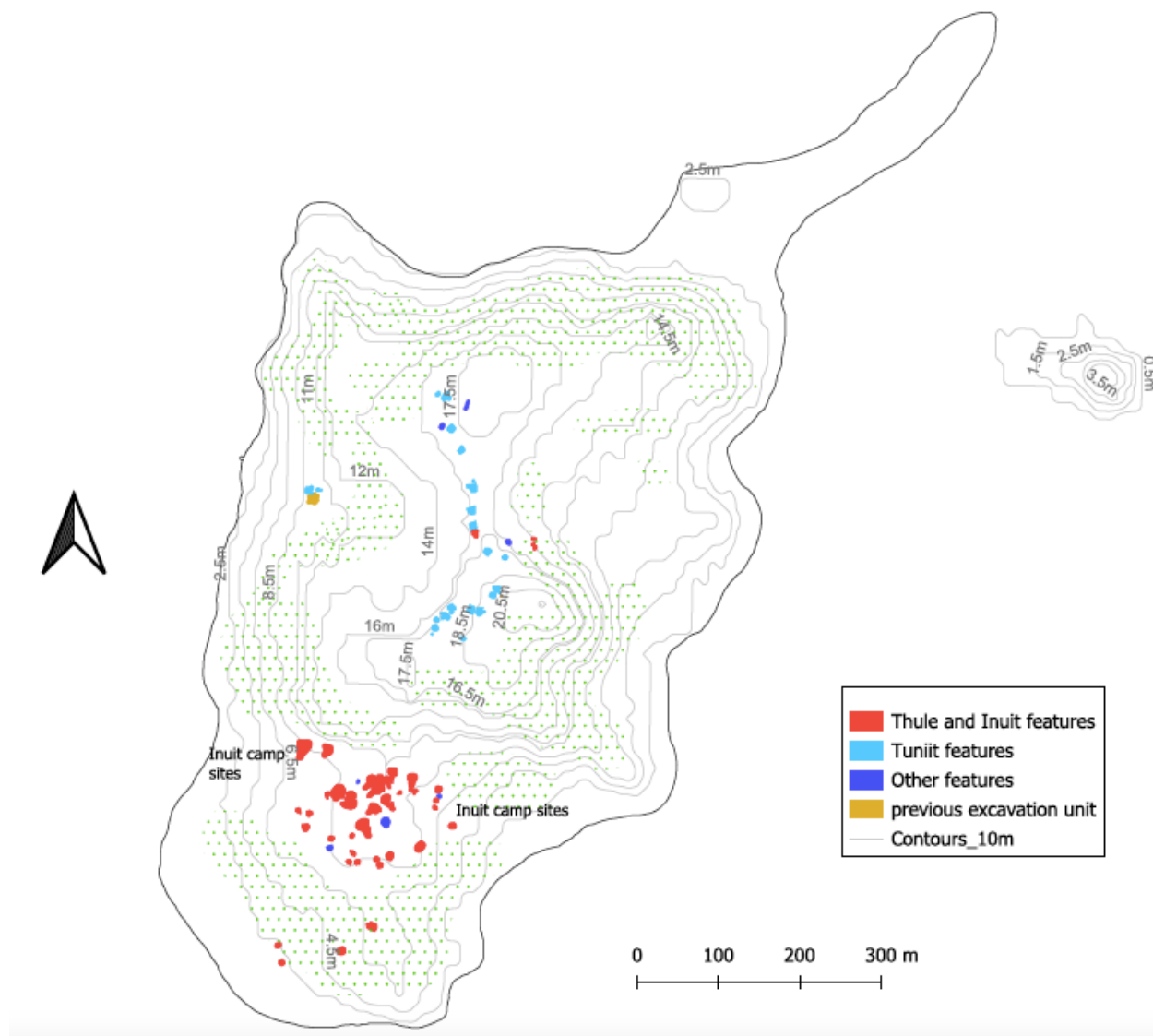


Figure 1. Site map of Qaiqsut based on the 2024 fieldwork.

