

Archaeological Research in the Gaspé Peninsula, Preliminary Report

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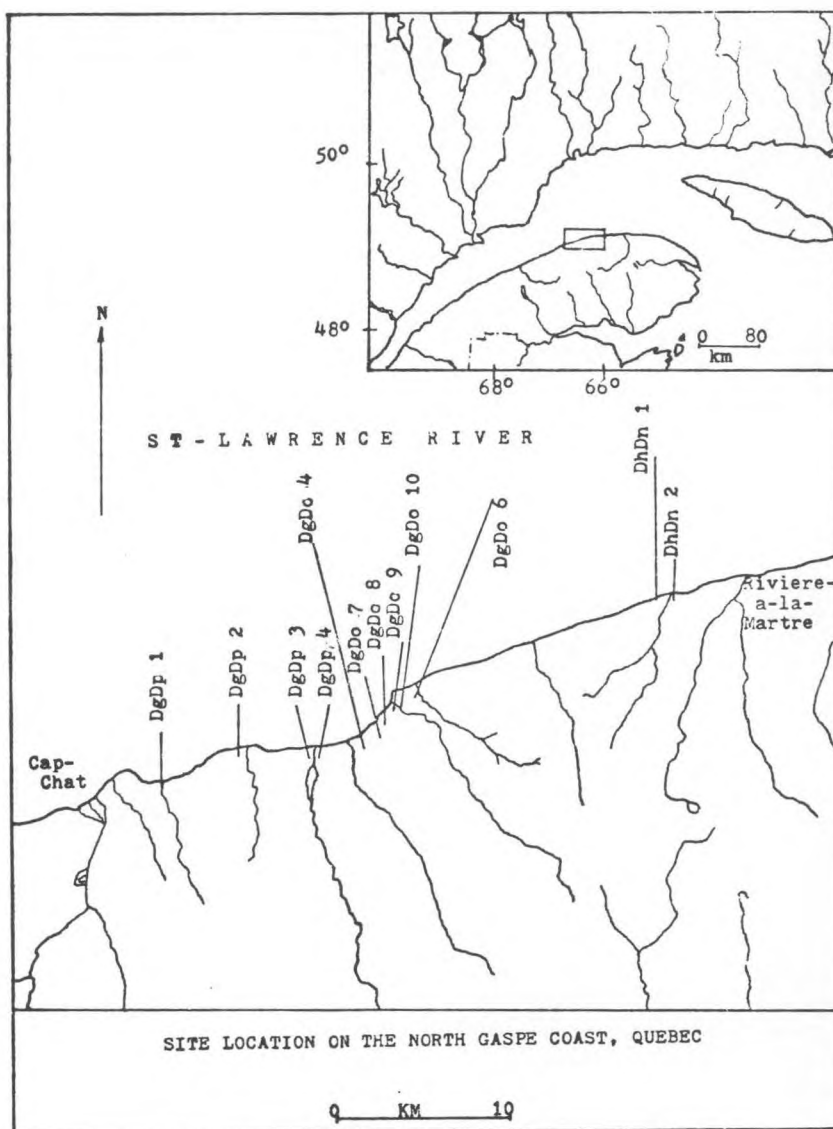
Introduction

Interest in the prehistory of the Gaspé goes back only a few years and is concentrated on the north coast where most sites have been found (see Martijn 1973, for a synthetic history of archaeological research in Quebec). It started in 1968 with the discovery by Father Roland Provost, of abundant surface collections spread over six terraces on both sides of Rivière-à-la-Martre. The same year, T. Lee visited the sites and after a brief study of the material, proposed they should be included in a new culture: the Gaspé Archaic (Lee 1969:30). Preliminary excavations in 1969 by the Société d'Archéologie Préhistorique du Québec (S.A.P.Q.) and surface collecting yielded several thousand stone artifacts and tens of thousand flakes (S.A.P.Q. 1970). The only charcoal specimen recovered, from a low terrace however (10 m), was dated to 1360 ± 120 B.C. (Martijn, 1973:13). The particularity of the material, exclusively flaked tools, was again noticed and differentiated from the Boreal Archaic Tradition. Crête, Girouard and McKenzie tentatively suggested this new manifestation be called "Peri-boreal Archaic" (S.A.P.Q. 1970:87). In 1971, road renovations at Cap-Chat unearthed a new site 4 m above sea level. Salvage excavations were carried on by G. Barré. This stratified site of the Middle Woodland period gave a radiocarbon date of 620 ± 105 A.D. (Martijn 1973:11). In the meantime, Father Provost and members of his newly founded Société d'Archéologie de Gaspésie (S.A.G.), discovered several more sites among which are the three sites reported here (Provost and Ross 1972).

In 1972, due to extensive repairs of route 6, which encircles the Gaspé, I was responsible for surveying the areas affected by the renovations. The last three weeks of an eight weeks contract were spent testing and surface collecting at sites partly destroyed, with the help of members of the S.A.G. They were Ste-Anne-des-Monts (DgDo-4), Cap-au-Renard (DhDn-1), and St-Joachim-de-Tourelle (DgDo-6) sites. The total material recovered, 280 flaked stone tools and about 7500 flakes, was the subject of a preliminary report (Benmouyal 1973). One of the conclusions stated that these collections seemed to reflect a similar tradition, sufficiently distinct from anything else reported in the Northeast to be termed the Gaspé Archaic tradition. The artifact sample however consisted mainly of broken surface finds and more data were needed to establish and define this tradition. These three sites being in further danger of destruction, DgDo-4 and 6 are on top of gravel pits, I returned with a crew of seven in 1973 for nine weeks, to conduct salvage excavations. At the same time, a reconnaissance between Cap-Chat and St-Joachim-de-Tourelle added eight new sites (Fig. 1).

