

Encouraging the ethical practice of archaeology



FIRST PEOPLE OF ONTARIO: THE PALEO-INDIANS



It is probable that Ontario was first occupied almost as soon as the land was exposed by melting ice. Fluted points, which are very similar to projectile points from the western and southwestern U.S., have been found on a number of sites in southern Ontario, although different "Type" names have been given to them to recognize slight differences in style which indicate variation in time and space. The fluted points in Ontario are believed to date between 11,000 and 10,500 years old.

Paleo-Indian sites are also recognized by the presence of other distinctive artifacts such as beaked scrapers, graters, and tiny projectile points made from channel flakes. Paleo-Indian sites are also often recognized by the types of chert used to make their tools. Collingwood chert, a light blue to creamy yellow chert found in the Beaver Valley, was a favoured raw material during Paleo-Indian times but other cherts such as Bayport chert from Michigan, Kettle Point chert from the southeastern shore of Lake Huron and Onondaga chert from the north shore of Lake Erie, were also used.

Some researchers suggest that the Paleo-Indian's choice of light coloured cherts may be related to their religious practices. The only other known indications of religious practices known so far for these people include a cache of heat fractured tools, which may indicate a cremation burial, and a fluted point made of clear quartz crystal with traces of haematite, or red ochre, adhering to it found near Newcastle, Ontario. Red ochre was believed to have special religious significance to many of the First Nations and was often used in burials. Ethnographic comparisons with people who lived similar kinds of lifestyles suggest that some forms of hunting magic and shamanism may also have been practised.

Many Paleo-Indian site clusters appear to occur around such glacial features as kettle ponds and the shore lines of glacial lakes. Site clusters presently known include the glacial lake shorelines north of London, Ontario, the Holland Marsh area north of Toronto and the Rice Lake area. A few Paleo-Indian artifacts have been found in eastern Ontario, such as two fluted points from the Rideau Lakes area, but these are rare. Furthermore, it is likely that Paleo-Indian populations which might have occupied extreme southeastern Ontario would have been more closely related to Paleo-Indians in neighbouring eastern New York and Vermont than to populations in southwestern Ontario.



Site areas indicate that band sizes may have been small, with few sites being returned to repeatedly. The total population of Ontario was probably only 100 to 200 people in the earliest periods. Their choices of site locations may indicate that they were hunting migratory caribou as these locations would have been travelled by caribou in their seasonal round. There is no indication of Paleo-Indians having hunted mastodons in Ontario although a paleontological site in New York has produced evidence of Paleo-Indians in association with mastodons and other large game animals.

The wide variety of chert types found on sites of this period suggests that either these people travelled great distances in their seasonal rounds or had contacts with people over wide areas.

Late Paleo-Indian sites are characterized by projectile points which are lanceolate shaped like fluted points but are not fluted. Like the earlier peoples, Late Paleo-Indians appear to have preferred distinctive light coloured cherts with Haldimand chert, from quarries just north of the Lake Erie shores, being one favourite variety. The available evidence seems to suggest that many of the living patterns of previous time periods were repeated although the population for southern Ontario may have been slightly larger than in previous time periods with new areas having been occupied.

Two broad groups of Late Paleo-Indian projectile points are recognized. In southwestern Ontario are found projectile points called "Holcombe" and "Hi-Lo", which are relatively broad and thick and have concave bases. In northern Ontario, and occasionally in southern Ontario, some projectile points have the characteristic "ribbon flaking" and straight bases more common to the west and southwest. These are the first occupations of northern Ontario and are believed to have derived from west of the great lakes area. Sites in the Thunder Bay area, for example, appear to have been situated along glacial lake shorelines and often involved quarrying of materials such as taconite, a tough jasper-like rock which flakes similarly to chert. Here again, however, the presence of materials from more distant sources indicates some form of trading network and/or long distance travel.

The late Paleo-Indian period is believed to date between 10,500 and 9,500 years ago.

This Summary of Ontario Archaeology was taken from the Discovering Ontario Archaeology - Speakers Kit. The original texts were written by Jeff Bursey, Hugh Daechsel, Andrew Hinshelwood and Carl Murphy.

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The Archaeology of Ontario



THE ARCHAIC PERIOD



The Archaic period in southern Ontario is characterized by the appearance of ground stone tools, notched or stemmed projectile points, the predominance of less extensively flaked stone tools, increased reliance on local chert sources, a lack of pottery and smoking pipes (except in the later parts of this period) and an increase in the numbers and sizes of sites.

