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Re-Presenting the Past: A New Archaeological Outreach Strategy for the Canadian Territory of Nunavut

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Abstract: In 2013, an Arctic-based organization known as the Inuit Heritage Trust spearheaded a new campaign to increase archaeological awareness in the Canadian territory of Nunavut. While Nunavut remains an Inuit-centered territory—founded on the knowledge and values that have long sustained its predominantly Inuit population—the rules and regulations surrounding archaeological resources are largely grounded in more scientific, and distinctly non-Inuit, valuations of the past. For multiple reasons, Inuit and non-Inuit traditions for understanding and preserving heritage resources have proved difficult to reconcile, despite numerous attempts at community outreach programs and the regular hosting of archaeological fieldschools. For many Inuit, the methodological and impersonal approach to history endorsed by incoming archaeologists remains a foreign concept. This paper will present a series of community resources developed as part of the Inuit Heritage Trust’s new archaeological awareness campaign, produced in partnership with archaeologists Brendan Griebel and Tim Rast. These resources seek to address the question of how to educate about Nunavut’s past through a framework that aligns with the interests and realities of both professional archaeologists and Inuit populations. To date, this campaign has produced two unique resources: the first, a guidebook series that explores archaeology’s relevance to community members, students and heritage workers in Nunavut, and the second, a portable excavation and experimental archaeology kit. While the campaign does not intend to change the way that either Inuit or archaeologists value the past, it does attempt to create a mutual awareness of differing worldview so that both groups might better navigate the complex landscape of regulation and interaction ascribed to Nunavut’s heritage resources.

Keywords: Nunavut, Inuit, community archaeology, indigenous heritage, public archaeology, Inuit Heritage Trust, experimental archaeology.

1 Introduction

In the Canadian Arctic, the high degree of separation that exists between incoming researchers and Inuit communities—whether measured in terms of knowledge traditions, contrasting worldview, or differing social conventions—has been a longstanding and particularly sensitive issue (Huntington 2005, ITK 2007). This is no different with the practice of archaeology in Nunavut. Despite the profession’s extensive history

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of interaction with the territory’s people and landscape, there is a sense that the discipline is not, and might never be, something that fully belongs to Inuit. Put simply, few Inuit know what archaeology is or how it is done, yet many feel that it does not play a large role in their lives.

While public disconnect from archaeological practice is not unheard of in many contexts around the world (Rockman and Flatman 2011), the situation in Nunavut is particularly unique. Roughly 85% of the people inhabiting Canada’s northernmost territory of Nunavut are indigenous Inuit. Many of these Inuit also refer to themselves as ‘Nunavummiut’ (sing. Nunavummiut), an Inuktitut language term that references the resident population of Nunavut, and which is inclusive of Inuit-and non-Inuit alike. In 1993, Nunavut became the site of the world’s largest indigenous land claim settlement (NLCA 1993), with roughly 350,000 of the total 2 million square kilometers of settlement land dedicated to collective Inuit ownership. This land claim agreement provided the first step towards the creation of Nunavut as a Canadian territory in 1999. Nunavut, which translates as “our land” in the Inuktitut language, became an experiment in indigenous self government: a semi-autonomous Inuit homeland governed by unique policies designed to ensure the representation of Inuit people and the continuation of the group’s cultural, historical and social well-being. By extension of their land claim settlement and culture-centric territorial policies, Inuit retain a strong voice in all dealings with environmental and cultural resources—including archaeological remains—which are found on Inuit-owned lands.

As recognized owners and caretakers of the past, Inuit have been granted decision-making powers about the process and permitting of archaeology-related activities in Nunavut. The territory’s archaeological materials are outlined as “a record of Inuit use and occupancy of lands and resources through time,” (NLCA 1993:33.2.1) and, as such, the involvement of Inuit in their identification, protection and conservation, is both “desirable and necessary” (ibid:33.2.2). Inuit consensus is capable of outweighing the desired plans of incoming archaeologists, land developers, outfitters or cruise ship organizers (Helmer, Lemoine 2002).