The material from 1973 has not yet been studied and the interpretations that follow must await further analysis and excavations to be supported. However, the new sample suggests a much wider range of variability than was first thought. In this report, I shall briefly describe the excavations conducted at these sites. In the light of the new data, some interpretations will be discussed.

Fig. 1. Site locations on the north Gaspé Coast, Quebec.



Sainte Anne des Monts DgDo 4

The site (Fig. 2) is situated about 1 km inland, south of the village which gave it its name on the 40–45 m terrace (49° 7' 37" N, 66° 27' 35" W.). It is on top of once cultivated fields, converted into a giant gravel pit a few years ago. Because of intensive bulldozing and earth removal, the original surface of the site is difficult to estimate; however, systematic sur-

face collecting and test-pitting revealed that cultural deposits must have extended for about 800 m along the terrace. South of the site, at the foot of the hill bordering the terrace, outcrops of bedrock showed slab formations of chert and other fine grained siliceous materials of various quality used in the manufacturing of most of the tools. The main excavations were concentrated

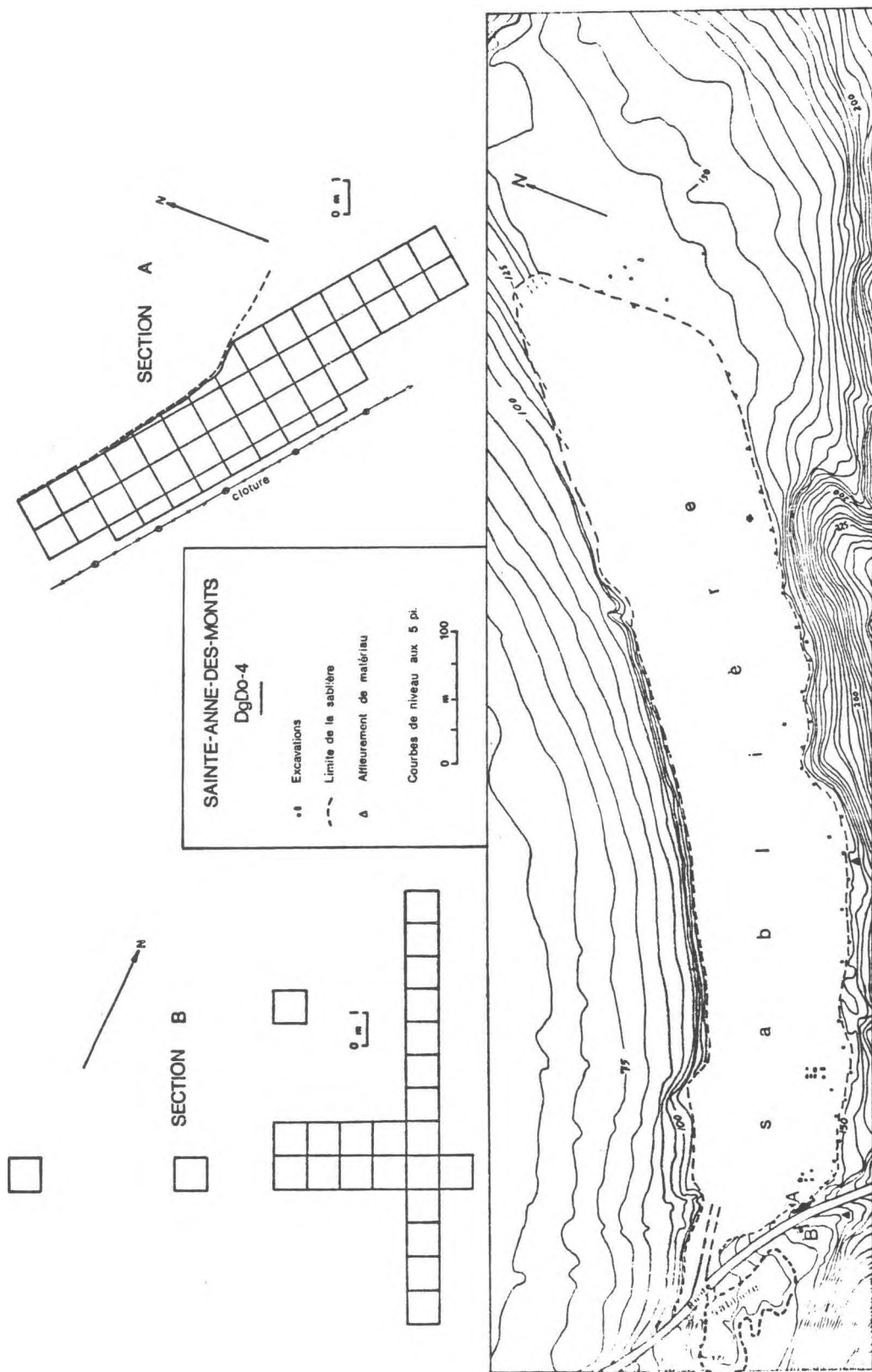


Fig. 2. Plan of excavations at Sainte Anne des Monts.

in two regions, sections A and B on either side of the road which gives access to the site.

