

The Use of Black Magic to Locate Prehistoric Archaeological Sites.

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Photographic contributions by; E. J, Leblanc and Angelina McWilliam.

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The authors are engaged in a documentary film making project on Great Lakes Regional archaeological sites, archaeologists and cultural resources management. In archaeologist heaven we think Dr. Norman J. Emmerson continues to smile down on our efforts and provided a one for us rediscover. This paper is a humorous look at the strange collision between archaeology and film making.



Photograph by Ed LeBlanc

We would like to thank the people of the Michipicoten First Nations for the privilege of filming on their ancestral homelands. With particular thanks to *Gimma Kwe* Patricia Tangie, and Band Manager, Holly Hughes and her memorable sense of humor. I have seen your flag, some of your land and I spoke to a few of your people. I see what you stand for and what you believe in. In a world

of global political anarchy, it begs the question? Have you ever considered a run for Premier? I would vote for you, you live in a good place and I like the way you think.

We also wish to thank the owners of the Rock Island Lodge and Naturally Superior Adventures for allowing us to shoot on their property.

While my field methodology and approach may be questioned, in addition to all that ridiculously deep diving on submerged archaeological sites and my many other peculiarities, it should also be noted that in a moment of weakness I have resorted to Black Magic in an effort to explain and understand the regions prehistoric archaeology.



Photograph by Angelina McWilliam.

This part of Canada is sometimes referred to as the “Near North,” the natural beauty of the North Shore of Lake Superior has made it a favorite destination for many Canadian Artists.



Group of Seven artists A.Y. Jackson and Lawren Harris and many others have painted here. Glen Gould pianist genius vacationed here annually for many years. The Michipicoten area served their needs in their medium in their time. We hope it will serve us ours. All major film funding in Canada now requires a ten-minute video submission and we came here to shoot our trailer. It should also be noted that *Michipicoten* is an *Ojibwa* word that means “**Big Bluff**” and when you’re going to be walking into someone’s office and asking for two million dollars to shoot the movie right, is there a better place to start than with a little *Michipicoten*?



Photo by Angelina McWilliam.

Ed LeBlanc was kind enough to make the trip up and assist with camera operations and still photography.

The camera attracts a lot of attention; fortunately, there are not a lot of people around. They are also quite interested in my fascination with archaeology. This apparently was enough to solicit additional recommendations for documentary films. Including, six great ghost stories, (as this is paranormal psychology possibly cultural anthropology it's not a Scott film). Followed by, one giant Alien UFO Mothership story, with the same old problem, "*the aliens erased my cell phone images,*" (also is unfortunately not a Scott film as anthropology deals with "human" evolution and culture,) the Aliens have their own anthropologists, whom they love, respect and pay well. Finally, there was a world class eight-foot-tall Sasquatch story. While the author seemed a little put out I did not want to film his Sasquatch and admittedly it is kind of physical anthropology, I would really have to meet with the Sasquatch and his agent and work something out contractually first before shooting. It should be noted than none of these stories came from First Nations people.

Alternatively, if you have like us lived a deprived life and never had an experience with ghosts, flying saucers or never met eight-foot Sasquatch you may be able to appreciate how surreal it all seemed to the crew and I.

As this essay is an attachment to **The Search For North America's Oldest Shipwreck**, we again return to the topic of prehistoric trade routes. Understanding how they worked is a matter of navigation, seamanship and hydrodynamics. It has little to do with archaeology. The same laws of hydrodynamics that effect hull performance, ex., hull speed today apply to ancient vessels as well as modern.