The same Nunavut Land Claims Agreement that grants Inuit authority over the archaeological process, however, also outlines the need for “appropriate sanctions against unauthorized disturbance of archaeological sites and specimens and unauthorized dealing in archaeological specimens” (NCLA 1993:33.5.1). When drafted, this legislation invoked formal archaeological criteria to define archaeological sites and artifacts, as well as the forms of permitted interaction that all Nunavummiut—Inuit and non-Inuit—should have with these resources (Arnold and Stenton 2002:38-42). This legislation creates the somewhat contradictory situation in which Inuit are acknowledged as owners of, and primary decision makers for, heritage resources in their territory, but are also required to meet archaeologically-inspired criteria for interacting with these same resources. This has resulted in numerous situations in which Inuit are deemed to be contradicting the same archaeological process they control. One of the most common such situations arises when Nunavummiut pick up and take home artifacts that they find out on the land. While Inuit have their own reasons for harvesting artifacts—ranging from a personal interest in the objects to the desire to prevent non-Inuit from finding and removing them—these actions result in what are territorially deemed to be ‘archaeological’ contexts being disturbed. Past public campaigns have been launched at the territorial level to curb potentially damaging involvement of Nunavummiut with archaeological areas, but tend to do so by communicating the regulations surrounding interaction with artifacts and sites, rather than exploring their importance for helping Inuit and archaeologists alike to build stories and better understandings of the Arctic past. Many valuable initiatives have been conducted over the years to bring archaeologists and Inuit closer together through fieldwork and oral history studies (see for example. Dawson et al 2010, Friesen 2002, Griebel 2010, 2013b, Lyons 2013, Lyons et al. 2010, Rowley 2002, Stenton and Rigby 1999), but these for the most part are localized case studies, aimed at a specific communities rather than changing attitudes across the territory as a whole.

To facilitate local and territorial responsibility in archaeological matters, an organization named the Inuit Heritage Trust was created in 1993 as part of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement. This organization helps to align archaeological research in Nunavut with the desires and perspectives of Inuit, a mandate typically realized through liaising between archaeological research and impacted northern communities, and the review of incoming archaeological project applications to ensure adequate participation by and benefits for Inuit. In 2013, the Inuit Heritage Trust sought to take a more active role in building archaeological awareness
across Nunavut through the development of a new public archaeology campaign in partnership between Torsten Diesel of the Inuit Heritage Trust, and Arctic archaeologists Brendan Griebel and Tim Rast. Unlike previous archaeology campaigns, this one was driven by the conscious negotiation of different perspectives on issues of archaeological regulation, ownership and training in the North. The resulting program was accordingly shaped by a desire to bridge different understandings of why the material past is important, and how it should be cared for, and to create more mutually intelligible frameworks for understanding the context and results of archaeology. In exploring how this was accomplished, this paper focuses specifically on the first two phases of the new archaeology program which include the creation of a new plain language series of community archaeology guidebooks, and a portable excavation and experimental archaeology kit.

2 Inuit Understandings of the Past

Prior to proceeding with a description of the Inuit Heritage Trust’s campaign, a brief comment should be made about how Inuit envision the history of Nunavut outside the realm of archaeology. As with archaeologists, not all Inuit understand the past in similar ways. Differences in regional culture and individual perspective abound. While Inuit have no culturally-defined methodologies for interpreting the past, certain consistencies have been recognized by Inuit authors in the relationships their people have to both concepts of the past, and its tangible remains (Anawak 1989, Weetaluktuk 1980, 1981). Old artifacts and sites, according to these authors, are well known to Inuit, but not considered off-limits due to historical importance (Anawak 1989:48). In many cases old objects are didactic tools, material mnemonics to educate the young and retain physical connections to past ways of life. As expressed by Jack Anawak (ibid, 46), “children quickly come to understand in my culture that time-honoured skills and attitudes can never be relegated solely to the past; that they ensure a way of life and survival in the present and for the future.”