Section A

Because of its situation immediately east of the road, this area was left untouched by the gravel exploitation. A previous test had shown a great concentration of cultural remains. For these reasons, extensive excavations were conducted in 1973. 38 square meters were excavated along the fence which borders the road; the area excavated was 15 m long and 2–3.5 m wide.

Stratigraphy

The stratigraphic units in this section from lowest to highest are as follow:
 Unit 1 – Well stratified sand and gravel deposits from the Goldthwait Sea, 8 or more meters thick, on top of the Cambrian to Ordovician bedrock. No cultural remains were found in these sand and gravel strata deposited around 9000 B.C.
 Unit 2 – A brown yellowish sand zone, 30–60 cm thick, sectioned by a thin (1–2 cm) oxidated irregular deposit. The top part of this sand zone (5–40 cm) contained most of the cultural remains.
 Unit 3 – A bluish grey 5–10 cm thick layer of compact clay, the very bottom of which contained the remaining cultural deposits.

Unit 4 – Up to 70 cm of dark brown compact clay containing no artifacts. This layer and the previous one could be interpreted as deposits of a stream which had its bed where the road is presently. They could also have resulted from a small landslide.

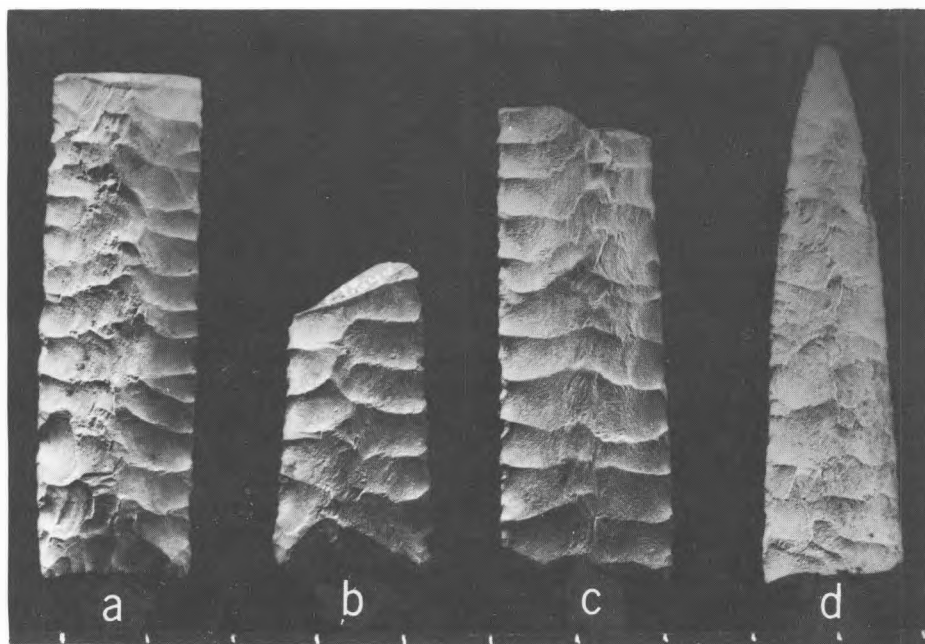
Unit 5 – 10–20 cm of road-fill and top soil containing no cultural remains.

Cultural material

The stratification suggests a single cultural deposition in this area of the site. The material was very unevenly scattered horizontally over this section, generally a continuous deposition 10–15 cm thick in the upper part of unit 2. Two regions, totalling 8.5 m², yielded 70% of the chipping detritus and over 50% of the artifacts. One area contained over 2000 flakes and tools made from one particular type of black chert. Other clusters of remains were made of other types of materials.

The artifacts are exclusively composed of flaked stone tools, mostly fragments which occasionally fitted together. They included: 5 *projectile point fragments* (Fig. 3 *a, c, d*) which exhibit fine parallel pressure flaking

Fig. 3.
Plano projectile point fragments. a, c, d, from DgDo 4, section A. b, from DhDn 1. 1 cm. scale.



usually associated with the Plano tradition; a wide variety of *bifaces* (158) of various shapes (oval, triangular, lanceolate, bipointed, asymmetrical, rectangular etc.) and sizes (8 to 30 cm in length) some of which are possibly preforms while others show fine edge retouch; 41 marginally *retouched flakes*, generally large and thin with one sharp or steep retouched edge (flake knives and side scrapers); some 8 *utilized flakes* showing wear patterns on one or more edges. Other tools included 1 drill fragment, 6 large quartzite used spalls, 1 hammerstone and

3 spherical nodules of iron pyrite, possibly used in fire making. About 10500 flakes, generally thin and large, obtained from the preparation of bifaces, complete the cultural remains from this section. No definite structure was encountered although the material distribution might reveal a pattern. Finally, two particularities should be noticed: with a few exceptions, most of the cutting edges seem fresh and do not show much, if any, use-wear; second, many artifact fragments seem to have been broken during their manufacturing.

Section B

In the hope of recovering similar material, 25 square meters arranged along two perpendicular trenches were excavated on the other side of the road from section A, in a small gently sloping plowed field south of an older gravel pit. The stratification and material content of this section proved to be markedly different.

Stratigraphy

A simplified stratigraphy, from oldest to youngest, is described here.

