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Adirondack PEEKS

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Front Cover: Wind-carved snow and trees covered in rime ice form a magical winter scene near the summit of Algonquin. Photo credit: Joey Priola; www.joeypriola.com
Inside Cover: View from Basin. Photo credit: Jonathan Zaharek #11171W

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President's Report

Hiking in the Time of COVID-19

A challenge or a journey? Climbing the 46 should be a journey, an experience rather than simply a challenge. Hiking is a personal pilgrimage unique to every person. Some people like to hike faster than others and relish the sheer athleticism of an adrenaline-pumping romp in the woods. Others relish every step of the journey and notice the nuances each turn unveils. Some are able to hike more frequently than others. One hiker's miserable weather may be awe-inspiring to another.

The term peak-bagger is irksome to many, including myself. If you climb only one peak a year, are you a peak-bagger? Maebh, Lee, and I climbed 48 peaks over 4,000 feet last season, but I still don't consider us peak-baggers. Our hikes are about the moment. They are a lasting memory of what we saw and how we felt during our precious time together. We found joy in each outing, a sense of togetherness, and a profound appreciation of the journey.

Now, in the midst of a global pandemic many of us reflect longingly on those journeys and dream of others to come. Currently, there is no cure for COVID-19. We are still learning about how it spreads and who is affected the most. Times of stress often prompt us to seek the mountains as a means of regaining our composure. But now is not the time to travel beyond our immediate surroundings.

While the mountains are not closed, we are being asked to remain closer to home and practice social distancing. While it is important to get outside and enjoy local trails and paths, this is not an appropriate time to hike the High Peaks even if you live in the High Peaks region. Additionally mud season is a great time to give our beloved peaks a break. At this time, our health and the health of the people in the communities we may travel to are also particularly at risk.

As 46ers, we are stewards of the environment. It is our personal responsibility to follow social distancing and travel regulations. However, I encourage all of you to stay local for now, and avoid potentially putting pressure on the health care system, especially in smaller, more vulnerable communities. It's time for us to embrace the reponsibility of "being" a 46er.

Sometimes, being a 46er means that we shouldn't hike. Many of us are out of school or work. We are scared and sad while also doing our best to remain optimistic and find fruitful ways to spend our sequestered time. As I write this, we are still unsure about when this will end. It is especially important that we recall that our goals should be to emphasize the journey and not the challenge. If you are looking for a challenge, then challenge yourself to stay local and close to home.The mountains will wait for you, but will you be able to wait for the mountains?

I sincerely look forward to meeting you out on the trails once we are given the "all clear" to travel, recreate, and congregate.

In the words of Grace…Good Climbing. In the words of Governor Cuomo…Stay Home.

Siobhán Carney-Nesbitt #5930W

Ascending Colden. Photo credit Jonathan Zaharek #11171W

Pre-Contact Native American History in the Adirondacks

By Elizabeth S. Chilton

When I was first studying archaeology at the University at Albany in the early 1980s, it was generally accepted that Native Americans had not spent much time in the Adirondack Mountains in the centuries prior to European colonization. In general, the known archaeological record follows modern development and road construction; thus, given the relatively light development within the Adirondack Park, few archaeological sites were known. The clearest statement of the assumption that Native people had generally avoided the Adirondacks came from the New York State Archaeologist, William Ritchie. Ritchie said in his book, ***The Archaeology of New York State*** (1965), that "Mountain and highland barriers, besides shutting out ready communication with the west and east, afforded in themselves very limited resources to food collectors and even less to food producers." The word Adirondack comes from an Algonquian word meaning, literally, "tree-eater." Some scholars thought this designation was used pejoratively to refer to people living in the region, who were so starved of food that they resorted to eating the bark of trees. Ritchie also suggested that native peoples may have avoided mountainous regions because of a fear of malevolent spirit forces that resided there.