Many non-Inuit researchers have also sought to articulate more theoretical dynamics of Inuit relations to the past. Traditional Inuit understandings of space and time—as developed through land-based and nomadic hunting lifestyles—are seen as constituting the basis of Inuit Qaujimajaqtuqangit (roughly defined as Inuit traditional knowledge) and continue to inform the core of everyday practice in the North (Wenzel 2004). As such, places, sites and features in the Arctic landscape—as well the landscape itself—are not simply symbols of the past, but continue to reverberate as meaningful and relevant in present understandings of belonging, cyclicity, and ancestral relationship (Sejersen 2004, Stewart et al. 2004). Historical places are absorbed into, and become part of, one’s personal and cultural identity. A similar phenomenon has been observed with Inuit understandings of time. As Jean Briggs points out (1992:87-88): “In the Inuit world, it is people who use time, not time that uses people. Inuit time is human in origin and personal in use… It is personal memories and experiences that constitute the temporal organizers and markers of lives, not abstract, generalized milestones such as ‘age’ or ‘month’ or ‘year.’”

Given the often-personal nature of both time and place in Inuit culture, it is generally understood that historical meaning is a pragmatic construction developed in relation to present day knowledge and practical requirements. Artifacts and sites are understood less as isolated historical phenomena than direct connections to contemporary “people, memories, places and things” (Lyons et al. 2010, see also Lyons 2013). Inuit classifications of history accordingly do not rest so much on criteria of archaeological realism or evidence-based credibility, but rather gain value in terms of personal connection to both the past and those who describe them.

3 Regulating Interaction with Heritage Resources

In Nunavut, interaction between people and historical remains is well regulated, yet also controversial. As with the rest of Canada, Nunavut possesses various forms of legislation that protects the territory’s artifacts and sites (Arnold and Stenton 2002, Stenton 2003). All archaeological work in Nunavut—including surveys, excavation, and artifact analysis—requires the acquisition of a permit that is jointly granted by the Government of Nunavut’s Department of Culture and Heritage, the Inuit Heritage Trust and, in most
instances, the community closest to the archaeological site of interest. As part of this permit process, researchers need to explain their intended project in plain language terms and ask for approval to carry it out. In most cases, archaeologists are also required to ensure that some form of Inuit participation takes place in their work, and that the disturbance of sites or cultural landscapes is kept to an absolute minimum. While these requirements are in place to bring archaeologists and Inuit communities closer together, the added protocol puts additional expectations on researchers whose work is already strained by multiple factors including expensive travel and logistical costs, narrow time windows for excavation, and the management of work crews in remote and often dangerous locations. The training of Nunavummiut students with no previous experience in field excavation is a beneficial, yet time-consuming, process (Rowley 2002). The presentation of archaeological findings in community settings almost inevitably encounters barriers of language and interest. Differences arise between archaeologists and Inuit communities, who envision the use and value of historical materials in dissimilar ways. While archaeologists genuinely desire close and mutually informed working partnerships with Inuit communities, these factors often conspire against the realization of such relationships.

While few formal laws govern Nunavummiut interactions with ancient sites and artifacts, best practice territorial policies have been developed and disseminated through various television commercials and poster campaigns sponsored by the Inuit Heritage Trust. These policies often loosely invoke Inuit cultural taboos against the unwarranted harvest of certain ancestral sites and artifacts. While these traditions have persisted in contemporary Inuit culture, exposure to different cultures’ valuations of materials over the past 150 years has resulted in the modification of many customs, particularly in regards to historical remains. The building of museums in many Nunavut communities, for example, has created an understanding that they are logical and sanctioned repositories for ‘all things old’ (Graburn 1998). As a result, many Nunavummiut pick up artifacts found on the land and bring them into local heritage centres with the expectation that these institutions will provide a safe and sustainable environment for their long-term care. In other instances, Nunavummiut opt to safe-keep discovered artifacts in their homes due to a lack of trust in how unknown people might otherwise handle them. Decades of observing archaeologists leaving town with bags full of historical artifacts rightly leads to rumours about them profiting immensely from the discovery and sale of these objects. While it is no longer a common occurrence, some Nunavummiut try to improve their own financial situations by selling traditional Inuit artifacts as antiques, or reworking raw materials from ancient sites into new pieces of art (Hollowell 2006, McCartney 1979).