Unit 1 – The same strata of well sorted sand and gravel described for section A, underlay the cultural deposits. The upper part of this zone, mostly composed of grey beach sand contained no cultural remains.

Unit 2 – A stratum of reddish brown sand 20–50 cm thick contained most of the cultural material.

Units 3 and 4 – Two strata of mixed clay, sand and gravel from 10 to 50 cm thick, 80 cm in one pocket, contained the remaining cultural material. This mixture seems the result of recent land levelling and plowing.

Cultural remains

The stratification contained many lenses

and at the moment, it is not possible to decide whether we are dealing with a one or multicomponent site. The distribution of the material was somewhat more regular than in the previous section but some deep pockets of material were observed in some areas.

The artifacts included one cluster of decorated *pottery* sherds, apparently from one vessel, somewhat similar to some of the Iroquois tradition of the upper St Lawrence valley; 3 *projectile points*, one complete small triangular stemmed (Fig. 4d) found at the same depth as the pottery and two fragments of lanceolate points; 47 *bifaces*, mostly fragments, generally triangular and thin of various dimensions; 13 *retouched flakes* similar to the previous ones; one utilized flake, a granite spall and about 2000 flakes complete the sample from this section. Features observed consisted of about 30 small possible post-holes and post-molds from 2–12 cm in diameter, some close to one meter in depth. Except for a few scattered pieces of charcoal, and five seeds, possibly hazelnut shells, no organic remain was found in this section or any other part of the site. Systematic surface collecting, test pits and excavation yielded more material which is included in Table 1.

Cap au Renard DhDn 1

The DhDn 1 site (Fig. 5) is situated in Cap-au-Renard, a small village 18 km east of the previous site and 5 km west of La Martre. The village is on the 45 m terrace, the top of a cliff that overlooks the St. Lawrence. The site itself is located about 60 m from the edge

of the cliff, in the vicinity of Mr. J. Vallée's house (49° 11' 44" N., 66° 14' 10" W.), and 120 m east of a small stream. In 1972, Mr. Vallée undertook to add a basement to his house and in the process unearthed cultural remains which were brought to my attention by members of the

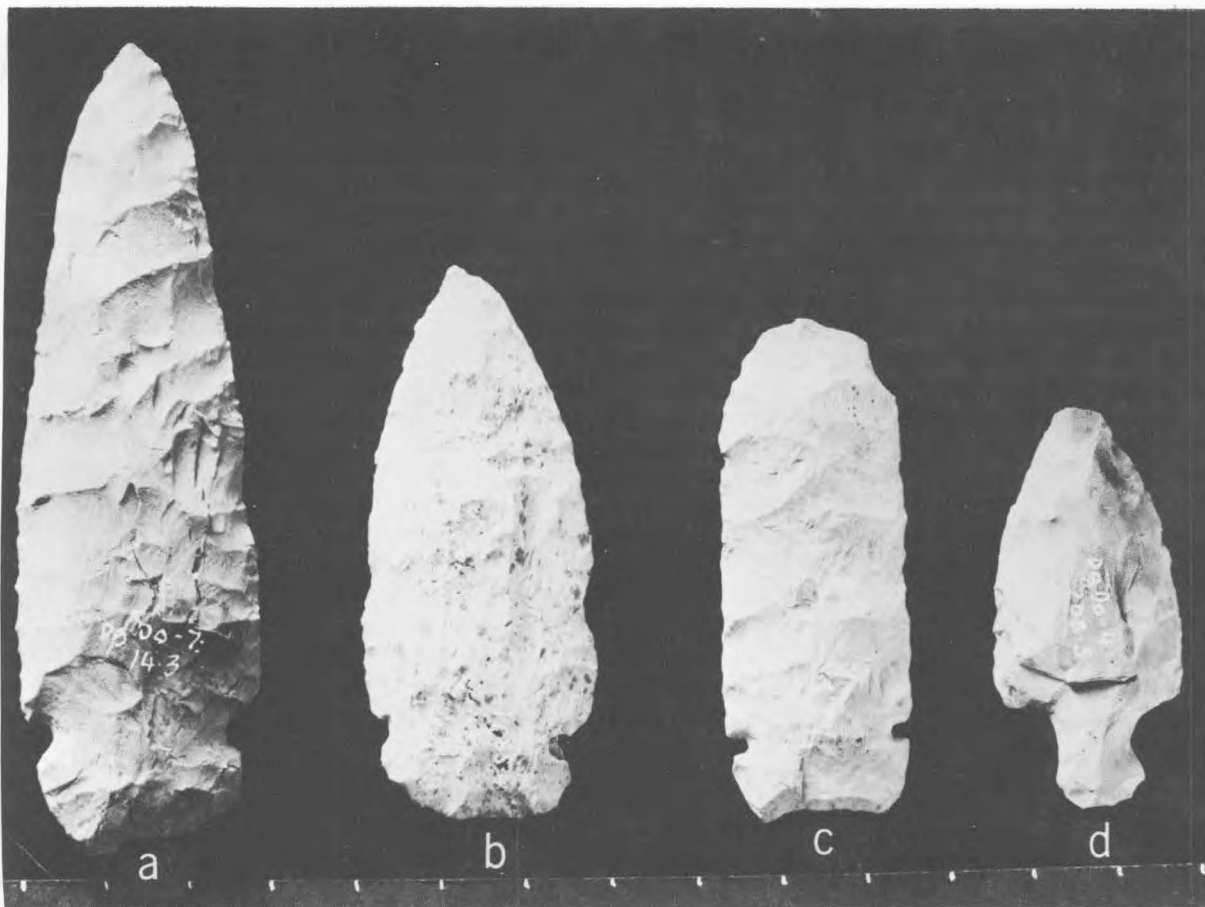


Fig. 4. Notched projectile points. *a*, from DgDo 7. *b*, *c*, DhDn 1. *d*, DgDo 4. cm. scale.

