

An Economic History of the Maritime Woodland Period in Port Joli Harbour, Nova Scotia

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Abstract - Five seasons of survey and excavation in Port Joli Harbour, NS, Canada, have resulted in a high-resolution archaeofaunal sample from 2 contrasting shell-bearing sites: AIDf-24, and AIDf-30 (Jack's Brook). In this paper, we discuss the evidence for differences in mollusk-, fish-, and mammal-harvesting strategies between contemporaneously occupied sites. Furthermore, we highlight shifts in Mi'kmaw exploitation of coastal resources around the Middle to Late Maritime Woodland transition (ca. 1300 cal B.P.). Finally, we present insights regarding shellfish-harvesting strategies and site seasonality from isotopic analysis of softshell clam (*Mya arenaria*) shells. In the process, we construct a history of human–animal relationships in Port Joli, and reveal crucial similarities and important differences with Wabanaki economic strategies in adjacent regions.

Introduction

In contrast with those from other provinces in Canada, Nova Scotian archaeofaunal assemblages from prehistoric sites have received comparatively little professional analysis (Murphy and Black 1996). This neglect is ironic, considering the high density of coastal shell midden sites in the province, which tend to contain well-preserved archaeofaunal remains. As a result, relatively little has been published about coastal economies during the Maritime Woodland Period (ca. 3300–350 cal B.P.) in the province, though pioneering work by Stewart (Nash and Stewart 1986, 1990, Stewart 1989), and later Rojo (1986, 1990) have provided critical insights. Furthermore, few comparisons with more comprehensively studied archaeological deposits in Maine and New Brunswick have been made. This is a significant deficit, as defining the economic and cultural links between these regions is critical to understanding regional culture history.

The E'se'get¹ Archaeology Project is a community-based research endeavor focused on defining the Maritime Woodland prehistory of Nova Scotia's South Shore, and in particular the relationship between ancient Mi'kmaw and the coastal ecosystem. An integral part of this work is the development of an economic and subsistence history in Port Joli Harbour (Fig. 1), to be used as a baseline for assessing aspects of culture change, human–animal relationships, and identity amongst the region's ancient Mi'kmaw inhabitants.

In this paper, we use the accumulated record of radiocarbon dates, site location, site structure, and faunal remains from 2 excavated sites, AIDf-24 and

AIDf-30, to construct an economic history of Port Joli Harbour. In particular, we focus on defining economic changes which occurred over the Middle Maritime Woodland Period (2150–1300 cal B.P.) to the Protohistoric era (550–350 cal B.P.), including harvest strategies, foraging efficiency and return rates, transport and butchery, processing, and seasonality. Additionally, we consider the taphonomic history of the assemblages and its potential impact on faunal frequencies.

Background

Port Joli Harbour, on Nova Scotia's southern shore, is a long, shallow arm of the Scotian Shelf. Located in an area of Devonian–Carboniferous bedrock, the outer harbor is protected on the north and south by granitoid headlands composed of bedrock, boulders, and cobble beaches, while similar outcrops punctuate portions of its interior coastline. Large granitoid glacial erratics are common throughout this region of the South Shore, and dot its coastline areas. Numerous streams and several small rivers drain into the harbor, and it is consequently rich in sediment and nutrients. The harbor's coastline is characterized by extensive marshes, eelgrass beds, and foreshore beaches and mud flats. Peatlands and wetlands are common in upland areas away from the coast, although dense Acadian-boreal forest, dominated by red spruce (*Picea rubens*), white spruce (*Picea glauca*), balsam fir (*Abies balsamea*), white pine (*Pinus strobus*), and sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*), covers much of the landscape. Softshell clams (*Mya arenaria*) and other shellfish are abundant on the extensive beach systems

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