

CHAMPLAIN AND THE ODAWA IN 1615

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Abstract

Samuel de Champlain's record of his meeting the Odawa *Cheveux-relevés* in 1615 is examined, and aspects of the relationship between the Odawa and the Petun are speculatively suggested.

Résumé

Le dossier de Samuel de Champlain relatifs à sa visite chez les Odawa Cheveux-relevés en 1615 est examiné, et les aspects des relations entre les Odawas et les Petuns sont largement évoquées.

Note on Original French Text

The text of Champlain's writings exclusively referenced in this Bulletin is "*Voyages et Descouvertes faites en la nouvelle France ..*", Paris, 1619, this being the only one of several versions most certainly authored by Champlain, translated into English and published by the Champlain Society, Toronto, in 1929 (Champlain III:xi-xii, 1-230).

Notes on Maps

Figure 1 - Champlain and Odawa Meeting Places 1615 and 1616. 2

Figure 2 - the French River indicated by Champlain in 1616 and 1632. 3

On the unfinished untitled draft map of 1616 the French River between Lake Nipissing (7 - lac des bicerenis) and Georgian Bay (Mer douce) is marked `33', meaning "R. de reuillon". The significance of this name (Revillon ?) is not known.

On the "Carte de la Nouvelle France" 1632 the French River between Lake Nipissing (Lac des Biserenis) and Georgian Bay (Mer douce), is marked `88', for which is given the simple description "Riuiere qui se va descharger à la mer douce" (River which discharges into the Freshwater Sea) (Champlain VI:244). A number of huts, possibly representing villages, are shown on both sides of the river. On the west (north) side of the river is the legend "Lieu ou les savvages font secherie de framboise, et blue tous les ans" (place where the savages dry raspberries and blueberries every year).

Introduction

In 1615 Champlain set off up the Ottawa River to fulfil his Commission "to bring into subjection, submission and full obedience all the people .." he discovered, and with them "to trade and traffic amiably and peacefully; to have carried out to this end .. discoveries and reconnaissance .. notably from the said place called Quebec to and as far as he shall be able, to extend upwards from this place, in the interior of the lands and rivers which discharge into the said Saint Lawrence river, to try to find the easy route to pass through the said country to the country of China and the East Indies .." (Jaenen 1996:54-55). This was his second and now successful attempt to ascend the Ottawa River, the commencement of his last major exploration and furthest adventure. His intentions were several, arising from differing provisions of his Commission. He hoped to contact the Nipissing Indians whom he thought would lead him to the