Fieldwork description

The 2024 survey at Qaiqsut was carried out primarily on foot, with data on cultural features recorded via (a) two Emlid Reach RS+ RTK GNSS receivers (rover + base), capable of centimeter-level accuracy, and (b) an iPad equipped with a Lidar scanner. (Unfortunately, an equipment failure prevented our use of a drone to collect aerial imagery of the site.) All house features and most substantial Tuniit (Late Dorset Pre-Inuit)

³ LeBlanc, S. 2012. The Inuksuit Project 2012 Field Program in Ikpikitturjuaq, Northern Baffin Island, Final Permit Report. Nunavut Department of Culture, Language, Elders and Youth Permit No. 2012-09A.

and (Thule/Historic) Inuit features were mapped using the RTK receivers, 3D-scanned with the iPad, photographed and described in both digital and written notes.

Importantly, **no Tuniit or Inuit cultural belongings (artifacts) were collected, and no cultural features (e.g., houses, tent rings, caches, etc.) were disturbed during the course of the fieldwork.**

Preliminary results

The survey revealed a total of 76 features—67 more than Meldgaard, including a further 10 Tuniit houses beyond his nine (see Table 1). Establishing dates for the Qaiqsut houses, both Tuniit and Inuit, is difficult. It is clear from local knowledge—including from Salomon Mikki (pers. comm. 2024), who has frequented the length and breadth of Qaiqsut since childhood—that the Inuit sod houses were considered very old as long ago as the 1950s. This may indicate they were roughly contemporaneous with similarly-sized Thule Inuit sod house sites at nearby sites, such as Pingiqqalik (NgHd-1) and Uglit (NfHd-1).

Culture and feature type	Number
Tuniit (Late Dorset Pre-Inuit) houses	18
Robust Thule Inuit sod houses	15
Thule/Inuit light sod houses (qarmat)	15
Thule/Inuit dance houses (qaggit)	2
Thule/Inuit heavy tent rings	2
Other Tuniit features (likely)	7
Other Inuit features (likely)	13
Indet. features	4
TOTAL	76

Table 1. Preliminary tally of archaeological features identified during the 2024 field season at Qaiqsut.

Our 2024 field crew was fortunate to locate four weathered and lichen-covered caribou (tuktu; *Rangifer tarandus*) bone fragments on the surface (sod) near a small number of the Tuniit houses. We believed these may indeed be associated with the Tuniit occupation; as such, the fragments were collected for eventual radiocarbon testing at the Centre for Isotope Research at the University of Groningen. (An analysis request has already been approved by the IHT Board, and we hope to begin the sampling soon.). **No further work on the part of the Nirjutiqarviulauqtut/TRACES team is planned for Qaiqsut.**

Land/water use in 2024 and community consultation

The general condition of both the archaeological features at the site, and the island itself, is good. There is no obvious evidence of either human-induced or environmental disturbance. Our own field crew established no permanent structures on the island, and nothing was left behind at our small campsite (at approx. 69°28'0.354"N -80°19'2.6904"W). There are no freshwater sources on Qaiqsut; water for the

crew was brought in by boat from Igloolik municipal sources. All garbage was removed by boat to be deposited in the Igloolik municipal dump. Personal waste (sewage) was buried near the beaches. There were no notable sightings of or interactions with wildlife (i.e., caribou, marine mammals or polar bears). All preliminary research findings—as well as updates on the condition of the site—were presented to the Igloolik IHT Board on August 7th, 2024; an in-person follow-up consultation for the Board, as well as a community-wide presentation, is scheduled for winter of 2025.

Acknowledgements

This work would not have been possible without the support of several institutions, including (but not limited to) the Igloolik Hunters and Trappers Association, the Municipality of Igloolik, Inuit Heritage Trust, the Canadian Museum of Nature and the Nunavut Department of Culture and Heritage. For the insights gained over many years of fieldwork in the North, I thank community members in Inuit Nunangat who have permitted me to work alongside them, particularly in Igloolik. Special thanks to Juuta Sarpinak, Lloyd Idlout, Salomon Mikki, Rebecca Mikki, Justin Mikki, Jeena Kadmutsiak, Scott Kadmutsiak, Carolyn Tapardjuk; Michael Irngaut, Zipporah Ungalaq, Emily Ruiz Puerta, Lesley Howse and Torsten Diesel and Sylvie LeBlanc.