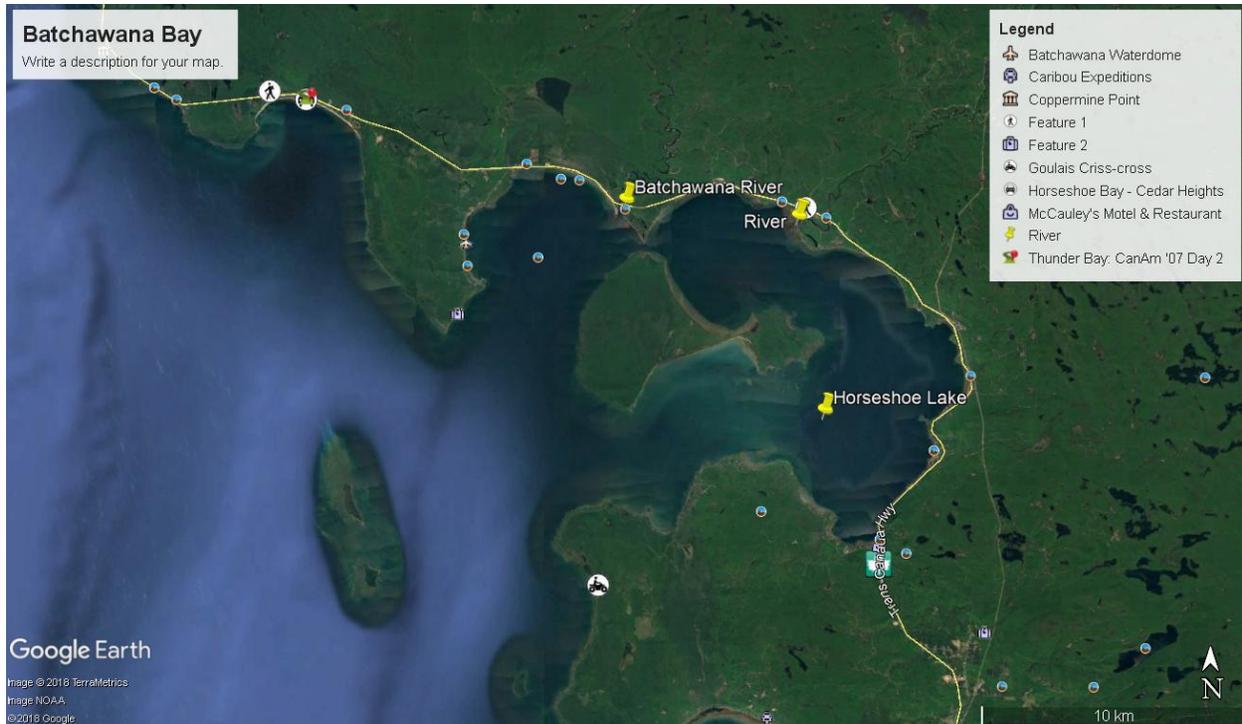
As we continued with our research we became aware that our efforts might not be entirely original thought. While reviewing earlier films I was involved with I returned to **Coming Back Alive**, NFB and Bill Mason, director of photography. Unfortunately, Bill passed away too soon, a cancer victim. His work continues to endure. At the **Canadian Canoe Museum in Peterboursal Ontario**, his canoe is an exhibit. His series on canoe technique **Path of the Paddle** is for sale. It remains the definitive guide to expert canoeing skills.

I also came across an early work of Bill's about his long-distance canoe trips. He suggested that when he started on a trip from a natural formation like a river mouth on an established trade route he was constantly camping on historic or ancient campsites. A man or a party all paddle canoes at about the same speed, now or in the prehistoric. It takes about the same amount of time to cross a portage now as in the past. Good places to land a canoe are the same now as in the past and good

campsites have the same desired features for camping as comfortably as possible and are also constants in time.

As a younger man I did a bit of long distance canoeing and when on lakes any kind of a headwind can substantially reduce the distance you can travel in a day.

Reliably, at the end of a day's travel the waves on Lake Superior are bigger than when you left in the early morning. You need a safe place to land the boat.



You need a harbour. Prehistoric harbours have many of the same characteristics we see in modern harbours with one key difference, a canoe is a shallow draft vessel and that is all prehistoric harbours had to accommodate.

