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# Temagami

## A Debate on Wilderness

Edited by  
**Matt Bray and  
Ashley Thomson**

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## **SUMMARY**

The archaeological record of the Temagami region reveals a long period of occupation by prehistoric hunter-gatherers. Earliest occupations may extend back as far as deglaciation at 10,500 years ago. In the Archaic period, early occupations at one site on Lake Timiskaming are radiocarbon-dated to 5,000 years ago, while the Three Pines Site on Lake Temagami could have been occupied at least 6,400 years ago, based on site geochronology. Archaic-period occupations fall within the Hypsithermal climatic period when temperatures were higher and the Mixed Forest extended much farther north. The ceramic makers of the Initial Woodland period had a cooler climate. Laurel ceramic vessels are well represented in the Temagami region, as are tools of Hudson Bay Lowland chert, a favoured lithic resource. The Terminal Woodland period is signaled by the earlier cord-impressed vessels and later "Iroquoian-like" pottery, indicative of trade and other contacts with horticultural Iroquoian-speakers south of the Canadian Shield.

Although archaeological research in the Temagami region has barely "scratched the surface," many questions and possible avenues of future research have arisen. For example, finding hypothesized Palaeo-Indian occupations will require a different archaeological-survey strategy than that currently employed. It will be necessary to reconstruct regional palaeohydrology and then survey systematically ancient proglacial lakes and other former shorelines. Preliminary work indicates that these strandlines occur far inland from present-day lakes and rivers. Inland locations may also have been used by Archaic and Woodland groups as winter-habitation sites, when the need for protection from cold winds was a dominant factor in settlement selection. It is premature to propose formulae concerning the maximum distances at which archaeological sites should be found from present-day shorelines, without adequate archaeological research in the Mixed/Boreal Forest or without consideration of how drainage systems have altered since deglaciation with the combined effects of isostatic rebound and climatic change.

As stone tools and debitage are the most frequent artifacts recovered from Mixed/Boreal Forest sites, the accurate identification of tool

lithology by specialists in geology is increasingly important to archaeological research. By determining which specific materials were selected by prehistoric tool makers, and drawing on information about local bedrock formations and exposures, future archaeological researchers in the Temagami region should be able to locate quarry sites and nearby lithic-reduction sites. This technique was successfully used at Lake Abitibi to locate the Mt. Goldsmith quarry and related sites (Pollock 1984; Kritsch-Armstrong 1982). In addition, by examining what local lithic raw materials were exploited, and identifying the exotics in lithic tool assemblages, archaeologists will be able to make more accurate statements concerning prehistoric group movement and trade.

The archaeological resources of the Temagami region are valuable, but also fragile. A single archaeological site, although occupied only on a seasonal basis for a few weeks or months, can reveal a long record of human activity over centuries, even millenia. Hunters and gatherers lost or discarded a few items each time they reused a site. After centuries of seasonal occupations, the most attractive locations will yield high-artifact frequencies. Such sites are often situated on sand and gravel, the same types of deposits and locales that have been used for logging-boom access to the lakes, road-construction material, and tourist campsites.

Archaeological sites in the Temagami region, with their long record of human occupation, can offer information on prehistoric hunting and gathering technology, economy, and settlement patterns. They can show how people adjusted and responded to changes in the natural and cultural environments. The past of this country, of this Canada, is in the ground — if only we have eyes to see it.

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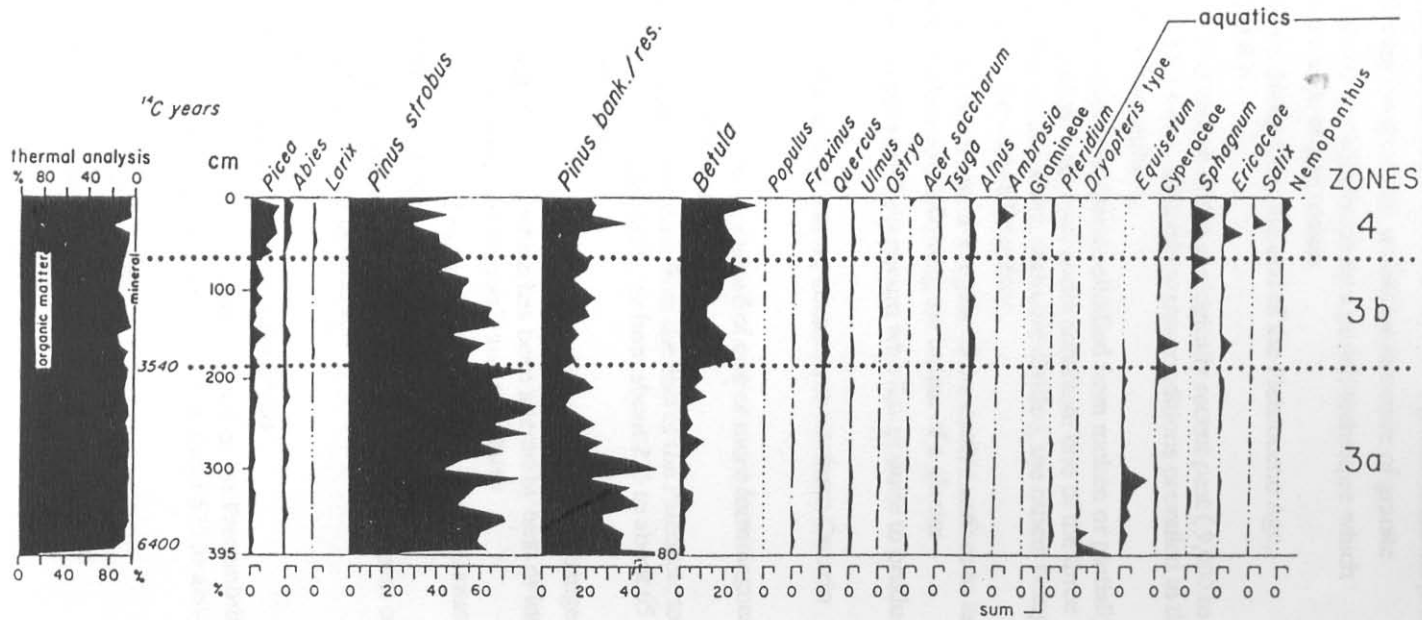


FIGURE 3 — Three Pines Bog