

4-1-2019

## Native American Camp in Marquette County, Michigan

John Anderton  
janderto@nmu.edu

Russell Magnaghi  
Northern Michigan University, rmagnagh@nmu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: [https://commons.nmu.edu/upper\\_country](https://commons.nmu.edu/upper_country)

---

### Recommended Citation

Anderton, John and Magnaghi, Russell (2019) "Native American Camp in Marquette County, Michigan," *Upper Country: A Journal of the Lake Superior Region*: Vol. 7 , Article 4.  
Available at: [https://commons.nmu.edu/upper\\_country/vol7/iss1/4](https://commons.nmu.edu/upper_country/vol7/iss1/4)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals and Peer-Reviewed Series at NMU Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Upper Country: A Journal of the Lake Superior Region by an authorized editor of NMU Commons. For more information, please contact [kmcdonou@nmu.edu](mailto:kmcdonou@nmu.edu), [bsarjean@nmu.edu](mailto:bsarjean@nmu.edu).

## Native American Camp in Marquette County, Michigan

---

**John B. Anderton Ph. D**

Northern Michigan University

Edited by: R. M. Magnaghi Ph. D

Editor's note: This material was presented at the Sonderegger Symposium in September 2013. It is the only report on a significant archaeological excavation by geographer and archaeologist John B. Anderton. He passed away in March 2014 and never finished the project nor wrote a report on it. It is hoped that readers will be enlightened about his work through this presentation. Here, Dr. Anderton presents his findings in a way that shows why he was beloved by his students because of his teaching skills. The report here is mostly an exact transcription, with minor revisions to make it more readable. Many of Dr. Anderton's comments refer to presentation slides and photographs, not included in this presentation.

Russ asked me to come in and give a little talk. I know the theme is Water this year and this archaeological site is probably near an old body of water. That is as close as I can get to the Water theme, but as Russ was saying, this is a site I have been working for the last two years [since 2011].

I want to start off by saying that this site is really an important archaeological site because it covers a rare time period. I'll try to explain that, more in a minute. I am trying to keep it relatively secret. This summer [of 2013] it became known, unintentionally. If you are wondering why I don't tell you exactly where it is, that's to protect it from looting. Looting of archaeological sites is a major problem in the Upper Peninsula. Sites get sacked and the artifacts are sold on E-Bay—a fine marketing outlet, but is really destructive to heritage.

The big story in the U.P.: There are technically four major periods. This is the GLO-3 site and I cannot tell you what "GLO" stands for. If I did I would give away the location.

There are four major periods [and the transitional Protohistoric Period] that are recognized by archaeologists and of course by historians. (see chart below) The Paleo-Indians were the first people in the U.P. using big spear points. The oldest spear point, the oldest known artifact made by people, goes back to 11,000 years ago and it was found in Marquette County.

The next period is the Archaic and it is known primarily in the region for the use of copper. These are the first people in the world to actually use copper on a regular basis or indeed any metal on a regular basis.

In the Woodland Period the bow and arrow finally arrive. Many people think that artifacts frequently found in this era were arrowheads, but most of the time they are spear points until you get to this period in the U.P.

Eventually, things become recorded in written records and we have the Historic Period. But it is

---

## John Anderton: Native American Camp in Marquette County Michigan

not quite that clean. Actually, there is a transitional era called the Protohistoric Period. In this period, we have material coming in through trade with connections to historic culture, European culture in this region. We also have the last bit of pre-history holding on—it is in transition. That's what makes the GLO-3 site so important. It is right at the period of transition from the end of prehistory, when we do not have written records, and the beginning of the historic period, when things are noted through written records.

It is a fuzzy time period and it varies depending on where you are in the region. Here, we think, now based on the work on this site it is probably starting in the early 1600s. It may start earlier if we go south and east. There is not a lot of direct contact with Europeans but trade material is coming in.

