OBJECTIVE

The extreme dryness of the area allowed the recovery of abundant plant material, such as wood charcoal, wood, fruits, seeds, leaves, fragments of bark and wooden artifacts. This fact, together with the long occupation sequence of the site, both infrequent situations in Patagonian archaeology, has allowed us to study, as a general purpose, the role of plant resources in the subsistence strategies of the hunter-gatherers of the area. The specific objective of the present work is to analyzed the archaeobotanical sample of Deposit 17 (8,390 ± 140 14C years B.P.)

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Archaeological excavation of the site is being carried out from 1991 up to day. Inside the area 1 of the cave (see stratigraphy) 14 m² were excavated. Plant material was recovered through dry screening (2 mm mesh). Preservation state was either desiccated and charred for both carpological and woody remains recovered.

Macroremains were visualized with a stereoscopic and a light microscope with optical reflection, and compared to present day reference samples. Wood identification was carried out by performing a clean cut on each charcoal, with the aim of obtaining the three diagnostic anatomical planes (Caruso Fermé 2012).

PLANTS AND PATAGONIAN HUNTER-GATHERERS: ARCHAEOBOTANY OF CERRO CASA DE PIEDRA 7 (SANTA CRUZ, ARGENTINA)

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The site Cerro Casa de Piedra 7 (CCP7) - 47°57’S, 72°05’W- is located in the mountains of the Perito Moreno National Park, in the north-west of Santa Cruz Province (Argentina). The stratigraphic sequence at CCP7 consists of 19 layers dated by radiocarbon determinations to a period between 10,600 and 1900 cal BP (Aschero et al., 2005). The results of the archaeological work performed there indicate that the settlement was a residential site (Aschero et al. 1992-93).

RESULTS

The study showed the presence of 10 taxa among the dispersed material and two among the charcoals of the campfire.

AMong the charred dispersed material, eight taxa were identified (Table)

Table: Woody and carpological remains

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Taxa</th>
<th>Charcoal Nb %</th>
<th>Wood Nb %</th>
<th>Campfire (charcoal) Nb %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nothofagus pumilio</td>
<td>69.31</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escallonia rubra</td>
<td>25.87</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxon A</td>
<td>11.83</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothofagus antarctica</td>
<td>6.94</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berberis sp.</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empetrum rubrum</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prunusae</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empetrum rigida</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxon B</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The presence of some taxa (Nothofagus pumilio, Nothofagus antarctica, Escallonia rubra, Berberis sp.), suggest the existence of a forest environment. However, the existence of Anarthrophyllum rigidum, Empetrum rubrum and Berberis sp., also suggests the proximity of steppe environments.

The strong representation of Nothofagus pumilio within this deposit, along with the presence of shrubs such as: Empetrum rubrum, Escallonia rubra and Berberis sp. could indicate an expansion of the forest for this period.

The high percentage of N. pumilio shows that the forest was an environment recurrently used by hunter-gatherers who occupied the cave Cerro casa de Piedra 7.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Plant taxa found within the woody remains of CCP7 suggested that either forest and steppe might be present in the area during the period near the 9000 years BP. This results are consistent with those observed from pollen analysis of the cave (Mancini 2007), which showed an increasing evidence of discontinuous forests of Nothofagus, shrub taxa and cushion plants (Empetrum, Azorella) by that time, with steppe patches also present, that replaced the granimous humid vegetation of the previous era. Within the carpological remains, desiccated and carbonized fruits of Empetrum rubrum and Carex spp., among others, were some of the most relevant. It is thought that the first may have been used as food during the Early/Middle Holocene, due to the fact that Empetrum rubrum fruit parts were found in human coprolites (from microhistological analysis) recovered from excavated sediment of the same archaeological site dated 6150 years BP (Martinez y Yaguez, 2012).

It is interesting to remark that also graminious and Coleoptera skeleton parts were found from these human coprolites, showing a strong coincidence with the macroremains presented above.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


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