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# WHAT LIES BENEATH

Excavating the past

TEXT BY RONALD F. WILLIAMSON AND SUSAN HUGHES

- 01/ Early hunters in the Toronto region would have sought high vantage points, such as shoreline cliffs, to track herds of caribou and other large game.
- IMAGE/ Shelley Huson, Archaeological Services Inc.
- 02/ 11,000-year-old stone points
- IMAGE/ Museum of Ontario Archaeology, Wilfrid Jury Collection
- 03/ A 500-year-old human effigy that adorned a ceramic pipe
- IMAGE/ Andrea Carnevale, Archaeological Services Inc.
- 04/ A 2,500-year-old artifact made of banded slate
- IMAGE/ Museum of Ontario Archaeology, Wilfrid Jury Collection





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For more than 13,000 years, southern Ontario has been home to indigenous populations. These indigenous peoples once occupied thousands of encampments and temporary villages. They left no written record of their lives, and their legacy consists of the oral histories and traditions passed on to their descendants, as well as the archaeological traces of their settlements. These traces are fragile: whenever you dig in the ground, you could be destroying irreplaceable cultural resources.

All types of development—from garden landscaping or excavation for an in-ground swimming pool to a single family dwelling or an entirely new community—can remove traces of the past. Any modification that disrupts or displaces the upper layers of soil can have a huge impact on unknown archaeological resources. Thus, in advance of any construction or land-altering activity, most planning authorities

in Ontario require archaeological assessments, which are mandated by the Provincial Policy Statement, for projects within their jurisdictions.

Some projects, however, may not “trigger” a permit requirement. In these instances, due diligence is critical, because encountering an archaeological feature during project work can result in costly delays. It is best to know the local municipality’s requirements for archaeological assessments, and to consult with the appropriate authorities early in the project design process.

One of the major problems in planning for archaeological site conservation is that we don’t know where all the sites are located. Comprehensive surveys of entire municipalities to complete archaeological inventories are clearly not feasible. Planners therefore depend on models that predict where sites are located. The main objectives are to design predictive models that map on a GIS platform the likely locations of archaeological sites, and to establish

planning guidelines for their management. Many regional municipalities, such as Ottawa, Durham, York, and Halton, and cities such as Kingston, Toronto, Brantford, London, and Windsor, among others, have undertaken archaeological management plans. In these municipalities, planners use the potential mapping to decide which projects require assessments.

When preparing an archaeological management plan, it is important to distinguish between lands where modern development activities are likely to have destroyed any archaeological resources, and other lands, such as schoolyards, parks, and golf courses, which may be generally undisturbed. While most properties subject to recent development lack any

05/	A 700-year-old ceramic pipe bowl
IMAGE/	Courtesy of Archaeological Services Inc.
06/	A 500-year-old ceramic human effigy pipe
IMAGE/	Andrea Camevale, Archaeological Services Inc.
07/	A 500-year-old ceramic vessel
IMAGE/	Andrea Camevale, Archaeological Services Inc.



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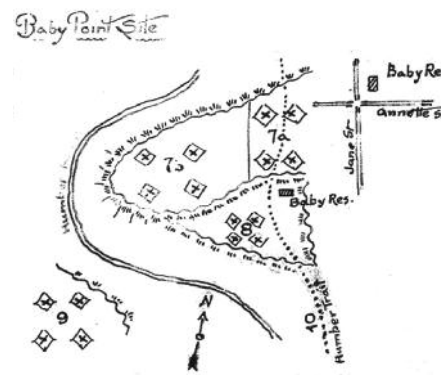
archaeological potential, the historic cores of municipalities may retain significant archaeological deposits, especially in parking or rear property lots and rear laneways. In downtown Toronto, for example, archaeological remnants of the first parliament buildings of Upper Canada were found in 2000 at the intersection of Front and Parliament streets despite the long history of disturbance at the location.

A number of municipalities have defined historic settlement centres, along with known archaeological sites, as Archaeologically Sensitive Areas (ASAs). In these areas, even small-scale activities, such as the construction of a house addition, park facility upgrades, or tree planting, would trigger an archaeological assessment.

