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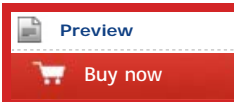

Ojibwa Fisheries on St. Louis River, Minnesota: 1800-1835

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Matti Kaups^a

pages 61-83

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Abstract

The westward migration of the Ojibwa Indians from the Sault Ste. Marie area of northern Michigan beginning about 1650, resulted in their widespread dispersal. Those who settled in the coniferous- mixed forest zone of interior Wisconsin and Minnesota adapted to the local conditions by developing an "emphatic" hunting economy, gaining a large share of sustenance from hunting large game and furred animals. On the other hand, the Ojibwa who settled along the southern littoral of Lake Superior are said to have engaged in fishing for their primary subsistence. The latter proposition is reinforced in the narratives written by Euro-American visitors to Lake Superior in the early 19th century. This study evaluates this alleged reliance on fish, and points to contradictions and inconsistencies in the narratives in the context of the Fond du Lac band located at the southwestern extremity of Lake Superior.

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Ojibwa Fisheries on St. Louis River, Minnesota: 1800-1835


Matti Kaups

ABSTRACT. *The westward migration of the Ojibwa Indians from the Sault Ste. Marie area of northern Michigan beginning about 1650, resulted in their widespread dispersal. Those who settled in the coniferous-mixed forest zone of interior Wisconsin and Minnesota adapted to the local conditions by developing an “emphatic” hunting economy, gaining a large share of sustenance from hunting large game and furred animals. On the other hand, the Ojibwa who settled along the southern littoral of Lake Superior are said to have engaged in fishing for their primary subsistence. The latter proposition is reinforced in the narratives written by Euro-American visitors to Lake Superior in the early 19th century. This study evaluates this alleged reliance on fish, and points to contradictions and inconsistencies in the narratives in the context of the Fond du Lac band located at the southwestern extremity of Lake Superior.*

The Huron-Iroquois wars of the 1640-1660s and the subsequent westward expansion of the French fur trade resulted in dislocation and widespread dispersal of Indian populations in the Lake Superior region. One of the groups thus affected were the Ojibwa Indians, known to the Jesuit Fathers as *les Habitans du Sault* or *Sauteurs (Saulteurs)*, so named because of their presence about the rapids of St. Mary's River (present-day Sault Ste. Marie) when the missionaries first came in contact with them in 1641. Though recognized as a “nation” or separate people by the Jesuits, the Ojibwa at this time consisted of several related clans, and occupied a broad territory reaching from the Lake Nipissing-French River-Georgian Bay area in Ontario westward to Au Sable on Lake Superior, and from the Straits of Mackinac on the south to Michipicoten Bay on the north (Fig. 1). The population estimates for the aggregate semi-nomadic Ojibwa inhabiting the territory range from 3,000 to 50,000, the lower estimate being the more acceptable.¹ They were divided into small, semi-autonomous groups of 100 to 200 people and gained sustenance from hunting, fishing and gathering. It is likely that through trade in surplus moose

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