

North Dumfries Once A Common Destination For Prehistoric Hunters?

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It is a common fact that 50,000 years ago a great immigration of Paleo-Indians crossed the Bering Strait onto the continent of North America. Eventually as the glaciers began to melt and climates changed vegetation began to grow. In North Dumfries a forest began to grow around the regions of the Grand and Nith River and other neighbouring streams. The abundance of water and vegetation drew animals to the area for it provided shelter, food and drink. Subsequently, it became what Andrew Taylor calls 'a happy hunting ground'. It's hard to believe that the same ground we tread could have possibly been the same place that a prehistoric hunter once walked. Fortunately to our interests these prehistoric people left a trace behind.

Browsing through our records I found some information about Cruickston Charitable Research Reserve (CCR) which now owns Cruickston Park. In a section entitled 'History' it discusses prehistoric seasonal campsites as well as a trail that was created along Blair Rd. In 2002, the time the report was made, it discusses the great amount of prehistoric artifacts unearthed at "a number of archaeological campsites, burial sites, chipping stations and lithic sites including projectile points, scrapers, corers and drill tips. Some artifacts may date back to 9500 before present." Carbon dating of the artifacts in the area has shown that the Attawandarons, Neutral relatives of the Hurons once found the area as a place for encampment about 9000 years ago.

By the Iroquois they were known as the Antiwandaronk but they called themselves the Chonnonton, meaning "people of the deer", or more accurately, "the people who tend or manage deer."

Interestingly enough, a few days ago as I was working on an article about Black Horse Corners I came upon an Archaeological Excavation report by Archaeological Research Associates Ltd. in 1991 from Jeff Stager. As I quickly read through the analysis I found a similar discovery. The excavation was to be completed as a pipeline was to be built through what was once Black Horse Corners Village located at Concession 11 however they discovered something that was much older than the 19th century.

In one of the trenches they were researching they discovered an Onondaga Chert Biface Fragment, as the report goes, "- a crude Onondaga chert biface was recovered from the layer. -Given the site's proximity to a clean and potable source of water, however, it should come as no surprise that prehistoric people, found the site to be an attractive locale." A biface fragment refers to a stone tool with a pointed tip and two flat sides and they are multi-functional used for activities such as digging, chopping, cutting and hunting.

The natives of the area would rely on prey for survival following herds with bows and arrows and perhaps spears, carrying tents and resources with them. It was claimed that, "There never were better, more skilful hunters."

During the Neolithic period peoples began gradually changing from nomadic hunters and gathers to semi-nomadic and sedentary agriculturalists. The majority would be seasonal and travel to campsites based upon the needs and available resources of the season. Dumfries is proposed as a camp that served during hunting seasons and later became a permanent camp.

It was noted that in 1950 a man by the name of Alex Edgar picked up a butterfly stone on his farm on Concession 9. When recognizing a slight oddness about the stone it was decided that it would be sent to ethnologists at the Royal Ontario Museum. A report later said that the ethnologist's conclusion said that it was 2,000 or perhaps 3,000 years old.

Mr. Kenneth E. Kidd who was the Curator of Ethnology of the Royal Ontario Museum said "These objects were made by the ancient Indians inhabiting the region between the Atlantic Coast and Wisconsin, south perhaps as far as Alabama but more commonly in the central portion of that area. They are nowhere abundant, only occasional finds occurring. Usually they are made of banded variety of slate known as Huronian slate, and show a high degree of skill in their manufacture. It is estimated that they are at least two or three thousand years old or perhaps even more."

Given such an interesting name I was inclined to know more about the use of these prehistoric stone. Was it used for weaponry, butchery, foraging, and jewellery perhaps? In further comments Kidd continues in answering my pondering question, "There is still some uncertainty as to their use. Some people hold that they were personal ornaments others that they were charms; but the best evidence suggests that they were used as counter-weights on spear-throwers, a device for giving additional strength to the population of spears of javelins."

Archaeologically the land was used as a hunting ground. It was mentioned by missionaries such as Father Dailon in 1626 that "there is an incredible number of stags" which can easily explain the surplus we have today. F. Douglas Reville's a scholar and historian of the area had claimed that he had outlined the boundaries of the hunting grounds of the Attawandaron. He first drew a line from Genesee Falls in New York to Sarnia and then another from Toronto to Goderich. In between the lines marked the hunting grounds that had been used for hundreds and thousands of years by the Attawandaron people. In speculation of the area it was clear that Dumfries lay in the heart of the designated region.

It isn't surprising that they chose the spot as it was mentioned by early missionaries and scholars that it was "-heavily forested, and full of wild fruit trees of vast variety, with nut trees, berry bushes, and wild grape vines." And as for hunting, according to F. Douglas Reville, "Elk, caribou, and black bear; deer, wolves, foxes, martens and wild cats filled the woods."

Continued evidence of native encampment happened on a beautiful spring day in May of 1954, a skeleton of a native girl beside the foundation of what was then Mr. Tillson's house on Concession 9 eighteen inches underground was discovered. With her were included beads, earrings and bracelets and only part of a necklace. In 1904 another incident involved workers on the



Across the wide, infinite varied upper continent that became Canada Indians staked out their hunting grounds.

Alfred Miller (15)

Grand Valley Railway who uncovered several native graves, once again near Concession 9. In records it was found that an Aboriginal camping ground once was situated in the area.

Andrew Taylor mentions in his "Our Todays and yesterday" "Farmers as they plough their fields still find arrowheads and bits of flint. There is a tradition that there were trails winding through the bush. Evidences of Indian campsites are perhaps more frequent where the soil is sandy, the ground being adapted to cultivation and the growing of corn and other native crops."

It is interesting to know that we are always surrounded by history, that the same earth was trodden by men, women and children all sharing in the commonality of survival. Today we hold the remnants of some of the prehistoric peoples in the area and somehow even though they are long gone they are still able to live in the traces left behind.

Information provided by Andrew Taylor's "Our Todays and Yesterdays" sold at the Ayr News and Township Office