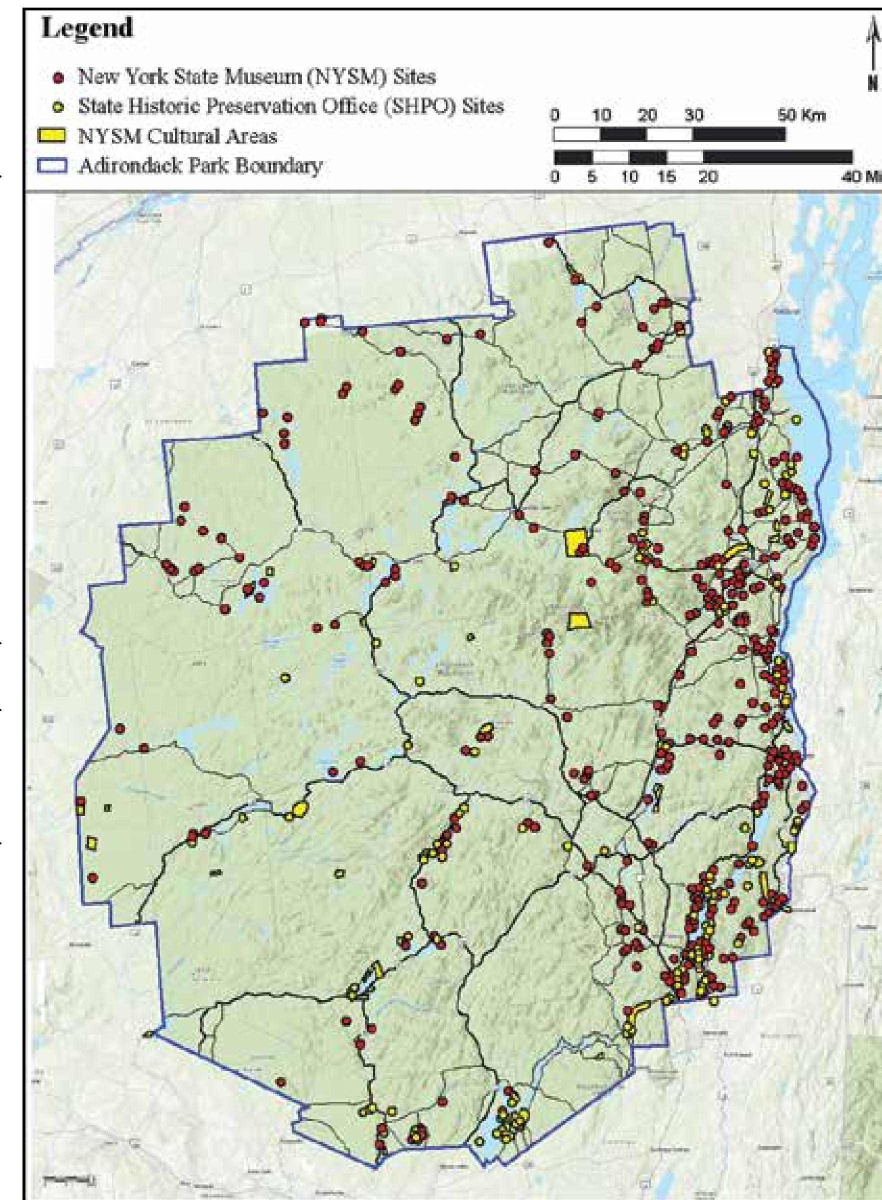
Certainly, at the time Ritchie wrote that book in 1980, only a handful of small archaeological sites were known from the Adirondack Park region. But even as a novice archaeology student, Ritchie's explanation struck me as odd. How could the diverse and complex Native societies of the Northeast completely have avoided 6000 square miles of an abundant and rich part of their environment, complete with thousands of lakes and ponds, many thousands of plant and animal species, materials for making stone tools, and extensive forests for wood industries? Everything I knew about hunter-gatherers and horticultural societies led me to question Ritchie's assumption, and I sought to test his hypothesis in the form of an honors thesis in anthropology at the University of Albany in 1985.