The key features are:

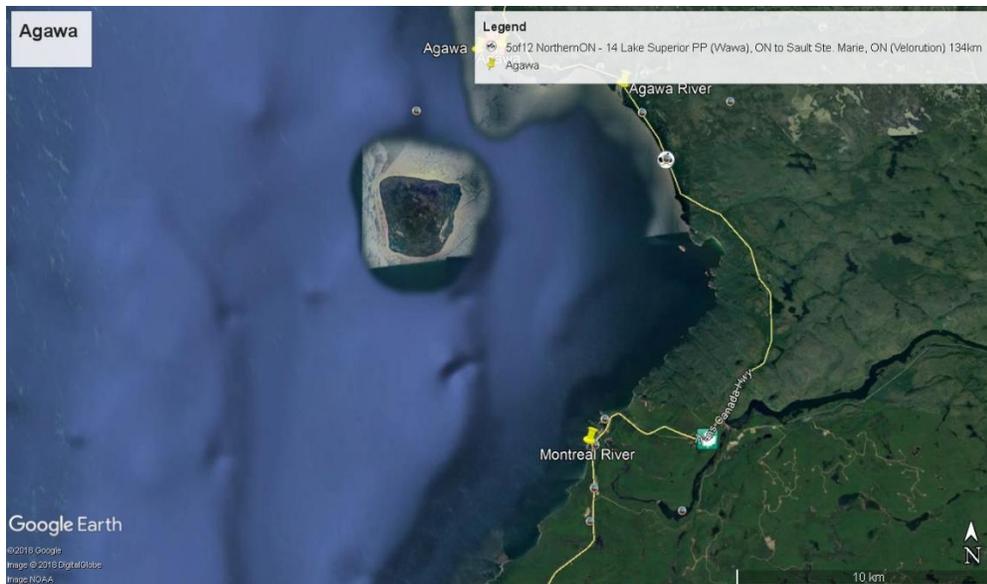
- 1) Each leg of the trip is approximately seventy-five miles long.
- 2) Ideal harbours have river mouth(s) associated with them. This is a food source and seasonally inhabited settlements to trade with are found there.
- 3) The harbours commonly have an Island, Batchawana Island, Agawa Island etc. This provides sheltered water and a beach to land the boat.

4) Some of these harbours are ports of call. You stop there because it is on route and the safest way to complete your journey. Other sites are ports of commerce, trade hubs where a variety of economic ventures were ongoing.

Ken Dawson, whom I studied under at Lakehead University, notes an Initial Woodland site at Batchawana Bay as I would have expected. I appreciate, understand and continue to enjoy reading Ken's work because I understand the context of the time in which he lived and worked. As one of Northern Ontario's pioneering archaeologists Ken had the scars to prove it. Much of his work was self-funded. The Thunder Bay Historical Society assisted and bake sales, silent auctions and rummage sales raised a bit of money for field work.

In truth, he was an interesting man; he usually wore an Ascot and smoked a pipe so it was like having an archaeological Hufe Hefner or Sherlock Homes as a professor. He was a diehard Aristophane, with an, I will speak; you will write it down approach to education. While I do not agree with his thinking on Pukaskwa Pits as vision quest sites I enjoy reading his work and continue to rely on his field work which I find more than sufficient for my needs. Remembering, that he worked before there was GPS I have no difficulty locating the sites he describes and his field work is reliable. In the least I appreciate the time and effort he put into his work.

The distance from Sault Saint Marie to Batchawana bay is 70 kilometers, 43.5 miles. This is short of our optimal 120 kilometers, 75 miles a day but it is a good secondary destination if lake conditions are less than ideal. The first overnight stop was likely in the area of Agawa Rock, the Mouth of the Agawa River and the Mouth of the Montreal River. This is 134 kilometers, 83 miles from the Sault and would have been a good first day's travel.



Agawa has the desired features mentioned for a prehistoric port. The next leg of the journey also has a primary and secondary port as a destination. Michipicoten Harbour is 60 miles, 96.5 kilometers, by water. The secondary port of refuge is Old Woman Bay. The distance by water from Agawa to Old Woman Bay is 41 miles, 71 kilometers. Old Woman Bay has a small stream rather than a river but provides a safe harbour and sand beaches that would have provided refuge in bad weather and high seas, while in other places the cliffs and rocky shoreline offer only death and disaster.

We will return to this point later as there are some additional reasons for this trade route with primary and secondary ports of call.

