

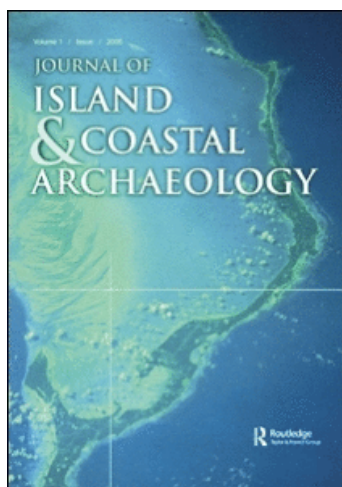
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### **Coastal Archaeology and Hunter-Gatherers in Southeastern Tierra del Fuego**

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## **NEWS AND NOTES**

# **Coastal Archaeology and Hunter-Gatherers in Southeastern Tierra del Fuego**

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The southeastern coasts of Tierra del Fuego are archaeologically multifaceted landscapes. This may be due to the fact that these settings served as zones of interactions between biologically, culturally, and linguistically distinct co-resident groups. Abundant ethnographic information indicates that the southeastern coast of Tierra del Fuego was inhabited by both maritime (*Yámana*) and terrestrial (*Selk'nam* and *Hausb*) populations of hunter-gatherers (Bridges 1886; Gusinde 1937; Hyades and Deniker 1891; Lothrop 1928). Although these populations maintained exchange and marriage relationships, their lifestyles were markedly different (Gusinde 1937). This population pattern is well known in historic times, but the timing and structure are still unclear for prehistoric times. It is only recently that this subject began to be assessed in the region (Zangrando et al. 2009).

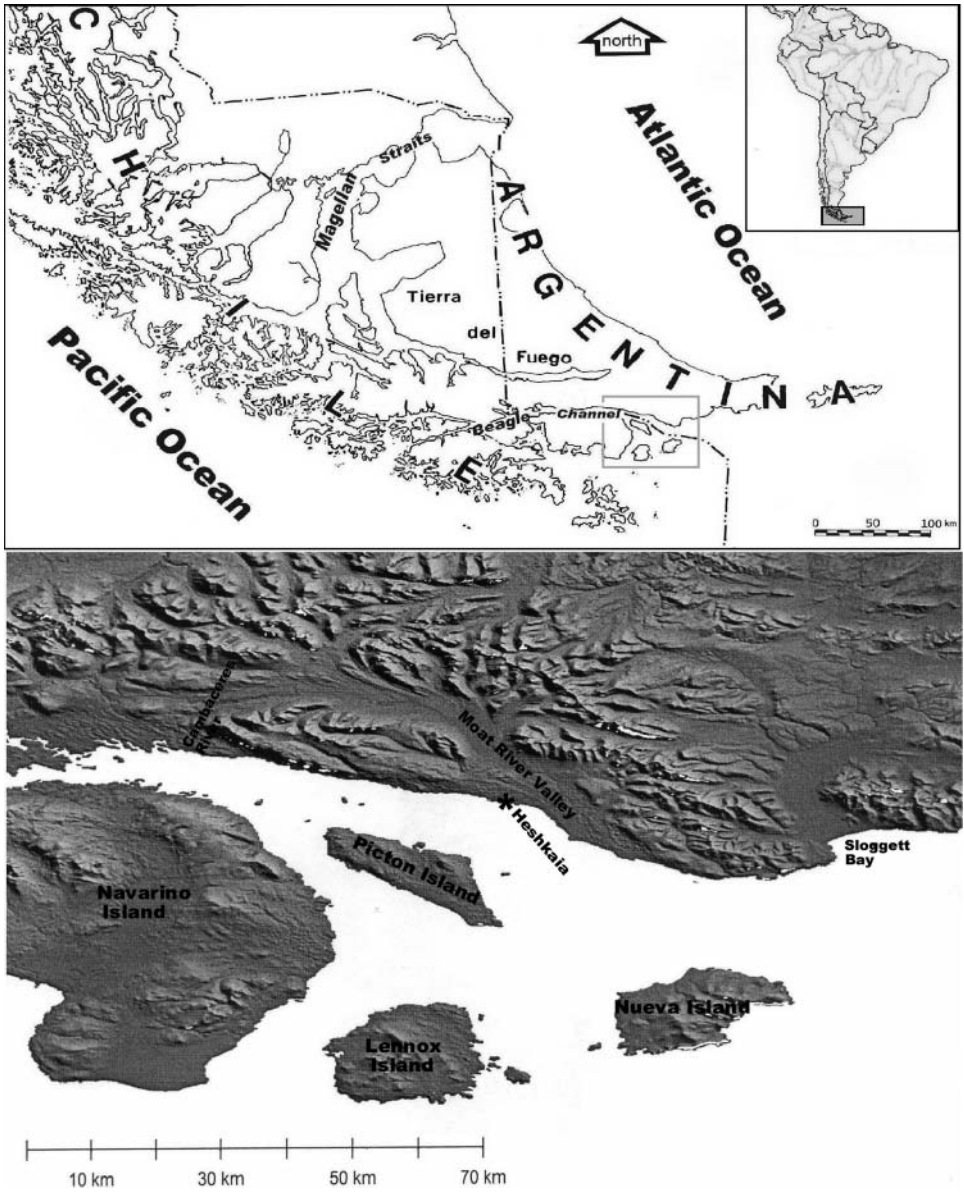
To improve our knowledge on the use of coastal environments and social interaction

by different groups of hunter-gatherers of Tierra del Fuego, I started with an archaeological project in Moat. This is a region located in the central section of the south coast of this island, and includes all of the homonymous river basin, and the coastline extending from the mouth of Cambaceres River to Sloggett Bay (Figure 1). This study area covers approximately 1,000 km<sup>2</sup>. No archaeological research was previously developed in this region.

