

DUNCAN SITE RESCUE EXCAVATION, 1979

PRELIMINARY REPORT

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The large concentration of jasper taconite flakes in Unit N3-W17 is of interest as it would appear to represent an activity area of restricted size. This is the only such feature found on the site.

The distribution of hearths and pits does not appear, from preliminary analysis, to represent a single occupation, but seems to indicate intensive use of the same general area over a period of time. It is possible, however, that the excavations encountered at least one dwelling structure. The distribution of artifacts, and the shape and thickness of the carbon zone suggest to some extent the shape of an oval lodge. It might be speculated that the black zone represents a burned lodge covering. The absence of post molds does, however, cause problems with interpretation.

ARTIFACTS

The majority of the artifacts from the site may be attributed to the prehistoric occupation of the site, however, a few recent and historic artifacts were recovered. These include nineteen fragments of modern transparent glass, a piece of aluminum foil, a ball bearing, a bottle cap, a piece of historic ceramic material, and two white glass trade beads. With the exception of the two beads (from Levels II and III of Unit N4-W18) and one piece of glass from N5-W17 II, all of the recent material was found on the surface or in the first three centimetres of excavation.

Lithic detritus constitutes the largest part of the artifact sample. Decortication, thinning, and micro flakes were all recovered, of such raw materials as Hudson Bay Lowland chert, jasper taconite, gunflint silica, quartz, and various unclassified cherts. A large number of the last were of a light brown chert.

Four of the flakes examined in the field had been utilized. Two of these were jasper taconite, one Hudson Bay Lowland chert, and one an unclassified chert. A number of unifacial stone tools were recovered. Nine retouched flakes and four endscrapers were found. Five retouched flakes and three scrapers had been manufactured from Hudson Bay Lowland chert, while jasper taconite was used in the manufacture of two retouched flakes and one endscraper. Two retouched flakes were made from unclassified chert. Fragments of three small bifacial tools were excavated. Two of these are of Hudson's Bay Lowland chert, the third is jasper taconite. A small number of biface trimming flakes were also found in the excavations. Four fragments from a minimum of four projectile points were recovered. The most complete is a side-notched point base of jasper taconite, which compares favourably with generalized Late Archaic point forms (cf. Pollock 1975: 39; 1976: 213). A second corner notched base fragment of Hudson Bay Lowland chert was also recovered. Two projectile point tip fragments, one of Hudson Bay Lowland chert, the other of jasper taconite, were found as well. The latter may be from the same point as the jasper taconite base fragment. Fragments of five cores were also identified; two of jasper taconite, two of Hudson Bay Lowland chert, and one of an unclassified chert.

In addition to those of stone, two possible wooden artifacts were found. These were short conical pieces with rounded ends. They appear to have been whittled into shape.

FAUNAL MATERIAL

A small amount of faunal material was recovered, all of it calcined. The majority was recovered from Feature I in Unit N4-W18.

FLORAL MATERIAL

A surprising amount of floral material, including partially carbonized twigs and bark, was preserved in the carbonaceous black zone. Samples of this material was collected for identification and radio-carbon assaying.

INTERPRETATION

On the basis of survey and excavation, the Duncan Site would appear to represent a small multi-component site comprising recent, historic, and prehistoric components. The first may be dated to this century and constitutes a small amount of material most likely related to the American Can logging operations on the Pic River. The second, consisting of only two trade beads, indicates some utilization of the area during the fur trade era. The major component at the site is a prehistoric occupation fairly rich in artifacts and features. Due to the paucity of diagnostic artifacts, it is difficult to assign a date to this occupation. The absence of ceramics indicates that this component probably dates before ca. 2200 B.P., when pottery was first introduced into the area. A late Archaic date for this site is also suggested by the presence of corner-notched projectile points. On this basis a tentative date of ca. 3000 - 2200 B.P. may be assigned to the site.

Some interesting problems arise when attempting to date the Duncan Site geologically. The site lies at an elevation of 190 metres (624 feet) on a sand terrace identified as the Sub-Sault beach. This feature has been tentatively dated to ca. 1000 years B.P. (Farrand 1960: 58-61, 215). If the geomorphological interpretation is correct, the site would have been beneath about 23 metres (75 feet) of water 3200 years ago, and under 15 metres (50 feet) of water at 2000 B.P. (cf. Farrand 1960: 126, 214). Should the archaeological dating of the site prove correct, it will have some rather profound implications with respect to the dating of late post-glacial beach sequences in the Lake Superior basin. This constitutes a major interpretational problem, which will hopefully be resolved through radio-carbon dating of the carbonaceous zone, and a more detailed analysis of the artifacts.

SUMMARY

The 1979 rescue excavations at the Duncan Site served to recover, from undisturbed context, a representative sample of artifacts delineating the main occupation of the site. A great deal of information was gathered, particularly concerning settlement patterns. The distribution of artifacts and features do suggest that a lodge structure may have been present. Unfortunately, no post molds were recovered to further substantiate this. Subsistence data, rare for the Archaic period in Northern Ontario, will be gained from the analysis of the faunal and floral material recovered. It