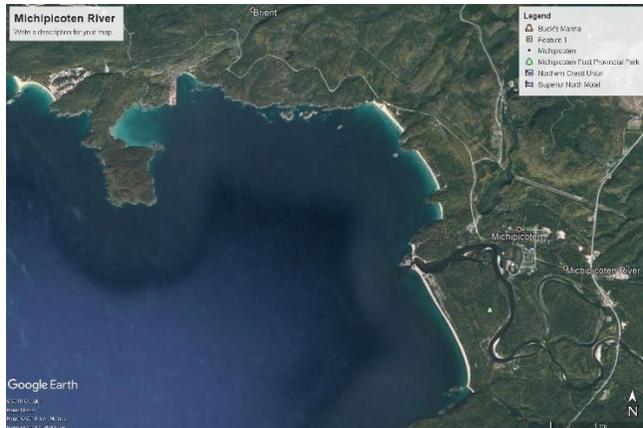
The Michipicoten area is a major port of commerce and a great deal of archaeology by many archaeologists' including some of the founding fathers of Ontario archaeology have studied there. Remembering that I specialized in underwater archaeology as opposed to prehistoric archaeology I started reading the archaeology of the area four months ago and I have not finished yet. Then for a bonus we visited the area for three days to discover how much we do not know and to shoot a trailer for our proposed documentary. In the process we were able to relocate what we were reasonably confident was a prehistoric copper mine.

The most recent submerged archaeological discovery in the area was of the J. S. Seaverns, (sank after hitting a reef, May 1884) found by, Ken Merryman, Dan Fountain, Jerry Eliason, Kraig Smith and Nick Lintgen. A group of advocational

archaeologists, historians and divers associated with Great Lakes Shipwreck preservation.

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/perfectly-preserved-shipwreck-found-lake-superior-180961070/>

https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/1884-shipwreck-found_us_5824acafe4b0c56101d5b45f/



There are over two dozen archaeological sites in the area shown in the Google earth image. In addition to the previously mentioned Seaverns shipwreck site, other historical archaeological sites include:

- 1) A North West Company fur trade post.
- 2) A Hudson's Bay Fur Trade Post (built on top of the North West Company Post.)
- 3) A Mormon settlement.
- 4) The Michipicoten Harbour area, this includes a substantial submerged site.

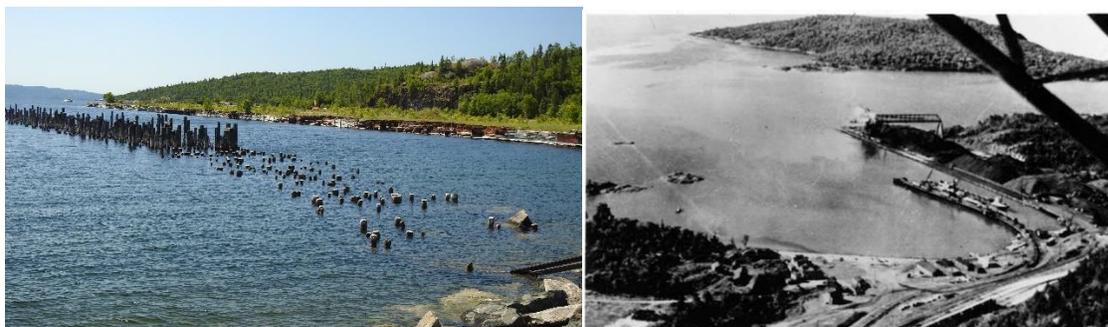


Photo by author.

This photograph illustrates some of the features at Michipicoten Harbour underwater visibility 15'+.

Michipicoten Harbour was used principally to export Iron Ore from the Hellen mine and offload coal for the mine and the Algoma Central Railway. An, on-site sawmill facilitated construction. It is now one of Ontario's official ghost towns.

The remaining sites are prehistoric and generally listed as habitation sites. With one notable exception, there is a medicine cave that is a ceremonial site likely dating from the terminal woodland through to present. Ceremonies still take place there.

It is in the least challenging to consider this great volume of data from the perspective of maritime archaeology. I envision the work of various archaeologist, including my own like a small piece in a very large Jigsaw puzzle. Through the diligence and quality work of others a new picture, a new narrative begins to appear.

While I have mentioned features that made Michipicoten a desirable port, others have noted features that help explain Michipicoten's cosmopolitan prehistoric nature. Dawson 1971, noted that at Michipicoten harbour there is a change in vegetation, Boreal forest to the North and West and Great Lakes Mixed Forest to the East and South. Both ecological systems had resources and goods common to the environment that could be traded with the people who lived in the other system.

