

SOME WOODLAND RADIOCARBON DATES FROM NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO WITH COMMENTS ON SIGNIFICANCE

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ABSTRACT

The results of 15 radiocarbon analyses from Middle and Late Woodland sites in northwestern Ontario, some previously unpublished, are presented with interpretations. These dates and interpretations summarize all that have been received by the Ministry of Citizenship and Culture since the establishment of a regional archaeological office in northwestern Ontario.

INTRODUCTION

1984 marks the tenth year since the establishment of a permanent Ontario government archaeological office in northwestern Ontario. Since the mandate of the Archaeology Unit is primarily cultural resource management as opposed to pure research the emphasis of fieldwork has been on inventory and salvage or rescue excavations. During the past decade approximately 1000 new sites have been assigned Borden numbers and major rescue excavations of five sites have been completed and published; in addition, preliminary reports have appeared for a number of test excavations and two other rescue excavations. While 12 of the 15 radiocarbon dates have been published in some form, a number have appeared only in a list attached to a synthesis of Selkirk ceramics (Rajnovich and Reid 1978:48). This report brings together all of the dates with their respective proveniences and associations, and examines the overall significance of both the dates and the sites.

RADIOCARBON ANALYSES

The C14 assays are presented by site (Fig. 1) and Table 1 presents the data in chronological sequence. The sites are all located in the connected water systems of the Boundary Waters/Rainy Lake, Lake of the Woods, and the Winnipeg River, and they are presented in order from southeast to north (i.e. direction of water flow). All dates are uncorrected.

The Lady Rapids Site (DcKc-1)

This large multicomponent site, which includes an undisturbed Laurel burial mound, was partially excavated in 1979 when a new logging road was proposed in the area, and has been published (Callaghan 1982). Two radiocarbon dates were obtained.

Sample 1: This sample of charred wood was recovered from a Late Woodland pit feature and yielded a date of 470 BP \pm 250 (61C 1720) or AD 1480. The sample was in association with Blackduck and Sandy Lake pottery. Arthurs (1978: 57) has pointed out that Sandy Lake is more common in northwestern Ontario than previously expected, and this sample is currently one of only two radiocarbon dates for Sandy Lake in Ontario (see DdKm-1 below). Birk (1977) has defined a Wanikan Culture with Sandy Lake Ware as one of its ceramic wares, coeval with Blackduck and sharing many traits including mound burial. Sandy Lake comprises 19.2% of the Blackduck/Sandy Lake stratum ceramic assemblage and this particular instance may represent intermarriage, a contact situation, or a brief reoccupation of a Blackduck site by Sandy Lake people.