S.A.G. We then excavated 11 m² under the house and in 1973, we resumed excavations under and around the house; 80 m² were then open, concentrated in three areas. The ground around the site slopes gently toward the stream; a few decades ago, it was plowed and levelled before the house construction. These activities disturbed much of the cultural deposits which lay close to the surface. The site's area seems to cover about 2500 m² but the main concentration was found to be around the house.

Stratigraphy

The soil deposition at this site is typical

of podsolis and the following zones were observed from bottom to top:

Unit 1 – Stratified sand and gravel layers deposited by a higher sea level as described for the previous site. This unit occasionally contained rounded granite boulders, up to 80 cm in diameter, brought by floating ice of the continental glacier from the north shore of the St Lawrence. No cultural remains are associated with this zone.

Unit 2 – A layer up to 50 cm thick of yellowish or reddish brown sand, gravel and pebbles. This is the B_s horizon of podsolis where aluminium and iron compounds have accumulated. Some material was found in the upper part of this

Table 1.
Artifact frequencies at the
three Gaspe sites.

	DgDo -4			DhDn 1	DgDo 6
	Sect. A	Sect. B	Test surface		
Points	5	3	1	8	32
Bifaces	158	47	29	73	267
Retouched flakes	41	13	9	111	39
Utilized flakes	8	1	2	49	-
Drills	1	-	-	-	16
Pottery	-	1	-	-	-
Others	10	1	3	3	3
Artifact total	223	66	44	244	357
Flakes	10500	2000	2100	6500	10300
Excavated surface in m ²	38	25		80	75

horizon.

Unit 3 - An ash colour, light grey, thin (2-20 cm) stratum consisting of the A_e or eluviated horizon of podzols. In some areas, it is absent and mixed with the upper zone (or humus) as a result of plowing. Pockets of this horizon contained the majority of the cultural remains which were also bleached as a result of this proximity.

Unit 4 and 5 - Layers of decomposed wood and gravel noticed under the house as a result of land leveling and filling.

Unit 6 - The humus, 5-20 cm thick, includes the plowed zone and contained the remaining cultural material.

This stratification, especially units 4-6, manifests postoccupational disturbances; logging, plowing and leveling. However, what appears to have been the original deposition of this site, the next one and most sites in the Gaspé, was observed in another undisturbed closeby site: DhDn-2. The strata were as follows:

Unit 1 - Sand and gravel marine deposits.

Unit 2 - B_s horizon containing some material near the top.

Unit 3 - A_p horizon with more cultural material.

Unit 4 - The humus; most of the material was concentrated between units 3 and 4. It should be underlined that no "cultural layer" was noticed at this site or any other site; only artifacts, flakes and occasional structures made the cultural layer. The matrix seems to have been washed off from weathering and possibly eluviation.

Cultural remains

The stratification suggests a single component site but three distinct forms of projectile points might be interpreted as resulting from different occupations. Contacts, however, could also explain this diversity. Except in two areas, north and east of the house, totalling 7 m², the material was more or less evenly scattered. The two concentrations, however, gave about 35% of the total material. The concentration east of the house is associated with a possible hearth

