

---

## **Shibaonaning [The Place of the Clear Passage]: Studies in the Archaeology of Northeastern Ontario**

Alicia Hawkins

---

This collection of five papers arises from presentations at the 37th annual meeting of the Ontario Archaeological Society, held in Killarney, Ontario, in 2010. This occasion marked the third time since its inception that the OAS held the annual symposium in northern Ontario and the first time the Society held it in northeastern Ontario. At first glance, the papers in this volume appear to be disparate. The ages of the sites discussed range from Palaeo-Indian to the Fur Trade. The nature of the sites includes rock art locations, an isolated cache, multicomponent camps, a Hudson's Bay Company post, and a quarry. The authors themselves demonstrate the range of people interested in the archaeology of the Northeast; they comprise professors, graduate students, avocational archaeologists, and government archaeologists. What, then, holds these papers together, apart from the fact that they focus on archaeology in northeastern Ontario—an area that in itself is difficult to demarcate?

Several themes are apparent; some have arisen from the nature of sites in the region and others have probably grown out of a shared history of research. To begin, those who live in the north are profoundly aware of the effect of geography on the structure of the archaeological record. Waterways—be they lakes or rivers—form the backbone around which human settlement and movement occurred (see the contributions by Zawadzka, Gordon, and Doroszenko). All the papers in this volume focus on sites that are near or adjacent to major lakes or rivers (the Spanish River, Lake Temagami, Georgian Bay, and the Moose River). As Zawadzka explains, waterways were important routes, providing clear passage in

both summer and winter. Where the terrestrial landscape is dominated by dense bush and—at some times of the year—maddeningly persistent biting insects, rivers and lakes would have been the obvious choice for getting from place to place. Knowledge of how to traverse this landscape would have been essential for survival. People would have needed to know which locations should be avoided in winter because they don't freeze completely, which places should provide a more sheltered passage on large lakes with high winds, and where to find the portage routes that connect a lake to a vast network of other bodies of water—and thereby to other people and places.

A second theme that emerges is that of continuity. Zawadzka refers to the large ethnographic literature on the Algonquian-speaking people who now inhabit the Shield environment as an aid to interpretation, but she also argues that the rock art in the Shield has a long history and that the Temagami pictographs were created by Algonquian-speaking ancestors. The routes that she envisions on the waterways of the north would have connected points, places such as sandy, sheltered locations that would make good camps or portage routes. When we examine the archaeological record, we see that several of the locations discussed by the authors testify to long continuity of use of a particular location. Gordon outlines the occupation at two sites on Lake Temagami that may have been such points. Three Pines and Witch Point are both multicomponent sites that were occupied intermittently for many generations. Repeated use of a single location is also a theme in Lee's discussion of the stratification at Sheguiandah, which deals with the sequence of

deposition (and occupation) at this important site. Finally, Doroszenko describes the dramatic Euro-Canadian history of Moose Fort and Moose Factory, but also indicates that the location was used by the Moose Cree.

The result of this continuity of use of certain locations—whether they were favoured for trade, control of a waterway, obtaining a raw material, or good camping—is that the depositional history of sites in the north is frequently more difficult to interpret than that of sites in southern Ontario. Sedimentation occurs slowly, but at the same time sites are palimpsests, reflecting the overlapping activities carried out over the course of many generations. Doroszenko explains how the different episodes of excavation, building, and destruction were ordered into phases at the Moose Factory Staff House. The methodology she used has become standard practice in the excavation and interpretation of Euro-Canadian sites in Ontario. It is more unusual to use this methodology to interpret the episodes of occupation at a pre-contact Aboriginal site such as Three Pines, but this is what Gordon advocates. Robert Lee shows that careful stratigraphic excavation and documentation of materials through piece plotting is by no means a new excavation methodology; his father, Tom Lee, used this strategy in the original excavations at Sheguiandah. Gordon, however, takes this methodology further and applies the use of Harris matrices to sites with compressed stratification in order to make sense of their complicated nature. Ultimately she describes phases at this site using a similar method to that which Doroszenko uses for Moose Factory.