The Michipicoten River, the Missinaibi and Moose Rivers are a well know canoe route to James Bay funneling trade from the Artic. The mouth of the Michipicoten River is the place where and east west trade route intersects with a North South trade route.

It has been a port of trade for at least the last 6,500 years. The earliest ceramics found in this part of Ontario are Laurel and they have been found here. The last ceramic form used in the terminal woodland period up to the historic period is Black Duck and these ceramics have also been found there. Four different types of ceramics from Michigan have been found here along with Huron-Petun (Canada) or Juntunen (US) have been found here, one type from Wisconsin and one from Lake Erie. A very dynamic and extensive trade system existed and is reflected in the cultural deposition.

The geology of the region also is a factor. Iron Rich veins and ore are common to the region.



This google image shows the extensive iron ore mining operations at the Helen mine.

Dawson 1971, cites Thwaites 1897-1905, Vol. 53: 131-133 of the arrival of father Dablon in 1670 who noted two groups of Indigenous local to the North shore of Lake Superior. The *Outchibous* and the *Marameg*. Dablon also notes they were mining copper at the mouth of Michipicoten river. In 1767 Alexander Henry refers to the *Gens de Terres* or *O'pimittish Ininivivac* (literal translation, Men of the Woods) living here.

We believe we have relocated the prehistoric mine site.



The Owners of the Rock Island Lodge and Naturally Superior Adventures allowed us to shoot on the grounds and there are two areas were a vein appears to have been worked.



Photograph by Ed Leblanc.

Many years ago, I had visited pre-historic copper mines at Isle Royale and this mine looks similar to me.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dd5XVnjmFbU>

They appear as a U-shaped trench in the bedrock and are often worked right to the water's edge. On examination the vein can be found on the bottom of the trench. In this case the vein was very rich in Iron ore. Several veins intersect the point but only this one seems to have been mined. Forty plus tons of material have been removed from the primary mine site.



Photograph by Ed LeBlanc.

We set up the camera in the mine and did five or six takes walking through the site and explaining what I think had happened here. The rocks were so rough I tore the soles off my shoes moving equipment around. I had been using a rock hammer as a prop and struck the vein a couple of times with it.



Photo by Author.

Copper presented immediately in two forms, metallic copper and copper pyrite. Iron pyrite is also present and when examined under magnification micro flakes of copper are apparent.

Always best to proceed cautiously with this type of thing. Another archaeologist with a more conventional terrestrial background in prehistoric archaeology is looking at the site and I look forward to hearing what he/she thinks. We are also hoping to get a geologist and a geophysicist to look at the site and see what they think.

In terms of terrestrial archaeology, no excavation is required as there is no topsoil. Associated cultural materials have been removed long ago. At the visitor center in Wawa a hammer stone, grooved for hafting is on display. We understand it is from the river mouth area and may be associated with mining operations at this site.

This type of feature is commonly mapped by Close-range Automatic Correlation Photogrammetry or LiDAR (light detecting and ranging usually done from an aircraft with pulsed laser light) and either would give us a map of where the ore was and how much was removed.

Off shore sediment core samples may reveal when and how long the site was mined. This has produced excellent results at Isle Royale.

<https://eos.org/articles/miners-left-pollution-trail-great-lakes-6000-years-ago>

As there is no shortage of rock at this location it may take a couple of dives to see if there is an area suitable for a sediment core sample. Some have suggested that fire was used to heat the rock to facilitate mining operations. This has fallen out of

popularity due to our inability to recreate the process. The use of fire to process the ore and shape prehistoric artifacts from copper has been illustrated in the archaeological record. There are two processes at work that have to be considered when regarding prehistoric copper mining operations. The objective would be to produce a piece of pure copper of sufficient size to fabricate the desired tool.

Mechanical work hardening occurs on most metals. By simply beating a piece of copper with a hammer on an anvil the metal is stressed and becomes brittle fractures and crumbles. There is no evidence that prehistoric people ever achieved enough heat to melt copper and cast it into a new ingot. During the mining processes unless you needed to fracture a piece of copper of a useable size from a larger piece of copper you would avoid striking the copper and focus your efforts and hammer stone on the parent basalt rock.