While the removal of artifacts from their original environments is a challenge to archaeological notions of heritage preservation in Nunavut, the highest risk to archaeological areas stems from the in-situ disturbance of sites and artifacts. One way that this happens is through the actions of Nunavummiut hunters and campers (figure 1). In both past and present times, land camps are strategically chosen to be close to good hunting and harvesting grounds. As resource availability and animal migration patterns remain relatively consistent in the Arctic, it often occurs that modern campsites are built in close proximity to, or sometimes directly on top of, the remains of past campsites. These highly localized areas of human activity result in archaeological traces becoming damaged through everyday activities: children playing around old occupation sites, campers recycling materials such as stones, wood and bone from old sites for the construction of new camps, and residual damage caused through heavy traffic through the area from snow-machines, ATVs, and foot traffic. From an Inuit perspective, the re-use of proven hunting and camping sites, and the building materials they already contain, is a pragmatic and age-old tradition.

It should be noted that Nunavummiut campers and hunters are not the only groups who pose potential threats to the integrity of archaeological sites in Nunavut. Adventure tourists, cruise ship tourists, military personal engaged in large-scale Arctic exercises, mining companies, municipal hamlets and other land developers pose an equal if not larger risk to archaeological sites than the actions of individual community members. Unlike community members, however, these organizations and industries are bound by legislation to follow a review process that attempts to ensure no sites are intentionally or unintentionally damaged. This review process is generally well communicated and enforced.
Figure 1: A Thule archaeological site located near Iqaluit, Nunavut that is under threat by camping and harvesting activities. Photo by Torsten Diesel.

Figure 2: The three volumes comprising the IHT guidebook series.

4 Balancing Archaeological and Nunavummiut Interests in the Past

Over the last decade, the Inuit Heritage Trust has attempted several different approaches to creating archaeological capacity and awareness in Nunavut. Scholarships and grants specifically dedicated to the funding of heritage education and careers for Inuit have been developed. In 2005, a CD-ROM titled “Arctic Peoples and Archaeology” was developed to bring archaeology and Inuit oral history into classroom settings (IHT, NDE 2005). Between 2002 and 2008, the Inuit Heritage Trust regularly sponsored summer field schools to familiarize Nunavut high school students with the work of archaeologists. While this last program in particular produced many positive results, participating archaeologists and students alike felt that the remote and lengthy field camps were prone to overwhelming logistical and social challenges. With the temporary closure of its field archaeology program in 2009 (the field school program has since re-started in 2015), the Inuit Heritage Trust looked into alternative educational approaches to increase Nunavummiut awareness of, and interest in, archaeology. A smaller project budget and larger outreach population were desired components for this new program.
4.1 Phase 1

In 2013, the Inuit Heritage Trust contacted Nunavut-based archaeologist Brendan Griebel about collaborating on a new archaeological resource for Nunavut. The basic goal of this initiative was simple: to create accessible resources for Nunavummiut to better understand how archaeology overlaps with their own lives. This entailed not only providing them with an overview of territorial regulations that might impact their interaction with historical areas and materials, but also encouraging them to recognize their own responsibility for ensuring that incoming heritage specialists (such as archaeologists and cruise ships) follow proper protocol when interacting with these same materials.

Over the course of the following year, the group designed a series of plain-language guidebooks to get this message out to as wide a number of Nunavummiut as possible. While seemingly an antiquated delivery model in a digital world, publication still remains one of the best ways to infiltrate communities in which Internet access is plagued with issues of high cost, low bandwidth, and variable digital literacy skills. Rather than simply listing the archaeological rules and regulations as defined by the territory, the development of these books chose to start with the basic question of “what do Nunavummiut know and want to know about archaeology?” Drawing upon Nunavut-based interview contacts and methodologies developed during his earlier dissertation work (Griebel 2013b), Brendan Griebel began to compile questions and concerns that Inuit have about archaeology, and how it relates to a history that they owned. The resulting list gave a much more accurate picture of how Nunavummiut perceived the profession, and provided a strong foundation for dispelling myths and addressing archaeological issues that captured local interest. A host of organizations involved in Nunavut archaeology—including the Inuit Heritage Trust, Nunavut Parks, Parks Canada, and the Government of Nunavut’s Department of Culture and Heritage—were also consulted in regards to archaeological issues and policies they felt should be made more public.