Along the Ausable River, 1985

An Archaeology of Archaeology

I began my thesis research by spending several days exploring the Adirondacks—literally driving around, hiking, stopping in small towns. Having spent most of my life until that point on Long Island, the Adirondacks were unexplored terrain for me. Those days exploring Indian Lake, Paul Smith's, Lake Champlain, and the High Peaks, left me even more convinced that it was extremely unlikely that Native peoples surrounding the Adirondack Mountains would have sought to avoid them. One of my stops during that initial foray was at the Six Nations Indian Museum in Onchiota, NY. There I was guided through the museum by one of the founders, Ray Fadden. While many of the thousands of objects in the museum come from elsewhere, Ray told me that he and others had found a number of the objects in the Adirondacks. Objects included a variety of spear points, fish net weights, grinding stones, stone axes, and ancient pottery. It was clear that there was quite a bit of evidence in the museum's collection for a long and complex Native history in the region. But for professional archaeologists, artifacts out of their original context and without documentation of excavation context don't provide adequate evidence to test a hypothesis. Somehow, I needed to find archaeological evidence.

Between the time that Ritchie wrote the first edition of his authoritative tome on the archaeology of New York (1965) and the time that I began my thesis research, a number of laws had been passed requiring archaeological compliance work in advance of construction projects. In particular, the Archaeological and Historic Preservation Act of 1974 spurred the professionalization of compliance archaeology or "cultural resource management." In the process, many more archaeological sites were documented in advance of construction projects around the U.S. Most of the reports from these surveys and excavations are not published, and comprise what is often referred to as the "gray literature." Thus, my research began at the New York State Museum and in the New York State Historic Preservation Office in Albany (SHPO), digging through paper site files and reports…a different kind of archaeology!



Archaeological Distributions and Roadways in the Adirondack Mountains

Data courtesy of the New York State Historic Preservation Office and the New York State Museum, May 2011. Graphic by Kathryn Curran.

Prior to March of 1985 only thirteen pre-contact archaeological sites were documented within the Blue Line of the Adirondack Park. However, in 1985 Hartgen Associates was contracted to do an "Adirondack Park Cultural Resources Inventory." They surveyed town and village historians, museum professionals, professors, and other professional archaeologists. Fifty-nine people replied giving the location of 187 pre-contact Native American archaeological sites. The location of all of these was recorded and put on file in the SHPO.

I plotted the location of each archaeological site, its time period, and function (if known) on a map of New York State. In total there were 200 archaeological sites documented at that time spanning all known periods of Native American occupation of North America, and across all regions of the Adirondacks. Sites included rock shelters, short-term encampments, villages, and cemeteries. Interestingly, but perhaps unsurprisingly, the pattern of documented sites followed modern highways and the density of modern settlement—this is because most archaeological sites are not found through comprehensive surveys, but by people inadvertently encountering artifacts either before or during construction or other ground disturbance. Several years ago, a student of mine at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, Jessica Aither, updated the data for the Adirondacks for her senior capstone project. As of 2011 the number of documented archaeological sites within the Blue Line had expanded to 1032. While the numbers of documented sites had increased fivefold since 1985, these newly documented sites followed the same general pattern of my work from the 1980s. There is no doubt in my mind that many more thousands of archaeological sites are dotted across the Adirondacks but have not yet been found or documented.

Fluted point

Given that the archaeological record in the Adirondacks includes hundreds of known sites from all time periods and across all geographical sub-regions, what can we say about Native American history within the Blue Line? Essentially, the pre-contact Native history follows what is known for the Northeast region in general, which I summarize here.

Ecological Setting

The Adirondacks are surrounded by major waterways that would have served as transportation and communication routes throughout human history in the region. Bounded by the Saint Lawrence seaway to the west and north, the Mohawk River to the south, and Lake Champlain and the Hudson River drainages to the east, the Adirondacks were clearly accessed by many different groups of Native peoples in the Northeast throughout prehistory. For much of their pre-contact history, Native peoples were hunter-gatherers, meaning they moved their settlements seasonally to exploit various plants and animals for subsistence, shelter, clothing, et cetera. The many hundreds of lakes, ponds,

swamps, and wetlands would have been very attractive to hunter-gatherers for fishing, food collecting, and for acquiring raw materials for stone tool-making, woodworking, basket and cloth-making.