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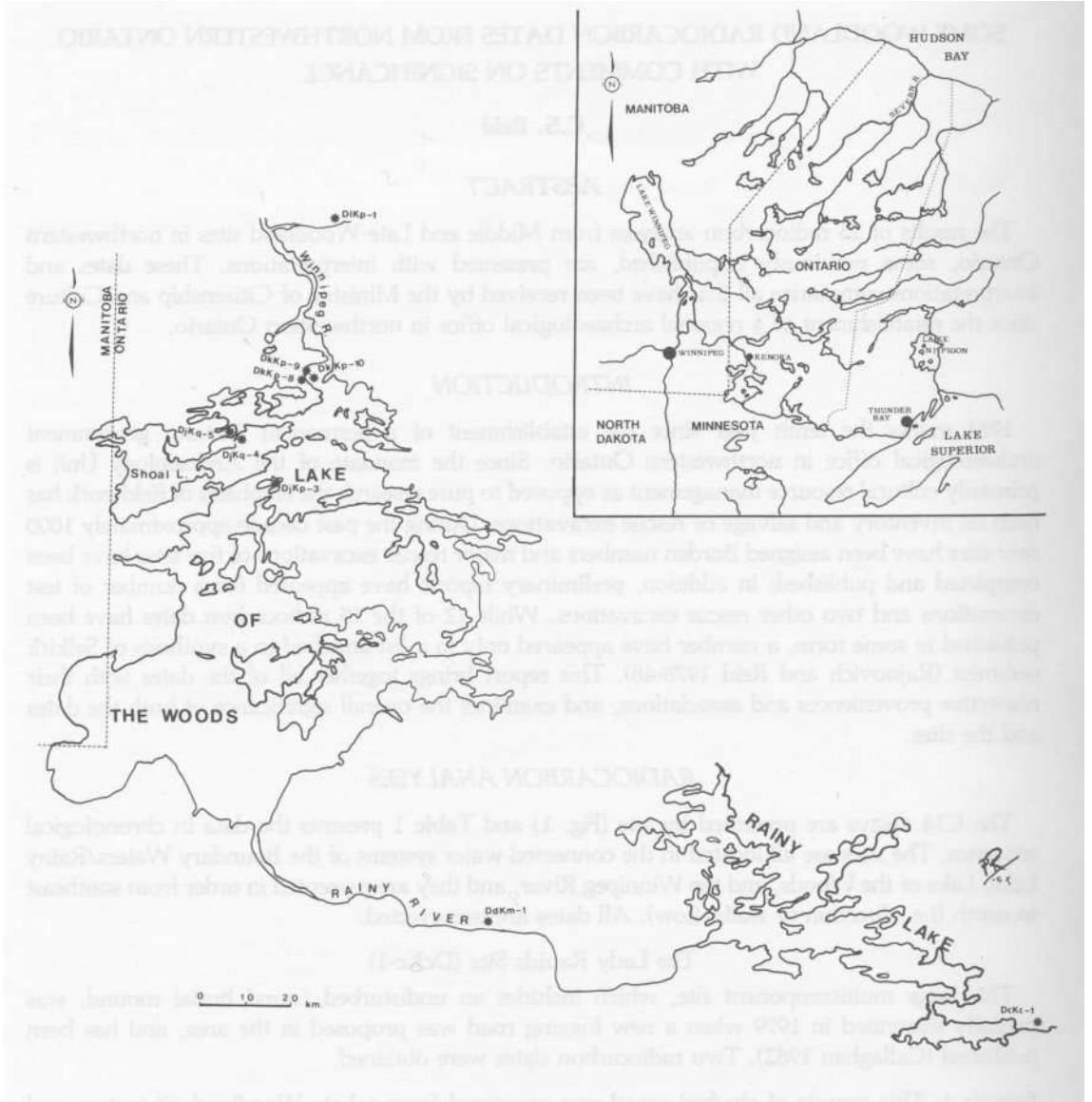


Fig. 1. The northwestern administrative region (dotted line and the Manitoba/Minnesota borders) showing locations of the sites discussed.

Sample 2: This sample of charred wood was recovered from a Laurel house structure which was partially excavated in Area C of the site, an area with a pure Laurel stratum, i.e. no overlying or intermixed Late Woodland component). It yielded a date of $1430 \text{ BP} \pm 60$ (DIC 1718) or AD 520. In direct association with the sample was a dentate stamp shoulder sherd. The sample is significant in that to date only six Laurel house structures have been positively identified in Ontario - indeed only seven are now known for the Laurel Culture - and of these five have been or are in the process of being radiocarbon dated.

TABLE 1
RADIOCARBON DATES BY CULTURAL AFFILIATION

Date	Lab. No.	Site	Cultural Affiliation
B.C.			
150+ 165	DIC 575	DkKp-10	Laurel
A.D.			
50 ± 115	DIC 762	D1Kp-1	Laurel
280 ± 115	DIC 764	DjKp-3	Laurel
450± 170	DIC 766	DjKp-3	Laurel
490± 130	DIC 571	DkKp-9	Laurel
520 ± 60	DIC 1718	DcKc-1	Laurel
930± 135	DIC 767	DjKp-3	Laurel
940± 60	DIC 759	DkKp-9	Laurel
1230± 125	DIC 569	DjKq-5	Ash Rapids Corded (early Late Woodland)
1350± 55	DIC 1719	DjKp-3	Selkirk
1410± 140	DIC 763	DjKp-3	Selkirk
1480± 250	DIC 1720	DcKc-1	Blackduck/Sandy Lake
1650± 70	DIC 760	DkKp-8	Blackduck
1690± 225	DIC 765	DjKq-4	Blackduck
1750± 115	DIC 761	DdKm-1	Selkirk/Sandy Lake