Three guidebooks, each running approximately 50-60 pages, have emerged from the first phase of this archaeological campaign (figure 2). The first guidebook is directed towards Nunavummiut who want to more clearly understand their formal relationship and rights in regards to archaeological work within the territory. The guidebook takes a historical perspective, describing not only how the past has given shape to regional differences in Inuit culture, but also how Inuit engagement with material culture has shifted according to different phases of exposure to western influences. The discipline of archaeology is clearly outlined as one of these influences. The current rules surrounding archaeology in Nunavut are introduced within this historical trajectory, contextualized by overlapping narratives involving the Inuit political movement, land claim settlement, and the formation of Nunavut as an independent territory. This guidebook ultimately stresses the role that Inuit play in preserving and documenting the past, with or without the presence of archaeologists. In one section, for example, a platform for the community monitoring of historical sites is laid out. Many Inuit carry cellphones while travelling on the land, and therefore have the ability to take photographs. The guidebook encourages individuals to self-document located sites and artifacts by describing how to capture relevant information in a photo (i.e. scale, context, and surroundings), and listing various heritage authorities to whom the photos can be sent if further information is desired.

Another approach this guidebook takes is one of building local knowledge of archaeological legislation, regulation and processes (figure 3). By virtue of their land claims settlement, Inuit have the right to oversee how archaeology takes place in their territory, and the tools (through the archaeological permit review process) to shape the projects to community-set standards of practice. Despite this, there is little public knowledge of what information and materials archaeologists are required to provide to communities, or when they are required to provide it. This section describes, in very clear language, what protocols need to be followed around archaeological sites by archaeologists, developers, and tourism groups, and the channels that Inuit can follow to halt these groups’ work if they feel it is not taking place in an appropriate manner.

The second guidebook, titled A Guide to Nunavut Archaeology and Artifacts for Northern Students, is designed to be used in Nunavut’s grade 10-12 school curriculum. This guidebook builds on the introduction to archaeology provided in Inuit Heritage Trust’s grade 8 curriculum “Arctic Peoples and Archaeology” (IHT, NDE 2005), by having students think critically about the past and its relationship to identity, politics and
Ethnographic artifacts can be owned by individual people or museums. Special laws have been put in place that allow the Inuit Heritage Trust to request the return of ethnographic artifacts from museums collections outside of Nunavut, as long as it can be proved the objects will be transported and displayed under safe conditions.

Who owns archaeological artifacts?

Inuit own the artifacts of their ancestors. The Government of Nunavut and the Inuit Heritage Trust are responsible for overseeing the collection, research and storage of all archaeological artifacts except for:

- Public records;
- A person's private property;
- Artifacts in an area managed by Parks Canada Agency;
- Artifacts collected and owned by museums or individuals prior to the signing of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement in 1993.

Nunavut has no territorial facility to store and look after its artifacts. Because of this, artifacts are often loaned out to other institutions such as universities and museums.

Archaeologists can not keep and do not own the artifacts they find during their excavations. However, they are required to study and report on the artifacts they find, and are allowed to borrow them from Nunavut for that purpose. An annual loan agreement for the artifacts must be signed if they are borrowed longer than a year after their collection. If the Government of Nunavut and Inuit Heritage Trust both agree, an artifact can be loaned out to a museum or another institution for a long period of time.

Can archaeological artifacts be kept if found on the land?

Old artifacts should always be left undisturbed when they are found. When an artifact is moved it loses its context, or relationship with the place it was left by past generations. Lack of context makes an artifact's history more difficult to understand. The rules in Nunavut do not allow artifacts to be taken home when they are found.

Where do the artifacts collected during archaeology projects get sent?

The Nunavut Land Claims Agreement makes it clear that a specific building needs to exist in Nunavut to house archaeological collections from the territory. This building has not been constructed yet, so arrangements have been made to store collections in other facilities outside of Nunavut.

