

Drawings by Shanawdithit

[Click on image for a larger view](#)

THE BEOTHUCKS OR RED INDIANS THE ABORIGINAL INHABITANTS OF NEWFOUNDLAND

by James P. Howley, F.G.S.

Originally published in 1915
by Cambridge University Press.

These drawings were obtained from Shanawdithit by Mr W. E. Cormack, during the winter of 1829, while she resided with him in his house at St John's. They represent scenes in the closing history of the unfortunate tribe, together with certain articles of food, utensils, implements &c., in use by her people. The drawings are ten in number, five of which represent scenes enacted on or near the Exploits River and Red Indian Lake between the years 1810 and 1823. The other three are delineations of wigwams, store and smoke houses, implements of the chase, culinary utensils, various kinds of preserved animal food, mythological emblems (?) &c.

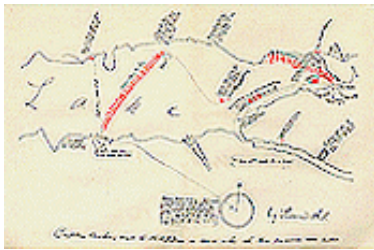
Although rude and truly Indian in character, they nevertheless display no small amount of artistic skill, and there is an extraordinary minuteness of topographical detail in those having reference to the Exploits River and adjacent country. These latter bear a striking resemblance to Micmac sketches of a similar character, such as I have frequently seen and made use of, when accompanied by Micmac canoemen on the Geological Survey of the Island. There is one notable omission in either, i.e., the entire absence of anything like a regular scale. As a rule, rivers and lakes are greatly exaggerated, and particular features, which may in nature be situated widely apart, are frequently crowded into a very small space; the reverse being just as frequently the case.

The bearings are tolerably correct, but it is in the outline of lakes, shores, position and number of islands, bends and turns of rivers, junctions of tributary streams, situation of falls and rapids, in relation to each other, that the minutia is apparent. For example, one of these sketches represents about one hundred miles of the Exploits River including part of Red Indian Lake, the whole of which is contained on one sheet of foolscap. If the scale were to be judged of by the width of the river or lake, it could not be less than six inches to a mile; nevertheless, every fall, rapid and tributary or other remarkable feature is laid down, all of which I have no difficulty in recognising from my own exploration and survey of 1875.

I might here add, that in all these drawings, the Indians and everything that pertains to them, are invariably marked in red lead, while the whitemen, the delineation of the lakes and rivers &c., are drawn with black lead pencil. Copious notes in Cormack's handwriting are scattered all over the sketches, so that there is no difficulty in following out their meaning.

In describing the first five drawings which are more or less of an historical character, I shall take them according to their dates. No. 1, refers to Capt. Buchan's expedition in 1811, to Red Indian Lake and is very accurately depicted. It will be found to agree, in most particulars, with Capt. B's published narrative, but there is some additional information contained in the former, which it was impossible to obtain except from the Indians themselves.

Sketch No.1.



This sketch represents about half of Red Indian Lake, including the NE. arm, where the principal encampment of the Indians was situated. It also takes in a portion of the River Exploits, below the lake and is on a very large scale. Some miles down the river and on its north side, a horse-shoe shaped figure, represents the depot of presents left there by Capt. Buchan. One red mark indicates the single Indian who remained with him when he revisited this cache. Two dotted lines extend along the river from this point to the lake, indicating the route back and forth pursued by the party. About

halfway to the lake, another red mark shows where one of the two Indians who accompanied Buchan, partly down the river, deserted his party and fled back to the lake. On the lake itself, the dotted lines continue up around the point which forms the outlet of the main river, and into the N E. arm, where the encampment was situated. A file of black and red figures on this line, represents the party accompanied by six Indians, returning for the presents, after the interview with the tribe. Just at the outlet from the lake, a note says, "two of the four Indians returned from Captain Buchan here." Further up arm the white men are seen doubling around on the lake, preparatory to surprising the wigwams, some of these figures seem to have guns on their shoulders (1), others have none. On the south side immediately opposite this circle of white men are seen three wigwams, and notes attached to each inform us that the westernmost was Shanawdithit's (Nancy) father's dwelling, the central one that of Mary March's (Demasduit's) father, while the most easterly, and apparently the largest of the three was Nancy's uncles. In front of the encampment on the ice are four red, and two black figures standing close together, and a note states, this represents the killing of the marines. Almost opposite, on the north shore four triangular red marks point out Mary March's cemetery, while a little further up the arm, on the same side, is a small black circle with a stick stuck up in the centre, and a black knob on its top, and a letter B alongside. A note on another part of this sketch refers to this as the place where the head of one of the marines was left.