The Long Sault Site (DdKm-1)

This site is of national significance, being a part of the complex of habitation and burial sites at the Long Sault Rapids of the Rainy River. There are at least four Laurel and eight Blackduck mounds in this complex. The one sample of charred wood was recovered from a stratified habitation area (Arthurs 1982:41) and yielded a date of 200 BP ± 100 (DIC 761) or AD 1750. The sample is from a late prehistoric stratum containing mainly Selkirk ceramics with some Sandy Lake. The contemporaneity of Selkirk and Sandy Lake is interesting; a Selkirk/Blackduck cooccupation of large areas of northwestern Ontario has previously been defined (Rajnovich and Reid 1978:46; Reid 1980:225-226; Reid 1981:13-14) and it would now seem that on the basis of this date and that from Lady Rapids described above that the Wanikan (Sandy Lake) people just south of the study area may have been interacting with both their Blackduck and Selkirk neighbours over a considerable length of time.

The Meek Site (DjKp-3)

This is a very large stratified (Laurel, Selkirk/Blackduck) site with over 1.5 hectares of habitation area, an ossuary measuring approximately eight metres in diameter, and associated petroglyphs. It is the largest known prehistoric site on Lake of the Woods and has been hypothesized to be the area's major Selkirk village and ceremonial centre in the 14th and 15th centuries AD (Rajnovich and Reid 1978:43; Reid 1979). It is also the site of the first positively identified Laurel house structure in Canada, one of six which have now been excavated in northwestern Ontario (Reid and Rajnovich 1977, 1983). Five dates have been recovered so far from both rescue excavations in the area of major water erosion and test excavations in the ossuary.

Sample 1: This sample of charred wood was recovered from a living floor at the bottom of the Laurel stratum and yielded a date of 1670 BP + 115 (DIC 764) or AD 280. All of the associated pottery consisted either of plain body sherds or dentate stamp rim and neck sherds. This is the earliest occupation level on the site, which appears to have been occupied by Laurel people from the 3rd through 10th centuries AD (see sample 2 and 3 below).

Sample 2: This sample of charred wood was recovered from a hearth feature in the Laurel stratum and yielded a date of 1500 BP + 170 (DIC 766) or AD 450. In association were pseudo-scallop shell, linear stamp, plain, dentate stamp and incised ceramics. The hearth feature is associated with a storage pit 60 cm away and these may represent a portion of a Laurel house structure (Reid and Rajnovich 1977). Unfortunately this area of the site is largely lost due to water erosion caused by the blocking of all exits from Lake of the Woods since 1895 by hydro dams; indeed since these excavations another two metres has slumped into the lake, so that the remainder of the probable structure is permanently lost.

Sample 3: This sample of charred wood was recovered adjacent to an ash lens in the Laurel stratum and yielded a date of 1020 BP + 135 (DIC 767) or AD 930. This portion of the Laurel habitation area is immediately adjacent to the Selkirk ossuary which has disturbed the Laurel in situ spatial patterning so it is not possible to determine diagnostic artifact associations (only plain body sherds and lithic flakes were uncovered). Nevertheless the date does provide evidence of a long Laurel occupation as this portion of the ash lens was not disturbed by the Selkirk people when they excavated their ossuary beside it.

Samples 4 and 5: These samples were obtained from the carbonized birchbark wrappings of two bundle burials in the ossuary and yielded dates of 600 BP ± 56 (DIC 1719) or AD 1350 and 540 BP ± 140 (DIC 763) or AD 1410 respectively. The ossuary was originally thought to be a semisubterranean structure but a one-metre-wide test trench across the obviously man-made pit uncovered an ossuary. In accordance with current Ontario practice the coroner and Grand Council Treaty No. 3 were immediately informed and, since the ossuary is not threatened by erosion or looting, Grand Council requested that it not be excavated further. At this point it was backfilled. The bone was pedestalled in situ so it is possible to return at some future date if required and excavate the entire ossuary as an undisturbed feature.