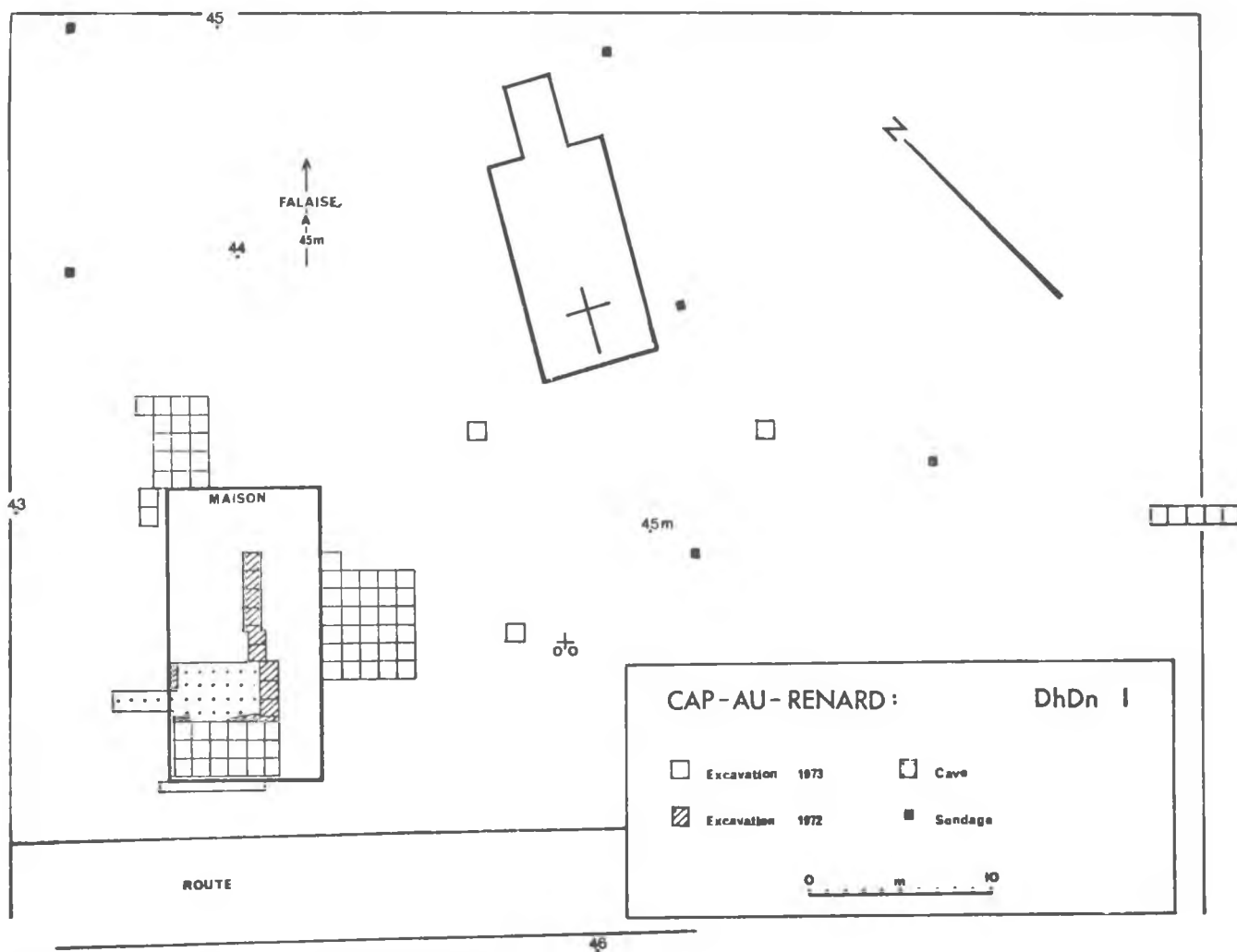


Fig. 5. Plan of excavations at Cap au Renard DhDn 1.

and other stone structures. No charcoal, except for a few dispersed pieces, or other organic material were found. Finally, about a third of the material comes from the upper disturbed levels.

Cap-au-Renard yielded only flaked stone tools and debitage flakes; again, most of these were fragmented and some displayed frost fractures. These included 8 *projectile points*, two side-notched (Fig. 4b, c), one fragment showing parallel pressure flaking (Fig. 3b), one small complete lanceolate and four fragments possibly

lanceolate in shape; 73 *bifaces* generally triangular or oval, thin and small but large ones also were found (a complete specimen from the 1972 season was 38.5 cm long); many *retouched flakes* (111): flake knives, side scrapers and one end scraper; *utilized flakes* amounted to 49. The remaining tools included a pebble tool and two hammerstones of which one was pear-shaped. About 6500 flakes, generally large and thin, mostly debitage from biface manufacture, were recovered. Most of the artifacts are obviously finished tools and show ground (utilized?) edges.

Saint Joachim de Tourelle DgDo 6

Situated between the two previous sites, 4 km east of DgDo 4, St Joachim site (Fig. 6) is also partly destroyed by gravel exploitation. The site is located south of the village of the same name, also on the 45 m terrace, about 400 m inland (49° 9' 10" N., 66° 24' 51" W.). From surface collecting and test pitting, the estimated area of the site is about 60000 m². Being on top of a flat or gently sloping surface, it has also been intensively plowed for several generations. DgDo 6 extends from a small road which goes

inland, into the fields south of the gravel pit and east to the edge of the deep V shaped Grande Tourelle stream valley. The main excavated area, east of the gravel pit, overlooks the stream and the St Lawrence seaway. It covered a surface of 65.5 m², mostly along two perpendicular trenches which were later enlarged. Test excavations along the gravel pit and around the main excavations brought this figure to 75 m². All the cultural remains from this site are included in Table 1.