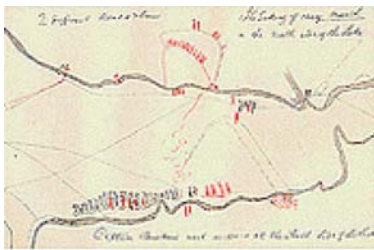
Extending across the arm obliquely from the encampment, towards the north shore, is a line of red figures, some twenty-two in number representing the Indians retreating after killing the marines. A dotted line along the north shore shows their route up the lake to a point where stand two more wigwams. Here we are told they halted for two hours on the first night of their retreat, until they were joined by five men, four women, three boys and four girls, who occupied the two wigwams. They then continued on, travelling all night, and reached a point inside an island (now Buchan's Island) before daylight. Here they remained a day and a half, awaiting Shanawdithit's uncle, whom it appears was the individual who remained with Buchan's party, and who after his escape joined them here. (2)

They then continued their journey along the lake, reaching a point about halfway up by the next night, where they encamped. Early next morning they crossed the lake on the ice to a point on the South side. The whole body of Indians marked in red are represented crossing in single file. The number of figures now reaches forty according to the drawing. Not being further disturbed, the whole party now go into camp here for the remainder of the winter. There are five wigwams shown at this point, and some distance further up, on another point, a single wigwam, with a note stating that a small party encamped here removed to join the main body. In the rear of this winter camp is a second small circle similar to that at B, and marked A. A line connects this with an enlarged circle in another part of the sketch, also marked A. It is simply to represent on a larger scale what this first circle meant. Its diameter is about two inches, and the circumference shows a double circle. A straight line rising from the exact centre represents a pole surmounted by a very good figure of a human head. This is explained in a note as follows: "Marines head stuck on a pole, around which the Indians danced and sang two hours in the woods at A, they having carried the head with them: the other marines head they left at B, and on their return there in the spring ? they danced and sang round it in like manner." One other note only remains which states that Capt. Buchan had 42 men with him two of whom were killed.

Shanawdithit gave an exact census of her tribe at that time to Cormack, as follows: "In the principal encampment, that which Capt. Buchan surprised, there were in one wigwam, or mamateek, 4 men, 5 women and 6 children. In the second mamateek, there were 4 men, 2 women and 6 children, and in the third mamateek, there were 3 men, 5 women and 7 children; in the whole 42 persons."

"In the second encampment there were 13 persons, and in the third 17, making in all 72 persons." (Noad.)

Sketch No.II.



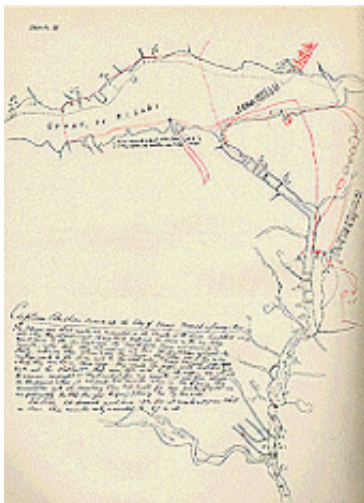
This sketch is labelled "The taking of Mary March on the North side of the lake." And in another place "Two different scenes and times." It depicts, on a large scale, the North East Arm of Red Indian Lake. On the south side is again seen Buchan's party, marching in single file towards the outflowing river, with the accompanying Indians in red. Also the four Indians approaching to kill the two marines. The three wigwams are shown in the same place as on the former sketch, but in addition there are 37 red strokes alongside the wigwams, which I presume represent the number of inhabitants they contained at the time. There are also two red figures standing on the bank, a short distance away, with a dotted red line leading from them across to the north side, the meaning of which is not quite clear. Dotted black lines up and down the lake refer to the various courses taken both by the Indians and Buchan's people, but there are no figures on these.