This ossuary is unique. To date the only known Selkirk multiple secondary burials have been in mounds with few individuals. Moreover the burial is not simply a backfilled pit but is an elaborate structure with a central pit, an encircling platform below ground level, a ring of at least 12 large slabs of modified rock at ground level (the two excavated averaged one m high, 40 cm wide and 15 cm thick and the remaining 10 were located using metal probes), a post mould with a diameter of 32 cm suggestive of a roof support, and stratigraphy suggesting a roof structure which later collapsed into the pit. In addition, bone preservation is remarkable for an area on the south fringe of the Boreal Forest with highly acidic soils, possibly because it is dug deeply into anaerobic clay deposited by glacial lake Agassiz. On the basis of the 11 individuals identified in the test trench a total population of 45 to 75 individuals is estimated.

The Ash Rapids West Site (DjKq-5)

This large multicomponent site forms part of a complex of sites at Ash Rapids, which connects Lake of the Woods with Shoal Lake. This and its sister site DjKq-4 on the opposite bank contain Fur Trade, Blackduck, Selkirk, Laurel, Shield Archaic and Plains Archaic components, with the addition of a stratum at the interface of Middle and Late Woodland which contains ceramics with distinctive Plains traits.

The sample of charred wood was recovered from a hearth feature at the interface between the Middle and Late Woodland strata and yielded a date of 720 BP \pm 56 (DIC) or AD 1230. The cultural affiliation was originally erroneously reported as Laurel (Reid 1977:30) but correctly published in a subsequent article (Reid and Rajnovich 1980:77-79). This is a particularly important radiocarbon date as it provides temporal placement for the recently defined Ash Rapids Corded ceramics (Reid and Rajnovich 1980). These ceramics possess marked Plains influences and occur (to date) on eleven sites in the study area. It has been hypothesized (Reid and Rajnovich 1980:84) that they are involved in the formative stages of the Late Woodland period (Blackduck and Selkirk).

The Ash Rapids East Site (DjKq-4)

This site parallels DjKq-5 in its cultural composition, and the sample of charred wood obtained from a feature in the upper Blackduck stratum yielded a date of 260 BP \pm 225 (DIC 765) or AD 1690. The feature is a hearth containing fire-cracked rock, calcined bone, lithic tools and debitage, and portions of at least seven Blackduck vessels. The date is not inconsistent with the presence of Blackduck in this area into the contact period, indeed in the same stratum in a unit seven metres west there were recovered two triangular projectile points of virtually identical morphology - one made of Hudson Bay Lowland chert and the other of bottle glass (Reid, Conway and Pollock 1977). No other Contact or Historic artifacts were recovered from this undisturbed stratum.

The Ballynacree Site (DkKp-8)

This is a multicomponent (Laurel, Selkirk, Blackduck, French Fur Trade, English Fur Trade) site at the source of the Winnipeg River. The one sample of charred wood analysed to date was recovered from a hearth feature in the Blackduck stratum and yielded a date of 300 BP \pm 70 (DIC 760) or AD 1650. In association were cord-wrapped stick decorated rims from at least three Blackduck vessels, and this radiocarbon date complements that from Ash Rapids East for the Late Prehistoric/Early Contact presence of Blackduck in the study area. The sample was recovered during test excavations at the time of discovery of the site in 1976; in 1983 rescue excavations in the face of planned development were begun and these uncovered a complete Laurel house structure which appears to have burnt. Twelve new samples each weighing more than 20 gm have been submitted for analysis and these include samples from every prehistoric stratum including some from burnt house posts and a bark-lined storage pit in the Laurel structure (Reid and Rajnovich 1983).

The Ballinamore Site (DkKp-9)

This site is the second of three (see DkKp-8 above and DkKp-10 below) at the source of the Winnipeg River within the contiguous towns of Keewatin and Kenora which form the locale for the Ministry's long range rescue project for urban sites threatened by development "Rescuing Rat Portage Prehistory." The site contains Laurel, Blackduck, Selkirk and Fur Trade components and two radiocarbon assays have been completed to date. Major rescue excavations are planned for 1984.