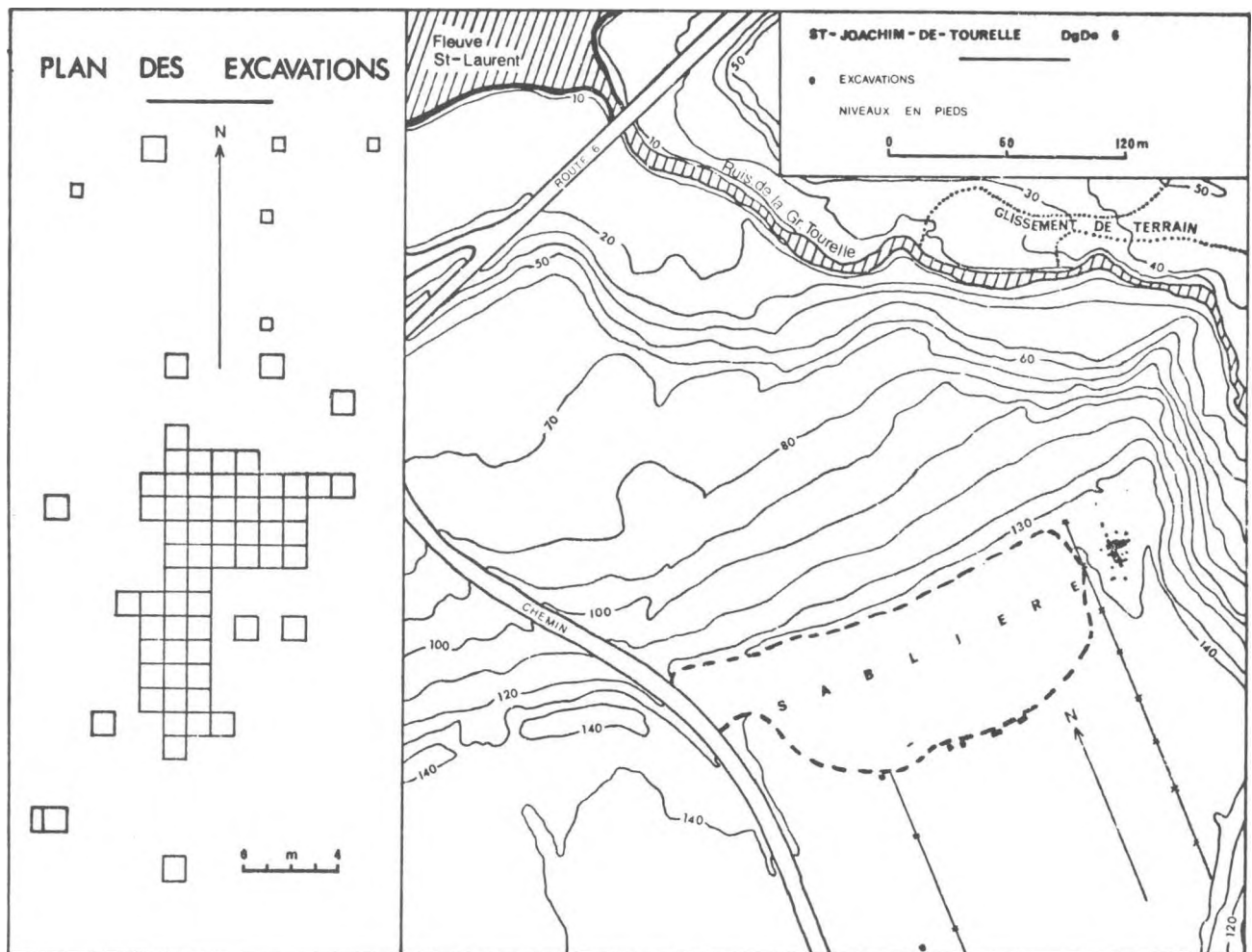


Fig. 6. Plan of excavations at St. Joachim de Tourelle DgDo 6.

Stratigraphy

The stratification was very similar to the previous site's; units 4 and 5, however, were absent. The A_e horizon, when still present, was directly under the plowed zone which was 20–25 cm thick.

Cultural material

The cultural remains appear to belong to one occupation of the site. The material was irregularly distributed, several concentrations, 10 m² in total, gave about 43% of the total remains. Almost 50% of these were found in the plowed zone, often close to the surface. The remains, composed entirely of flaked tools and chipping detritus, were, as in DhDn 1, bleached

and often broken. No feature was encountered; a small lens of charcoal containing a few small flakes, was collected and is being dated.

The total artifact count from the 1973 season includes 359 tools and some 10300 flakes. The artifacts can be divided as follow: 31 small *projectile points* fragments possibly similar in shape as one complete small lanceolate point; 267 *bifaces*; mostly fragments, triangular and oval, some lanceolate, of various dimensions but often of medium size (10 – 15 cm in length); 39 *retouched flakes* similar to those from the previous sites; 16 *drills* and fragments; one large utilized spall, one tabular nucleus and a nodule of iron pyrite. Many of the bifaces are possibly preforms but some seem finished and exhibit rounded edges which appear to result from use.

Site Survey

During about eight weeks, A. Baulu, director of the survey, and one crew member chosen on a rotating basis, surveyed for sites between Cap-Chat and St-Joachim-de-Tourelle. This represents a distance of 22 km, along every terrace up to 65 m above sea level. The reconnaissance was however concentrated along the 45 and 35 m terraces, the lower ones being occupied by present villages. Eight sites were located, mapped, systematically surface collected and test pitted. All sites were in plowed and cultivated fields or around new housing developments. They were all situated on ancient beaches, except one above the maximum sea level line, ranging from 12 m to 70 m in altitude. All were close to a river or stream. Two sites represent individual finds or small clusters of material while others are spread on one or several terraces up to 600 m in length. From DgDo 4 to DgDo 6, a distance of 4 km, cultural remains were found almost continuously on different terraces.

The cultural remains from these eight sites total 224 artifacts and some 2000 flakes; two sites DgDo 7 and DgDo 8 gave the majority (85%) of the tools. As in the three excavated sites, tool forms include mostly bifaces, plus some retouched flakes and projectile points,

and individual pieces (drill, hammerstone, nucleus). The survey revealed new data of particular interest for the prehistoric occupation of this part of the Gaspé Peninsula.

First, two pottery sherds were again found on an ancient terrace much higher than the present sea level (38 m). This is possibly related to the accessibility of raw material outcrops nearby.

Second, for the first time a polished stone artifact, a siltstone gorget (or pendant) fragment with a biconical perforation, was discovered in this part of the Gaspé. This surface find comes from the 15 m terrace.

