

STATEMENT OF GRANT PURPOSE

Isaac Shearn, Dominica, Archaeology

Communities and Socio-political Integration in Pre-Columbian Dominica, West Indies.

The proposed research is a one-year archaeological study of Pre-Columbian communities in Dominica, a volcanic island in the southern Lesser Antilles noted for its intense topographic variability, rugged coastline, high rainfall, dense tropical forests, and fertile volcanic soils. The research addresses specific questions about community organization and socio-political integration during the Late Ceramic Age (LCA) (ca. 900-1500 CE), as well as broader questions about the relationship of small-scale local communities to regional or global networks.

Background: The LCA is well studied in many parts of the Caribbean, benefitting from ongoing advances in the application of archaeological methods and new levels of interpretation achieved by applying ethnohistorical documents dating to the contact period (e.g., S. Wilson, *Caribbean Archaeology*, Cambridge, 2007). During the LCA, the Caribbean region was a diverse matrix of ethnic and socio-political groupings with wide geographical ranges, often including connections between multiple islands and between the islands and mainland South America. The Circum-Caribbean region is still very much like this today. Dominica is located along what has been called a “threshold in the political geography of the archipelago in later prehistory” (Wilson 2007:148). Given its regional significance, Dominican research remains surprisingly underrepresented as compared to research on other Caribbean islands.

Research Objectives: The proposed research is the first major step in establishing a long term archaeological research program in Dominica, and is designed to build up a baseline understanding of community organization in a range of locales in Dominica. Archaeological excavations will be conducted at a representative sample of sites in three distinct locales in Dominica, each locale defined as a micro-region. Specific objectives of the proposed research include: 1) identification of sites; 2) characterization of variability in terms of site size and structure; 3) characterization of relations between sites within the micro-region based on distance, intervisibility, and geographic setting; and 4) collection of artifacts to provide evidence of interaction, including intra- and inter-island exchange. Comparisons between sites within micro-regions will be conducted to identify aspects of community organization at the local level. Comparisons between micro-regions should indicate whether communities within micro-regions were autonomous or if they were integrated with other such communities across Dominica into higher-order regional networks. If integrated, the research should indicate how higher-order communities were organized with respect to sociopolitical hierarchy and/or heterarchy within and between micro-regions.

Preliminary Research/Feasibility: Shearn carried out nine weeks of fieldwork over two seasons in 2009 and 2010 in order to identify sites and address logistical concerns about establishing long-term research plans in Dominica. These efforts were conducted in collaboration with Dr. Lennox Honychurch, Curator of the Dominica Museum. Honychurch is a Member of the Advisory Committee to both the Carib Council and University of West Indies and has held several positions in the Government of Dominica (see attached Letter of Affiliation). In 2009, reconnaissance survey and suitability assessments were conducted in approximately 20 distinct locales, and archaeological excavations and systematic collections of artifacts found on the surface were conducted at six sites located across Dominica. Computer modeling of geographical features, along with the results of this research, suggested that large stable watersheds with accessible coastlines stood out as important settlement locations. One such watershed was

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targeted in 2010 for more extensive investigation. Pedestrian survey was conducted in the area surrounding Castle Bruce, and six discrete sites were identified and investigated. The study demonstrated the presence of sites in a variety of sizes and settings within the watershed, and suggested that intervisibility among sites may have been an important factor in their location. These efforts were crucial for establishing a feasible scope of work for the proposed study.

Methods: Fieldwork will include additional excavations and systematic surface collections at Castle Bruce, as well as at two other micro-regions initially investigated in 2009; Pagua Bay, located 9 km north, and Delices, located 17 km south. Excavations will include 50-cm-x-50-cm test pits arranged at regular intervals across sites, and 1-m-x-1-m test units in areas with high artifact density, good preservation; or unique features such as fire hearths, residual stains from post-in-ground structures, or refuse middens. This sample should capture the range of variation of both the size and density of sites, while simultaneously capturing the range of settings in which sites are found. As pottery is likely to dominate the artifacts assemblages, pottery analysis will play a crucial role in the research. Data on pottery manufacture techniques will be used to investigate differential labor investment, a critical feature in the organization of a community. Variability in the functional aspects of the pottery assemblages between sites will aid in determining what types of activities occurred at different sites while stylistic aspects of pottery design will be analyzed for evidence of boundary or identity maintenance practices.

