

A detailed historical map of the Mississippi River basin, showing the river and its tributaries, various lakes, and geographical regions. The map is overlaid with a dark grey horizontal band containing white text. The text includes the journal title, issue information, and a URL. The map features labels for regions like 'CHIPEWAY COUNTRY', 'M' DEWAKANTON COUNTRY', and 'WARTPEKUTEY'. It also shows numerous place names, rivers, and lakes, such as 'Red Lake', 'Little Fork', 'Namekan R.', and 'St. Croix River'.

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INTRODUCTION

GUEST EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION TO ISSUE TWELVE: WATERY PLACES AND ARCHAEOLOGY

By Amélie Allard

Archaeology, the study of past human societies, has a certain aura of mystery to it that captures the public's imagination. The authors in this issue, myself included, are broadly defined as archaeologists. Not the Indiana Jones kind—more the geeky and scholarly kind, whose

job and passion is not only to uncover how past people lived based on the things and structures they left behind, but also to take prodigious amounts of notes, photographs, measurements, and soil samples. Today's archaeologists have traded Indi's whip for a trowel and a bagful of



An excavation unit has been carefully laid out and is awaiting excavation at Réaume's Leaf River Post, Minnesota. Photo courtesy of Amélie Allard.

pencils, sharpies, tape measures, grid paper, and the latest technological tool they can get their hands on. The goal of all this work, of course, is to gather information and data from both the ground and the artifacts recovered from it, and ultimately to create and share narratives about how past people lived. Now, you might wonder: that's all good and fine, but what does archaeology have to do with water, place, and community? The place and community part of the question is obvious because archaeologists work on sites, that is to say specific locations where there are remnants of past human activities, and are often called upon to interact with local communities. But what about water?

As academically trained professionals, archaeologists generally have a land-based perspective: we excavate soils and sediments, and map geological strata. We are trained to understand how sites are created through human and nonhuman geological forces such as wind and erosion. Yet, as students of the past, archaeologists deal with lakes and rivers regularly, be it in our understanding of the strata that make up our site, or in our interpretation. However, the engagement that archaeologists have with water, and with rivers in particular, is not often theorized or acknowledged explicitly. Because of this dearth of theorizing, I was intrigued to ask other archaeologists how they engage with water in their work.

It is worth noting here that a potential exception to this lies in the subdiscipline of underwater archaeology, which has been gaining notoriety

since the 1960s. Though there are a lot of commonalities between terrestrial and underwater archaeology, the two subdisciplines necessarily have their own methodologies for recovering information about the past. This is because in the case of an underwater find (be it a shipwreck or an isolated pot) the context—that is, all of the relationships the object or site has with its surroundings, including with other objects—is often lost. And for a terrestrial archaeologist, context is everything. Context is what allows us to understand how objects relate to each other, and how we can create a more comprehensive picture from a site. With this in mind, while underwater archaeology is a fascinating field, for this issue I have been primarily interested in the different ways in which terrestrial or more typical archaeologists engage with water in their field.

The features of this issue highlight three different angles from which archaeologists engage with water: the first one is more common, and considers water as a geological force impacting archaeological sites and our understanding of the past. The second brings to the fore the interconnection between the work of archaeologists, rivers, and heritage. The third angle considers riverways as gathering forces; through their innate properties, rivers have the power to gather together humans, things, and animals in ways that go beyond the human scale of time. What these three angles have in common is that they take on the perspective from watery places to zoom in on archaeological practice and interpretation.

Rivers as movers of archaeological information

One engagement with water that archaeologists readily acknowledge is how water has affected the geological history of the site they excavate. Indeed, we are trained to recognize the past and present impact of water upon archaeological sites, for example in the ways that water erodes away sediments and may carry archaeological evidence along with it. This important facet

of archaeological work is illustrated here in the feature by Katrina Yezzi-Woodley, Martha Tappen, Reed Coil, and Samantha Gogol. In this feature, the authors consider the impact of rivers on early humans' move out of Africa millions of years ago. Taking the fascinating archaeological site of Dmanisi in the Republic of Georgia as a case study, they illustrate how learning from

past ecologies can help us learn more about why and how early humans moved out of Africa. For an archaeologist or a paleontologist who specializes in taphonomy (the impact of human and nonhuman forces on animal remains from archaeological sites), water, and rivers especially, is a crucial factor to consider. As Yezzi-Woodley and her colleagues demonstrate, animal remains from an archaeological site may move through river action, and learning how bones behave in

water or in a riverine environment helps archaeologists understand how the bones came to be deposited in a specific way: did people leave them there, or were they carried there by some other forces, such as carnivores, or water? The careful compilation of experiments with a detailed analysis of surface modifications on animal bones can therefore reveal unforetold information about our species' history.