On the north side of the Arm, stand three wigwams, two in red and one in black pencil. The latter no doubt represents the wigwam covered with Peyton's boat's sail. Two semicircular red lines start from the wigwams running back into the woods, and after a considerable sweep, coming out again on the lake shore. On one of those lines 13 red figures are seen running away and five on the other. A third red line extends out on the lake upon which four figures are shown. In front of the wigwams on the ice are grouped half a dozen black, with one red figure in their midst. Standing near this group is a single red figure apparently of a large man, as if in the act of haranguing the group, while a little to one side is another red figure lying prone on the ice. It is almost needless to say this represents the furriers taking Mary March, her husband coming back to the rescue, and his dead body, after being shot, lying on the ice. A short distance to the eastward of the wigwams, a party of whitemen are seen hidden away in a recess near the mouth of a small brook, and amongst them is one red figure. This is Peyton's party taking observations of the wigwams etc. from their place of concealment previous to making a descent upon the Indians, the red figure would indicate that they returned here with Mary March after the capture.

The only other thing to be noted on this drawing is a red line extending along the shore of the lake westward, to a point beyond the wigwams where a group of red figures are seen on the shore evidently where the Indians halted to watch proceedings. This same red line continues on to another point where stand two wigwams, apparently the same two which stood there nine years previous when Buchan paid his visit.

All that is shown on this latter drawing relative to the capture of Mary March, corresponds exactly with the story as related to me by Mr Peyton himself, and so clearly are the topographical details laid down, that I had no difficulty in recognising the different points, on my last visit to Red Indian Lake a few years ago.

Sketch No.III.



This is the drawing which so accurately depicts the River Exploits and the greater part of Red Indian Lake. It refers particularly to Buchan's expedition up the lake in 1820 with the body of poor Mary March, as the following note testifies.

"Capt. Buchan carries up the body of Mary March in Jan. 1820. The Indians were that winter all encamped on the banks of the River Exploits, at A, and when they observed Capt. B. and party pass up the river on the ice, they went down to the seacoast near the mouth of the river, and remained a month; after that they returned up and saw the footprints of Capt. B's party, made on their return from the river: they then went by a circuitous route to the lake, and to the spot where Mary March was left; which they reached in three days. They opened the coffin with hatchets, and took out the clothes etc. that were left with her; the coffin was allowed to remain suspended, as they found it, for one month; it was then placed on the ground, where it remained two months; when in the spring, they removed her into the

cemetery they had built for her husband, (who was unfortunately killed the year before) placing her by his side.

"The tribe had decreased much since 1816 (?) (1811) for it would appear that in 1820 their number only amounted to 27 in all."

On this sketch, as already stated, the entire River Exploits from the tide water to Red Indian Lake and the greater part of the Lake itself are shown. Every fall, rapid, or other feature is given with extraordinary minuteness. Two dotted black lines along the course of the river indicate Buchan's two journeys up the lake. At short intervals all along, sometimes on one side, sometimes on the other, small squares with a

stroke rising therefrom and a pennant flying from its top, represent Buchan's various camps or stopping places as he journeyed along, these are further distinguished by the letter C close by. No red marks appear till near Little Red Indian fall; some forty nine miles from the mouth of the main river. Here a wigwam is shown on the right side, a short distance back, marked with the letter A, and on the left side, several red strokes are seen, and further back, on Little Red Indian Lake, some three miles from the main river, three wigwams are shown, also marked with the letter A. A note here states, "Three wigwams containing all the tribe when Capt. Buchan and party passed up on the ice with the body."

Still further back on the Badger Bay waters, three more wigwams are seen, but these refer to the next drawing.

Red lines extend from this encampment, through the woods to the N E. Arm of the lake showing the routes by which the Indians themselves travelled back and forth. On the lake itself, the old camp on south side is shown abandoned, and now only indicated by a red circle with strokes radiating therefrom, presumably indicating the number of former occupants, but this time there are only 20 strokes.

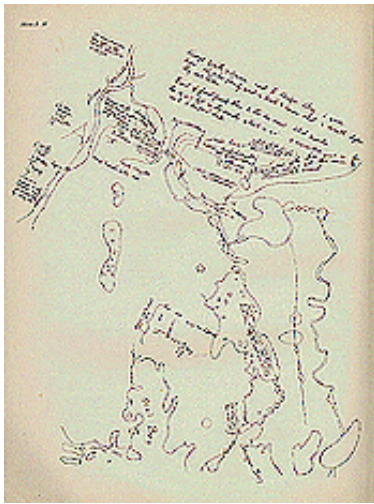
Out on the lake, following a line obliquely across the arm towards a point where stand three wigwams (the same three surprised by Peyton the year before) are shown 15 figures in black hauling two sleds after them, on the last of which is the coffin containing poor Mary March's body. As before related the wigwams were found deserted, and apparently had not been occupied for the past year. On one of these is now shown an oblong figure in red some height above the ground, representing the coffin suspended from poles driven through the roof of the wigwam. A number of red figures are seen approaching this spot from behind, indicating the return of the Indians to examine the coffin after Buchan had left.

