

## **A NATIVE ARTIFACT FROM THE OCEAN FLOOR NEAR INDIAN ISLAND**

by David Black

In the autumn of 1995, Shawn Robinson, a marine biologist employed by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans at the Federal Biological Laboratory in St. Andrews, New Brunswick., contacted me about a Native artifact he had found. On July 31, 1995, Shawn and three colleagues, Steve Drake, Jim Martin and Ross Chandler, were using a scallop drag to take samples of scallops from the ocean floor as part of their biological research in the Quoddy Region. They discovered a stone tool in a sample raised from 38 meters depth just east of Indian Island, between Deer Island and Campobello Island. The Biological Lab loaned the artifact to the Department of Anthropology, University of New Brunswick—Fredericton, for study.

The artifact represents a type of ground stone tool that archaeologists call gouges, because their shapes resemble modern steel gouges used for wood-working. Probably, Native people used ground stone gouges for heavy wood-working tasks, such as constructing dugout canoes.

The Indian Island gouge is complete, and was not damaged by the scallop drag as it was brought to the surface. It also was not damaged by whatever events led to its presence on the ocean floor. However, there are patches of coral and the shells of small marine snails stuck to its surfaces.

A Native artisan made the gouge from a piece of dense, fine-grained, blue-black igneous rock (probably gabbro or diabase). The tool measures 16.05 cm in length, 3.80 cm in width, and 2.90 cm in thickness, and weighs 281.0 gm. The tool-maker used hammerstones and abrasives to peck and grind the stone into a cylindrical shape with an oval cross-section, then ground a groove or channel varying from 0.5 cm to 1.5 cm in depth along the entire length of one surface of the cylinder. Thus, this artifact is classified in archaeological terminology as a fully-channelled gouge, and can be contrasted to gouges on which the channels extend only part of the length of the tool.

At the working end of the gouge, the channel was ground deeply to create a sharp, but sturdy, semi-circular cutting edge; at the opposite end, the channel is shallower and terminates in a thicker, blunt end. The surfaces of the tool were polished to a smooth finish at the working end; toward the blunt end, some areas were left with a slightly pitted surface texture. Probably, the blunt end of the tool was once hafted in a wooden or antler handle, so that it could be pushed or driven through the wood being worked without fracturing the blunt end of the tool. When the cutting edge of the tool became dull from use, it would have been re-ground using a whetstone, as is done to sharpen metal tools.

In northeastern North America, gouges were used by Native people during the Middle and Late Archaic periods (3800 to 7000 years ago). Fully-channelled gouges are typical of the Middle Archaic period, while partially-channelled gouges are typical of the Late Archaic. Based on comparisons with fully-channelled gouges found at radiocarbon-dated archaeological sites, I believe the Indian Island gouge is at least 5–6000 years old, and, perhaps, as much as 8000 years old.

This find is one of a growing number of Native artifacts recognised by fishermen who drag scallops from the Gulf of St. Lawrence, the Bay of Fundy and the Gulf of Maine. Other

artifacts recovered include ground stone plummets, ground slate semi-lunar knives (ulus), and flaked stone bifaces and projectile points. Offshore artifacts typically date to the Archaic period, when sea levels were 5 m to 15 m lower than at present.

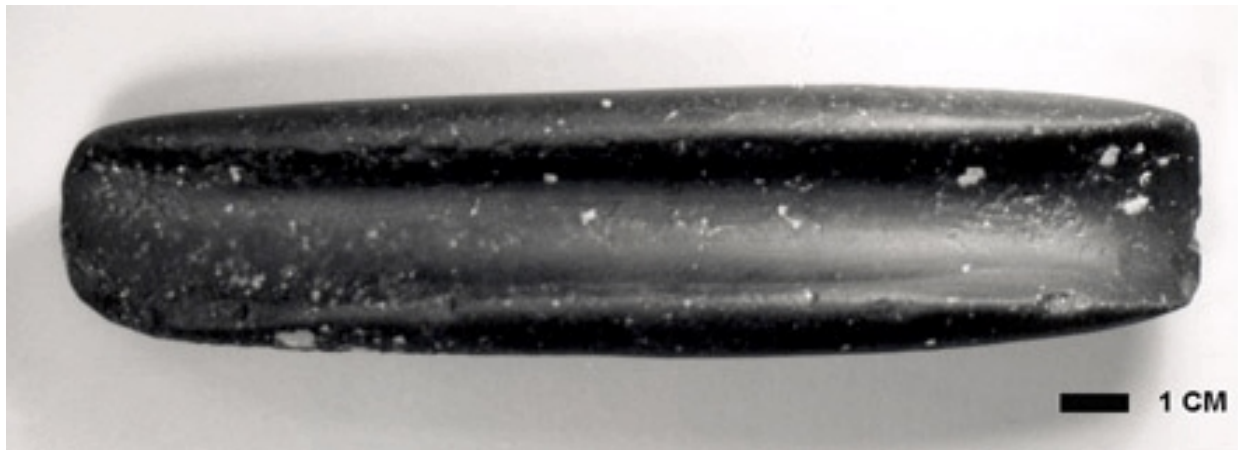
Some offshore artifacts probably were washed out of ancient Native campsites as these were eroded by rising sea levels. Others may have been lost over sides of boats while Native people fished, hunted sea mammals and travelled over the water. Artifacts like the Indian Island gouge bear witness both to the importance of the sea in the lives of Native people in the distant past, and to the threat the sea poses at present to the archaeological record left by those people and their descendants.

To readers interested in more information about artifacts brought up from the ocean floor by fishermen, I recommend the following articles:

Crock, J.G., J.B. Petersen and R. Anderson. 1993. Scalloping for artifacts: a biface and plummet from eastern Blue Hill Bay, Maine. *Archaeology of Eastern North America* 21:179-192.

Keenlyside, D.L. 1984. Ulu and spear points: two new archaeological finds from Prince Edward Island. *The Island Magazine* 16:25-28.

Turnbull, C.J., and D.W. Black. 1988. The slate ulu from White Horse Island. In *Bliss revisited: preliminary accounts of the Bliss Islands Archaeology Project, phase II*, edited by D.W. Black. New Brunswick Manuscripts in Archaeology #24.



**Fully channelled gouge found off-shore from Indian Island, New Brunswick; the cutting edge of the gouge is to the right.**