Sample 1: This sample of charred wood was recovered from a living floor in the Laurel stratum and yielded at date of 1460 BP + 130 (DIC 571) or AD 490. This living floor was primarily an activity area for the finishing of lithic tools, with a high concentration of chert and rhyolite secondary and tertiary flakes; it occurred at the bottom of the Laurel stratum and the decorated rim/neck/shoulder sherds at this level (12 to 15 cm) are all either dentate stamp or pseudo-scallop shell, some of which are dragged.

Sample 2: This sample of charred wood was recovered from a rock-lined hearth at the interface between the Laurel and Blackduck strata and yielded a date of 1010 BP + 60 (DIC 759) or AD 940. A topographical error in the aforementioned list indicated this sample was Blackduck (Rajnovich

and Reid 1978:48) when it was placed one line too low in the table; it is in fact Laurel. In direct association with the sample are rims decorated with dentate-stamp-and-punctates and linear-stamp-and-punctates and a pseudo-scallop shell shoulder sherd. The hearth feature may be part of yet another Laurel house structure and the projected research design for the 1984 rescue excavations will test this hypothesis.

The Ballysadare Site (DkKp-10)

Rescue excavations were conducted at this multicomponent (Laurel, Blackduck, Fur Trade) site in 1975 and 1976 and subsequently published (Rajnovich 1980). The sample of charred wood was obtained from within a probable Laurel house structure and yielded a date of 2100 BP \pm 165 (DIC 575) or 150 BC. The sample was in direct association with Laurel ceramics - a linear stamp rim, a plain rim, a dragged linear stamp rim, and plain neck/shoulder/body sherds (Rajnovich 1980:54), and is currently considered to be the "earliest acceptable (Laurel) date" (Dawson 1981:37).

The Fisk Site (D1Kp-1)

This multicomponent site (Laurel, Selkirk, Blackduck), now completely destroyed through use as a boat launch/shore lunch site by a nearby fishing lodge, was the object of rescue excavations in 1975 and 1976 and has been published (Rajnovich, Reid and Shay 1982). The sample of charred wood was recovered from a rock-lined hearth inside a Laurel house structure and yielded at date of 1900 BP \pm 115 (DIC 762) or AD 50. The feature contained mostly burnt bone fragments and tertiary quartz flakes and extended to a depth of 48 cm below surface (the Laurel stratum begins at 14 cm below surface) and contained no ceramics below 15 cm. The sample was recovered at a depth of 42 cm, and the ceramics above it at 15 cm were portions of a vessel decorated with dragged linear stamp.

SUMMARY

This paper is not intended as an outline and interpretation of all known radiocarbon dates for the geographical area of northwestern Ontario, but rather to present new dates with provenience and significance for an administrative district of the Ministry's Archaeological Unit (see Fig. 1). Northwestern Ontario is, as an entity, a much larger area and a number of syntheses of previously reported radiocarbon dates for the area and its surrounding environs are already in the literature. Dawson (1981:39, Table 17) has presented a list of 27 Laurel dates from northwestern Ontario and Manitoba with considerable discussion (Dawson 1981:37-40). Rajnovich, Reid and Shay (1982:141-2, Table 37) listed 42 Laurel dates from northwestern Ontario, Manitoba, Michigan, and Minnesota with a differing but not completely divergent reevaluation of Laurel (Rajnovich, Reid and Shay 1982:99-102, 174-5). Both publications also discuss Blackduck dates, and a recent publication by Rajnovich presents 31 dates for Selkirk from northwestern Ontario, Minnesota, Manitoba and Saskatchewan (1983:55-6, Table 19) with a complete reevaluation of known Selkirk components (Rajnovich 1983:52-59). These comprehensive studies, together with Arthurs's recent (1982) study, are recommended as the most up-to-date evaluations of Woodland cultural dynamics and radiocarbon analyses for northwestern Ontario.

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