GLO-3 and 20MQT140 in the state numbering system refers to 20—Michigan; MQT—Marquette County; and 140 designates the 140<sup>th</sup> site found in Marquette County. It sounds like many sites but then you go over to Alger County and I think there are something like 600 sites. It depends on whether or not you have federal lands. If you have federal land you will often have a lot of sites because there is lots of archaeology going on.

This site was found by Mr. James Paquette. Jim and I and Dr. [Marla] Buckmaster, who some of you probably remember is recently retired—the three of us were the three amigos. We got together and worked on the site. But Jim was the one who found it back in the mid-1990s. He did this quite ingeniously—by examining old survey maps of Marquette County. Dean [Michael] Broadway had some old maps of the county. But you can go back quite far, back to the British and further back to the earliest French maps.

So what he did, he started to look at and study survey maps primarily, the first detailed American maps of the U.P. He started to notice Native American trails marked in segments from Lake Superior into the interior. As he started to look at these he noticed that there was a segment of trail that ended in what today we call the Sands Plains area.

Jim is quite remarkable. He'll get a hunch, a clue, a lead, and within hours he is going to find something. So he jumped in his truck, went out and relocated this trail and literally—from setting foot on the ground, he found artifacts. He encountered a hearth or fire pit. He continued to investigate and pulled out a series of iconographic rings—little brass rings—then he found another one in the excavation. They are called Jesuit rings. They were given to Native People when they converted, often to women and children, thus they are small in size. They are incredible artifacts. He found four of these immediately. Of course, these piqued quite a bit of interest. He contacted Dr. Buckmaster at Northern and they went out and conducted limited Phase II field investigations in 1999 and 2000. They found a great deal of animal bone and early French trade goods.

Archaeology follows three phases. Phase I, find the site. And that's what Jim did. Phase II, inves-

---

## John Anderton: Native American Camp in Marquette County Michigan

tigate a little bit more, and that is what Jim and Dr. Buckmaster did in the 1990s and early 2000s. Phase III is the full-on excavation and that is what I've been working on for the last two years.

They did their preliminary excavation and found a lot of bone and more trade goods of French origin. [Here are the three iconic Jesuit rings.] The first three came out in a cluster. They were lumped together. Maybe they had been tied together. They are made of brass and they have classic symbols on them from the Jesuits—crosses, letters that represent Latin inscriptions and things like that. If the three of us reviewed the site of the ring discovery we would possibly say that these rings were probably located in the floor of a house structure, although it is hard to say.

Here is the survey map and it doesn't show much in the area. There was a minor creek coming in off to the right into a little more major creek. There are a series of rocky hills of to the left. The Sands Plains sweep off back to the east. So we're on the edge of the plains. Not exactly where you might think to look. The "sterilized" version of this map shows a major trail heading from the Chocolate [Chocolay] River down to the "Esconawby" [Escanaba] River. This is a major trail. Several early French maps show this trail. If people wanted to get from Lake Superior, now the Marquette area, down to the mouth of the Escanaba or into the Escanaba River, they could take this trail

Trails were a way that people could get across a major feature, across the Peninsula—I still believe the U.P. is a peninsula, the dean has not convinced me otherwise—trails were also a way to get into the interior and then branch off and get to winter hunting sites. And that is probably what we are looking at here. You can see a little spur right here and that was what Jim was intrigued by. He went out and actually drove down this one and walked down it and found the site.

Jim and Marla back in 1999 and 2000 went out to the site where the rings were found. It is a little open area that was logged prior to this discovery. Actually, it has had a little bit of disturbance. The two-track road that you can see was photographed in the spring and you can see some snow on it, that road seems to be right on the Indian trail. They did some test excavations, sort of a miniature version of a dig. At the time they did not completely understand what they were getting into. When we look back at these photos—that is a hearth! The light color, the reddening, is from the heat of the hearth. You can see fire-cracked rock all around it. It is a classic hearth.

They did get some amazing artifacts. This is a pair of scissors that would have been used to cut fabric, hides—a very sought after trade item, a common trade item.

That is a piece of moose bone. There were lots of moose bones. They began to dig into dark soil and that is the cultural layer of archaeology. They did two excavations.