During the Archaic period, Native peoples evolved their way of life to adapt to a temperate forest environment in a landscape criss-crossed by streams and rivers and surrounded by large fresh water lakes. Subsistence strategies which developed during the Archaic are generally considered to be based on increased exploitation of seasonally abundant resources. Small hunting and gathering bands (20-50 people) utilized the lake shores during the spring and summer months, then broke into family groups and moved inland for the fall and winter. Food would have been plentiful during the warm months of the year. The lakes and rivers were teeming with many species of fish, aquatic birds and mammals. Nuts, berries and edible roots could be found in the forests and marshes. The fall would have been a busy time because foodstuffs would have to be stored and clothing made ready for the winter. During the winter, people moved inland to hunt and trap fresh food and furs.

We don't know exactly what Archaic houses looked like, but from the size of most sites, people probably lived in oval wigwam-like structures made of frame poles and covered with bark slabs or reed mats. This type of house was easy to build or move and could be heated with a small fire near the centre of the structure. There might have been pits placed within the houses for the storage of food or other items.

The Early Archaic (9,500 to 8,000 Years Ago)

The earliest time period of the Archaic appears to have been characterized by lanceolate points like the Late Paleo-Indian styles but with crude side notches. By about 9,500 B. P. a change in the environment from primarily coniferous forests to mixed coniferous and deciduous forests seems to correlate with the appearance of new styles of projectile points featuring corner notches and serration along the sides of the blades. This change in conditions would have ended the relatively open environment of the Paleo-Indian period, which the caribou herds preferred, to be replaced by more closed forests favouring deer, elk and moose. These animals do not congregate in large herds like caribou, necessitating the adoption of different hunting strategies.

In addition to the new styles of projectile points, sites from this time period often produce finely made end scrapers, hafted concave side scrapers, crude celts (ungrooved axes or adzes) and polished stone tubes. These latter may have been weights for atlatls or throwing sticks which

increase the power for throwing short spears or javelins.

The chert used by people of this time period appears to have been obtained from more local sources although cherts from distant sources were still commonly obtained.

There seems to be some evidence that an increase in population sizes had occurred at this time. Slightly greater concentrations of sites occur in new areas and a few of these sites appear to have been occupied repeatedly over a number of years. One cluster of sites of this time period has recently been discovered and excavated in the Woodbridge area. Another is located to the southwest of London. In southeastern Ontario, Early Archaic sites have not been found, either because the sites are under water or because they are in areas which have not been examined by archaeologists.

In northern Ontario, the reason for the lack of Early Archaic sites is relatively apparent. During the Paleo-Indian period, a remnant ice mass from the last glacial advance lay across the eastern outlet of Lake Superior, at the present town of Sault Ste. Marie. This maintained artificially high lake levels, producing the now inland beach ridges. Towards the end of this period, the ice mass wasted away allowing the lake level to drop over 100 meters. The lowest levels were reached between 6,300 and 6,000 years ago. Following this drop in lake levels, isostatic rebound led to a gradual return to the water levels of today by about 4,000 years ago. Since the archaic people would have had most of their camps on the lake shores, sites dating between the end of the Paleo-Indian and 4,000 years ago would be largely under water today.

This is not to say, however, that there is nothing known of the Archaic in the north. Many sites have been found and excavated with diagnostic projectile points of the Archaic period including projectile points which obviously derived from Archaic groups in the south, east and west. Many of these sites, however, had been occupied frequently and over a long period of time with little soil formation or deposition and so individual occupations are difficult or impossible to separate. They do tell us, however, that the Archaic people in northern Ontario lived a similar lifestyle to the Archaic people in southern Ontario.

The Middle Archaic (8,000 to 4,500 Years Ago)

Over the next 5,000 years, Archaic sites in southern Ontario increase in frequency and are characterized by a variety of styles of projectile points and other tools, often made from broken projectile points. General trends for this period include increased use of lower grades of stone such as quartz, quartzite, siltstone and coarse-grain rhyolite to manufacture flake tools. Finely made Bannerstones, polished stone tubes with wings, appear after about 8,000 years ago, probably functioning as atl-atl weights. It was about this time that the predominant forest cover appears to have changed to primarily deciduous forests. Grooved axes and netsinkers, used for fishing, also appear around this time. By about 5,500 years ago the earliest use of native copper can be documented.