On the point near the outlet of the main river, stand three wigwams, which were not shown on the former drawing. These apparently indicate a new encampment, formed here subsequent to Buchan's former visit, and are so situated as to command a view down the river, as well as, up the NE. Arm. No doubt this was intended to guard against a second surprise from either direction. A red line leads from this across to the north side, and into the woods, while another red line trends along the south side of the lake, up to the point where they wintered after retreating from Buchan in 1811. It apparently was the route followed in coming back to their old home.

On a point near the mouth of Victoria River, which flows into the lake on the south side, about four miles from the outlet, there is a small red dot marked with the letter B, with a note attached, recording the pathetic circumstance that, "Here Mary March's child died two days after its mother's abduction."

There is another red line extending along the North side of the lake but this is situated inland, and not apparently on the frozen surface. It is probably the route followed in returning to the NE. Arm after the ice became unfit to travel upon. One very interesting new feature on this sketch is a black dotted line, on the same side reaching a long way up the lake to a cove which would seem to represent the mouth of Shanawdithit Brook, only five miles from its extreme head. At four different places along this route short lines branch off to the shore, and at each point the square camp with the flag and letter C, would clearly indicate, that Buchan, after disposing of Mary March's body, and not seeing anything of the Indians, made an extensive search of the lake shores, but as we know without success. He then returned to the N E. Arm and entering the country at its head, made a long detour in around Hodges Hill etc. Part of this route is shown as usual in black dotted lines. This drawing demonstrates clearly how very observant these Indians were, nothing seems to have escaped their notice. No doubt, after Buchan returned to his ship they visited the sites of every one of his camping places to search for any odds or ends he may have left there, otherwise, I do not see how Shanawdithit could have so accurately laid them down.

Sketch No. IV.



This sketch represents a portion of the Exploits River with the waters of Badger Brook and the country lying between the mouth of the Badger, Badger Bay and Seal Bay, portions of both the latter being shown. It is all drawn in black lead pencil, inked in because I presume as no white men figured in this one, there was no occasion to make a distinction by the use of black and red lines.

It depicts in the most faithful and striking manner the last sad scene in their history, at least as known to Shanawdithit and has copious notes by Cormack written all over it. It contains beyond all question the last authentic information of the miserable remnant of the ill-fated Beothucks, we can ever now hope to obtain.

Numerous ponds and lakes belonging to the Badger watershed are shown and which seem to form an almost continuous chain, stretching from the Exploits to the seashore, these appear to be connected by short streams, indicating that the waters flow both ways, which has in reality since proved to be the case.

Between the first and second lakes on the river, at a point marked A, four wigwams, or mamateeks, are seen, where the tribe were encamped in March 1823. A note informs us that the first of these was that of Nancy's, Shanawdithit's father, and was occupied by five persons. The second wigwam contained nine individuals, the third, that of Shanawdithit's uncle, contained seven persons, and the fourth six, 27 in all. Of these one died, out of the nine in the second wigwam, two from the third, and three from the fourth. Though she does not state the cause, there can be little doubt that starvation was the principal one.

Impelled by dire distress and misery Shanawdithit's uncle and his daughter, her cousin, here left and travelled out to Badger Bay in search of shell fish, and were there ruthlessly shot down by two furriers named Carey and Adams. The course they travelled along the waters of the Badger is shown by a black line, also the point on the shore where they were killed is indicated.

At the northern end of the second lake, at a point marked C, another encampment consisting only of three wigwams is shown, at which place they were camped in April, previous to Shanawdithit's leaving the country. As by her showing there could now only be 19 individuals remaining; I presume three wigwams were found ample to accommodate this small number of persons.

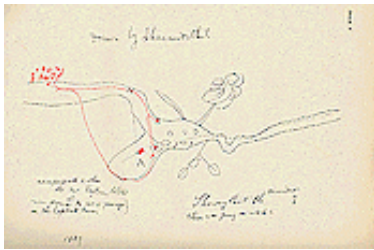
At camp C, in April the two remaining in her uncle's wigwam died⁽³⁾, thus was this whole family wiped out of existence.