The First Peoples: Paleo-Indian Period

The first peoples of North America are often referred to as "Paleo-Indians." Until about 13,000 years ago, the Adirondacks were covered with a continental-size ice sheet that, at its height, was over a mile thick. Not a single one of the High Peaks would have been visible above the ice at the time of the last glacial maximum 18,000 years ago. The first people to colonize the Northeast arrived around 13,000 years ago from the south and west, just after the continental glaciers had melted. The glacier would have mowed down everything in its path, scouring valleys and mountain tops, leaving behind piles of dirt, rock, water, and ice. Given the higher elevation of the Adirondacks and overall slower drainage, it is likely that ice remained in the mountains for longer, and it likely took a bit longer for the environment to bounce back after glaciation than it did in the major river valleys and lowlands. Nevertheless, there is archaeological evidence for Paleo-Indian archaeological sites in the Adirondacks.

The environment and the climate at that time was bouncing back from glaciation and would have been patchier, variable, and somewhat unpredictable. Like other food foragers, these first peoples would have exploited many species of plants and animals in a given year. Paleo-Indians are known by a distinct form of stone tool: the fluted point. Many other stone tools have been found on Paleo-Indian sites, including a variety of scrapers, drills, and cutting tools. Paleoenvironmental evidence suggests that there would have been a plethora of wild animals and plants, including turtles, fish, and sea mammals along the coast and interior seaways, birds, wild grapes, and other berries and fruits.

The Archaic Period

By about 10,000 years ago, much of the Northeast U.S. had been colonized by these first peoples, and the environment had rebounded and was much like it is today. Many of the larger rivers had settled into their modern

Arrowheads

courses and floodplains were established; sea level had risen to close to modern levels, and the forest had matured significantly in just a few thousand years.

This period is referred to as the "Archaic Period" by archaeologists. Over the course of the Archaic Period, Native peoples settled into regional homelands, moving their settlements seasonally within relatively circumscribed territories. They exploited many thousands of species of plants and animals seasonally. A large portion of the sites in the Adirondacks date to the Archaic Period. People clearly spent whole seasons or portions of the season in the mountainous regions of New York, collecting berries and plants, fishing, hunting, obtaining materials for stone tools, et cetera. The population size and density of native populations clearly expanded through the Archaic Period.

There is some evidence for social conflicts during the Late Archaic Period, and towards the end of this period there is evidence for increased burial ceremonialism and ritual. Dena Dincauze (1968) suggested that this may indicate more territorial marking and social tensions. It is possible that an increase in population led to some of these social

Pottery sherds

tensions, but more study would be needed to see how this might have played out in the Adirondack region.

The Woodland Period

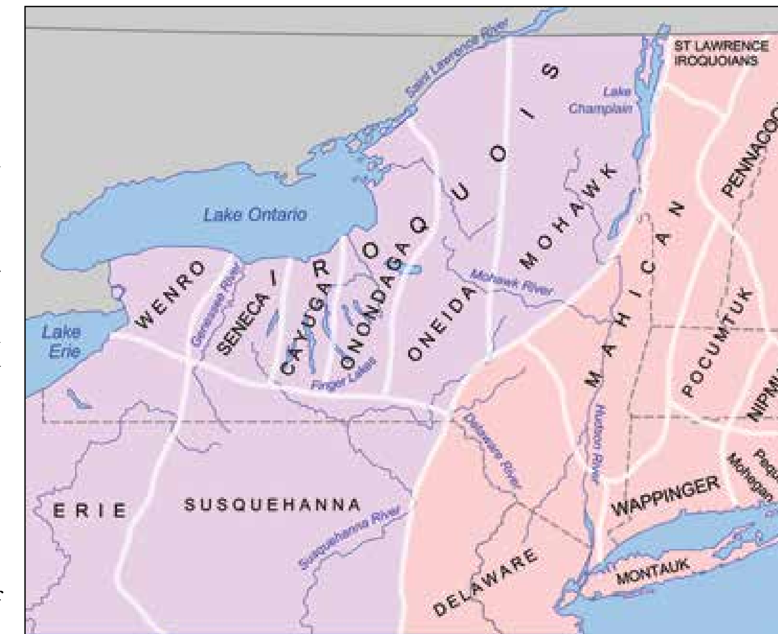
The period when Native peoples began to make pottery marks the beginning of what archaeologists call the "Woodland Period," 1000 BC - 1600 AD. The making of fired clay vessels clearly marks a change in cooking technology and likely indicates the intense exploitation of particular kinds of starchy seeds that require intense cooking (e.g., goosefoot, sumpweed, and acorns).

