LAURENTIAN ARCHAIC IN THE MIDDLE OTTAWA VALLEY

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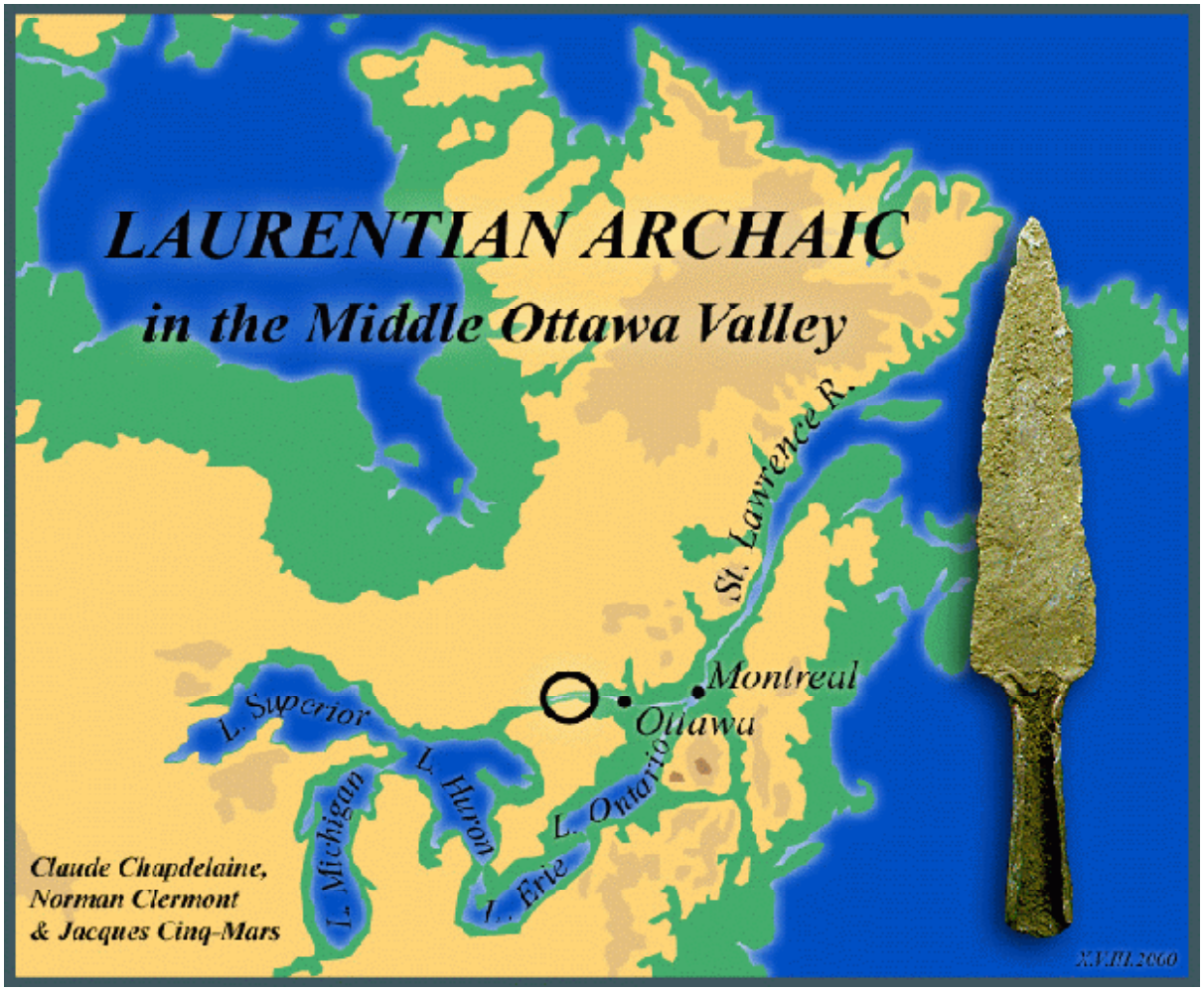
Abstract

A revision of the Laurentian Archaic Concept for the Middle Ottawa Valley will soon become possible using data from the Morrison and Allumettes Island Sites. Data from Morrison Island has been published recently and it will be summarized here along with the first conclusions stemming from the preliminary analysis of the Allumettes Island Site collections. It will thus be possible to discuss the potential of these two sites for the understanding of the human occupation of the Middle Ottawa Valley during Late Archaic times.

