

North European sea fishing origins studied

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The study of fish bones, once considered an esoteric branch of archaeology, is helping British scientists study the Middle Ages' fishing trade.

The research will spotlight the earliest development of Europe's sea fisheries and, given the continuous expansion of sea fishing since the Middle Ages, the ultimate origin of the current fishing crisis.

The 3-year project is supported by the Census of Marine Life, a network of researchers in more than 70 nations engaged in a 10-year study of the diversity, distribution and abundance of oceanic marine life.

It builds on research by the team that discovered extensive sea fishing began in Europe 1,000 years ago. A major shift from freshwater to sea fishing was believed due to a combination of climate, population growth and religion.

Archeologist James Barrett of the University of York, which is coordinating the project, has pinpointed the time between 950 A.D. and 1050 A.D. as the period during which the fishing revolution occurred.

By studying fish bones from archaeological sites in Belgium, Denmark, Germany and Poland, the researchers hope to establish what long-term affect the rapid switch to intensive sea fisheries had on medieval trading patterns.

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