As mentioned earlier annealing is the process of stress relieving metals. The copper is heated until it glows and then allowed to cool slowly returning it to a soft malleable state. By repeating the process many times to produce a knife for example, the tool can be formed free of braking or cracking. This process has another important role in the processing of ore. Copper is commonly bonded to the parent basaltic rock. Metallic copper a good thermal conductor relative to the basalt and has about three times the thermal expansion of basalt. The copper heats up faster than the relatively cool basalt and this high thermal gradient the cohesion between the copper and parent rock is broken thermally. (Horton 1993)

The annealed copper could be mechanically worked with additional hammering to remove any remaining basalt and the process repeated until a pure copper ingot is formed. The ash from these fires is then washed into the lake and high levels of potassium, copper and lead are deposited. To date the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport has declined the opportunity to provide a Borden number for the site.

Additional cultural materials such as hammerstones may be associated with the adjacent water lot.

Why try, what does it all mean? Another small piece in the infinite three-dimensional jigsaw puzzle of the past. All archaeologists study theory, few risk the pillory to float one.

Through a darkened glass clearly. . .

To understand prehistoric trade routes, you have to understand the prehistoric fleet. With canoes, size matters. Many used small one and two-person canoes for family and clan use on rivers and some inland lakes.



This is a carbon fiber of a replica voyager canoe used during the historic period. It is 36' feet long and it is kind of a compromise vessel. Large enough to be reasonably seaworthy and still small and light enough to be portaged by its crew.



Silver Falls Magpie River by author. High falls Magpie River. View from the dam Michipicoten River.

The features pictured, Silver Falls, High Falls, on the Magpie River and the hydroelectric facility on the Michipicoten River are indicative of the type of obstacles that had to be overcome when travelling the rivers by canoe. These portages are all within three kilometers of the Mouth of the Michipicoten river. In terms of entropy, a canoe with a 36' length is a good boat for the job.

There are pictographs of very large 65' plus canoes with as many as 100 people on board.



Googol image from Bob Echo.

Some of the complexities of this prehistoric trade route start to emerge. The trip from Sault Ste Marie to Michipicoten took two or three days depending on the size of your boat. A 36' canoe would have a displacement hull speed of 8 knots while a 65' canoe has a hull speed is 10.8 knots. In terms of entropy the large canoe travels farther with the same investment of energy per person that is spent on the less efficient smaller vessel. Two days paddle by 65' canoe, three by 36' canoe.

While we agree that some of the prehistoric archaeological sites in the area are habitation sites, others are also, prehistoric trading posts, primarily involved in the fur and copper trade. They also functioned like a forward operations and supply base to facilitate large groups of people. The real action was on the beach not at the remains identified as habitations sites.

In, Restorative Dispute Resolution in Anishinaabe Communities – Restoring Conceptions of Relationships Based on Dodem, Patricia D. Mcguire recounts the travels in the Lake Nipigon area by Father Specht, S.J. (1852) in his journal he detailed members of the various clans. They found about 360 Indigenous people living in the Lake Nipigon area. The party that Father Specht traveled with was three hundred strong.

This method of travel, many large canoes with trading parties three to six hundred people were common in the historic period and undoubtedly a practice co-opted from the prehistoric travel and trade practices. Adversities, like a catastrophic hull failure and the loss of a canoe is the end of the trading expedition and likely death, if you are travelling in one canoe. In large parties with many canoes the crew of the lost vessel could be taken aboard other canoes it was a safer way to travel.

Life in the prehistoric port of Michipicoten was based around trading days. As a result of the lifestyle few in the local population were above the age of 33 and very few lived past the age of 44. This was also true of the visiting traders. In the local population there was a gender imbalance. Hunting, fishing, trapping and a lifestyle built around canoeing reduced the male population and there would have been two to three women locally for every man. The visiting traders were 97-98% male. The first two or three hundred miles of canoeing you lose that extra ten pounds you put on over the winter.

Being only human, one thing leads to another . . .