What constitutes an archaeological site, and what do we find in them? The earliest sites in southern Ontario date to about 13,000 years ago when people came to live on the shores of the glacial lakes formed by the



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melting glaciers. These early inhabitants hunted caribou, mastodon or mammoth (now-extinct elephants), and other game in what was then an open spruce forest mixed with tundra. Evidence concerning these hunters is very limited since their populations were not large and few of their tools have survived.

By 9,000 years ago, southern Ontario had changed from a tundra-like environment to one more like ours today. Nomadic hunter-gatherers adapted to the changing environmental conditions by shifting their

hunting strategies and developing more varied toolkits. By 4,000 to 5,000 years ago, small bands of related families had settled into hunting territories along major drainages, and were trading across the eastern continent and producing exquisite stone art made of banded slate, which they carved and ground to resemble animals.

Horticulture profoundly changed the lives of the indigenous people of southern Ontario. Maize was introduced into southern Ontario about 1,600 years ago and, by 700 years

08/ This small ancestral Huron ossuary, containing the remains of 87 people, was found near Leslie Street and Highway 401. Aboriginal leaders have viewed the disturbance to this sacred site as an immense act of disrespect that could have been avoided by proper planning in advance of development.

IMAGE/ Courtesy of Archaeological Services Inc.

09/ This map identifies the locations of Seneca and Cayuga villages on the north shore of Lake Ontario in the late 17th century including Teliaagon, on the Humber River, and Ganatswekwyagon, on the Rouge River.

IMAGE/ Courtesy of Archaeological Services Inc.

10/ A moose antler comb found at the site of Teliaagon (Baby Point, Toronto)

IMAGE/ John Howarth, Archaeological Services Inc.





ago, it often comprised more than half of the diet consumed by people. Iroquoian-speaking peoples, like the Huron-Wendat, Neutral, and Petun, established base settlements and cleared land for crops, while sending out hunting, fishing, and gathering parties to satellite camps to harvest other resources. Groups in northern Ontario, where the environment precluded the growing of crops, continued with their traditional lifestyles and were the ancestors of the Algonquian-speaking Anishinaabeg peoples.

By the 1660s, the Haudenasaunee or Iroquois, whose homeland was in what is now central New York State, had established a series of settlements in southern Ontario at strategic locations along the trade routes inland from the north shore of Lake Ontario, including two villages in what is now Toronto on the Rouge and Humber branches of the Toronto Carrying Place—the canoe-and-portage routes that linked Lake Ontario to Georgian Bay and the upper Great Lakes, through Lake Simcoe.

The Humber River settlement was called “Teiaiagon” (now “Baby Point”) and is situated on a large promontory overlooking the main channel of the Humber River near Jane Street. There are few historical sources that refer to Teiaiagon, although we know that the Recollet missionary and explorer Father Louis Hennepin as well as René-Robert Cavalier de La Salle visited the site in the mid- to late seventeenth century. While hundreds of burials were documented there at the turn of the twentieth century, archaeologists have recently encountered the burial sites of two late-seventeenth-century Seneca women, both of whom were disinterred from the utility service trenches in which they were found and re-interred nearby during ceremonies performed by a Six Nations traditional chief.

Both women had been laid to rest along with a number of grave objects meant to accompany them to the next world, one with a brass pot containing an ash bowl that in turn contained squash, acorn, and grape remains; a number of iron tools; and a carved and engraved moose antler comb.

The comb included carved representations of a human, a bear, and a panther (with a rattlesnake tail) possibly representing Mishipizheu, the chief manitou of the underwater realm. Etched designs were also present, some of which can be seen in the art of Norval Morrisseau and demonstrate the unbroken link between indigenous Ontarians and their ancestors. It is everyone’s responsibility to care for the traces of these ancestors, especially those of us who work with the land on a daily basis.

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11/ Late 19th-century map of Baby Point showing the locations of various archaeological deposits

IMAGE/ Courtesy of Archaeological Services Inc.

12/ Recreated village

IMAGE/ Courtesy of Archaeological Services Inc.