

FOGO ISLAND



Fogo Island lies exposed on the eastern edge of Notre Dame Bay. In fact it is the part of Newfoundland (and thus North America) that is closest to Ireland and Europe in general. Moreover, sailing south along the east coast of Newfoundland from L'Anse aux Meadows – as the Norse would most likely have done at some point and to some extent – it is actually hard to avoid Fogo Island. In summer 2015 I had my base camp on Fogo Island for most of June, and apart from investigating the island's own role for the Vinland Phenomenon I also made day trips to Fortune Harbour, Twillingate and Carmanville from there. Soon after my arrival on Fogo I was told that for any information on the island's history, be it fact or fiction, I should get in touch with the mayor, Andrew Shea. It wasn't easy to get a hold of Andrew, a dedicated mayor with a wealth of responsibilities and interests, but finally we met at *Mudder's*, the family restaurant and informal meeting place in Fogo Town. Andrew brought an artefact with him that had been found behind Miller's grocery and liquor store: an obviously hand-crafted artefact with rusty stains all over it which made it hard to judge if it was made of stone or metal. While stone had also been used by the Natives to manufacture tools, only the Norse knew how to craft metal one thousand years ago. The shape was reminiscent of a hammer or small axe – or the head of the now extinct Great Auk, as Andrew pointed out to me. But so far nobody could tell what it really was or what purpose it might have served. Andrew had a photo of the object published in the *Downhome* magazine which appears monthly in St. John's and is distributed all over Canada, to ask if anyone had

ever seen anything like it before. To no effect. I went to see the little pebbly beach behind Miller's store and found that it was bristled with rusty metal artefacts like nails, parts of machinery and rebars which in turn had stained the adjacent stones with rusty spots. So the artefact was most likely made from stone, and not from metal. Andrew had always refused to have it examined at Memorial University as he feared it could be destroyed in the process.

To me, the other artefacts Andrew had brought to our meeting were actually more puzzling: two pieces of bog iron slag which he had found in his potato field, where he said were plenty more. The Natives never melted iron, and while later immigrants to Newfoundland did they operated proper forges where bog iron slag would not have been produced. But the Norse employed more primitive techniques, and bog iron slag had also been found at the Norse site in L'Anse aux Meadows...

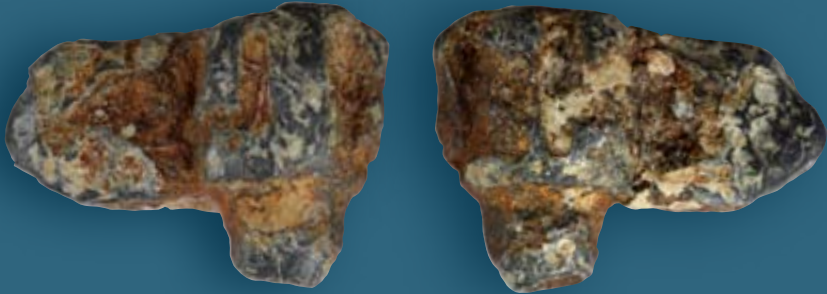
Only after I had left Fogo Island and continued my road trip around Newfoundland, did I receive an email from Carol Penton. Carol is the editor of the Fogo Island newspaper *The Flame* and she had read about my project on the notice I had put up on the Fogo ferry. She told me about a rumour among senior citizens of the island community of Joe Batt's Arm that a place nearby called the *Field of Battle* refers to a battle between the Norse and the Natives. Those rumours couldn't be confirmed though: when Carol kept asking around, others said that "the word *battle* used here has nothing to do with Indians or Vikings; *battle* being used to describe the difficulty in getting their firewood home through the steeping hills instead."





View of Fogo Harbour from behind Miller's store

both sides of the carved stone



big iron slag from Andrew Shea's garden



The Field of Battle in the hills above the east side of Joe Batt's Arm harbour