Résumé

Les sites des Îles Morrison et Allumettes permettent une révision du concept de l'Archaïque laurentien dans la moyenne vallée de l'Outaouais. Les collections de l'Île Morrison sont déjà publiées et nous les résumerons tandis que celles de l'Île-aux-Allumettes sont actuellement en cours. Nous présenterons néanmoins les premières conclusions dans le but de circonscrire le potentiel analytique de ces sites majeurs pour la compréhension de l'occupation du moyen Outaouais au cours de l'Archaïque supérieur.



A COLLECTION OF PAPERS PRESENTED AT THE 33RD ANNUAL MEETING OF THE CANADIAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION.
Edited by Jean-Luc Pilon, Michael W. Kirby and Caroline Thériault

ISBN 0-9694868-4-7

Introduction

Eastern North America is characterized by a large and far reaching river network that has always served to facilitate water travel and communications between the deep interior of the continent and the Atlantic Coast (Title-plate). The Saint Lawrence is considered to have been the major prehistoric highway but the Ottawa River was also very important. This is shown by the fact that during the Late Archaic Period this river was intensively used by native groups who had direct or indirect access to a bright reddish metal (copper) found in surface outcrops around Lake Superior. The purpose of this short paper is to present and illustrate some of the preliminary results of our ongoing analysis of two major sites strategically located along the Ottawa valley, the so-called Old Copper route: the Morrison Island and Allumettes Island Sites.

Geographical Setting

The Allumettes and Morrison Island Sites are indeed found at a very strategic location. (Figs. 1 & 2). In this area, anyone travelling down or up the Ottawa River had to stop to avoid the dangerous rapids surrounding Morrison and Allumettes Islands. The two sites had commanding views over these rapids and their respective terraces were well drained, allowing early spring to late fall occupation of these rich fishing spots.

The Morrison Island Site occupies a well drained, flat terrace which slopes slightly towards the edge and overlooks Allumettes Lake from the South. More or less facing it from the North, the Allumettes Island Site is found on a lower terrace that provides a tremendous view over the whole area. Less well drained than the Morrison one, the Allumettes terrace was, nonetheless, likely to have been a good occupation spot from the end of May until the end of October. Both sites are located downstream from the rapids.