Cultural activities such as digging pits and erecting shelters are not the only things that affected the archaeological record of northern sites. The effect of natural processes is a major concern for many of the authors. One of the central questions of Lee's paper is the extent to which cross-mending projectile point fragments were displaced by cultural processes (pit digging) and natural processes, such as tree throws. Julig and Long also touch on the issue of post-depositional processes, arguing that in the case of the Spanish River cache, the materials were not greatly

disturbed by natural processes.

We may also examine how natural processes have altered the larger landscape in the course of the past several millennia. Gordon and the other authors in this volume do just that, focussing on the way in which the Lake Temagami basin would have changed in the face of higher lake levels. Although none of the authors discuss this in detail in their papers, changing lake levels are of concern to many northern researchers because places that are exposed today would have been submerged in earlier times; some of the earliest archaeological sites are therefore likely to be associated with ancient beaches (which are now found deep inland, in the domain of those biting flies).

Intimate knowledge of the landscape and of the location of resources within it are implied in all of the papers, but are perhaps most directly addressed by Julig and Long. Using two different methods of analysis of the chemistry of stone tools from a cache, they are able to identify the raw material these tools were made from. They then go on to suggest the general area where people obtained this raw material. While the site where these objects was found was not directly beside a waterway, the nature of the raw materials led the authors to suggest that the person or persons who deposited this cache had spent time at the headwaters of the Spanish River. One way, therefore, whereby we may start to understand how people navigated this vast network of interconnected lakes and rivers is to employ raw material sourcing.

Just as many of the sites in the north were visited repeatedly by different Aboriginal and, later, Euro-Canadian people, a number of these sites have also been examined on a variety of occasions by different archaeologists. Zawadzka shows us that investigation of rock art in Ontario is nearly as old as the practice of archaeology in Ontario and that many people have researched the rock art of Temagami. Yet, she also points out that in her recent investigations she has documented new rock art locations. Doroszenko outlines the long history of research at Moose Factory and the Moose Factory Staff house and shows that recent work by the Ontario Heritage Trust has added to our knowledge of that site. Gordon works at sites

that have previously been excavated by other archaeologists, and in her case, the methodology she employed in her excavations was novel. Julig revisited the locality where the Spanish River cache was found and was able to confirm the exact site location through excavation. While Robert Lee did not undertake new investigations of Sheguiandah, he did undertake a re-analysis of the re-analysis by Storck and Julig of the original analysis by Tom Lee. In general the scale of more recent excavations is small by comparison with that of earlier ones, and certainly the pace of excavation is much slower.

The fact that archaeologists have been drawn to the same archaeological sites on multiple occasions underscores the importance that some of these places must have had in the ancient landscape. Because of the complicated and/or long histories recorded at such places as Moose Factory, Sheguiandah, and the sites on Lake Temagami, researchers are pulled back, time and time again. But although these sites are seductive, it is important we not forget the other smaller, less obtrusive sites. Places such as the Spanish River cache also have a story to tell.

The complicated history of site investigation at a number of sites raises points that are discussed in detail by Lee and Doroszenko. The archaeological record is comprised not only of artifacts, but also of site records. Doroszenko's documentation of the archaeological collections from the Staff House at Moose Factory raises

fundamental questions about curation of notes, maps, and photographs as well as artifacts. Lee grapples with similar issues in his discussion of how researchers interpreted field notes and collections made by earlier investigators. The question of curation is also touched on briefly in Julig and Long's paper, arising from the fact that the collection was originally located by a member of the general public. In the northern Ontario context, we must also consider whether artifacts, maps, photographs, and field notes should remain in or near the communities where they were obtained, or whether they should be transferred to repositories in southern locations where they are likely to be more accessible to the majority of researchers.

A final point that unites these papers is that all fail to do something—a failure that could be to their advantage. The authors have a variety of goals, ranging from description to interpretation, but they all eschew an approach in which the archaeological material they discuss is described in terms of pre-existing archaeological constructs. While they may make mention of Archaic, Middle Woodland, or Blackduck, each of them appears to approach the material on its own terms to address their respective questions about the history of occupation of northeastern Ontario. Together these studies contribute to our understanding of the rich, diverse cultural and natural history of northeastern Ontario, about which we continue to learn.