

# Artifact of the Month

Tribal Historic Preservation Office

May 2018



Misconceptions about deer antlers run the gamut; from calling them horns, to thinking that they stick to a certain growing schedule, to whether or not they can grow separated from the head. Deer antlers are in fact a bit complex. Another example of a common misunderstanding is this month's featured artifact. While many people would call the image above deer antlers, they are in fact a great example of deer pedicles! Deer pedicles are a part of the deer skull that begins the formation of the antler itself. Now, while antler growth is the fastest known type of tissue growth (growing up to  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch per day!) it is very dependent on seasonality and the genetics of the deer. During the spring, summer and fall months, deer antler growth is usually very extensive because of the long hours of daylight. This culminates in the classic prized rack usually hunted during deer hunting season.

Around the same time that deer hunting season ends, erosion begins to take place between the pedicle and the antler, eventually causing the antler to fall off. For most deer, the antlers fall off during the winter months and start the process of regrowth again in April. However, not all deer are alike and in some instances, they have been sighted with a full set of antlers year round. Knowing the potential deer antler growth rates and having an understanding of its triggers (genetics, nutrition, and age) allows for archaeologists to pin-point a section of time and space in which deer is used for sustenance. While there are always anomalies, as explained above, it is important for archaeologists to take them in account when discussing availability and access to food resources.