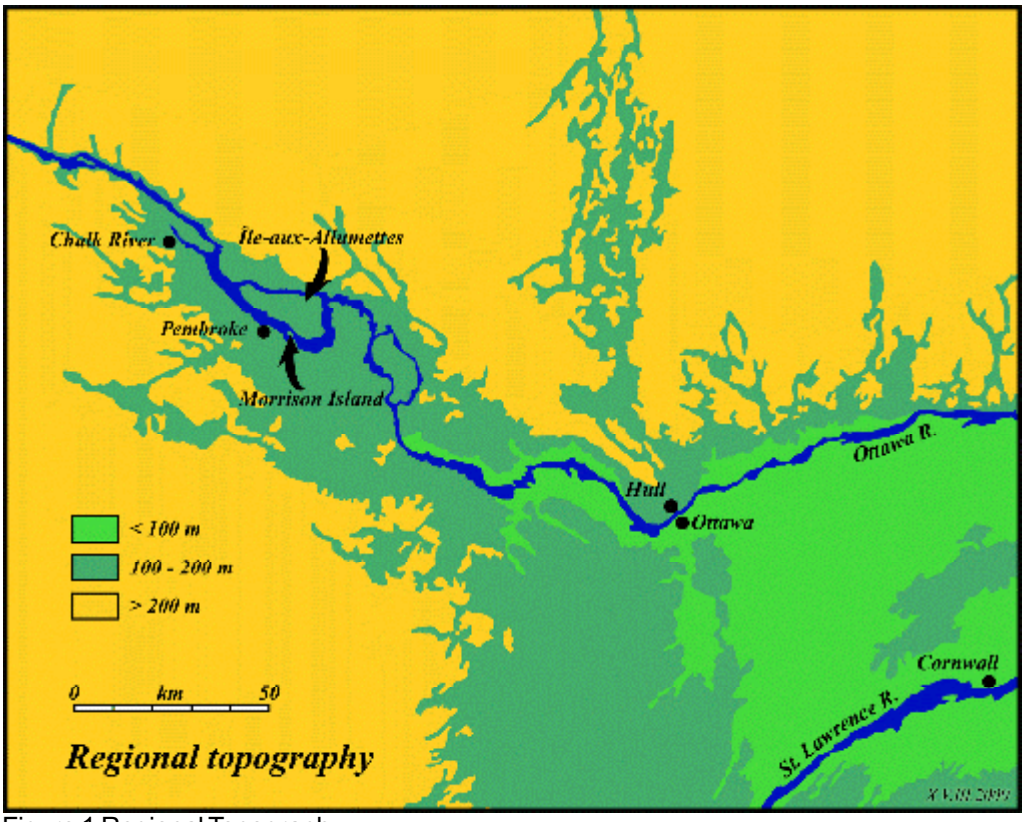


Figure 1 Regional Topography

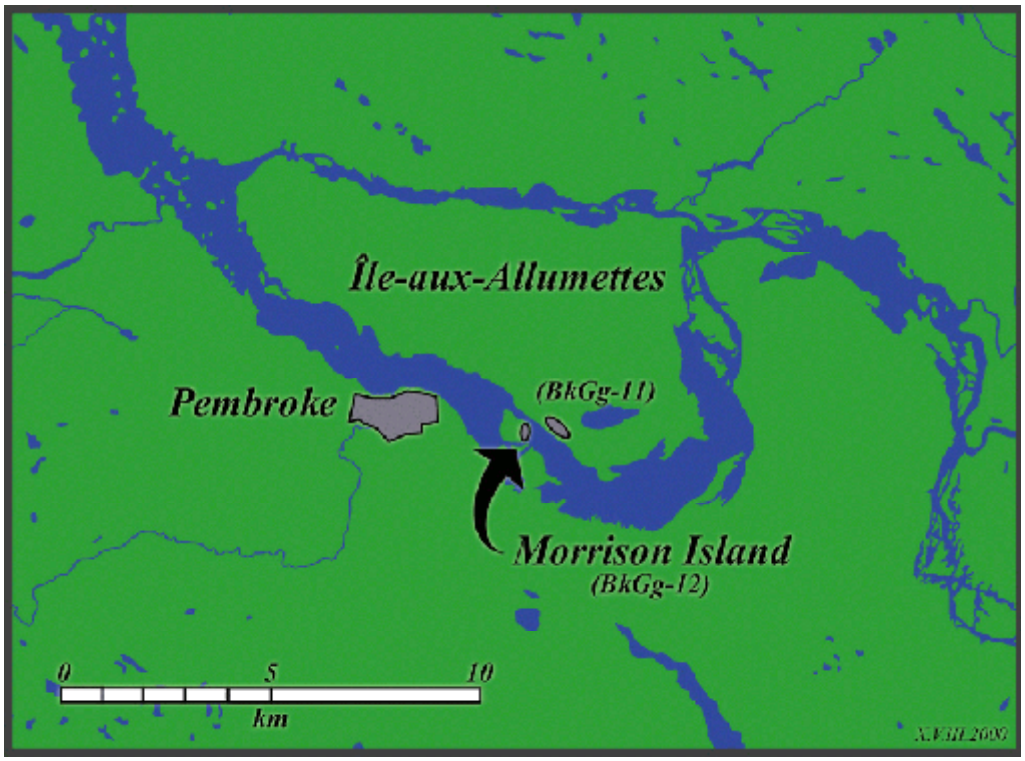


Figure 2 Site Location.

Comparisons

In this brief summary, we would like to present data on the chronology of these two sites and on the activities generally carried out on these prehistoric grounds, as well as an overview of similarities and differences with regards to the copper, the bone, and the lithic industries.

Dating the sites

Morrison is well dated with three new AMS dates (4860±50, 4630±40, 4620±40) giving an average of 4700 BP uncalibrated (Clermont and Chapdelaine 1998). These radiocarbon dates are in accord with the stone industry, and in particular the projectile points that are assigned to the Brewerton Phase of the Laurentian Archaic (Fig.3).

We are waiting for new AMS dates for Allumettes, but the C-14 date previously obtained from the University of Saskatchewan (S - 509, human bone) by Clyde Kennedy is 5240 ± 80 BP (Kennedy 1970:255). So far, this date is in accord with the presence in the lithic collection of a number of Otter Creek projectile points (Fig. 4). One of our goals in the ongoing study is to verify the hypothesis of a single-phase component at Allumettes, a hypothesis that we can now support for Morrison with its single Brewerton component (Clermont and Chapdelaine 1998:154; Kennedy 1967:109).

The function

Both sites appear to have been used as workshops and as sacred land, the latter use being revealed by the presence of several burials located within the workshop area. Hearths or possible fireplaces have not

been identified during Kennedy's excavations, suggesting that these sites were not standard base camps. Distribution of all the cultural remains is quite uniform and shows no clear-cut special use of the space at Morrison Island. We suspect that the same general pattern will emerge from our analysis of the Allumettes Island data.

