

Gratitude

Duffin Creek drainage has been occupied by Indigenous peoples for more than 10,000 years. For many millennia Anishinabek peoples lived by Lake Ontario fishing for salmon and wintering inland in smaller groups.

Recently, Anishinabek elder Gidigaa Migizi (Doug Williams) from Curve Lake published an oral history of the occupation of his people on their traditional lands on the north shore of Lake Ontario from Long Point in the west to Gananoque in the east. His book—*Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg: This is Our Territory*—not only documents life in their territory, it also provides an account of how some Iroquoian peoples were given permission around A.D. 1000 to settle on some of the interior lands of Anishinabek territory to grow their crops. The Anishinabek maintained their traditional lifestyle based on hunting, fishing, and gathering which involved moving their sites seasonally as these resources became available. The Huron-Wendat lived in large villages often with associated special purpose sites.

Some of these early Iroquoians settled along the Duffin Creek. Over more than six centuries they moved northward up the Duffin Creek seeking new lands to plant their crops. Sometime after about A.D. 1615 they abandoned the Duffin Creek drainage. Since the latter part of their occupation of Duffin Creek at the Mantle site was contemporaneous with the occupation of what is today Simcoe County by Huron-Wendat, we know that these Iroquoians were not Huron-Wendat. Rather, they were one of a number of groups of Iroquoians who occupied the north shore of Lake Ontario but whose ultimate fate persists, obscured by the sands of time.

For many centuries, the Anishinabek and these Iroquoians lived in harmony on the Duffin Creek, traded, inter-married and shared a symbiotic lifestyle. They left behind the archaeological remains of their dwellings, some of which were surrounded by palisades for defense, many millions of artifacts, animal bones, and carbonized plant remains—traces of the food they ate and the tools they made, used, and discarded.

I am honoured to have been able to spend a large part of my career as an Ontario archaeologist studying these Indigenous peoples, and to assist in some small way by writing their archaeological history. I express my gratitude to the generations of these Indigenous peoples for the traces they left behind which help all of us understand who lived where, when, and how.

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