Copper occurs naturally in some of the rock formations that underlie northern Ontario, especially in the Lake Superior Basin. While the two primary sources for copper are Isle Royale and the Keweenaw Peninsula, this same geological formation occurs on the north shore of Lake Superior at Black Bay Peninsula and copper is known to have occurred in abundance elsewhere along the lake

shore.

Lake Superior copper is unusually pure and this purity allows it to be worked and shaped at low temperatures and with relatively simple tools. The mining of copper has been determined by some archaeologists to have been a relatively simple procedure. Large nuggets of copper and the surrounding rock were broken away from the main deposit with large rocks and sticks. These nuggets were then heated in fires and, when the copper was well heated, splashed with cold water. This sudden cooling resulted in the fracture of the surrounding rock leaving almost pure copper.

At first native copper was used almost exclusively in the production of utilitarian tools such as socketed and "rat-tailed" projectile points, fish gaffs, adzes, needles, etc. Through time, however, more decorative objects such as beads and other ornaments began to appear. It is possible that, as these objects became more widely available they began to acquire prestigious or magical values and were sought for these reasons. By the Late Archaic, copper was increasingly deposited in burials, perhaps as offerings for the afterlife, and the objects either exhibit less evidence of use or were intended as non-utilitarian status objects, such as ear spools or pan pipes.

Over this time period there is increased evidence of larger populations and new areas being exploited. This evidence also includes indications of greater and more intensive exploitation of smaller areas. In southwestern Ontario influences from Michigan appear to be important all through prehistory but in southcentral Ontario influences from across the Niagara River seem more important. Similarly, influence in eastern Ontario probably derived from across the eastern end of Lake Ontario while in northern Ontario influences from the west have been noted. Like the Paleo-Indian period, subsistence appears to have focused on hunting, although the emphasis was no longer on migratory big-game. Fishing and gathering of various plant foods was also very important, perhaps more so than hunting. Some groups appear to have been particularly oriented towards the collection of acorns.

Emerging in New York State and southeastern Ontario at this time is a tradition archaeologists have identified as the Laurentian Archaic. Laurentian Archaic sites are associated with the Canadian Biotic Province, which is a transition zone between the deciduous forests to the south and coniferous forests to the north. The environment afforded both a variety and reasonable quantity of food and other resources to local populations.

The Laurentian Archaic peoples made broad-bladed projectile points with notches as well as an assortment of ground and polished stone tools such as semi-lunar knives, plummets, slate points, bayonets, knives, gouges, adzes and ungrooved axes. Other flaked tools include notched end scrapers, drills from recycled points and knives. There is also evidence for the use of bone tools including stemmed, socketed and barbed points, unilaterally barbed harpoons and needles. In eastern Ontario, this is the period when copper tools first appear and are most common.

The earliest recorded burials in eastern Ontario date to this period. There appear to have been a variety of burial practices including both cremation and extended burials with some grave goods. Examination of skeletal remains indicates that individuals reached ages of 50 to 60, although the average life span must have been around 30 - 35 years.

Laurentian Archaic peoples continued the hunting and gathering subsistence pattern of their

ancestors. It is suggested that there was less reliance on plant food by populations in eastern Ontario than by groups to the southwest and a correspondingly increased dependence on fishing. One of the earliest fish weirs in North America has been identified for this period at Atherly Narrows on Lake Simcoe.

Laurentian Archaic materials have been identified for most regions of eastern Ontario. Unfortunately very few sites have been systematically excavated. Among the most important known sites are those at Morrison's and Allumete Islands along the Ottawa River near Pembroke. Middle Archaic material has also been identified at Brophey Point on Wolfe Island along the St. Lawrence River and in the Napanee Drainage Basin at the Salisbury Site.

The Late Archaic (4,500 to 2,900 Years Ago)

Human activity in southern Ontario appears to increase significantly during the later portion of the Archaic Period. Archaeologists have recognized at least three "distinct" traditions within a fifteen hundred year time period. These are referred to as "Narrow Point", "Broad Point" and "Small Point".

The "Narrow Point" tradition is defined largely on the presence of narrow-bladed, stemmed projectile points often made from coarser grained raw materials such as quartzite. Other tools associated with this tradition include flake scrapers, graters, spokeshaves and wedges.