Third, the two sites that yielded most artifacts (DgDo 7 and 8) gave more complete and finished tools than any other site in the Gaspé. This could suggest they were primarily habitation sites rather than workshop sites. These sites are situated east of DgDo 4 on the 30 to 60 m terraces. Among the finds are a complete long side-notched point (Fig. 4a) and several oval hand axes.

Finally, sites size and distribution suggest intensive occupations of this region in prehistoric times, contrary to ethnohistorical accounts which mention small scattered populations mainly east and south of the peninsula.

Discussion and Conclusion

As a result of the 1973 field season, it is evident that sites cannot be relatively dated on the basis of their elevation above sea level alone. Sections A and B at Ste-Anne-des-Monts were both situated on the same 45 m terrace, less than 20 m apart. The first area gave 5 projectile point fragments usually associated with the end of the Paleo-Indian tradition, while section B yielded pottery fragments of the end of the prehistoric period. More pottery sherds were discovered during the survey on the next lower terrace (38 m) further west. At La Martre, material interpreted as Archaic from the 10 m terrace was dated to around 1360 B.C., a reasonable date for the elevation of the site and its content.

It thus appears that other factors than sea level alone were important in the choice of site location. As pointed out above, the distribution of raw material might be one of these factors. So far, both sites which have given obviously late material (i.e. pottery) and are

situated on ancient beach terraces, are close to raw material outcrops. This seems to corroborate the importance of this factor in the settlement pattern of this region. It remains to establish which sites were habitation or/and workshop sites. Phosphorous content in collected soil samples awaiting chemical analysis, should help to answer such questions. First observations revealed some sites gave more tools showing use-wear than others, but this remains to be supported by more exhaustive analysis. The presence of features usually associated with habitations and the flake/artifact ratio both indicate DhDn 1, section B of DgDo 4 and possibly DgDo 6 were habitation as well as workshop sites.

Nevertheless, on the basis of artifact types, the Gaspé seems to have been inhabited by Paleo-Indian, Archaic and Woodland populations. We shall now briefly discuss each of these manifestations.

Paleo-Indian

No fluted point has ever been found in Quebec although such finds are numerous in Ontario (Garrad 1971; Stork 1971) and in almost every other region of the Northeast (MacDonald 1971; Funk 1972). Part of Quebec was free of ice and inhabitable by 8000 B.C. and the absence of such finds must be partly due to the lack of archaeological research. Late Paleo-Indian projectile points showing characteristic collateral flaking associated with the Plano period, however, have been reported on the Richelieu River, near the New York state border, in the lakes Mistassini-Albanel region and possibly at La Martre (Martijn 1973:19; Martijn and Rogers 1969:318). This year, the first substantial evidences were found at the Ste-Anne-des-Monts (section A) and Cap-au-Renard sites. Both have

yielded one or more point fragments exhibiting parallel ripple-flaking. Very similar specimens seem to have been discovered on Thompson's Island, Ontario and in New Brunswick by D. Sanger (MacDonald pers. comm.). Their cultural affinities in terms of adaptation is not known yet; neither is their origin or age. J. Wright (1972a:23, n.d.:3) proposes that the Plano hunters migrated eastward in the Northeast once Archaic populations were already present in this region. This hypothesis is supported by a number of sites in the Great Lakes area where Plano and early Archaic tools are found in direct association. A similar association is present at Cap-au-Renard, as was described above.

Archaic

Evidence of Archaic populations is well established at Riviere-à-la-Martre, Cap-au-Renard, St-Joachim-de-Tourelle, DgDo 7 and possibly some areas of Ste-Anne-des-Monts. All these sites have yielded lanceolate or side-notched projectile points associated with this

tradition. The lithic industry however is very different from any archaic tradition defined in the Northeast. The complete lack of polished stone tools and differences in other cultural material make comparisons with the Laurentian Archaic described by Ritchie (1965:79-80) and

the Maritime Archaic (Tuck 1971), impossible. Tuck suggested the Maritime Archaic should be found along the St Lawrence as far as Quebec city, and thus in the Gaspé. Our research, so far does not support this hypothesis although the Gaspé does show similar environment and resources as Tuck's Maritime tradition (1971: 350-2). Possibly, less importance should be placed on environmental adaptation in defining the latter tradition.

As in the Shield Archaic, the artifact assemblage of the Gaspé Archaic contains no

polished stone tools, but here the similarities end, although the interior of the Gaspé offers a similar environment as the Shield's. The lithic industry defined by Wright (1972b:11-12, 1968: 57) are markedly different in both technology and artifact types from the Gaspé's. As stated before (Benmouyal 1973:141-4), the Gaspé seems to exhibit a different type of cultural tradition; in the absence of similar manifestations in the Northeast, it is best identified as the *Gaspé Archaic Tradition*.

Woodland

Sites from the Woodland period have been found in the Gaspé. Cap-Chat is dated of the Middle Woodland on the basis of radiocarbon dating and pottery; section B of DgDo 4 and possibly DgDp 2, both gave pottery suggesting Late Woodland occupation. The relations between the Woodland and Archaic populations remain to be established.

In summary, the north shore of the Gaspé Peninsula has been inhabited for several thous-

and years, possibly since 5000 B.C., by late Paleo-Indian, Archaic and Woodland populations. The great number of sites of a local Archaic tradition, which I have named the Gaspé Archaic, suggest an adaptive climax during that period. So far, the first steps of the chronological sequence have tentatively been laid. Cultural interpretations must await further cultural remains analysis and field research.