Most of the archaeological collections are stored in the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre in Yellowknife, or the Canadian Museum of History in Gatineau, Quebec. If an archaeological collection comes from Inuit Owned Lands, the Inuit Heritage Trust decides where it will be sent.

Artifacts collected from archaeological investigations in Parks Canada protected areas are stored in a specialized building in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The temperature and humidity in this building is set at levels which help to preserve very fragile artifacts.

Figure 3: A page spread from the Guide to Nunavut Archaeology and Artifacts for Northern Communities.

culture in modern day Nunavut. This emphasis on critical thinking has students consider the foundations of both archaeology and other narratives of history that are prevalent in Nunavut. Students are encouraged to form their own opinions regarding professional archaeology’s claim to scientific objectivity, while at the same time question dominant political discourse about Inuit relationships to the past. Each section of the booklet is accompanied by a series of suggested classroom discussions that help students form personal opinions about history’s various uses and values in Nunavut. In all of these discussions, archaeology is framed as a very strong and desirable research tool, albeit one that sometimes contradicts local, cultural and political narratives about Nunavut’s past. The guidebook uses this sense of opposition to encourage students’ adoption of archaeology as a profession so that they can draw on both cultural and scientific knowledge to push new boundaries for the discipline (figure 4).

The final guidebook in the IHT series is specifically designed for heritage workers in Nunavut. Many communities throughout the territory possess a tourist centre, heritage centre or some form of cultural facility that exhibits or displays cultural artifacts. Many of these facilities are staffed by individuals with no training in the handling or storing of such materials. These centers are also used by communities as repositories for artifacts that are collected out on the land. Rather than staunchly opposing the collection of artifacts, or the donation of artifacts to heritage centres, this guidebook acknowledges the reality that these acts happen and will continue to happen in northern communities. The guidebook tries to strike a balance between clearly explaining why the collection of artifacts from the land is discouraged by archaeologists, and at the same time informs heritage workers and people who have these artifacts at home how to document where they came from and take care of them properly. The guidebook covers all the essential information about stabilizing, labeling, storing and transporting artifacts. For more complicated procedures involving the maintenance of artifact collections, the guidebook directs readers towards a professional support team made up of archaeologists, conservators, more experienced museum workers, and more detailed plain language resources. All the territorial contact information for these individuals and resources is provided.
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Figure 4: Students are introduced to the idea of archaeology as a potential profession in the Guide to Nunavut Archaeology and Artifacts for Northern Students.

The Inuit Heritage Trust guidebook series ultimately tries to find areas where local understandings and interest in history intersect with the archaeological discipline. The guidebooks’ ultimate goal is to frame archaeology within the territory as a community responsibility rather than the purview of incoming researchers. It highlights the roles that Inuit, as acknowledged owner’s of Nunavut’s material heritage, can play in documenting material culture, managing the preservation of historical sites, and ensuring that incoming archaeological projects conform to the standards, expectations and regulations that have been set out for them. The content walks the fine line between encouraging archaeology as a potential profession and recognizing how archaeology’s somewhat controversial history in the North requires that Inuit think about, and respond to, its practices and ideas in a critical manner.

The completed guidebook series was officially launched in early 2015, and has since been distributed to various schools, museums and organizations throughout the territory. In 2016, the initiative was awarded the Canadian Archaeological Association’s Public Communications award, and its reception by Nunavummiut has been equally positive. All three guidebooks are currently being translated into the Inuktitut language. English copies of the guidebook are available for purchase as softcover publications, or for free as PDF downloads, at the Inuit Heritage Trust’s website: www.ihti.ca.

4.2 Phase 2

Upon completion of the first project phase, the Inuit Heritage Trust began considering more ‘tactile’ methods for Inuit to become involved with archaeology. Physical contact with historical materials has been highlighted as playing a seminal role in human engagements with the past (Jones 2007, Pye 2008), with the drawing of history and memory from material remains being particularly prevalent in Inuit culture (Gadoua 2014, Griebel 2013b, Lyons 2013). The specific intention of this project phase therefore, was to develop a series of practical workshops that would allow Inuit participants to gain hands-on experience with,
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and knowledge of, archaeological excavation and interpretation, without the additional complications of permits, schedules and logistics that usually accompany a fieldschool situation. For this program, the working group expanded to include arctic archaeologist and traditional technology specialist, Tim Rast.