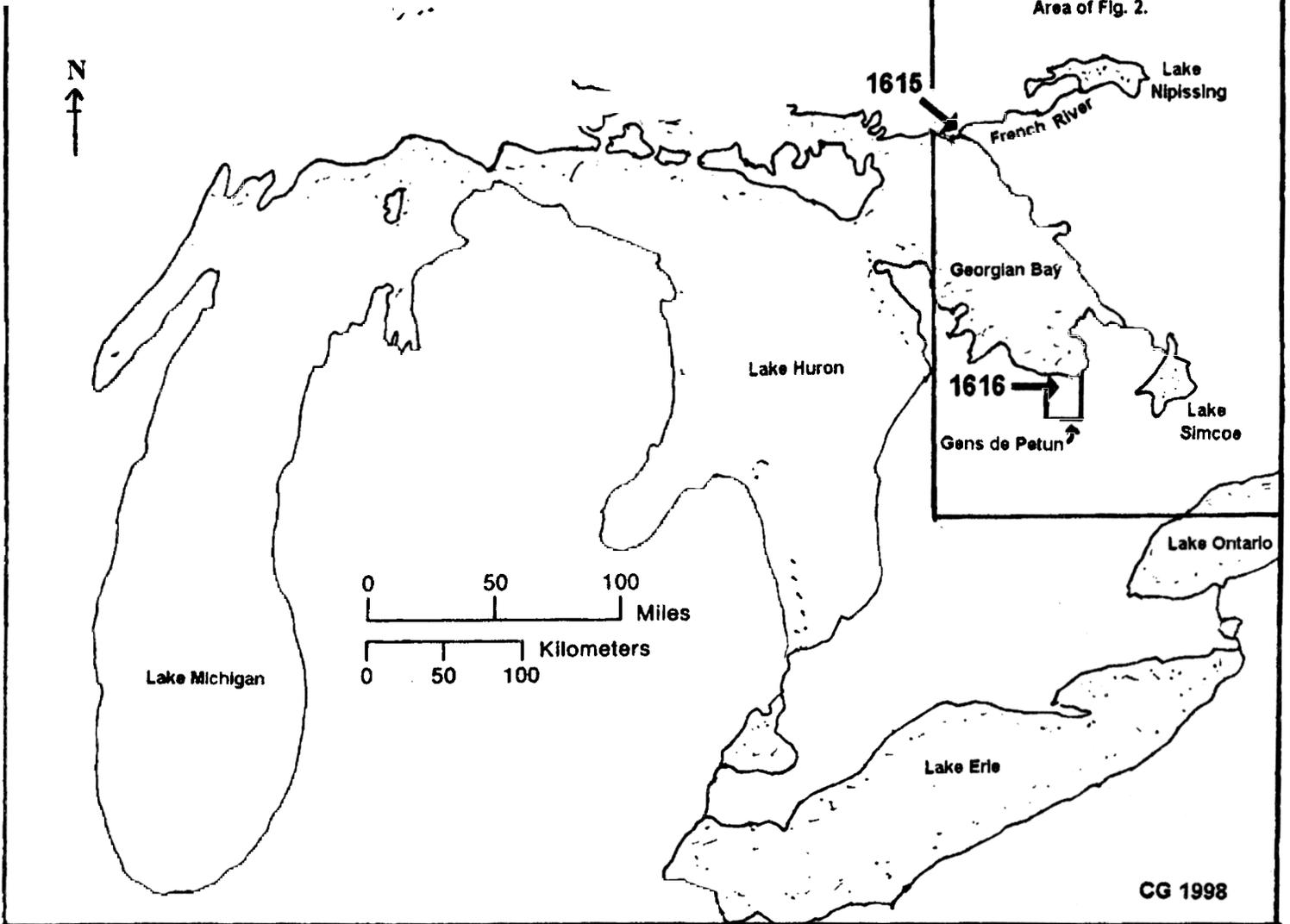


Fig. 1. Champlain and Odawa Meeting Places, 1615 and 1616



Figure 2. the French River indicated by Champlain in 1616 and 1632.

Left map: part of the unfinished untitled draft map of 1616. The French River between Lake Nipissing (7 - lac des bicerenis) and Georgian Bay (Mer douce) is marked `33', meaning "R. de reuillon" (Revillon River).

Right map: part of "Carte de la Nouvelle France" 1632. The French River between Lake Nipissing (Lac des Biserenis) and Georgian Bay (Mer douce), is marked `88', meaning "Riuere qui se va descharger à la mer douce" (River which discharges into the Freshwater Sea). On the west (north) side of the river is the legend "Lieu ou les savages font secherie de framboise, et blue tous les ans" (place where the savages dry raspberries and blueberries every year).

northern sea and possibly to China, and also to aid the Hurons in their war with the Iroquois.

It was incidental that during his travels he met other peoples, among them those he called *Cheveux-relevés* (Standing or High Hairs), the latter comprising, it will be argued, two bands of the Odawa nation. One of these bands, probably the Kiskakon, he met twice, once on the French River in 1615 before he reached the Hurons, and again in 1616 in their winter village at the most distant westerly point of his explorations, in the *Gens de Petun*, the territory of the Petun and allies. He met the *Cheveux-relevés* men in 1615 on the French River when they intercepted his two-canoe fleet. While the men were trading with passing canoes, the women were drying blue-berries away from the river. In this paper will be examined the first meeting, in 1615.

Champlain's first meeting with the *Cheveux-relevés* Odawa, July 1615

Near the end of the month of July 1615, Champlain and his party of two other Frenchmen (probably Etienne Brûlé and Thomas Godefroy) (Harris unaccountably states that Champlain was accompanied by Brûlé and three other Frenchmen 1920:41) and ten Huron Indians in two canoes, passed through Lake Nipissing on their way to the Huron country. Descending the French River towards Georgian Bay they found some corn and squashes, apparently unattended. It was also somewhere along the river that:

"We met with three hundred men of a tribe name by us the Cheveux-relevés, [a Champlain Society editorial insertion translates "les cheueux releuez" as "High Hairs"], because they had them elevated and arranged very high and better combed than our courtiers, and there is no comparison, in spite of the irons and methods these have at their disposal. This seems to give them a fine appearance. They wear no breech cloths, and are much carved about the body in divisions of various patterns. They paint their faces with different colours and have their nostrils pierced and their ears fringed with beads. When they leave their homes they carry a club. I visited them and gained some slight acquaintance and made friends with them. I gave a hatchet to their chief who was as happy and pleased with it as if I made him some rich gift and, entering into conversation with him, I asked him about his country, which he drew for me with charcoal on a piece of tree-bark. He gave me to understand that they had come to this place to dry the fruit called blueberries, to serve them as manna in the winter when they can no longer find anything .. For arms they have only the bow and arrow .. these they carry as a rule, and a round buckler of tanned leather which comes from an animal like the buffalo. The next day we parted, and continued our journey along the shore of this Lake of the Attigouantans" (Georgian Bay) (Champlain III:43-45).