In fact, I hate to say it but I can't stick around here today. I am going to go out there and go through the fill from those early units and fine screen it. Actually, we are looking for smaller artifacts that

might have been missed in the original excavation.

This discovery sparked a lot of interest. In fact, Jim presented papers on the Jesuit rings for several years. Some of you may have caught that at some point if you are from around here. But the actual returned excavation did not happen until the summer of 2012. Dr. Buckmaster, Jim Paquette and myself were able to get permits to go in and do a full-blown Phase III excavation, a “dig”. We just completed the second season of digging this past summer.

The first day, August 9, 2012, we had lots of different people volunteering. On USGS maps that two-track follows the native trail and it comes right by where the native site is located. There is a water feature—the old water feature—a wetland. There is a railroad grade across it that disturbed it a bit. We have a natural feature called a kettle here as well. So the environment is a lot like what you would see if you went up and did some blueberry picking on the Sands Plains. It is a big outwash plain made by a glacier. The site itself is not that old, but the landform is quite old. It is sand and gravel. The little kettles are formed when blocks of ice detach and get buried and they melt and leave behind this hole. We kind of wonder “Why did they pick this spot to camp?” You have old channels, this kettle and wetland edges and then you look at the most common artifact at the site—moose bone.

This is primarily a moose hunting camp. We get real “wowed” by the artifacts, but the story here is the bones.

Normally, sites in the U.P. are not so well preserved; you don’t find bone like this because most of the soils are these nasty leached-out forest soils. They are really acidic and they eat bone for breakfast. But not here. This site is a little different. It is more basic.

This [photo] is a fly-by. Much thanks to Tony Williams, who went up in his Docile Don and flew over the site as best he could. You can see the wetland feature is pretty well filled with water, and Lake Superior off in the distance. Marquette is outside the photo. The site makes archaeology in the U.P. so challenging. It is a needle in a haystack. How do you find something like that? A more direct view here, you can see the railroad track, the wetland feature and extended up here at one point you have all these edges; there are more of these edges as you go farther west. Soil-wise as I said we have something unique here. The bottom line here is, you’ll see silt and clay, and there on the Sands Plains it is usually sand. The sand plus clay has made it a little more moist and a little richer and the vegetation we are finding with the initial analysis of the charcoal is that this was sugar maple in here, a little strip of sugar maple.

The site is actually in a little transition from a sandy area that would eat bone to wet things over here where nobody wants to camp. It is right between. A “Sweet Spot”. Luckily it has preserved all of the material.

Now one of the things that we did at the site last summer, we got some of our equipment out [to

---

## John Anderton: Native American Camp in Marquette County Michigan

the site]. This was equipment purchased to scan sites. It is GPR—Ground Penetrating Radar. It sends a pulse of energy down into the ground and you can actually get images and get an idea of what's there before you dig. This is kind of like Star Trek archaeology, you can scan it before you dig. It looks kind of silly. It is set up on the “baby jogger”. You just roll it along the ground. It sounds good until you hit a bunch of stumps; then it is a little tougher. We had new software that Dr. Legg hammered out and we scanned it so we could follow our excavation level. There are actually small levels—four inches at a time but at four inches we start to pick up density differences. All these blips—as I like to call them—potential hearths and features on the site. Those really caught our attention, but we have to be careful because sometimes they are cultural features as we found out this summer, but also sometimes disturbances from logging. It is just showing density differences that are all 10 to 20 centimeters. That is the actual primary cultural zone at the site.

You can actually see massive features showing up. There is a whole series of hearths down here that we found. This is probably a house structure. This is where we found out this summer that there was a pit feature. It had a birch bark lid on it! This is actually a little bit below where we dig (20-30 cm or 8-12 inches). We started to pick up huge density differences. That's outwash gravel. Once you hit that, it is very hard going. You are usually outside the cultural zone.

OK. So we followed standard methodology digging very slowly, scratching away sometimes down to dental picks. Everything goes through a quarter inch mesh [sifting screen] and also in the last two years we've gone to a really fine 1/16<sup>th</sup> inch mesh because the artifacts are so small. These are like forensic screens. That's what I am headed out to do after this presentation.

