

## AN OVERVIEW OF THE PREHISTORY AND EARLY HISTORY OF THE SOUTHERN CANADIAN SHIELD REGION

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### Introduction

The Southern Shield has a cultural history which begins approximately 11,000 years ago. As this region represents a transitional zone between two cultural and ecological areas, it will be necessary to review the culture history of both northeastern Ontario and southern Ontario. The chronological ordering of the periods in Ontario's past has been made with respect to the following three temporal referents: B.C. - before Christ; A.D. - *anno Domini* (in the year of our Lord); and B.P. - before present (1950).

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### The Paleo-Indian Period (c. 11,000-8,000 B.P.)

In regions south of the Great Lakes, Early Paleo-Indian groups were present between 11,000 and 10,000 B.P. Late Paleo-Indian settlement may have occurred in the southern Shield immediately following the lowering of the Lake Algonquin water levels. This initial settlement took place when the climate and vegetation of the area was comparable to that of the modern sub-arctic.

Evidence concerning these people is very limited since populations were not large and since little of the sparse material culture of these nomadic hunters has survived the millennia. Virtually all that remains are the tools and by-products of their sophisticated chipped stone tool industry. Characteristic Paleo-Indian tool " include fluted points, large lanceolate projectile points, bifacial leaf-shaped and semi-lunate knives, and a variety of unifacial scrapers and graters. During this period, there was a marked preference for lithic raw materials derived directly from bedrock outcrops, rather than from secondary sources such as glacial till. Paleo-Indian populations may have obtained quartzite toolstone from one of several sources located along the La Cloche range. The Sheguiandah site on Manitoulin Island and the Killarney site in the Killarney area represent two important quarry sites that have been associated with the late Paleo-Indian period. An important chert source during this period was the Fossil Hill quarry situated in the Collingwood area.

Given the tundra- or taiga-like environment which prevailed during this period, and the locations of their hunting camps, it has generally been postulated that the Paleo-Indian subsistence economy focused on the hunting of large Pleistocene mammals such as mastodon, moose, elk and especially caribou. Of particular interest in this regard is the frequent location of the larger Paleo-Indian sites adjacent to the strandlines of large pro- and post-glacial lakes. This settlement pattern has been attributed to the strategic placement of camps, representing larger population aggregates, in order to intercept migrating caribou herds. This traditional view of Paleo-Indian subsistence practices is currently being modified, as it is becoming more apparent that smaller game and fish were also important dietary contributors.

Whether the Paleo-Indians were dependent on the constantly moving herds or on less communal species, these subsistence strategies would have necessitated that social groups remain relatively small and egalitarian. These highly mobile bands probably moved in seasonal patterns throughout very large territories.

To date, no Paleo-Indian sites have been identified in the Lake Nipissing-Mattawa area.

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### The Archaic Period (c. 8,000 - 3,000 B.P.)

Very few confirmed Early or Middle Archaic sites have been recorded in the Canadian Shield. However, in the area to the south there are numerous finds of projectile points which are diagnostic of the Archaic. It was during this period that present day plant and animal communities were becoming established.

Archaeological data relevant to the Late Archaic period, however, is rather more abundant. By this stage, almost every lake and river system in northcentral and northeastern Ontario had been occupied or travelled across.

The Late Archaic artifact assemblage and subsistence and settlement patterns were relatively uniform for a long period of time over a large area. Sites normally occur as small, thin scatters of flakes, and occasionally, include a hearth feature. Given

the length of time encompassed by this cultural period, and the typically small size and short term occupation of its sites, most Archaic sites manifest themselves as ephemeral lithic scatters which lack diagnostic artifacts.

During the Archaic period, people developed an adaptation to the environment that involved the use of many diverse animal and plant resources. Exploitation of these resources required being in specific places at certain times of the year (fish spawning areas, moose yards, berry patches, beaver ponds). This resulted in a set pattern of repetitive seasonal movement through a territory. Fishing became a more important part of the subsistence base, and the use of canoes probably developed in this period. The appearance of small projectile points indicates the introduction of the bow and arrow for hunting smaller game species. The annual subsistence cycle probably involved interior fall and winter microband hunting camps which were situated to exploit nuts and animals attracted to mastproducing deciduous forests, and larger spring and summer macroband settlements which were located near river mouths and lakeshores in order to exploit rich aquatic resources.

Archaic artifact assemblages are characterized by the presence of biface and uniface blades, stemmed and side-notched projectile points, large and variable slate and greywacke choppers, a relatively high proportion of a variety of scrapers, knives, stone axes, as well as groundstone gouges and tetrahedral adzes. Large axes, socketed spear points, pendants and chisels cold-hammered from copper obtained from Lake Superior sources are also frequently reported on Archaic sites.

Archaic period sites have been identified on Lake Nipissing at the Frank Bay site (Ridley 1954), Campbell Bay site (Bryzinski 1979) and on Garden Island (Sweetman and Dibb 1995). An Early Archaic component on Garden Island would appear to be the earliest site identified in the region to date.

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### **The Early Woodland Period (c. 3000-1500 B.P.)**

The Early Woodland period is poorly represented in the Shield area and until recently was subsumed in Ontario under a "catch-all" referred to as Initial Woodland. However, it appears that artifacts related to the Meadowood Phase of the lower Great Lakes do appear in the Shield area.

The Early Woodland period differed little from the previous Late Archaic period with respect to settlement-subsistence pursuits. On the other hand, the period is marked by the introduction of ceramics into Ontario and can be characterised as a time of increasing social or community identity. In southern Ontario, this latter attribute is especially evident in changes to, and elaboration of, mortuary ceremonialism.