The project’s first challenge was creating a kit that was able to accurately simulate the experience of encountering historical materials within the context of an archaeological dig. While several simplified ‘sandbox sites’ and cardboard container excavation exercises have been developed for elementary school learning (Brown n.d., Hoffman 2010), there were no existing models of excavation kit that met the needs of this specific project. In preparing a prototype design for a portable archaeological excavation kit, Brendan Griebel first outlined the specific logistical challenges that face travelling workshops in Nunavut. The first of these challenges is portability. Nunavut is a territory defined by distance, with each of its 25 remote communities located hundreds, if not thousands, of kilometers from one another and accessible only via air transport. Any form of travelling archaeology workshop, therefore, would have to be sufficiently compact and light so as to be shipped by air cargo between communities. Compatibility was also an issue of concern with this project. There are two distinct considerations in regards to compatibility with Nunavut communities. The first is of a material nature: any product created needed to be designed within Nunavut’s limited range of available materials. Many products are difficult to obtain in northern communities; repairs and replacements accordingly require special order shipping that is both time consuming and expensive. A missing or broken piece on any item often results in its disuse or disposal. Compatibility with Nunavut communities must also be considered in cultural terms. Any history-based project in Nunavut—even one that is distinctly archaeological in nature—should align with local understandings of how the past is known, valued and taught. The final criterion for the creation of an archaeology kit was one of flexibility. While the remote nature of traditional archaeology fieldschools in Nunavut requires that they cater to a limited amount of participants for an extended period of time, our workshop would need to meet the challenge of condensing that experience into a short delivery period for multiple audiences in a variety of different settings.

After the construction of several prototypes, a design that met the above criteria was finally created. The completed excavation kit has been created exclusively with materials easily obtainable in any Nunavut community, and is designed to pack neatly into a 48-gallon packing container. Within this container is everything required for a simulated excavation exercise (figure 5). This includes a foldable structure that assembles into a meter square unit and extends to a depth of 30 centimeters. The unit allows up to four participants at a time to excavate a 1x1 meter square (or four 50 centimeter test pits), and provides each member with a full archaeological tool kit that contains a trowel, bucket, brush, line level, plumb bob, and metric tape. Additional tools for soil screening, artifact processing, and site mapping are also available in the kit. A plain language manual also accompanies the kit, providing basic instructions for community-based facilitators to both assemble the kit and develop relevant programming around its use. As with the guidebooks, translation of the manual into Inuktitut is awaiting completion.

![Figure 5: The folding archaeology kit both in its container and fully assembled. Photo by Brendan Griebel.](image)
The archaeology kit has been designed to accommodate a broad spectrum of participant experience and social settings, ranging from student use in classrooms to heritage centre staff training and community field day events for the broader public. Interaction with the kit can entail something as simple as a five-minute drop-in visit or a full day of organized programming. This short delivery period helps to maintain the interest levels of both the facilitator and participants, and supports the kit’s potential for greater outreach. The kit is designed to be assembled by a local facilitator according to simple assembly instructions. The facilitator creates various cultural layers by combining locally obtained soil and sand with a series of artifact replicas manufactured by Tim Rast for the kit (figure 6). Changes in soil type (if multiple soil types are available) or thin strata of visibly different materials such as sawdust, gravel or pigmented sand signal the division between cultural layers.

**Figure 6**: A selection of artifacts created by Tim Rast for the Dorset cultural layer of the excavation kit. Photo by Tim Rast.

When engaged in the excavation, participants work through four of these layers to uncover and map various types of artifacts and assemble a narrative about the different cultures they are encountering. Bone fragments give clues as to the groups’ diets, artifact types indicate social and economic activities, and fragmented composite tools require investigation into how the materials might once have been assembled and used (figure 7).

**Figure 7**: A group of Iqaluit Inuksuk High School students conduct an excavation during a pilot trial of the kit in December 2015. Photo by Brendan Griebel.