The first goals of this project are to analyze the spatial and temporal distribution of sites, and to explore the composition of archaeological assemblages to assess the use of space and resources by hunter-gatherer populations. This research will assist in identifying contrasting subsistence and technological strategies of those groups at the same or at different points in time, and will provide clues about past habitat use and competitive/cooperative social relationships associated with resource procurement.

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**Figure 1.** Map of Tierra del Fuego with the study region indicated inside square, and topographical image with major geographical references.

The coastal surveys identified a total of 40 archaeological sites distributed in three localities. The sites are shell middens with variable extensions and surface aspects, except

for one sub-superficial small site. The radio-carbon analyses available at the moment indicate chronologies up to 1600 radiocarbon years BP.

Table 1. Summary of excavated sites, and material culture recovered from Heshkaia.

Site name	Site type	Extension	Distance to coastline	Excavation method	Maximum depth	Material culture
Heshkaia 28	Shell midden: isolated dome of low height	20 m <sup>2</sup>	22 m	1 × 1 m test unit	29 cm	16 lithic artifacts were recovered, which include a retouched flake and a core fragment. No tools were found.
Heshkaia 30	Shell midden: three mounds aligned parallel to the coast	80 m <sup>2</sup>	1 m	1 × 1 m test unit	75 cm	18 flakes and lithic debris; 2 instruments: a stone with indentations pickets and a bone wedge.
Heshkaia 34	Shell midden: two ring structures and five very large mounds	1500 m <sup>2</sup>	40 m	1 × 1 m test unit	63 cm	122 flakes and lithic debris; 3 lithic instruments (2 side-scraper, 1 scraper) and 2 retouched artifacts.
Heshkaia 35	Shell midden: isolated mound of considerable height	40 m <sup>2</sup>	200 m	1 × 1 m test unit	58 cm	9 flakes; 2 lithic instruments (1 side-scraper, 1 scraper) and 1 blank.
Heshkaia 39	Sub-superficial small site in soil of forest area	10 m <sup>2</sup>	300 m	2 × 1 m test unit	10 cm	Also 1 tool made on guanaco bone. 31 flakes; 1 side-scraper, 2 scrapers; 3 blanks; and a retouched flake.

Table 2. Frequencies and percentages of faunal specimens recovered in archaeological sites of Heshkaia.

Site	NISP (NISP%) of taxa						
	Pinnipeds	Guanacos	Canids	Birds	Fish	Cetaceans	Totals
Heshkaia 28	2 (1.2%)	8 (4.8%)	0 (0%)	80 (48.5%)	22 (13.3%)	9 (5.5%)	165
Heshkaia 30	22 (1.6%)	17 (1.2%)	1 (0.1%)	444 (32.4%)	677 (49.4%)	36 (2.6%)	1370
Heshkaia 34	6 (0.4%)	784 (52.1%)	0 (0%)	78 (5.2%)	58 (3.9%)	7 (0.5%)	1504
Heshkaia 35	5 (1.1%)	197 (43.5%)	1 (0.2%)	105 (23.2%)	26 (5.7%)	1 (0.2%)	453
Heshkaia 39	1 (2.1%)	37 (75.5%)	0 (0%)	6 (12.2%)	0 (0%)	4 (8.1%)	49

To explore the composition of archaeological sites and to assess the use of space and resources by those populations, one archaeological locality (Heshkaia) was chosen for test excavations. The excavations were conducted at five sites with dissimilar location and structural characteristics over the total of 13 sites recorded in this locality (Table 1).

All artifact assemblages recovered in Heshkaia are dominated by flakes and other lithic debris, obtaining a low proportion of lithic and bone instruments (Table 1). In Heshkaia 34, 35, and 39, side-scrapers and scrapers are the more notable tools; technomorphological variability among these sites was not observed. It is also noted that in Heshkaia 30 a stone with indentations pickets was recovered, which is similar to fishing line weights used by hunter-gatherers in historic times.

Zooarchaeological evidence indicates a major role of guanacos (*Lama guanicoe*), birds, and fish in subsistence (Table 2). Heshkaia 34, 35, and 39 have high frequencies of guanaco, while the remaining two sites (Heshkaia 28 and 30) are dominated by remains of birds (mainly Phalacrocoracidae and Diomedidae families) and fish (principally Nototheniidae family). Bone remains of both guanacos and birds show clear evidence of processing (cut marks and traces of impacts). The low proportion of marine mammals represented in the zooarchaeological assemblages of the different sites is also noteworthy, especially the low incidence of pinnipeds, which are common in archaeological sites of the south of Tierra del Fuego.

The results of fieldwork and preliminary studies presented in this note provide a first image on the subsistence of the hunter-gatherer groups of Moat, which is valid for the last 1600 radiocarbon years BP. Even though the sizes of assemblages to further interpretations are still reduced, it is noteworthy that in the three assemblages dominated by guanaco remains, most conspicuous instruments are side-scrapers and scrapers. In the same vein, it is interesting that in Heshkaia 30 a large number of fish remains was recovered, and

fishing technology was also registered. This information shows the existence of different technological strategies for procurement and processing of animal resources from both terrestrial and marine ecozones. While there existed intensive and regular use of coastal areas in Moat, the information obtained so far presumes larger use of terrestrial over marine mammals. This last situation is different from that recorded in the Beagle Channel coast (Orquera and Piana 2009), where archaeological evidence shows a greater importance of pinnipeds over other resources.

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