
Did Inuit influence the evolution of the Labrador landscape? Palaeoecological evidence from Nain region.

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Abstract

Arctic and subarctic environments are usually considered to be pristine natural environments lacking anthropogenic disturbances. In Labrador, recent studies have shown that major changes of the landscape have occurred over the last centuries. Most of them have been related to climate changes; one of the primary driver of vegetation change in northern area. However, various indigenous populations have called Labrador home during the last 7000 years such as Maritime Archaic, Paleo-Eskimo, and Neo-Eskimo. The Nain region of central Labrador is the traditional territory of the Inuit. For them, natural resources like wood has always been an essential material used in their day life activities. However, the idea that pre-settlement forests represent initial environmental conditions suppose that Inuit did not play a role in shaping landscapes. In fact, very few research has been done about anthropogenic impacts on subarctic and arctic ecosystems. Given the long history of Inuit natural resource harvesting in Labrador, it is necessary to identify the source of disturbances on vegetation in order to raise the question if did Inuit influence the evolution of the Labrador landscape? The study aim to document the role of the anthropogenic impact on ecosystem using palaeoenvironmental investigations in the Nain region. According to our data, vegetation changes linked to human occupation took place since the late 17th century at local scale in the Nain region. Also, two periods of intensive vegetation changes in the forest dynamic have been identified at the late of 18th century and in the 20th century linked to anthropogenic disturbance following wood harvesting. This study provides a useful example of the dynamics of present-day landscape and the importance of knowing past events, patterns and processes that shaped current vegetation dynamics in contexts where humans have long histories of occupation.

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