Appendix: Photographs

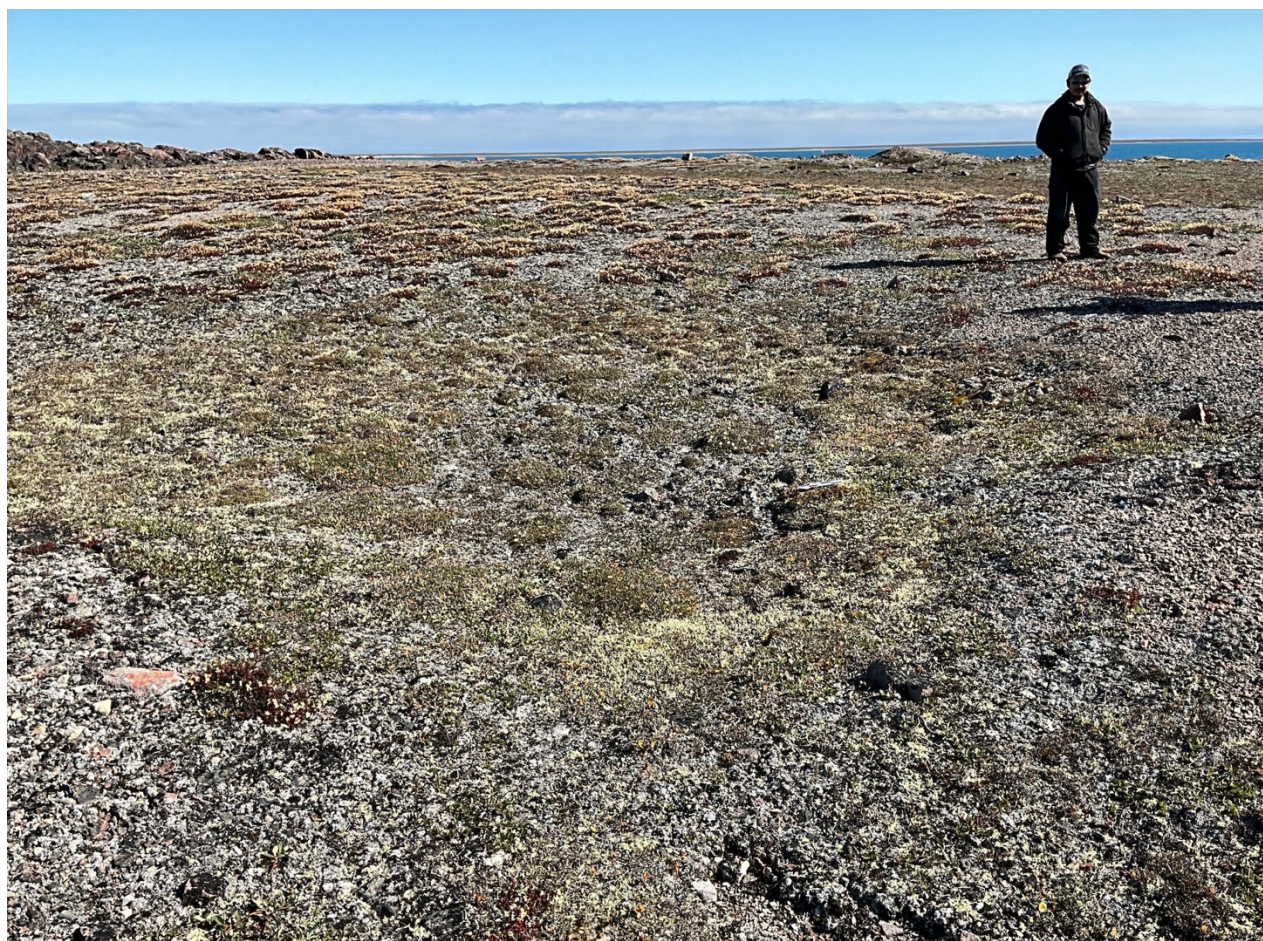


Figure 2. Feature F5, a Tuniit house feature, undisturbed. Field assistant and guide Justin Mikki stands nearby.



Figure 3. Feature F35, a Thule/Inuit house feature, showing the entrance passage and central activity area.