Although in the opinion of W. F. Ganong Champlain was not well served by his engravers (Champlain VI:221-2), the illustration of a *Cheveux-relevés* man accompanying his text (Champlain III:Plate IIIC facing p.44), sufficiently confirms his statement that the men were ceremonially adorned, and carried a bow, arrows and a shield.

His explicit statement that he met only *Cheveux-relevés* men on the French River in July 1615, to the number of three hundred, ceremonially adorned and painted, is so obviously inappropriate to a berry picking and drying party that at least one researcher has rejected it as "strange .. a large complement of warriors, doing nothing but process berries, and during the raiding season at that .. I believe it possible that Champlain here met an attempt at humour or evasion", an argument accepted by at least one other scholar (Waisberg 1977:33; Fox 1990:457).

Berry picking and drying was the "the activity of children, adolescents or young women" (Waisberg 1977:33), and their absence from the camp during the July berry-picking season surely was because they were away performing this work.

A later traveller, Gabriel Sagard, whose account of meeting the same people is extensively plagiarised

from Champlain, nevertheless contributes two significant added statements. The first is that the: "Andatahouats, or .. High Hairs, .. had come to station themselves near the Freshwater sea with the purpose of bartering with the Hurons and others on their return from the trading at Quebec, and we were there for two days trading and doing business with them". The second is that the women were then in camp making mats for trade (Sagard 1939:66). Significantly this was in August, the July berry-picking season being over. The men did not process berries at any time but throughout July and August waited at the river to intercept the passing canoes filled with French trade goods intended for the Hurons and other upper lakes tribes. They were appropriately adorned and painted for the "trading mart" (Smith 1996:94) that would ensue with each arriving brigade.

Champlain's reception was probably eased by the presence of Etienne Brûlé in his party. Brûlé not only served as interpreter, but was probably already known to the *Cheveux-relevés*, having first ascended the river in 1611 (Harris 1920:41). Frenchmen on the river was no longer a novelty. Father Joseph le Caron's party had recently preceded Champlain (III:35).

Precisely where Champlain met the *Cheveux-relevés* on the French River is not known. Champlain's text seems to imply he reached the Georgian Bay the same day he left them (III:45), placing them within a day's paddle of the river mouth. The legend on the map "Carte de la Nouvelle France" (1632) meaning "place where the savages dry raspberries and blueberries every year" is too large to indicate an exact place, other than being to the north of the river, and is placed closer to the Wanapitei River (?) than the French. Sagard's "near the Freshwater sea" can be variously interpreted. Bishop gives the meeting place as near the river's mouth (1963:193), Heidenreich at the mouth (1976:23) while Parkman thought that Georgian Bay was "close at hand" (1886:394). Du Creux placed the legend "Nationes algonquiniae" on the south shore of the river on his map (1660).

Odawa Trading Practices

Odawa trading practices required the participants to "develop either fictive kinship ties or regard each other as metaphorical kin", in turn requiring "Relations of peace", and "mutual consensus in etiquette and ritual protocol .. interaction which facilitated the social and political relations", ritual feasting, gift exchange and formal alliance (Smith 1996:281-283; White 1991:15,107). Odawa prosperity, even survival, depended on such formal alliances. The *Cheveux-relevés* Odawa encountered by Champlain made no attempt at evasion or humour, nor to raid the passing canoes. The men were not dressed for war but for trading, although their numbers and preparedness for war surely benefitted their trading position.

By intercepting the canoes before they reached the Hurons the Odawa probably not only obtained the newest goods but skimmed off the most desirable items while retaining their political and trading autonomy. That the Chief explained the dual purposes for his people being where they were (men trading, women berry-processing) solely in terms of the womens' function might have several underlying culturally-dictated reasons, or simply reflect that coming annually to the French River for the berries, corn and squashes was an ancient and long-established practise, and the coincidental passing of trade canoes with European goods, providing the opportunity for trade, but a recent development. Not impossibly, "drying blueberries" had taken on a metaphoric double meaning.

Although Champlain's party was outnumbered twenty-three to one, there is no hint of threat or coercion in the relationship between the two groups. The Odawa behaved impeccably according to their trading ritual protocol. Nevertheless, three hundred armed warriors would have outnumbered the manpower of the largest canoe brigade likely to pass. It was certainly within the power of the Odawa to dictate the terms of the trade with the passing canoes, and to prevent their passing. In fact, they controlled both the route and the trade that occurred on it. They could have, and probably were in fact, charging tolls for passage through their French River territory, albeit the procedure was couched in the usual terms of formal trade based on reciprocal gift-exchange between political allies and fictive kin. Other instances are recorded of Algonquin tribes requiring mandatory gifts to allow passage or imposing conditions on trade favourable

to themselves, which were in fact tolls (Champlain II:195, V:103; Sagard 1939:255, 263; JR6:19, JR9:271, 275-7). Even a party as large as sixty Frenchmen (including soldiers) and three hundred Hurons were compelled to pay tolls to the Kichesipirini to pass Morrison's Island when the Jesuits abandoned Huronia in 1650 to return to Quebec (Perrot, cited by Trigger 1987:785).