The local population may have only been two or three hundred. Several times each summer large groups of traders would arrive at Michipicoten, 300 to 1,000 people.

Some of the small sites listed as habitation sites served as trading posts, goods and supplies were stockpiled and traded there. You do not however, have four hundred of your friends in for a sleepover. The beaches became huge campsites for a few days each year. Travelers arrived, carried their canoes a short distance up the beach and turned them over for shelters to sleep under, fires were built for cooking, warmth and to dry out clothing and equipment. Then in a day or two they would leave, a suddenly as they had arrived.



This highly sophisticated and well-organized trading practice developed and evolved over thousands of years. It originates with the Old Copper Culture people. They had a copper-based economy and it was the principal high value trade item, but things changed.

There is a well-established and documented hiatus in the Old Copper Culture. There was an early period of intense copper mining activities followed by a period of reduced mining activities. Copper mining never dies out completely but is far less important to their economy. While much discussed, few have offered any kind of an explanation for this. I think that to understand why copper mining was less important in the Terminal Woodland Period at places like the mouth of the Michipicoten River and Isle Royale you also have to understand what was happening at Teotihuacan.



It has been some time since I was last at Teotihuacan. The public was then allowed to climb the pyramids. We were sitting on the alter on the temple of the Sun, listening to the late great Janis Joplin, singing, Take Another Piece of My Heart,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hsJPDYWOMdg>

I had succeeded in cleansing the doors of perception to a point where I was able to stand up and look around. We are not sure if you can see it from there but you are very close to a place where some of the first agriculture took place in North America, around 2500 BC.

There are several places in North America with early dates for agriculture and Teotihuacan and the area around present day Mexico have very early dates. In both the New World and Old there is a pattern to human social evolution. The agricultural revolution occurred in many places independently around the world. People change subsistence strategies and move from hunting and gathering to farming. This is a one-way transition. Once you are there you can never go back and it is the same for the Copper Age, the Bronze Age and the Iron Age. With each epoch man is better able to exploit his environment to his own ends. Typically, there is an increase in population and life expectancy with each age.

Commonly the agricultural revolution is followed by:

- mound building that transits into temple building.
- development of politics, religion, warfare and textiles.

The agricultural revolution also leads to the development of a new tool kit. Farming began south of the Old Copper Culture people and steadily advanced Northward well into the Great Lakes Region. By the terminal woodland period the area down town Toronto is presently located was being farmed. A population of 1,500 people had cleared 800 acres. They used a Swidden agricultural method, the land was cleared, normally by fire and crops planted. 82% of their diet was corn and all they needed to farm was fire, a pointed stick a fish for fertilizer and seeds.

The furs then become the trade item that drives the trade system. The entire region enjoys robust winters with deep snow and early textiles were of limited thermal value. Shelters like Wigwams and long houses were dry, out of the wind and provided shelter from the sun but with no insulation offered limited thermal protection. Clothing made from quality furs are essential to survive the winters. Prehistoric fur trade routes were co-opted by the early Europeans. Furs had value in both cultures.

Wampum served, to a degree as a kind of money. This was interesting to the Europeans but of no particular value. Glass trade beads totally devalued this prehistoric currency.

The early European “explorers” were able to hitch, buy a ride or charter the prehistoric equivalent of a Gray Hound Bus to get from one “discovery” to the next. They were often then rewarded vast tracks of property that belonged to somebody else by their parent home countries. The Indigenous population was reduced through disease, murder and warfare from an estimated 20,000,000 in North America to the current level around 6,000,000, (70%) with zero population growth.

The Michipicoten area is a port of commerce, for these trade activities. It is also a good place to search for North America’s Oldest Shipwreck.



Mouth of the Michipicoten



In fact, it is still an excellent place to sink a canoe and also a challenging place to conduct underwater archaeology. In general, the visibility in the river is variable but less than ten feet. In the same way you can never step in the same river twice, I doubt you will ever see two dives that are the same there. The sand dune and sand

spit and sand bar move around a constant clash between eluvial deposition and shoreline erosion. When the wind is right a longshore current combines with the river current and if you get caught in that you may be on your way to Whitefish Point. Chase boat would be prudent. Other areas with potential are on Lake Superior and commonly have 15-20' visibility.

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