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The Earliest Islander Found: A Major Discovery for the PEI Mi'kmaq

The Mi'kmaq and their ancestral relations have lived on Epekwitk (Prince Edward Island) for more than 12,000 years – since time immemorial.

Recently, a human jawbone fragment was discovered near Stanhope, PEI, revealing the earliest known Indigenous ancestor on the Island. The bone, about 5,000 years old, belonged to a woman who lived during a time when rising sea levels had shaped Epekwitk into the Island we know today. A swimmer found the jawbone fragment and handed it to authorities, who later confirmed its age and returned it to L'nuey on behalf of the Epekwitnewaq Mi'kmaq (Mi'kmaq of PEI).

“This discovery adds greatly to our understanding of the Mi'kmaw legacy and significantly advances what we know about the archaeological history of the Island and the broader Atlantic region, also known as Mi'kma'ki,” said Dr. Helen Kristmanson, Senior Archaeologist with L'nuey.

In support of L'nuey's rights-based mandate, a newly formed archaeology team is working closely with its History and Outreach Program to bring together different types of knowledge – archaeological, oral, traditional, and historical – to tell a fuller story of the Mi'kmaq's past on Epekwitk. This combined research is challenging narratives about Mi'kmaw presence on the Island and enriching awareness of their history across time.

Jenene Wooldridge, Executive Director of L'nuey, noted, “This historic finding is incredibly important as it shows just how vital Mi'kmaw knowledge, values, and rights are in understanding our shared history. With the exciting launch of our Archaeology Program, we have strengthened our capacity to take a leading role in managing cultural heritage. Through this, we are ensuring that Mi'kmaw voices guide the way in studying and preserving the past, while also shaping our future.”

Epekwitnewaq Mi'kmaq are gaining a clearer understanding of ancestral Mi'kmaw society, culture, and way of life through the launching of L'nuey's Archaeology program. This information will support and empower Epekwitnewaq Mi'kmaq efforts to safeguard cultural history, and ultimately, advance the exercise of their Constitutionally protected Aboriginal Rights.

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