Champlain's surprise at the chief's strong reaction to his gift of an iron (?) hatchet suggests he little understood that to the chief the gift had associated implications of an alliance and further aid in their hunting, cures and subsistence (White 1991:26). The chief on his part, happily drawing the charcoal map of his country to reciprocally confirm the alliance, could not have dreamed that rather than thinking of future benefits to his hosts, Champlain was more probably interested in the route to China to benefit his sponsors in France.

Two Odawa bands

The 1:4 male:total population ratio proposed by Feest and Feest (1978:774) applied to three hundred men suggests that a total possible population of 1,200 persons were present on and near the French River. If the total Odawa population at the time was 2,000 to 2,500 divided into four "tribes", each of from 500 to 625 people, as proposed by Beverley Ann Smith (1996:87) it follows that two bands were present, each of about 600 people. Alternatively, if the total Odawa population was 1,500 to 2,000 divided into four or five tribes, as proposed by Leo Waisberg (1977:124,132,166-167,170), a significant majority of the Odawa were present, certainly a minimum of two bands. Feest and Feest somewhat improbably propose that the entire Odawa nation was present (1978:774). Accepting Smith's figures as reflecting the most recent research, it is concluded that Champlain met the men of two bands of Odawa, whose families, comprising perhaps nine hundred women and children, were absent processing berries.

If two *Cheveux-relevés* Odawa bands came together on the French River at berry processing (July), mat making (August) and trading time (July-August), each as part of its seasonal round, they separated to winter apart from each other. One of the bands wintered "near our Hurons" (JR20:41), the other near or with the Petuns (Champlain III:96). This was probably the Kiskakon band (Smith 1996:2, Fig.1).

The presence of more than one Odawa band on the French River is indicated by Du Creux' use of the plural "Nationes algonquiniae" on his map (1660). However, Father du Creux cannot be regarded as an authority.

It was said of the Petun in 1640 that "this Nation is not of the number of those that go down for the Huron trade - those who claim the trade for themselves not permitting it" (JR21:177). The author of this statement was Father Jérôme Lalemant, who since his arrival in Huronia as Superior in 1638 had been pre-occupied with building and moving to the central mission headquarters of Ste. Marie rather than getting to know the Petun or the intricacies of relationships within the fur trade. For what reason he did not identify "those who claim the trade" is open to conjecture. To assume that he intended the Hurons when he could easily have said so, but did not, is to dismiss the political and military reality of the presence of an overwhelming large Odawa force of three hundred armed men astride and controlling the principal route from Quebec, nominally to trade but in fact capable of wholly enforcing their will on the crews of passing canoes. The lack of specific identification may have been the simplest way to record a complicated situation. The Hurons provided and organised the canoe brigades, but had to pay the Odawa a *de facto* toll in the form of preferential trade. Each group played its role in the trade. As the Kiskakon (?), flush with the latest trade goods, then wintered with the Petun, it was from the Odawa, not the Hurons, that the Petun received their abundance of European wares. They had no need to "go down" to Quebec to receive them, and were not subject to Huron control.

There seems little probability that those of the Hurons involved in the trade who were capable of preventing other Hurons from going to Quebec to trade could extend any similar prohibition to the Odawa.

The Odawa were simply too necessary and too powerful. In addition, they and their allies were probably recognized as the "owners" of the routes, even the very land which the Hurons had in recent centuries come to occupy. The band which wintered with the Huron might well have done so in part to assert their prior and ancient sovereignty in the area.

Naming the French River

The name "French River" seems have originated with people who were never in Canada. Champlain himself at first named the river "R. de reuillon", the significance of which is not known. On his 1686 (?) map the Abbé Bernou marked the river "Riviere des francois qui uient du lac Nipissing". This was rendered "riu. des Francois" on Coronelli's 1688 map, and subsequent cartographers followed this precedent.

Summary and Conclusions

There is no reason to dispute Champlain's understanding that the bands of *Cheveux-relevés* he encountered on the French River in 1615 were there to dry blueberries. This they were doing, both literally, the task being that of the absent women and children, and possibly metaphorically, the men waiting at the river to levy tolls on passing Huron canoes in the form of beneficial trade backed by the possibility of irresistible military force.

It would take a second meeting, the following year, in the *Gens de Petun*, for Champlain to understand that the *Cheveux-relevés* band he met was part of a larger autonomous nation of considerable power and consequence.

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