



Mystery #14 Shell Heap Digs

Maine's first fishermen were Native Americans. They were skilled fishermen and mariners. They fished for a variety of fish and utilized a number of different techniques that were later adopted by the English. They used nets to catch fish through holes in the ice. They used bone hooks and hemp lines that were superior to the English tools of the time. The English adopted the Native American techniques for creating fishing nets and fish weirs. Smoking fish as a means of preservation is something else that originated with Native Americans. One thing that they were not interested in was lobsters, eating them only "when they get no Basse." They used them for bait instead. The lobsters were merely picked up at low tide, no fishing skills required! Shell heaps were created as a result of the Indians' love of quahogs and clams, while the English chose to use them as food for their hogs.

In Greene's history, we learn that there were numerous shell heaps in the Boothbay Region, mostly on islands in the Sheepscot River, including Sawyer's

Island and Indiantown Island. On Southport Island, they were found in Ebenecook Harbor and on the southern slope of Dogfish Head. At one time, and in some places, these shell heaps were 10 feet deep. Artifacts were discovered on this site in the 1850s and excavations were done in 1995 and 1996 by the Boothbay Region Land Trust.

This Mystery Site is only accessible by boat. GPS Coordinates are N43°51.823'W69°40.030'.

Resources:

Out of Our Past, Native American Fishing

A History of Fishing in the Boothbay Region by Chip Griffin

The History of Boothbay, Southport, and Boothbay Harbor by Francis Greene

The Boothbay Region Revisited by the Boothbay Region Historical Society

Photo Requirements: Your selfie should include a sign with the name of this island.

MAP CLUE