The other thing we did, we recorded as much as we could, photographed everything. My lab is full of soil samples that we're going to analyze and look for seeds and things like that. Right from the very beginning, the first screen full of soil, you can see a moose molar and literally thousands of pieces of bone as well.

So the site map looks roughly like this. I'm an archaeologist but I am also a geographer and you don't get me far from maps.

Here we have the Northern excavation; the two-track road comes through. Here is what the site looked like after it had been cleared. It is hard to tell that this is all poison ivy. We had major problems with it. It doesn't bother me, but it just about took out my other two investigators. There were bandaged up with calamine lotion. That was Marla's dog. It was the last time it was on the site. The dog got poison ivy [laughter].

Here is the Northern excavation. A very thick sod, which is unlike most of the soils up there. You can see how rich it is, very dark. You actually have to cut it into blocks and work it through the screen. There is Marla. She's 70 years old, but you can't beat her on a site. She is a master of excavation.

---

## **John Anderton: Native American Camp in Marquette County Michigan**

So, we are shovel skimming, trying to get down to the cultural level. That's Sue Bellenger in the background there. Now we've gotten on our first level and we are actually recording it. You can see some linear features already. That's the edge of that house. You can see it there as well. There's the edge. It has heavy organics inside. This is probably from pine boughs put on the floor of a small cabin. That was a common technique to insulate.

What we're looking at are the remains of something that is over 350 years old. Where people were living up here. It looks like in winter. Other features popping out. It's an incredibly rich site.

There is Jim skimming down into the second level.

Initially we didn't have very good fine screening equipment. This is from Habitat for Humanity, but it is quarter inch mesh. We got some very good screens this summer. Why fine screen? Trade beads are very small. That is a robin's egg blue trade bead probably made in Venice [Murano], probably before 1630. We know for sure that most of the beads are pre-1660. We got a bead a couple of weeks ago that we think is 1620. Beads are heavily studied by historians and archaeologists so the styles and the colors are pinned down nicely. These are some cherts. They look like chert blades. We are looking at these some more. We think they might be gunflints, actually.

And down on level three . . . that is my son Jack there in an orange shirt uniform. He is about to get yelled at by Marla for sitting on the wall. You can't sit on the wall. But it was quite a day. We found a Madison-style projectile point; that's a true arrowhead and that is interesting about the site, you have trade material, European manufactured, but you also get the prehistoric materials overlapping. At most sites you don't see that; the prehistoric material gets left behind fairly quickly, but it takes a few decades for that to happen. And we're right in that transition.

That's made of chert. Some people like to call it flint, but it is a chert from the Lake Michigan Basin and that would have gone on the end of a small arrow.

So the excavations follow through. You can see the original soil profile in here in some places but then people cut through that, they dug into it; cultural zone it. The excavations follow through. You can see the original soil profiles; the cultural zone is between level A and in the leached-out area. This was something that was expected, given the age of the site.

We continued the excavation further up. We pinned down more and more of what was going on, on the north side of the site. That's a rib bone from a moose; often times you see butcher marks on the bone. Here are some more beads. Here it [the bead] is on the bottom of the soil level. We didn't even have to fine screen that one.

Then we went over to the southern part of the site and started an excavation of the site. That's Jim's granddaughter in the photo. As we started go down we hit a similar layer of cultural material. Fire-

---

## John Anderton: Native American Camp in Marquette County Michigan

cracked rock, popping out. So we are slowly scraping out chert. I am not sure if you can see it, but there is a Jesuit ring right there. It is right next to a piece of fire-cracked rock and there is a piece of moose bone right there. Here is the fifth Jesuit ring. It looks kind of small; it is in Jim's hand. We were pretty excited. Marla's infamous "Yeah!" I remember the Gorto site, she was kissing people. She would grab your head and kiss it, every time you found something. Some of us wanted to go home. She was so excited.