Early Woodland cemeteries contain evidence of ritual behaviour such as the application of large quantities of symbolically important red ochre to human remains. In addition, they often contain grave offerings of art indicative of prevailing social and spiritual perspectives. Much of this art is fabricated from exotic raw materials such as native copper from the western end of Lake Superior, and as in the case of certain ground slate figurines, it displays a considerable investment of time and artistic skill. Moreover, the nature and variety of these exotic grave goods suggests that members of the community outside of the immediate family of the deceased were contributing mortuary offerings. Thus, social integration during the Early Woodland period appears to have increased and expanded relative to earlier times.

No Early Woodland sites have been identified in the Lake Nipissing region.

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### **The Middle Woodland Period (c. 1,500 - 1,000 B.P.)**

The Middle Woodland period is manifested across the southern Canadian Shield and in northern Minnesota by the Laurel artifact assemblages and sites. These sites extend from Quebec to Minnesota and, with regional variations, exhibit similar artifact inventories, subsistence, and settlement patterns. Similarly, in southcentral Ontario, sites of this time period are classified as Point Peninsula, which occurs throughout the lower Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River areas.

Remains from Laurel sites show a strong riverine and lake adaptation. The subsistence strategies during this period involved, like the Archaic period, a wide range of faunal and floral resources. Seasonal gatherings of people for subsistence and social purposes began to occur during this period, resulting in the appearance of large settlements at prime fishing locations. A Middlesex burial mound occurs in the Killarney area northeast of Georgian Bay, and later Laurel mounds are known from the Rainey River area of northwestern Ontario, indicating a strongly developed mortuary practice influenced by the Hopewell groups of the Ohio valley. The grave offerings associated with these burials continued to place an emphasis upon the exotic origin of raw materials. These developments suggest that changes first evidenced in the preceding Early Woodland period continued to develop and be expanded upon.

In northern Ontario, this period saw the addition of pottery and net sinkers to the artifact assemblage. The Laurel artifact assemblage is also characterized by distinctive side notched projectile points, small blade knives, great numbers of scrapers, some bone harpoons, and some use of native copper. Laurel pottery is finely made, thin ware with numerous rows of a variety of stamped patterns decorating the shoulders, necks, and/or collars of the conically shaped vessels.

Middle Woodland sites are found in close proximity to the study area, having been identified at the Frank Bay site (Ridley 1954), on Garden Island (Dibb and Sweetman 1995), on the Manitou Islands (Smith 1985), and at Camp Island on the Mattawa River (Tyyska and Burns 1973).

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### **The Late Woodland Period (c. 1,000 B.P.- contact)**

This is the period prior to the arrival of Europeans and their trade goods. Before the European arrival, however, extensive exchange systems had already developed between the Nipissing, Odawa, Ojibwa and Cree of northcentral and northeastern Ontario and the Huron and other Iroquoian groups to the south. The Nipissing, in particular appear to have played an important role in this trade in the upper Great Lakes.

Sites from this period appear to be more numerous than the previous periods, and the pattern of large seasonal settlements appears to have remained well established from the Middle Woodland period. Towards the close of the period, however, some of these sites may have grown in scale and density to resemble the large villages of the Huron who were situated a short distance to the south. The Nipissings practiced limited horticulture and the Lake Nipissing area, contains suitable soils for horticulture.

In northern Ontario, three ceramic traditions predominate during the Late Woodland period. Blackduck ceramics are generally characterized by a variety of cord wrapped object impressions over the whole pot, while Selkirk decorations consist of fabric impressions on the body of the vessel and a variety of decorations between the shoulder and the lip, consisting of cord-wrapped object impressions, incised impressions, punctates and bosses. In the southern Canadian Shield, castellations and distinctive decorative motifs on the vessel rims indicate Iroquoian influence.

In addition to these ceramics, the Late Woodland artifact assemblage is characterized by small triangular and side-notched projectile points, use of relatively unmodified greywacke flake or spall tools, flat slate knives, and, towards the end of the period, clay smoking pipes.

Late Woodland components are found throughout the Lake Nipissing-Mattawa area, represented by the Iroquoian ceramic tradition. These have been found at the Frank Bay site (Ridley 1954), the Campbell Bay site (Brynski 1979), on Garden Island (Dibb and Sweetman 1995) and on Camp Island (Tyyska and Burns 1973).  
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### **The Contact Period (c. A.D. 1600 - 1900)**

The end of the Late Woodland period in the southern Shield area is marked by the appearance of European Trade goods c. A.D. 1600. In the fur trade which was to subsequently develop, the Nipissing continued to play an important intermediary role, although this became increasingly difficult due to the disruption caused by the dispersal of the Ontario Iroquoian groups by the Five Nation Iroquois from New York State. Following the dispersal of the Ontario Iroquoians, the Five Nation Iroquois continued to exert pressure on northern Algonquian speaking peoples such as the Nipissing. This eventually led to their relocation to the area of Lake Nipigon (Day 1978). During the eighteenth century the area around Lake Nipissing region became re-occupied by Ojibwa speaking people who are the ancestors of the Dokis and Nipissing First Nations.

The eighteenth century is marked by a predominance of European derived trade goods on aboriginal sites and the appearance of Euro-Canadian sites related to domestic and fur trade activities.

Sites of this period have been identified within the study area (Pollock 1993), at Frank Bay (Ridley 1954), at the Campbell Bay and Frank Ridley sites (Brynski 1979), on Garden Island (Dibb and Sweetman 1995).



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