Shanawdithit with her mother and sister now left for the seacoast in search of mussels for food. They followed the same route as that pursued by her uncle and cousin, over the frozen lakes and river to Badger Bay. Here they were captured by another party of furriers. Her subsequent history, already related, shows that from the time she left the interior she had no further communication with her tribe, and we are left to conjecture only what was the ultimate fate of the small remnant left behind. According to her statement there were but 12 individuals remaining, and these, she says, started off by a circuitous route for the Great Lake⁽⁴⁾, a black line leading away from the wigwams in a NW. direction indicating the line of retreat.

She then specifies very exactly who the 12 individuals were that composed this remnant, as follows:

There were five men, four women, one lad, and two children. The five men were, her uncle, her brother, two brothers of Mary March, one of whom was called Longnon, and his son. The four women were, Mary March's mother and sister, Longnon's wife, and Nancy's cousin. The lad was Mary March's sister's son, and the two children, a boy and girl, Nancy's brother's children. There is no mention of her father and the other occupant of his wigwam so that I conclude they must both have died previous to her leaving. Thus ends the historical sketch of the last stage of their existence, so far as was known to Shanawdithit.

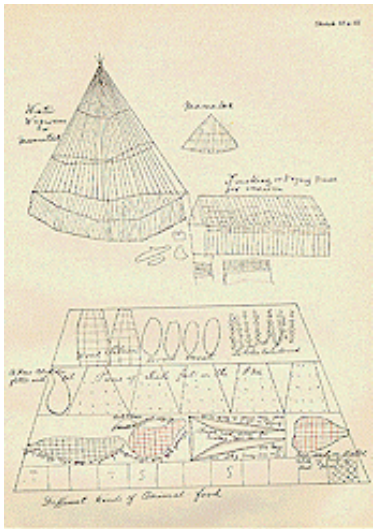
Sketch V.



This is but a small drawing and represents one of those brutal murders so frequently recorded. The scene is laid somewhere on the Exploits River, apparently in the vicinity of Rushy Brook. On an island on the south side of the river, marked A, a red circle with a confused red mark is shown, and a note referring to this says "Accompanied by 2 others old Mr..... kills an Indian woman at A 14 or 15 years ago, on the Exploits River." A black lead pencil line along the river's course indicates the direction by which the furriers approached the wigwam and surrounded it. Three red lines radiate

from the wigwam, one across the river to an island opposite on which a group of red figures are seen, another runs up along the course of the main river, and the third circles around through the woods coming out again on the river above. Where these two last meet a group of ten or twelve red figures are collected on the bank, no doubt to show where the fugitives from the wigwam met again after being so ruthlessly disturbed. Another note on this sheet is as follows " Showing that the murder of them was going on in 1816."

Sketch VI & VII.



(Sketch VI) This is but a small drawing representing three figures, two of which are wigwams (mamateeks). One is of large size and is labelled Winter wigwam. It is of octagonal shape at the base, and appears to have an upright wall or fence of sticks driven into the ground all around, of about two feet in height. Inside this a circular mound of earth was thrown up, probably for warmth, though some authorities assert it was for protection from an enemies missiles. Rising from the top of this earth wall is the usual conical shaped roof of poles meeting at top, or the apex of the cone. Only the internal structure of the wigwam is shown, the outer covering of birch bark being omitted. Two hoops, also of octagonal form, and about equal distances apart are shown, against which the rafters rest, or to which they are fastened. The upper part of the conical roof was, as usual left uncovered to allow for the escape of the smoke from the fire in the centre.

The second wigwam is much smaller and does not show the vertical wall at the base. It appears to rise directly from the ground as do the Micmac wigwams, and was most probably merely a temporary structure. It is labelled " Summer wigwam" and only shows the internal structure as in the first instance. The third figure represents an oblong structure consisting of upright sticks, forming the walls on all sides, with a gabled roof similar to the fisherman's tilt or store-house. It is labelled Smoking or drying House for venison, and seems to have some sort of lattice work shelves or benches inside, presumably upon which to lay the meat.

Six small figures are shown in the foreground which are not easy to determine. Two of them look like hand barrows or sleds, another rudely resembles a seal's carcass, still another looks like a chopping block, the remaining two may be bundles of meat tied up.

(Sketch VII) This is a most interesting drawing, and is entitled, "Different kinds of animal food." It is arranged in three rows, one above the other. Reading from left to right the first two figures on the top row look like sections of truncated cones crossbarred with vertical and horizontal lines and are labelled " Dried Salmon." They apparently represent the fish split and spread out flat with small sticks to keep them in that form. These are followed by four oval-shaped figures labelled dried meat, while on the right are eight or nine rows of small round figures apparently connected by strings and labelled "Lobsters tails dried."