Anyway, we continued excavating and not far from where the ring was found we hit a hearth; that might remind you of the initial excavation. The heat of the fire causes this discoloration that keeps popping up. All these little white flecks that you see are moose bones that have been boiled. Maybe people are stone boiling in birch bark containers, but they are trying to extract every last bit of calories out of that moose bone. Jim maintains that when you find bones, you find beads. And I would agree. Bones and beads. The hearth turned out to be pretty big.

This is all fire-cracked rock. Most of the time this rock is taken, we've found where they were getting it—from that rock outcrop that's about a mile away. Maybe going on sleds and then breaking off pieces of the rock. You can't get down to the ground to collect rocks in the winter—too much snow—but they're going for the rock outcrop.

Here is the hearth there at the bottom of the excavation. And we continued chasing the hearth.

Here is another Madison style projectile point—a little bit smaller; sometimes people call them "bird points."

More of the hearth . . . Now we moved over a little bit.

[Question from the audience] Was there a cabin or structure over the hearth?

-No. This part of the site we think is an open-air hearth. There are no structural remains. The structures are on the northern part of the site.

Now this part of the excavation as we were going down, we noticed this little bit of leather poking out. And then we dug it out a little bit more and we realized there is a copper rivet in it. And there is more leather. And as we started to dig we realized that we had a leather strap preserved in the site. It was actually maybe part of a belt or some sort of a harness. It makes me think of a tumpline; Native people often carried things strapped across their forehead rather than shoulder straps. It might be the remains of a tumpline. If any of you do any canoeing, you know what I mean. That's the belt set on tin foil, ready to be taken out of the ground.

And in 2013 we went back out and got into some of those same hearths. One of the more interesting things that we found is what looks like a round piece of stone, but it has been worked—it has a groove around it and when I found it, people didn't believe it. But it is a grooved stone hammer. They are

---

## **John Anderton: Native American Camp in Marquette County Michigan**

normally found with archaic sites. I shouted, “I have a grooved stone hammer!” and they went “Yeah, sure.” But it is. It is made of quartzite and it looks like Alger County quartzite, like Grand Island quartzite, and it’s got this big groove across it. It is probably the latest documented use of a grooved stone hammer, ever! People thought they were done with them 3,000 years ago and we got one in this site.

Massive hearth. This is all kona dolomite. It is taken from a rock outcrop several miles away. And moose bone in the hearth so it’s like an outdoor moose bone cooking area.

Then we went back to the northern part of the site and we got into more of that structural feature and we also had a huge pit feature, which is right over here. This took weeks to actually get through this thing. It’s hard to tell but the top of the pit feature is right here, fire-cracked rock all around it, this probably inside of that structure. There are some interesting rock alignments; I don’t know exactly what those were.

As we came down into this, it became apparent that birch bark was coming out in little pieces. We were able to borrow some of the kids from the Grand Island field school. They came over and helped.

This is the top of the pit feature. It looks like it was a sheet of birch bark rolled over the hole, basically. What was stored in the hole, we don’t know yet. We’re going to do a “flot” analysis. We were able to take it out in pieces; we’re ready to take it out, here it comes; it is encased in some soil but that is a piece of birch bark. We took out a piece four times that size later.

That’s the bottom of the pit feature. It is lined with fire-cracked rock. That was towards the end of the excavation. Almost the very last day, we started to hit more beads and another feature.

The site continues, this is why we keep it very secret. We can see another pit feature right here. See that round stain? The beads are right in here.

So what did we find, in the end?

### **Bone Fragments**

Thousands of pieces of bone fragments; mostly moose fragments.

A young lady from Illinois is going to do here master’s thesis on the bone, mostly moose. Some of it is burned, some of it is unburned, some is boiled.

### **Jesuit Rings**

We have the Jesuit rings—five complete rings and one fragment.

### **Glass Beads**

43 glass beads; maybe the next time I talk to you that number will be higher; I might find some today; 43 glass beads all are pre-1650; most of them are robin’s-egg blue.

