



Gouvernement du Québec
Ministère des Transports
Service de l'Environnement

ARCHEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL STUDY OF THE IMMEDIATE ENVIRONS OF THE VILLAGE OF TASIUJAQ

NORTHERN QUEBEC AIRPORTS DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

ARCHÉOTEC
centre de recherche
en archéologie et
en géomorphologie

A SYNTHESIS

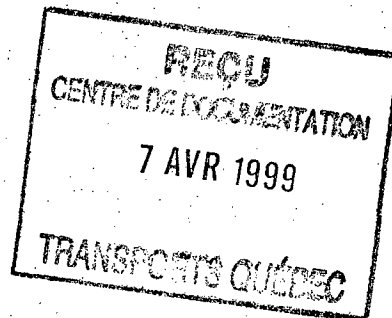
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

On July 17, 1984, the Ministère des Transports du Québec commissioned the Montreal based firm Les Entreprises Archéotec, Inc. to produce an archaeological potential study of the Tasiujaq area (south-west coast of Ungava Bay on the south shore of Rivière aux Feuilles (Leaf River)).

This study is part of the Northern Quebec Airport Development Project and aims specifically at

- defining, justifying and mapping areas of high, medium and low probability of finding archaeological remains in an area not exceeding 5 kilometers from the center of the Village of Tasiujaq;
- and proposing state of the art archaeological intervention measures and expertise in the case of future field surveys.

The detailed french report on which this synthesis is based on comprises chapters on the methodological approach used by Archéotec to determine the potential areas and the environmental and archaeological framework of the study. A map

(scale 1:20 000) and a description of the archaeological potential areas are also included whereas concluding remarks concern recommendations referring to future fieldwork.

Herein we will focus mainly on the general framework and conclusions put forward in the detailed report.

2.0 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Basically, an archaeological potential study confronts cultural data relating to the ways in which a human population occupies and exploits a certain territory, with the physical and environmental setting of this same territory.

Topography, geology, geomorphology, distribution of faunal and floral resources are but some very important factors influencing possible land use by a given human population. These physical attributes must be put in relation with the population's cultural attributes, namely daily and seasonal activities of the people, their technology, the animals and resources that they seek and their religious and mythical beliefs.

The more we go back in time, the more it is difficult to relate these cultural and environmental attributes. It is one of Archaeology's goal to ascertain these factors and to expand on the nature of their specific and respective evolution in time.

Geomorphological data, of which much is known, are very reliable in this respect because geomorphic processes and

their resulting landforms evolve very slowly in time. That is why so much emphasis is put on them in this study.

The Tasiujaq study zone is divided in areas of high (A), medium (B) and low (C) archaeological potential. These areas take in account physical land factors and the possibility of human adaptation to them. For example, it is generally agreed that a bay with a sandy and/or gravelly beach, revealing a small river outlet and sheltering from the northern winds, offers a very suitable place to disembark and install a settlement. This does not mean, of course, that other less seemingly suitable environs could not have been chosen by possible land users. In this study, we put forward that certain physical attributes in the area of Tasiujaq have had practically the same dominant influence on settlement patterns since prehistoric times.

3.0 ENVIRONMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS

Tasiujaq is located on the west bank of baie Profonde (Deep Bay) at the mouth of Bérard River (Finger River) on the Rivière aux Feuilles (Leaf River) estuary. This coastal zone is characterized by very high tides. Combined with highrising bedrock capes and coves in the area, these factors inhibit access to certain portions of the land. Landforms associated to the coast feature mostly marine sediments (beaches, boulder fields) deposited, after the retreat of the last glacial

outflow, by the so-called Iberville Sea 7500 years ago.

At that time the sea level was 155 meters higher than today. It covered all of the study area. When the first inhabitants came to the Ungava Bay region some 4000 years ago, the sea had then receded to a level that is 20 meters higher than today. Thus it is important to examine and survey the old beach ridges that now cover parts of the interior of the land.

Minor climatic fluctuations in the last thousands of years have also been put forward by, among others, vegetation studies. We know for instance that tundraic conditions have always prevailed in this area but changes in weather conditions (on a century basis) have resulted in fluctuations of shrub and tree distribution and density. The same applies to faunal resources which have been present on the territory in lesser or higher fashion depending on climatic and vegetation conditions and variability. More studies on these subject matters would give us a better idea of these fluctuations influencing probable land use.

Based on the fact that environmental studies show that general conditions have been left practically unchanged for the last 5000 years, we assume that the early inhabitants of the Tasiujaq area exploited the region in search of the same resources that are still available today with special emphasis put on sea mammal and migratory bird hunting.

4.0 CHARACTERISTICS OF HUMAN OCCUPATION

Archaeological sites dating back perhaps up to 2000 years have been discovered on the Gyrfalcon Islands at the mouth of Rivière aux Feuilles (Leaf River). These sites are proof that prehistoric human populations have inhabited the region for a very long time. Possible archaeological evidences have also been found near the village. In other areas of Ungava Bay, archaeological sites have been found giving clear indications that these areas attracted different human groups. They were either influenced by resource availability and/or by scarceness of a suitable settlement area.

Objects usually found in prehistoric sites show that stone tools were used to make bone or wooden implements, to process hides, to mount spears, arrows and harpoons. Built over depressions, the dwellings consisted of structures made out of stones and wooden poles covered with hides. Inside the dwelling, stone or earth platforms were used as sleeping areas and/or storing areas. Sometimes tunnel entries were erected with stone slabs.

Some prehistoric dwellings discovered were longhouses measuring up to several tens of meters; such a structure implies that many families resided under the same roof seasonally.

Traditional Inuit activities also help us to understand how hunters exploit faunal resources and choose their settlement areas. Based on these informations, it is probable that the Tasiujaq village area as well as the study zone was occu-

pied more regularly in the Spring and in the Fall. It is most likely that the early inhabitants settled there for migratory bird hunting purposes and for fishing in the Bérard River (Finger River). Beluga hunting was also extensively practiced.

Though we cannot assume that human populations had exactly the same behaviour in prehistoric and historic times, we suggest that the environmental setting influenced their settlement choice in the same manner at various time periods.

5.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL AREAS

It is our belief that the Tasiujaq village area may have been occupied by human populations at the same time as the Ungava Bay some 4000 years ago. Occupation of the land has been going on since then.

Areas of probable settlement have been identified, evidence of prehistoric, historic and recent events have been added and mapped on this 90,8 square kilometer study zone. The results show that

- a total of 25,6 square kilometers of land (28,2%) consist in high (A) archaeological potential areas. This indicates that if there are archaeological sites to be found in these zones, they should most probably be discovered in these high potential areas;
- a total of 5,3 square kilometers of land (5,8%) consist in medium (B) archaeological potential areas; in these zones there is a good chance of finding sites;

- the remaining 59,9 square kilometers of land (66,0%) consist in low (C) archaeological potential areas; very few sites should be found in these zones though some verifications are necessary to be certain.

In conclusion, we stress the importance of conducting archaeological field surveys in any of the above mentioned A and B areas before the start of land development construction programs.

Archaeological sites are a key to the past and must be preserved and studied in the best possible ways.

6.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many published reports were necessary in the making of this study. The complete list of references appears in the detailed french version. We would like to express our thanks to D. Roy and C. Adams for the use of their preliminary report (June 1984) on the archaeology of the Tasiujaq area.