Towards the latter part of the Woodland Period, new, domesticated plants made their way into the region, specifically corn, beans, and squash. Corn and beans were originally domesticated in Central America, and Native peoples adopted them into their subsistence across many parts of North America between 4000 BC – 1000 AD. As the plants were grown further and further north, Native people hybridized the plants to become better adapted to a colder climate. While there is evidence for maize in the Northeast dating to 200 BC, it was not likely a significant part of the diet until several hundred years later. For Iroquoian-speaking peoples along the Mohawk and St. Lawrence Rivers, the adoption of maize horticulture is associated with an increase in population size and density, the formation of sedentary villages, and a rise in inter-group warfare. Archaeological evidence for this intensification includes the remains of numerous multi-roomed longhouses in villages that were inhabited for up to 50 years at a time. Population estimates for these villages range between 600-1300 people. Many of these villages were palisaded for defense, and there is clear evidence for inter-tribal warfare during the Late Woodland Period. While the most intensive horticulture was practiced only after about 800 AD and primarily in the major river valleys of the Mohawk and St. Lawrence, certainly there were some farming villages in the Lake George and Lake Champlain areas and in some of the lower elevations around the edges of the Blue Line. Further, it is clear that people continued to make forays into the Adirondacks for seasonal encampments, fishing and hunting, and other natural resources through the pre-contact period.

Aside from farming, by 700 AD another technological was adopted in the Northeast: the bow and arrow. Prior to that, hunting spears were thrown, often using a spear-thrower or atlatl. Bow and arrow technology was first invented in Northeast Asia about 5000 years ago and then spread across North and South America. Evidence for this new technology comes in the form of a new projectile point: a small, lightweight, triangular point that would have been more aerodynamic for use with bow and arrow. While later—and especially after European colonization—this became a weapon of war, it was initially adopted as a more effective hunting technology.

Post-Contact Native Settlement

While the main focus of this article is Native American use and habitation of the Adirondacks before European colonization, it is important to emphasize that Native peoples have persisted through the Contact Period in the greater Northeast and through to the present day. There were numerous Contact Period Native American sites reported in the NYS site files. Because of the number of objects traded among and between Native peoples and Europeans in the 17th and 18th centuries, and because of the quick settlement changes among Native societies, the persistence of Native peoples is often overlooked in the early histories of the Northeast U.S. Throughout the Contact Period there were several periods of dispersal and realignments among Native tribes, and the Adirondack region certainly played a role in both seasonal settlement and movement of peoples throughout human history.



Tribal territories during the early colonial period. Source: Smithsonian Institute

On a final note, I would like to come back to Ritchie's hypothesis that Native peoples believed that there were spirit forces in the Adirondack Mountains. Certainly, mountain tops are often associated with the sky-world or above world in Native American oral histories, and many of the origin stories of Iroquoian peoples include stories about the creation of the mountains, often as a result of contests between benevolent and malevolent forces. But as I discussed with Ray Fadden back in 1985, while both Iroquoian and Algonquian-speaking peoples would have regarded mountainous regions as special places in their cosmologies, there is no reason to think that this would have limited their travel to, and settlement in, the region. The ideological and spiritual aspects of Native relationships with the Adirondacks would be an exciting avenue to explore in future research. For those of you who want to explore this, I encourage a visit to John Fadden—Ray's son—at the Six Nations Indian Museum in Onchiota.

If you ever do come across artifacts while on a hike or while camping in the Adirondacks, whether it is a spear point or ceramic sherds, please report it to the SHPO (https://parks.ny.gov/shpo/contact/). The rich cultural history of the Adirondacks is as important as its precious natural resources, and we need to work together to protect this cultural heritage for future generations. The Adirondacks have not been truly "wild" for the past 13,000 years, as people travel through, in, and among, all the regions within the Blue Line, hunting, fishing, farming, sleeping, hiking, and living and dying among those beautiful and precious peaks. ■

Further Reading

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