

## Carbonized Botanical Beads from the Ontario Pre-Contact Archaeological Record

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### Introduction

Carbonized botanical artifacts are rare in the Ontario pre-contact archaeological record. During the past four decades I have been actively involved with archaeobotanical research and have examined tens of thousands of samples from hundreds of pre-contact sites spanning a 4,000 year period. I have identified only a few carbonized botanical artifacts, two of which are beads. Other researchers have also identified some. Recent excavations by Archaeological Services Inc. in 2014 recovered wooden beads at a 15th-century Huron-Wendat site in Whitby, Ontario, among the tens of thousands of artifacts (Watson 2017).

This article stems from chance encounters with charred botanical artifacts from unfamiliar archaeological contexts. Normally I am busy examining and reporting on carbonized plant material from light fraction samples processed by CRM companies. I have rarely had access to heavy fraction material and only once to quarter-inch screening samples. Below I discuss single carbonized beads recovered from a Meadowood-occupation site and an early-17th-century Huron-Wendat village in southern Ontario.

### Wood Bead

In 2013, I examined and reported on carbonized botanical remains in feature samples from the Stavebank Road site (Fecteau 2013). This is a multi-component camp with a significant Meadowood (ca. 2,500 years B.P.) component (Wood 2015:127) located on a terrace overlooking the Credit River in Mississauga, Regional Municipality of Peel, Ontario. The site was excavated by New Directions Archaeology, a CRM company based in Ancaster, Ontario.

The information from my report was also included in Lara Wood's M.A. thesis (Wood 2015). In addition to light and heavy fractions, I examined feature remains from quarter-inch screening, the first time I have had the opportunity to do so!

The matrix of this sample consisted of mud chunks that contained tiny charred wood remnants. One mud fragment in particular had a barely noticeable tubular shape protruding from its side. I carefully



Figure 1. Obverse and reverse of the wood bead (all images courtesy of Dr. Catherine Paterson).

teased the specimen from its mud crust and it revealed itself as something that had been manufactured – a bead (Figure 1). The charred object weighs .80 g and is 19.35 mm in length by 8.56 mm in diameter. A 1.0-mm hole was drilled completely through its long axis. The interior cell structure appears to be “caramelized,” making identification of the tree species difficult. I was, however, able to make a partial identification as deciduous wood. Charred wooden beads are rare at Ontario sites and this bead's early date of circa 2,500 years B.P., as well as its location in screening material, make it an exciting find.

### Plum Seed Bead

In early 2015, several bags of carbonized macrobotanical remains from a looter's back dirt pile at the Allen Tract site (now the Ahatsitstari Site) in northern Simcoe County, Ontario, were given to me for analysis by Dr. Alicia Hawkins of Laurentian University, Sudbury. Work to remediate eroding banks created by looting was an initiative of the Huronia Chapter of the Ontario Archaeological Society. All the sediment was screened through 1/8-in. mesh screen. The glass bead assemblage from this site clearly places it in Glass Bead Period II (early 17th century) (Hawkins 2014). The



Figure 2. Canada plum seed bead with close up of drilled hole showing the beveled edge.

remains were examined, identified, and documented (Fecteau 2015).

The Ahatsitstari samples provided an opportunity to examine floral material from an unlikely source. In the carbonized botanical matrix I noticed a Canada plum (*Prunus nigra*) seed measuring 12.0 mm x 11.0 mm x 7.0 mm with apertures in both sides (Figure 2). Under closer magnification, I noticed that the drilled holes exhibited a distinct beveled pattern seen in beads made from other materials such as bone and marine shell. Subsequent photos provided by Dr. Katherine Paterson at Sustainable Archaeology, McMaster University, Hamilton, clearly show this distinct pattern (Figure 2).

### Conclusion

Botanical beads are rarely encountered (or recognized) at archaeological sites in Canada, and North America in general. It is, therefore, interesting to note their presence at both a prehistoric and a post-contact aboriginal site in southern Ontario. It is hoped that this will encourage others to look for them in their archaeological material and report any new findings.

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