

GAMBO



It was on Fogo Island that I first heard of Gambo as a candidate for being one of the Vinland saga sites: Angie Shea, originally from Gambo and now teacher at Fogo Island Central Highschool and daughter-in-law of mayor Andrew Shea (who figures in another story not included in the present selection), told me that her father, the late Lloyd Noseworthy, had been in touch with saga scholar Jónas Kristjánsson from Iceland who, in the early 2000s, visited Newfoundland in search for Vinland. With Lloyd's local assistance Jónas came up with the thesis that Gambo, where Gambo River connects Freshwater Bay with Gambo Pond, is the *Hóp* of the sagas.* Some years later Jónas was also the driving force behind the investigation of the caribou pitfalls near Sop's Arm.**

When I came to Gambo I entered the local pharmacy and asked the saleswoman behind the counter if she knew someone in Gambo with whom I could talk about the Norsemen. She replied that her husband would probably be keen to talk to me and gave him a phone call. Ten minutes later I was following Don Collins' car to his house where he had invited me for a tea and a chat about Gambo and Vinland.

Don began to study the saga texts and related literature after he had heard about Jónas Kristjánsson's theory. He agrees with him that Gambo is indeed a likely candidate for one of the saga sites, although he builds his theory on different observations than those of Lloyd Noseworthy. Don shared his hypothesis with Jónas Kristjánsson who then revisited Gambo on a later trip to Newfoundland to check on Don's arguments. According to Don there are two places around Gambo with unique characteristics which would have favoured a landing by the Norsemen, and which he thinks would be worth receiving a thorough archaeological examination. One of them is what Don calls *the Point* on Freshwater Bay where he used to fish for years before he first saw the place with different eyes: what was good for fishing (a steep rock above deep water) could also be seen as a natural wharf for larger ships. The other place the Norse would have been intrigued by is a beach where three salmon rivers flow into Gambo Pond.

Don gave me detailed directions to both places, and

when I set off to find them I felt well prepared. It turned out to be more intricate than I had thought, however, and I am sceptical if I have visited and documented the right spots. After a short hike through woods, bushes and mosquito swarms, I reached a place which I thought matched the description of *the Point* fairly well. What irritated me was the fact that the cemetery where Don directed me to turn left had not shown up at all. At what I identified as *the Point* I found a bench with a plate in memory of someone who had loved to fish there. The bench and the plate seemed to be at least several years old, and I wondered why Don wouldn't have mentioned them when describing the place...?

I then headed for the Anglican Church's Mint Brook summer camp on Gambo Pond, where Don had told me to look for a sandy beach and three salmon rivers. After some kilometers of gravel road I passed a gate and sign leading towards Mint Brook Camp and parked the car next to a large field surrounded by small cabins. Kids were playing in the field and looked at me curiously when I walked by to see if there was a beach at the other end, but I found nothing but a small landing. When I turned around a lady with a concerned look upon her face came towards me across the field. She asked what I was doing here, and told me that I was not permitted to enter the camp. I apologized, and my story must have sounded too curious to be fake. She thought for a moment, and said there was only one place remotely resembling a sandy beach she could think of. When I got there, it was disappointing: the beach was tiny, not much more than a shallow riverbank with one other brook coming out of the woods nearby. I left Mint Brook Camp with the strong feeling that this was not the place Don Collins had in mind when he told me about an ideal spot for a Viking settlement.

Later, on an online satellite map I discovered an apparently more impressive beach at the other side of the Gambo River exit from the lake. I visited this beach one year later, and it is beautiful. But I didn't find a single river or brook flowing into the lake at that end.

**The First Settler of the New World*, 2005

** *Falling into Vinland*, Acta Archaeologica, Vol. 83, 2012



Don Collins



Coming out of the woods ...



...and to "the point"



Until recently Gambo was home of the *Dark Cove Cottage Winery* where Glenda Baker had for many years successfully experimented with growing different types of grapes outside a greenhouse. But lacking any start-up support she had to finally give up her business idea. A number of grapevines in her garden still give evidence of the possibility to grow grapes in Newfoundland.



Beach at the other side of the Gambo River exit



disappointing Mint Brook Camp beach