

Ancient spiritual treasures discovered in Bird Cove

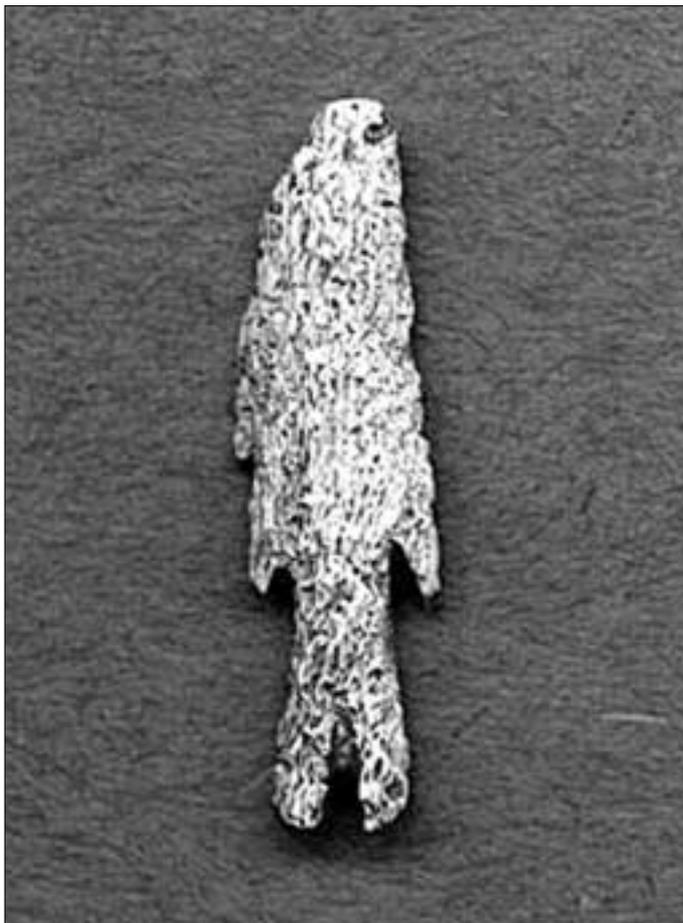
A bone caribou hoof amulet, indicative of Paleoeskimo spirituality and the presence of a shaman, is helping scientists reconstruct belief systems that date back to 2,000 years ago in Bird Cove.

In 1998, archaeologists uncovered a four cm long amulet in a test pit on the Dog Peninsula. Little was researched about the find until 2006-07 excavations were possible at that site. Archaeologists found that the amulet was located in a hearth littered with finely crafted yet unused artifacts. Several artifacts were buried deep inside pockets of red ochre, over which fires were lit.

It is the first time an amulet of this type has been found in a Groswater Paleoeskimo context on the Island or in Labrador.

"This discovery is phenomenal," said Latonia Hartery, director of the Bird Cove Archeology Project. "Only seven of these hoof amulets have been found in the world to date, with the others located in Greenland and Eastern Nunavut. Whatever spiritual purpose these amulets served, it worked for a long time and for a wide range of people, since the earliest discovery dates to 3,000 years ago in Greenland."

Archeologists debate whether everyone in early Paleoeskimo society used these



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A photograph of the hoof amulet found during archeological excavations at Bird Cove. It's the first find of its kind in a Groswater Paleoeskimo context on the Island or in Labrador.

amulets or if they were the sole property of shamans. More detectable, however, is the perforation usually located at the top of the amulet which suggests it was pinned to an article

of clothing or a necklace. Examples of these amulets worn on powerful shamans can be seen in historic ethnographies as well as the Inuit made movie, *Atanarjuat: The Fast*

Runner.

"The nature of the find suggests its uniqueness. There are no animal bones or other organic debris associated. Red ochre is used as a ceremonial substance among ancient people and is therefore likely the case at this site," noted Ms. Hartery.

She added that people in contemporary Bird Cove rely on prayer and faith to help them through difficult times.

"The earlier people who lived there were not different and likely made their own offerings, to whatever it is they saw as negatively or positively affecting the world they lived in."

The findings will be presented in detail in Bird Cove later this year at a conference, 'Bird Cove and Beyond: Celebrating Regional Archeology on a Global Scale', which is sponsored by the Amina Anthropological Resources and the Big Droke Foundation.

Ms. Hartery stated that "these rare finds are possible when the community and researchers work together. Archeologists often talk about economics, as it is easier to discuss than ancient spirituality. But from this small yet unprecedented example we learn that our needs, and those of the ancient Paleoeskimo, may overlap not only on land and sea but also in the mind."