The similarities and the differences (preliminary observations)

Native Copper industry *(Table 1).* Few differences in percentage, in basic shapes, and in technological skills (Fig. 5). Predominance of Conical Projectile Points in the Allumettes Island assemblage (Fig. 6). New type of Beads (spiralled or coiled) in the Allumettes Island assemblage (Fig. 7). High levels of wastage and detrital material indicating that both sites were used as native copper workshops. In this regard, it is worth noting that the waste from Allumettes is four times higher than that recovered from Morrison, possibly suggesting a more intensive use of the former as a copper workshop area.

Bone industry *(Table 2)*. Beaver incisors: At Allumettes, these objects are shorter and less specialized; the proximal ends are rarely polished and the distal ends are flatter, but the two main types are essentially the same: (Fig. 8).

Needles: At Allumettes, they are shorter, with less regular shafts, often flattened transversal sections, and less frequent "eyes" (Fig. 9).

Harpoons: The Allumettes collection is characterized by a lack of large or long harpoons, by very few proximal ends with an "eye", and unique trianguloid sub-type (Fig. 10).

Awls: These are highly variable in both assemblages.

Workshop rejects and unidentified fragments are more numerous at Allumettes.

Lithic industry. The following observations are based on a preliminary, visual inspection of the Allumettes Island lithic collection.

Flaked tools: Similar scarcity of scrapers, drills and bifaces. At both sites, the most abundant tool type is the projectile point: Brewerton types at Morrison (Fig. 11) and Otter Creek types at Allumettes (Fig. 12). Significant presence of Onondaga chert at both localities, but definitely more important at Morrison. There is more lithic source variability at Allumettes.

Flaked debitage: the local groups at both sites made extensive use of the locally available quartz of highly variable quality.

Ground tools: Fewer abraders and fewer types of abraders at Allumettes. Fewer gouges at Allumettes (Fig. 13). Fragments of Bannerstones (2 types) and ULU at Allumettes.

Ground stone debitage: a significant presence at Allumettes that will be analyzed in the coming year.

Figure 3. Brewerton Points.

Figure 5. Copper Points.

Figure 4. Otter Creek Points.

Figure 6. Conical Copper Points.

Figure 7. Copper Beads.

Table 1. Comparison of native copper artefacts from Morrison Island and Allumettes Island Sites

	MORRISON		ALLUMETTES		Remarks
Categories	N	%	N	%	
Projectile points	27	5,26	133	6,30	CONICAL POINTS
Axes (Chisels)	6	1,17	5	0,24	FEW ADZES
Fishhooks	33	6,43	82	3,89	SIMILAR
Harpoon	1	0,19	1	0,05	DIFFERENT TYPE
Gorges	35	6,82	89	4,22	SIMILAR
Barbs	37	7,21	328	15,55	DIFFERENT %
Awls/Punches	71	13,84	345	16,35	HIGHLY VARIABLE
Needles	28	5,46	40	1,90	EYELESS
Knives	5	0,98	17	0,81	SIMILAR & BIGGER
Pendants/Beads	11	2,14	13	0,62	NEW TYPE
Bracelets	5	0,98	0	0	
Ring	1	0,19	0	0	
Miscellaneous	24	4,68	156	7,39	HIGHLY VARIABLE
Wastage	229	44,64	901	42,70	SIMILAR %
TOTAL	513	100%	2110	100,02%	

Table 2. Comparison of bone tools from Morrison Island and Allumettes Island Sites

	MORRISON		ALLUMETTES		Remarks
Categories	N	%	N	%	
Beaver Incisors	699	34,6	1737	42,1	SAME GENERAL TYPES
Needles	132	6,5	204	4,9	SOME DIFFERENCES
Harpoons	86	4,2	184	4,5	DIFFERENT TYPES
Awls	66	3,3	252	7,1	HIGHLY VARIABLE
Spatula	18	0,9	16	0,4	
Decorated pieces	17	0,8	3	0	
Fishhooks	2	0,1	1	0	SCARCE
Handles	2	0,1	2	0	
Miscellaneous	17	0,8	18	0	
Wastage	980	48,5	1668	40,4	INCLUDING FRAGMENTS
TOTAL	2019	100%	4125	100%	