---

## **John Anderton: Native American Camp in Marquette County Michigan**

The first year of digging [2012] we got several of these as well but we didn't get any last year; they are long glass tubular beads.

### **Other Artifacts**

Stone Projectile points—Madison style “arrow heads”.

Two iron trade knife blades (French clasp).

Iron scissors and sewing needles.

Copper kettle fragments.

Leather belt with copper rivet.

### **Several Features**

Hearths, cache pits, possible structure walls, birch bark cover or lid.

### **Closing Remarks**

It is an amazing site, remarkably well preserved. Like I said, it is in that transition period from pre-history to historic period. You don't get anything older and if you do it's like older gravels or something. It's not an artifact. If you find something younger it is a pull-tab or a .22 shell. So it's a site that is not corrupted by other things at all, other than a little bit of disturbance from logging [20 years earlier]. We think it is a wintertime camp and it is along that trail. Probably Anishinaabe but it might be Huron. There was a period when Huron people were here for a bit. Because there is so much early trade material it might be Huron.

It is a critical period (1630-1650) as Native People began to have more and more contact with Europeans. This is the initial contact. You are looking back at archaeology from a time period of incredible cultural change. So we are still working on it. We will probably be working on it for the next year or more. So much of what we found is down at the Marquette Regional History Museum. Keep an eye out for displays and things of that sort. We're trying to present at a major international archaeology meeting, not this year but next year.

Questions from audience:

Where were the trade goods coming from?

—Trade was coming up from Ontario. The Huron were the kind of middle-men, so to speak. Ultimately it was coming up the St. Lawrence [River] out of Quebec.

Were the French coming here at that time?

—This early there might have been limited trade. They [these Natives] were probably trading with

---

## John Anderton: Native American Camp in Marquette County Michigan

other Native People to get the trade goods up here. There are some early French people here but there are no major fur trading posts of anything yet.

What are the pit features?

—They are part of caches. They are a way you can store excess food. You dig out a hole in the ground, you line it usually with birch bark and you put in your dried food. Maybe you have [maple] sugar you are keeping in them, dried berries, maybe wild rice. Things of that sort, that can keep for awhile—cover it, bury it and come back in time and you have food.

Was the piece of birch bark part of a canoe?

—What we found would not have been big enough.

Do you think that the beads and the rings were there because they were traded to the Indians? I cannot imagine they didn't like the beads and threw them away.

—These beads were sewn into clothing, most likely they break off. What we're seeing in terms of these artifacts are probably loss. It's a winter site with three, four feet of snow there. If you've ever lost your keys in a snowbank—you don't find them. So it's very easy to lose things at a winter site.

Do you think the rings were traded?

—That's a whole mystery in and of itself. I've spoken to Anishinaabe elders and they have suggested that's a Jesuit that met their demise. I don't know about that but that might have been a small cache where things were being left maybe in a structure to be returned to. Some of it might have been lost—just lost rings. But to get three rings like that—maybe they were tied together and lost. You would think that these rings would be curated, would be kept rather than sprinkled around the site, but could be losses too.

Another idea you might want to consider, they were discarded as redundant. It's a transition period, the Jesuits were trying to proselytize the Indian people. The People take the rings and then say "You know what? We don't need them," discard them in the trash.

—Dumping it. That is a definite possibility.

Were the stone hammers carried around and used to break rocks for hearths?

—For breaking bone. The hearth stones get broken by the heat. They will have a distinctive break pattern. People will ask "How do you know they are from a hearth?" They will turn red [in the heat] and they will have a distinctive break pattern on them from the heat. The stone maul is probably for breaking larger bones.

How did they get the rock off?

---

## John Anderton: Native American Camp in Marquette County Michigan

—They probably wedged it off. They may have used stone hammers over there too, possibly.

How large is the hammer?

—It is maybe 6-8 inches across. Made of quartzite. We have to look at it more, but it looks like quartzite you would get in the Grand Island area.

Were these stones used by previous people?

—That was actually Marla's interpretation. We were seeing an archaic artifact that is being re-used.

OK. Well, thank you. [applause]