Significance: This research will be the first study of settlement patterns and community organization in Dominica as well as the first dissertation specifically focused on the prehistory of Dominica. This research will seek to advance both the regional understanding of community organization, and the broader theoretical and methodological issues surrounding the concept of community in archaeology. By investigating the relationship between local communities in Dominica and regional cultural or socio-political networks, the research has broad significance to Anthropology, which is growingly concerned with the dynamic relationship between global and local communities. As an early step towards a long term research initiative, the proposed research will provide a groundwork on which more detailed archaeological studies can be based.

Impact: Public outreach initiatives were begun in 2010 when Shearn invited Dr. Honychurch to join him in presenting a public lecture at the community center in Grand Fond, the small village in which Shearn and his crew resided. This lecture, in which Shearn presented his initial findings, was videotaped and rebroadcast on local television, reaching an island-wide audience. This generated significant interest in the research and, in the weeks that followed, Shearn provided opportunities for several individuals to participate in the on-going excavations and to receive on-site training. The proposed research will expand significantly upon these public outreach initiatives in order to: (1) promote cultural heritage management by raising awareness about the island's Amerindian history and the value of archaeological sites; and (2) promote training and education to local participants who are traditionally underrepresented in the execution, interpretation, and presentation of Caribbean research. Over the course of the year, Shearn will present lectures at more community centers, schools, and through radio broadcasts; produce informational posters and small exhibits for display in village community centers and national parks; design an exhibit for the Dominica Museum; and provide opportunities for students and other interested parties to participate in the research and help design methods for interpreting, presenting and publicizing results.

PERSONAL STATEMENT

Isaac Shearn, Dominica, Archaeology

Over the last five years, I have developed a long-term relationship with Dominica. I first became aware of Dominica through Dr. James Petersen, my undergraduate advisor at the University of Vermont (UVM) who, in 2005, began a collaboration with French archaeologist Dr. Benoit Berard to conduct the first phases of a long term archaeological research project in Dominica. Tragically, Petersen passed away later that year. In 2006 I went to Dominica for the first time with other members of the 2005 crew in order to continue the work that Petersen had started with Berard. I returned to Dominica in 2009 for a month of fieldwork, now as principal investigator, and again in 2010 for six weeks.

In 2010, I made the village of Grand Fond my base of operations. During my stay in Grand Fond I was something of an oddity. I already knew several people in the Grand Fond community, having visited many times in previous years, but now I was living in the village, in a house a friend's mother rented to me. The house was across the street from the practice house for a local reggae band, The Blazing Squad. A drummer for over 15 years, I was delighted, and on my first night in Grand Fond, I got to sit in on drums. I began to play with them on a regular basis, and joined them for a number of shows at the local bar. Having first bonded over music, we soon realized that several members of the band were related to Junior Felix and David Prince, local friends in Grand Fond I had met in 2006 and had stayed in touch with. Along with me were two volunteers, Warren Rich and Allie Clark, UVM graduates who had received training from the same archaeological field school I attended as an undergrad, and for which I later served as TA. Warren achieved near-celebrity status in the village by playing keyboards in the band, an instrument that carries far more status in Dominican reggae music than drums.

By night, we spent our time learning to cook local dishes and to play local music. By day we worked. Hard work is highly valued in Grand Fond, and everyone there knew we were working hard, our SUV crammed with equipment, and our clothes often caked in mud; especially once we started bringing people from the village out to show them the sites we were working on. Traveling north by car, Castle Bruce is the nearest village to Grand Fond, and it was in Castle Bruce that we spent our days doing the nuts and bolts of preliminary archaeological survey. Having all worked as professional archaeologists, we were able to accomplish a great deal of work in a very efficient manner. However, it would not have been possible without the help of our friends Junior and David. They already knew about archaeology, and immediately wanted to learn more, and work with us whenever they could. By working with Junior and David, we were able to communicate our intentions much more effectively with local landowners, and we also learned invaluable insights about Dominica, such as how particular watersheds flood during the rainy season, and which kinds of soils are the best for agriculture.

Our house became a popular hangout, so we got to discuss our work with many people in the community. Marcus, a local artist and singer in The Blazing Squad, was immediately interested in our work; through our talks, we came up with the idea for the public presentation I later organized. We now have plans to renovate a small historic building to serve as an educational center for the history and culture of the area. By developing this long-term relationship with Dominica, I hope to provide the framework for an international collaboration in which American students, such as Warren and Allie can collaborate with local Dominicans such as Junior, David, and Marcus in a variety of archaeological, ethnographic, and public education projects.