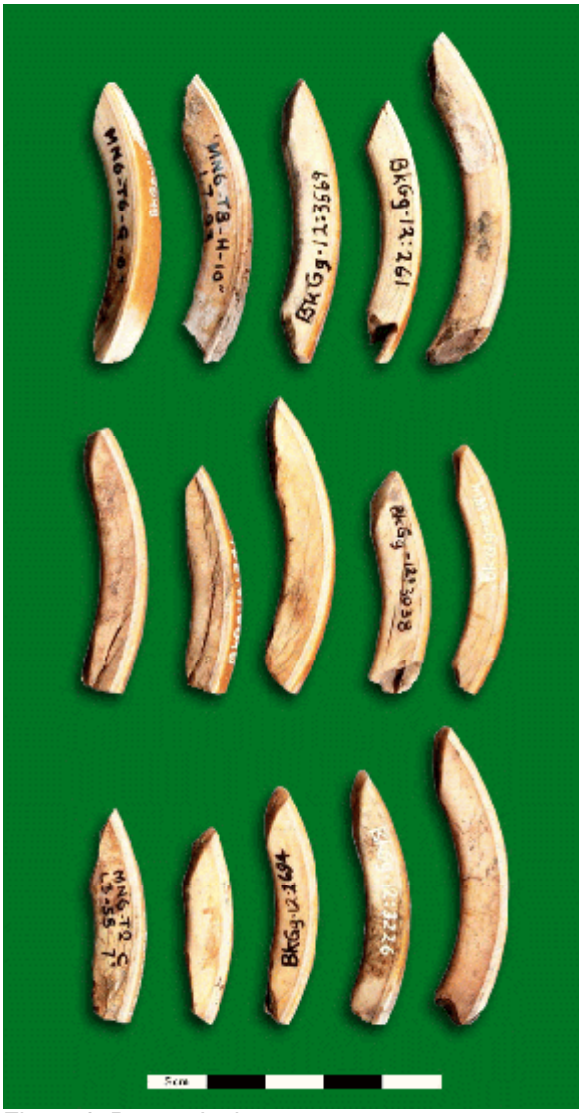


Figure 8. Beaver Incisors

Figure 9. Eyed Needles.

Conclusion

The production and recycling of bone and copper are two specific and important characteristics at these two sites. The presence in both lithic collections of a large number of abraders as well as the variability exhibited by the chipped stone projectile points indicate that these localities were used for a variety of reasons or functions. The faunal remains that are indicative of an extensive faunal resource exploitation system and, particularly, the presence, within the excavated areas, of a number of human burials also show this. But for one exception, these sites exhibit all the features that one should expect from major or central, seasonal "base camps". Missing from the record are obvious traces of hearths or other vestigial structural remains that would normally be present in "camps" of this type and magnitude. For the time being, this "anomaly" is best explained by noting that the available (excavated) sample may not be representative of the true or full land/spatial use that was made of these localities by the Laurentian Archaic people. Nor does it allow us to determine the full range of site formation processes that may have led to today's configuration. In other words, more (field) work needs to be done.

Figure 10. Harpoons.

Figure 12. Otter Creek Points.

Figure 13. Gouges

Figure 11. Brewerton Points

Be that as it may, the Morrison Island and Allumettes Island sites do suggest that the Middle Ottawa Valley formed, during Archaic times, a strategic node in a large communication and exchange network involving the Great Lakes and the whole of the Saint Lawrence River drainage. It is evident, from the data painstakingly gathered by Clyde Kennedy that the occupants of these sites were major players in this network and were participating, at various technological and ideological levels, in an extensive, subcontinental interaction sphere.

The two sites are certainly not contemporaneous, but what are the genealogical and cultural relationships between these Archaic groups? These questions will be examined more thoroughly in the coming months. At

this time, however, we feel that the basic elements shared by Morrison and Allumettes are indicative of a genealogical and cultural continuity in time and space between the groups who inhabited the Middle Ottawa Valley during the Laurentian Archaic Period. These main elements or traits are as follows: the bone and lithic macro-types, the copper technology which is clearly reflective of a broader, well-established native copper exchange network, and the indications that these groups were also participants in a south-eastern axis Onondaga chert trade or exchange network. But, needless to say, a more conclusive answer regarding the nature of the Laurentian Archaic tradition in the Middle Ottawa Valley and beyond will have to await the results of the detailed examination of the full range (including micro-types) of the similarities and differences between these two rich sites.

As a final remark, we would like to note that our ongoing re-examination of this important chapter in the prehistory of north-eastern North America would not have been possible without the dedication of the late Clyde Kennedy. Not only did he discover the Morrison Island and Allumettes Island sites, and recover large collections from these rich deposits, but also he carried out his work with reliable crews, and by using, over a short period of time, the best archaeological techniques available in the early 1960s. This is in great part why the two assemblages are so significant from an analytical (comparative and interpretative) point-of-view.

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