The second row has on the left hand side a gourd shaped figure, or still more nearly resembling the shape of the bag of the Highland pipes. It is marked, "A Deers bladder filled with oil." This is succeeded by five figures, somewhat rudely triangular in shape and marked over the surface with small black dots. These are called "Pieces of Seal fat on the skin." Presumably they cut off one piece of fat at a time according as they required it for food or cooking.

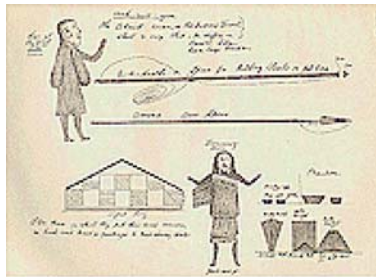
On the third or lowest row, the first figure is a long, somewhat oval shaped one tapering towards either end, and is crossbarred with black lines. It is called "Bochmoot" or seal skin sled, full, it represents an entire seal skin apparently fitted with a frame-work to keep it extended and partly hollowed like a skin boat.

Such a vehicle when drawn along on the ice or snow, and with the grain of the hair would slip over the surface with great ease, a fact well known to our seal hunters, who always drag their "tow of seals," as it is called, along the ice in this manner. Two gourd shaped figures come next, the one quite small labelled "Seals bladder filled with oil," the other and larger one, which is crossbarred with black and red strokes, is

the stomach of the seal filled with the other intestines. The next figure is oblong in shape but much wider at one end than at the other. The sides and wider end are turned up so as to form a hollow basin-like utensil which is called a "Birch rind vessel for boiling eggs in." It is stated that after the eggs are boiled they are then dried in the sun on birch bark. Whitbourne makes mention of this when, speaking of the Indians surprised near Hearts Ease, he says, "They had also many pots sewn and fashioned like leather buckets, that are used for quenching of fire, and those were full of the yolks of eggs, that had been taken and boiled hard, and so dried small as it had been powdered sugar, which the savages used in their broth, as sugar is used in some meats."

The last figure is somewhat fan shaped and is black lines, and is called a "Nap Sack or wallet made of half a Seal skin."⁽⁵⁾

Sketch VIII.



This is another very interesting drawing and represents a variety of subjects. On the top left hand corner is the figure of a man standing upright, about six inches in height. One arm is extended in front, turned upwards from the elbow, with the hand in the attitude of becoming or making some friendly gesture. The figure is draped in a long black loose fitting garment reaching to the knees with an outer cape to the waist, not unlike an Inverness wrapper. The lower limbs from the knee down appear to be cased in leggings or long boots. The head, which is bare, and the whole pose of the figure, would indicate that it represents a white man, yet it is labelled

"Ash-mud-yim," the blackman, or Red Indian Devil, seen at the Great Lake. He is described thus, "Short and very thick, he dresses in Beaver skin, and has a long beard, yet there is no beard shown, the face being quite smooth, with clean chin."

It has suggested itself to me, judging from the pose and attitude of this figure, that possibly it represents a missionary of some kind who may have at some period penetrated to the home of the Beothucks at Red Indian Lake, but we have no recorded history of such a visit. Possibly one of the French priests or brothers formerly stationed at Placentia might have undertaken such a mission. When we read of the daring exploits of these missionaries amongst the aborigines in Canada and along the Mississippi River it would seem to give colour to such a supposition, but why the Indians should have designated such a messenger of peace the "Devil" we are at a loss to conjecture. Did such an occurrence ever really take place, it is greatly to be regretted that its result was a failure. Why Cormack did not question Shanawdithit more closely with regard to this figure and obtain more particulars about the circumstance I cannot conceive. One would naturally suppose that his curiosity would have been aroused by the suggestiveness of the figure, and that he would try to obtain a solution of this mysterious apparition. Of course it must have been merely a tradition with Shanawdithit, if as I suppose, the visit occurred during the French occupation of Placentia, which was long before her time. Whatever the true solution of this strange figure may be, it certainly is very suggestive of Longfellow's

" Black robed chief the Prophet,
He the priest of prayer, the pale face."

