

ANTH 392

Archaeology of Coasts and Islands

INSTRUCTOR: Dr. Quentin Mackie

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

Islands and coastlines are a global phenomenon which raise consistent, yet cross-culturally diverse, questions for archaeologists. Some of these include: Is water a barrier or a highway? Are watercraft cognitively and conceptually very difficult, or surprisingly obvious? Are marine resources highly challenging to live off, or hyperabundant and stable? Are islands natural laboratories, or do their boundaries not always map well to cultural phenomena? Is the land/sea boundary highly liminal, or simultaneously a centre and an edge?

In this course we will try to understand how these questions about coasts and islands matter in archaeology, primarily through exploring a series of topical case studies. These will include the history and archaeology of boats; the problems and prospects of utilizing marine resources; the implications of changing sea levels for people; the intertidal zone as a global ecotone; the long-term archaeology of drowned continental shelves; the cognitive challenges of knowing the invisible underwater environment; and shipwrecks as archaeological time capsules. Through these topics we will generate an archaeological perspective on the long-term human relationship to aquatic environments and the role these have played in humanity's deep history.

Skills Development

The course material will encourage critical thinking about empirical research in archaeology and the evidence-based interpretation of the past. The course will be very interdisciplinary in both lectures and assigned readings. Through a major research essay, students will gain skills in accessing and synthesizing archaeological and other data, as well as diverse theoretical perspectives. These will then be applied to generating an original research proposal, which entails grappling with the practical constraints of applied archaeological research. In this way, the topical nature of the course will demonstrate archaeological method and theory in action, and encourage critical thinking skills around history, material, and the environment.