River archaeological sites as heritage

Rob Mann's feature, "Life, Land, Water, and Time Revisited: Archaeologist Douglas A. Birk and the Little Elk Heritage Preserve in Little Fall, Minnesota," shifts our attention from a consideration of rivers in terms of paleoecology to the relationship between place, water, and heritage, and the role of the archaeologist in bringing this connection to the fore. Mann's piece is a tribute to a pioneer of Minnesota archaeology, the late Douglas Birk, who spent his prolific career bringing to public attention the rich archaeological history along Minnesota's riverways. Although his work has spanned a variety of contexts, his focus, as Mann tells us, was largely on the Little Elk River's confluence with the Mississippi River in Little Falls, Minnesota. This location was the home of a rich eighteenth-century fur trading

post known as 21MO20 (or just MO20), as well as the location of the Little Elk River Methodist Episcopal mission site. The missionaries had set up shop at this location at the request of Hole-in-the-Day, an influential chief among the Ojibwe in the nineteenth century. Through a history of this location, Mann relates Birk's success in creating an archaeological and cultural heritage preserve at this location in order to valorize local history. Through his project to protect and disseminate knowledge about the past at the Little Elk, Doug restored meaning to this once important meeting place. The feature further illustrates the paradoxical nature of an archaeologist's work; while we are working to reconstruct the past, our most important contribution is to the present.

Rivers as gathering places

When archaeologists reconstruct the way that past people lived, waterways tend not to feature predominantly in the relationships that are discussed. Yet people in the past, just like people today, held meaningful relationships with water and waterways, just as they did with each other, the objects they used, or the landscape they traveled. The trappers and voyageurs of the North American fur trade, for instance, engaged with waterways in a meaningful way, yet this relationship is often overlooked by archaeologists or discussed in terms of the background upon

which human actions are played out. In our feature titled "The View from Watery Places: Rivers and Portages in The Fur Trade Era," Craig Cipolla and I challenge this idea as we explore the gathering power of rivers, highlighting their role in constituting fur trade history rather than merely enabling it.

Specifically, we consider the importance of watery places, such as rapids and the portages that allowed traders to avoid them, in thinking about the relationships that constituted the

eighteenth-century fur trade. Rather than consider the riverways in terms of mere mode of transportation, we envision the rivers as actors or agents in and of themselves, having an impact on human lives and their material legacies. Rivers gather people and things and animals in particular ways, and here we illustrate this via two examples, or two places of the fur trade. The first one is a late eighteenth-century trading post known as Réaume's Leaf River Post located in Central Minnesota. Situated on the Leaf River, a tributary to the Mississippi River, this trade post was established at the end of a portage, that is to say a land-based path that allowed traders to avoid dangerous rapids or to go from one river to another. These portages get their names from the French verb "porter," or to carry, because

the traders would have to carry their cargo, in addition to the canoes themselves, overland when taking the portage route. Establishing a trade post at the end of a portage was a meaningful decision, one that is ultimately influenced by the place itself.

The second place that we discuss is the river itself. We draw from fur-trade related objects housed at the Royal Ontario Museum that were recovered from two of Ontario's rivers: the French and the Winnipeg Rivers. Our discussion of those collections and the canoe accidents that created them emphasizes the dangerous nature of the river world of the voyageurs, as well as the indomitable character of the rivers themselves.

Concluding thoughts

Overall, the goal of this issue is to showcase the relationship that archaeologists of different specializations have with water and rivers in their work. While for some disciplines this is somewhat of a banal exercise, for archaeologists this emphasis is rather unconventional. Yet the exercise is worthwhile, because it promises new ways of understanding the past. Giving deeper consideration to water and rivers in archaeological interpretation and practice has the power to completely alter our perspectives of the landscape, not only as archaeologists, but in terms of

human experience. It opens new avenues, and makes us see things that were not visible before. As I discuss in my co-authored feature with Craig Cipolla, a place that may seem "in the middle of nowhere" from a modern, land-based, perspective, can turn out to be a place rich with meaning and history when the river is taken into account. So it is my hope that through this issue you will learn more about archaeology as a discipline, but also that the features illustrate how riverways and water connect us all, just as they have since time immemorial.

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About the Author

Amélie Allard is an archaeologist and a recent doctoral graduate in anthropology from the University of Minnesota. She is now undertaking postdoctoral research at the Royal Ontario Museum. Her work has focused on issues of colonialism, mobility, and identity politics in eighteenth-century North America, especially in the context of the fur trade.