Sites from the "Narrow Point" tradition appear to have been most common in New York State and further to the southeast but a few have been found in the Niagara Peninsula region and as far west as Guelph. These sites seem to have been especially common along the shores of a lake known as Lake Wainfleet in the Niagara Peninsula area and Lake Tonawanda in western New York. This lake would have drained when Niagara Falls had eroded a high topographic contour about 3,900 years ago. It is suggested that this group overlapped with the Laurentian Archaic which might explain the lack of Narrow Point sites in Eastern Ontario. Points characteristic of this tradition, however, have been recovered from the Armstrong site on Wolfe Island in the St. Lawrence River.

The "Broad Point" tradition is defined on the basis of large, broad-bladed, stemmed points which make an abrupt appearance in the sequence of cultural development but probably developed from similar forms found in eastern New York where soapstone vessels appear for the first time. In Ontario these points are generally made from Onondaga chert but greywacke was also commonly employed in Southwestern Ontario. A very distinct red quartzite has been used in the production of these points in the Rideau Lakes area. The large size of these points has led to the suggestion that they were not used as projectile points but rather as knives. Ground stone tools are less common in this period.

The "Small Point" tradition is characterized by a reduction in point size that may suggest the introduction of the bow and arrow. Although differences in point styles are difficult to distinguish within this tradition, a number of point types have been recognized based primarily on sites from southwestern Ontario.

Much is known of this period on the basis of excavations around Hamilton and Brantford, near Lake St. Clair and along the eastern shore of Lake Huron. One site excavated in the Hamilton area

produced possible evidence of housing structures. This site had either two 4 by 4 meter houses placed adjacent to each other or a single 8 by 4 meter structure with the greatest intensity of occupation located at either end. Although no sites relating to this time period have been systematically excavated in eastern Ontario, Small Point Archaic sites and multi-component sites with Small Point Archaic material have been reported in the region. These include two burial sites in the Kingston area: Collins Bay and the York site near the community of Verona and a burial near Picton, Prince Edward County. Sites with Small Point Archaic material have also been identified in the Ottawa Valley near Arnprior.

Among the more significant developments to occur near the end of the Archaic Period is the elaboration of burial complexes including what has been referred to as the Glacial Kame Burial Complex. Sites relating to this complex have been found throughout southern Ontario. Representative sites include the burials at the York Site and Picton in eastern Ontario, the Hind Site southwest of London and the Port Franks site on the eastern shore of Lake Huron.

Burials consist of both cremations and extended individuals with inclusion of grave goods. These materials consisted of a variety of items including slate gorgets, paired copper adzes, sandal-sole or circular marine shell gorgets, and bird-stones with protuberant eyes. Galena, believed to have been obtained in the Ottawa Valley (Mississippi Valley) has been identified on southwestern Ontario sites. The increase in exotic materials and the increased attention paid to burials heralds a trend which is to continue until the end of the Middle Woodland and appears to be at least inspired by similar phenomena to the south, specifically from the Ohio and Mississippi River regions. Some researchers suggest this rise in behaviour extraneous to simple food procurement and survival may be due to increased efficiency in food collecting which allows greater amounts of time to be devoted to other, more social and symbolic activities. The establishment of specific cemetery areas certainly indicates greater group identification with specific geographic areas, possibly tribal territories. The presence of exotic, and therefore relatively expensive, artifacts with some burials suggests that some individuals had achieved greater status in their life time but there is no evidence as yet that this status was inherited.

Data from the burials suggests that band sizes ranged between 35 and 50 persons with considerable freedom of movement for individuals between bands. Populations would meet in these numbers at sites located near larger lakes and rivers, presumably when food here was most abundant such as when fish were spawning. Limited evidence from southwestern Ontario indicates that these groups would have dispersed in the winter and resided in more secluded locations, probably in order to hunt more dispersed animals such as deer.

Archaeologists have attempted to trace ethnicity and language to at least the Late Archaic Period, with considerable variation in opinion. Two language groups are recognized to have occupied Ontario at the time of European contact: Algonquian and Iroquois. One contention is that the Iroquois language and what ultimately became recognized as Iroquois culture resulted from in-situ development in southern Ontario from the Laurentian Archaic. Others have suggested that the Small Point Tradition represents the first appearance of Iroquoian speaking populations migrating from further south. Yet another interpretation is that the Algonquian language developed from western influences from Paleo-Indian times until at least the Point Peninsula Tradition (Middle Woodland Period) in southwestern Ontario when the Iroquois intruded as the Princess Point Culture.

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