This figure is followed by two full length spears, one for killing Seals the other for Deer. The first called "A-aduth," is represented as being 12 feet long (?). It consists of a long straight wooden handle, to which is affixed, at one end an iron point of a triangular shape set in a bone socket. This socket is not permanently attached to the handle but is kept in its place by a long string, one end of which passes through two holes bored through the bone and securely tied, while the other end is brought along the handle, passing over a notch at the further end, and thence back to about the middle of the handle where it would appear to have been grasped by the operator. The bone socket, where it meets the handle is forked and has a groove cut in it, into which the end of the handle is inserted, the string being then drawn tight, and firmly grasped by the hand tends to keep the point in its lace while striking the animal, But immediately the spear head enters its body, the string is released and the spear separated from the handle, which remains in the hand, while the ample coil of line shown, allows full play to the animal in diving. The spear head is tied in such a way that so soon as it penetrates the skin and flesh of the seal and a strain is put upon it by the exertions of the wounded animal, it turns crossways in the wound which prevents its being withdrawn. The whole contrivance is one of a most ingenious character, and I have little doubt the idea was borrowed from the Eskimo, who appear to have been the originators of this kind of weapon. It only differs from that of the latter people in being more slightly and delicately made, in having a triangular instead of a leafshaped iron point, and in the absence of the float or drag attached to the opposite end of the line. I would surmise from this that the Beothuck did not pursue the seals in his canoe, on the water, as the Eskimo does, but speared them on the ice, or in their blow holes. This seems the more probable from the fact that their frail birch bark canoes were ill adapted for the pursuit of the animal in its native element.

The Deer spear differs considerably from that just described. It has a similar long straight wooden handle, but the point, which is all of iron is much longer, has no bone socket, and is fastened permanently into the end of the handle by a long slight stem or tang. The blade is long and tapering, somewhat resembling the Zulu Assegai in shape, except that the wider portion near its base forms two obtuse angles instead of having the shoulders rounded off. Of course the point of this weapon does not come unshipped as in the case of the Seal spear, consequently there is no string attached, none being required. It is called "A-min" or "A-mina."

In the lower left hand corner of this drawing is a large and more elaborate representation of a store or drying house. It shows a section across the middle of the building, which is said to be 10 feet wide, by 4½ feet high to the wall plate. Its roof is of the triangular shape, with rather a low angle of slope. It is divided internally, into two rows of large squares, one above the other, six squares in each row, and every alternate square is crossbarred as though representing lattice work. This was probably to allow for the free circulation of air. It is labelled "Store house," in which they put their dried venison, in birch bark packages, to keep during winter.

The next figure is a very interesting one. It represents a woman dancing. The features are fairly well depicted, with long black hair hanging down either side of the head, the arms, which are bare, to the shoulders, are extended on either side outward from the body and bent slightly upward from the elbow. A long loose fitting robe reaches from the neck to the knees, but is gathered in at the waist by a cord or belt. The upper part of this garment has a wide crossbarred strip, passing just under the pit of the left arm and over the point of the right shoulder. This has some sort of a fringe attached to its under side. There is also a similar border or fringe along the tail end of the dress; and from under the right arm, a portion of the dress with a similar border and fringe both at top and bottom is seen flying loose, as if extended by the action of circling round while dancing. Whether these fringes are merely slashed pieces of deer skin or, what appears to me, from their shape more likely, bone or other ornaments, similar to those found in their burying places, which being attached to the dress would jingle or rattle, after the manner of castanets during the process of dancing. This belief is strengthened by the fact that the skin robe covering the body of the small boy in our local museum had such ornaments together with birds' legs so attached to the hem of the garment. The lower limbs of this figure from the knees down appear to be bare or otherwise encased in leggings of some sort.

In the lower right hand corner of this drawing are shown several birch bark vessels of different sizes and shapes. Two very small ones, shaped like an ordinary bowl, are called "Shoe-wan-yeesh" Drinking Cups. Two others of similar shape but of larger size are simply called "Shoewan." The three lower, and much larger vessels are labelled "Water buckets," all differ in shape. The first to the left, is triangular, very small at bottom but wide at top, apparently about a foot or so in height, and stands upright on its narrow base. The next is also triangular in shape, about the same height as the first, but instead of having a small base, it carries the same width from top to bottom. The third and last, also triangular, is not as high as the other two, and is shaped somewhat like the first, wide at one end and narrow at the other, but in this case, it has the small end up while the wide end forms the base. The two first are called "Guin-ya-butt," while the third is called "Sun-onguin-ya-butt."

Sketch IX & X.



