Archaeological excavations were initiated this summer (July-August 2004) at Needle Point on Rowley Island, in northern Foxe Basin. Excavations were focused upon Dorset sites located on a series of beach ridges at Needle Point, extending from approximately 23 m above sea level (ASL) to 16 m ASL. These sites are believed to span from the Early to Late Dorset periods. Needle Point therefore provides an ideal opportunity for an expansive investigation of the Dorset occupation of northern Foxe Basin.

Sites at Needle Point were first located through survey during the summer of 2003 by James Savelle (McGill University) and Art Dyke (Geological Survey of Canada). Given a limited time frame of 4 weeks, we restricted excavations to the sampling of 5 sites. The field crew consisted of one guide from Igloolik (Marius Kayotuk), two graduate students (myself and Christine Iorio) and three undergraduate students (Josée Boudreault, Brendan Griebel and Sara Lebensold) from McGill University, Montréal.

Excavations sampled both house features and middens (garbage) areas at each of the 5 sites. Test-pits were also undertaken in a ‘hopping-stone row’, which is located in a large midden. Numerous animal bones and artifacts were recovered from all 5 sites. A substantial collection of stones tools was assembled, and a number of ivory and antler artifacts. Most notable was an ivory carving featuring four faces, and an antler fragment with a carved face. Also included in the collection were a miniature ivory harpoon head and a small ivory spatulate stylized bear engraved with a skeletal motif.

These archaeological investigations represent the first phase of my doctoral fieldwork. My objective is to look at changing subsistence strategies across time and their relationship to potential changes in social complexity. This will be undertaken through the analysis of animal bones, in addition to artifactual and architectural evidence. Walrus are particularly abundant in northern Foxe Basin, therefore the relationship of walrus-hunting to social complexity is of significant interest here. The animal bone assemblage recovered thus far at Needle Point contains an impressive number of walrus bones, however the relative importance of walrus appears to vary among sites. Numerous other mammal, bird, and fish species are also present in the assemblage, and the degree of species diversity also appears variable among sites. Further excavations are required in order to verify these preliminary observations. Ideally the second phase of my fieldwork will take place in summer 2005.
Image captions -
Figure 1: View of Needle Point facing North with Josée Boudreault.
Figure 2: Ivory carving with 4 faces, recovered from ‘hopping-stone row’ (2 faces visible, one partially-visible).