

A ticking clock? Considerations for preservation, valuation and site management of Greenland's coastal archaeology in the 21st century.

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Summary

Documenting and evaluating the rate of deterioration at coastal archaeological sites presents a number of fundamental challenges in the Arctic. In Greenland for example, increasing soil temperatures, perennial thaws, coastal erosion, storm surges and pioneer plant species such as dwarf willow and dwarf birch are observed as increasingly detrimental to the long-term preservation of archaeological deposits and features found scattered along the country's west coast and extensive inner fjord systems. Since 2009 several projects, including the ongoing REMAINS (REsearch and Management of Archaeological sites IN a changing environment and Society) project, have explored the variable factors that currently threaten Greenland's heritage landscape in the 21st century. This paper specifically addresses the threats immediate to house middens located in the littoral zones of Greenland west coast and reviews data collected during the project's fieldwork in 2016. Information gathered provides a baseline for "ground-truthing" predictive models of preservation and deterioration of material such as bone, antler and wood frequently observed in varying states of decay in these coastal middens. Knowledge derived from the project will assist heritage managers, conservationists and local people with new tools to actively document annual changes observed at archaeological sites at both the local and regional scale.

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