(Sketch IX) This drawing is labelled "Emblems of Red Indian Mythology." It consists of six figures in one row, and all of about the same length. Each figure represents a straight tapering staff, said to be 6 feet in length, surmounted at the thicker end with the supposed emblem. No. 1 is clearly intended to represent a fishing boat such as was in common use around our coasts. It is very faithfully executed, the hull with a slight rise in the fore-part and drop towards the stern, the two short masts, the after one showing the characteristic rake familiar to all acquainted with this little craft, is all very realistic. In fact the boat is better drawn than many of our youthful artists could depict it. If this emblem ever had any name written upon it the same has been completely obliterated.

No. 2 represents very clearly the crescent shaped tail of a whale, it is called "Owas-bosh-no-un." A note informs us that a whale was considered a great prize, this animal affording them a more abundant supply of food than anything else, hence the Indians worshipped this image of the Whale's tail. Another reference to this occurs amongst some stray notes of Cormack's

as follows: "The Bottle Nose Whale which they represented by the fishes tail, frequents, in great numbers the Northern Bays, and creeps in at Clode Sound and other places, and the Red Indians consider it the greatest good luck to kill one. They are 22 and 23 feet long."

No. 3. This represents the half Moon inverted, and is named "Kuis." There is no note of any kind to indicate what significance was attached to it.

No. 4 is a long wooden staff, wide at top with a pyramid end but tapering gradually away towards the bottom. It is named "Bocgh-woodjeeb-shneck " (?). There is no further explanation.

No. 5 has four square or somewhat oblong pieces which appear to be let into the upper end of the staff, and are separated from each other by narrow open spaces. It is called "Ash-wa-meet."

No. 6. Somewhat similar to the last, having four triangular shaped pieces cut at the top, and reducing in size downwards. This is named "Ash-u-meet," and is but another form of the preceding one.

It appears to me very strange that Mr Cormack did not obtain more definite information from Shanawdithit as to the real significance of those so called mythological symbols. The only other reference to them I can find amongst his writings is in a letter of his to the Bishop of Nova Scotia, in which he says, "I have lately discovered the key to the Mythology of her tribe, which must be considered one of the most interesting subjects to enquire into."

I confess I am greatly inclined to agree with the late Sir William Dawson, that these emblems were in reality the "Totems" or crests of families, corresponding with armorial bearings of civilized persons. Possibly they may have been badges of office.

The figure of the boat in the first described symbol may very probably have reference to the boat carried off from Mr Peyton's wharf in 1818. No doubt this act, was looked upon as a great feat of daring, and the individuals engaged in the undertaking would thereby be entitled to use the symbol of the "Whiteman's boat" as their totem henceforth.

Again the person or persons who succeeded in capturing such a formidable animal as a whale, and one so much prized by the Indians, would be considered a great hunter and be entitled to adopt as his totem the Whale's tail.

It is not so easy to trace the connection as regards the Moon and the other symbols.

(Sketch X) This is the last of Shanawdithit's drawings. It represents a house of two stories, having five, 12 pane windows on top, a porch with a semicircular fanlight over it. Its roof is of the ordinary saddle type, and there are two chimneys in it. Underneath is written, "The house in St John's, in which Shanawdithit lived (Roopes') drawn by herself."

There is still another small sketch of hers in the *Philosophical Journal of Edinburgh* for 1829, showing the interior of a room, in which there are a table, a bench, and a clock on the wall. At one side are two windows draped with curtains, and on the opposite side a door with a square lock upon it. The drawing was evidently intended to illustrate Shanawdithit's idea of perspective.

1. These are I presume the furriers, who would not accompany Buchan unless allowed to take their guns. His own men only carried side arms.
2. He is represented running away from Buchan's party after the discovery of the marine's bodies. A red half loop near him is referred to as "Trousers thrown away during his flight." It will be remembered that Buchan's men made him a pair of swan-skin trousers which I presume he found an encumbrance to his speed and so discarded them.
3. Most probably these were children.
4. In this case I believe the Grand Lake is meant, as it lies in that direction.
5. Our fishfolk use a somewhat similar article made of a seal skin sewn round, which they call a "nunny bag."

Please contact [Dr. Hans Rollmann](mailto:hrollman@morgan.ucs.mun.ca) at hrollman@morgan.ucs.mun.ca for info, enquiries, criticisms or problems.
This page created by and currently maintained by [David Cantwell](#). Last modified July 22, 1997.