The second phase of the excavation workshop entails the replication of tools uncovered during the dig. This is an opportunity for Inuit participants to move beyond historical objects as ‘artifacts’ to better understand the materials and techniques used by their ancestors. Through simple hands-on learning, participants
work with facilitators and local elders to create their own stone tools. The kits have been stocked with the materials required to construct roughly one hundred ground slate uluit, or semi-lunar knives through traditional methods of slate grinding and bow-drill use. This workshop not only helps participants draw connections between Inuit knowledge and archaeological practice, but also opens up the world of archaeological science to possibilities beyond the bucket and spade.

To date, the papers authors have piloted the archaeology kit in a variety of situations with Iqaluit High School students, Department of Education staff, Nunavut teachers, and Parks Canada/Nunavut Parks staff. Two kits are currently in active circulation throughout the territory, available for use by local organizations or incoming archaeologists. We envision this kit as a strong tool for both Inuit communities and schools to teach themselves about excavation, and for archaeologists to bring their field season excavations back to communities in an interactive and feasible manner. While sustained interest in learning about archaeological methodologies through these kits has, admittedly, been mixed during our pilot tests, there has been a general consensus that gaining exposure to, and understanding of, archaeological methods over the course of 23 hour sessions, is far more efficient than embarking on a full-scale excavation. Participants who enjoyed the meticulous process of digging and recording artifacts, communicated their desire to seek out employment in a ‘real excavation’ at some point in the future.

5 Discussion

The two phases of the Inuit Heritage Trust’s archaeology awareness campaign ultimately intend to strengthen the relationship between archaeologists and Nunavummiut. For Nunavummiut, the program turns the profession of archaeology into a less-complex set of ideas that can be realized through hands-on training without the pressure of a foreign researcher’s agenda or authority, or the tedium of weeks in the field. More than anything, it creates the much-needed opportunity for community-driven conversation about history that can take place between a diverse cross-section of youth, elders, and community members. Whereas in most archaeological projects few local people have the expertise to contribute to such a conversation, this program allows various local experts to emerge in fields of traditional tool making, artifact interpretation, and workshop guidance. The campaign provides Inuit with the opportunity to learn about archaeology through their own frameworks of knowledge building, their own questions, and the ultimate understanding that they are responsible for the management of both archaeological practice and the historical materials the profession seeks to document.

For archaeologists, the newly created archaeology campaign meets several outreach objectives. It encourages Nunavummiut to become better informed about basic archaeological procedures and to understand ideas of chronology and conservation. The guidebook series, for example, provides suggestions on who to contact if artifacts or sites are discovered or how to report situations in which industry and developees are not following proper archaeological protocol. The archaeology kit in particular sensitizes participants to the importance of context, and its accompanying implications for leaving archaeological sites and artefacts undisturbed. Most importantly, the program helps to build Inuit interest in the processes and outcomes of archaeology. In a territory that requires Inuit approval for all incoming archaeological research, having more Nunavummiut who understand and appreciate the significance of the work helps to dispel rumour and misinformation that might otherwise prevent project permission from being granted.

6 Conclusion

The Inuit Heritage Trust recognizes that two very different understandings of the past are at play in Nunavut. Their new archaeology campaign is not designed to synthesize these understandings, or replace the valuable first hand experiences that often accompany the meeting of these mindsets during archaeological fieldwork. The goal of this campaign is to create an important foundation of knowledge to help Nunavummiut and archaeologists alike navigate an archaeological system that itself is clearly divided.
By beginning to understand the ideas and practices that motivate professional archaeology, Inuit can more effectively exert their decision-making powers over when, where and how archaeological excavations should take place in the territory. Archaeologists, in turn, profit immensely from increased local interest in, and comprehension of, their research. They can begin to draw novel information and forms of engagement from the admixture of their profession with the social and cultural needs of Nunavummiut. While the Inuit Heritage Trust continues to support the development of archaeologist-assisted fieldschools and interpretive talks, the campaign to develop archaeological resources that can be independently used, taught, and appreciated by Inuit themselves remains an ongoing priority.

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