Leveraging whole genomes, mitochondrial DNA, and haploblocks to decipher complex demographic histories: an example from a broadly admixed arctic fish

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Abstract

The study of phylogeography has transitioned from mitochondrial haplotypes to genome-wide analyses, blurring the line between this field and population genomics. Whole-genome sequencing offers the opportunity to join use both and provides the density of markers necessary to investigate genetic linkage and recombination along the genome. This facilitates the unraveling of complex demographic histories of admixture between divergent lineages, as is often the case in species evolving in recently deglaciated habitats. In this study, we sequenced 1120 Arctic Char genomes from 33 populations across Canada and Western Greenland to characterize patterns of genetic variation and diversity, and how they are shaped by hybridization between the Arctic and Atlantic glacial lineages. Several lines of evidence supported mito-nuclear discordance in lineage

distribution, with all Canadian populations under the 66th parallel being characterized by

introgression from the Atlantic lineage, leading to higher nuclear genetic diversity. By

scanning the genome using local PCAs, we identified putative low-recombining

haploblocks as local ancestry tracts from either lineage and described the impacts of

recombination on the introgression landscape in admixed populations. Finally, we inferred

conflicting origins of recolonization using whole genomes vs. ancestry tracts for the Arctic

lineage, suggesting that haplotypes sheltered from introgression by low recombination

could enlighten complex post-glacial histories. Overall, we argue that Whole-Genome

Sequencing, even at low depths of coverage, provides a versatile approach to the study

of phylogeographic dynamics.

Introduction

Understanding a species' evolutionary and demographic history is central to interpreting

the processes that produced its contemporary genetic diversity and population structure.

Since its inception, the field of phylogeography has aimed to interrogate the micro-

evolutionary processes responsible for the geographical distribution of genetic lineages

(Avise et al. 1987). For two decades, phylogeography was dominated by the study of gene

trees based on mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) sequences because of their easy

sequencing, short length, and simple uniparental inheritance without recombination (Avise

et al. 1987; Edwards et al. 2015). With the advent of high-throughput sequencing,

phylogeographic studies now commonly use thousands of nuclear DNA (nuDNA) markers

such as Single Nucleotide Polymorphisms (SNPs). Frequent cases of discordance

between mitochondrial and nuclear genetic variation have highlighted the limitations of

mtDNA (Ballard and Whitlock 2004; Zink and Barrowclough 2008; Toews and Brelsford

2012), e.g. the effect of sex-biased migration on genealogies for these matrilineally

inherited markers. Despite these limitations, mtDNA remains a valuable tool in

phylogeographic studies: being haploid, non-recombining, and having a lower effective

population size, they provide a rich source of information independent from the nuclear

genome. Used in conjunction with nuclear markers, they offer a more comprehensive

understanding of species' evolutionary histories and genetic diversity.

The integration of genome-wide nuclear markers into phylogeography has also

blurred the distinctions between this field and population genetics (Edwards et al. 2015).

Population genomics continues to rely heavily on averaging the genome-wide genetic

variation of SNPs, for example, as a means to investigate population structure, while

ignoring fluctuations in genetic variation at a finer genomic scale (Bhatia et al. 2013; Peter

2022). However, these "vertical" approaches stacking information from individual genetic

markers across individuals usually ignore or purposely try to reduce the impacts of linkage

disequilibrium, neglecting the "horizontal" signal contained in haplotypes (Leitwein et al.

2020). Haplotypes are usually defined as DNA sequences where alleles for multiple

markers are inherited as a block. Unlike SNP-based approaches focusing on mutations

and assuming independence between markers, haplotypes carry information about

recombination events and have the potential to increase accuracy in the inference of

selection, gene flow, and population structure (Martin et al. 2017; Shipilina et al. 2023). In

particular, long haplotypes, sometimes called haploblocks, may be maintained in low

recombination regions or within structural rearrangements, providing information about

deeper coalescent times than short haplotypes within high recombination regions (Lawson

et al. 2012).

Phylogeographic studies are particularly relevant for arctic species, as their

habitats and ranges were among the most impacted by the glacial cycles of the

Pleistocene. As demographic bottlenecks and extended periods in allopatry lead to the

accumulation of divergence between populations that survived in distinct glacial refugia

(Hewitt 1996; Hewitt 2000; Shafer et al. 2010), post-glacial recolonizations are commonly

the stage for secondary contact between previously isolated lineages (Bernatchez and

Wilson 1998; Hewitt 1999). These cases of hybridization between lineages lead to an

admixture of genetic backgrounds, producing a mosaic of local ancestry tracts that tend

to shorten through the recombination of chromosomes over generations of backcrossing

(Liang and Nielsen 2014; Leitwein et al. 2020). Whole-genome averaging approaches can

struggle to properly identify admixture at a relatively recent glacial timescale, as isolation-

by-distance can produce similar genomic signatures (Wiens and Colella 2024). Therefore,

integrating multiple aspects of the genome (e.g., mtDNA and haplotype information) may

help distinguish between true admixture events and patterns that arise due to gradual

changes in genetic variation over geographical space.

Arctic char (*Salvelinus alpinus*) is a widespread circumpolar species with the

northernmost distribution observed in freshwater or diadromous fishes, most of which

coincides with regions covered by ice sheets at the last glacial maximum, around 18,000

years ago (Hocutt and Wiley 1986; Bernatchez and Wilson 1998). Arctic Char has been

called "the most diverse vertebrate on earth" (Klemetsen 2010) with many localities

harboring morphs diverging in size, diet, habitat choice, phenology, migratory tactic, or life

trait history traits (Reist et al. 2013). Some authors recognize dozens of subspecies, and

five main glacial lineages have been defined using mtDNA (Brunner et al. 2001; Moore et

al. 2015). However, these fail to offer a perfectly discrete classification of wild populations

around the globe, as post-glacial secondary contact zones have been described between

most pairs of neighboring mtDNA lineages (Salisbury et al. 2019; Dallaire et al. 2021;

Gordeeva et al. 2021; Jacobsen et al. 2022). With their unique blend of moderate

philopatry, higher dispersal rate than other anadromous salmonids (Moore et al. 2013),

and range spanning the most recently deglaciated region around the globe, Arctic Char

offers unique opportunities for the study of the distribution of genetic diversity in post-

recolonization populations. Notably, the origin of the post-glacial recolonization of the

'Arctic' mtDNA lineage, presently found throughout most of the Canadian Arctic, has

remained cryptic, while both Beringia and the Arctic Archipelago have been suggested as

potential refugia (Moore et al. 2015).

In this study, we used low-coverage whole-genome sequencing to investigate the

recolonization of the recently deglaciated Canadian Arctic by several lineages of Arctic

Char and their putative hybridization. We sequenced 1,120 Arctic Char genomes (Fig. 1a;

average coverage = 2X, with 100 samples in 5 populations further sequenced at a depth

of 8X) from 33 river systems across the 4,000 km wide range of the previously defined

Arctic mitochondrial lineage in northern Canada and western Greenland to characterize

patterns of genetic variation, diversity, and admixture with the neighboring Atlantic

lineage. We combined information from both mitochondrial and nuclear genomes

including mtDNA haplotype networks, genome-wide admixture and ancestry, low-

recombining haploblocks, and demographic inference to resolve the history of the

secondary contact between those glacial lineages. Finally, to highlight the complexity of

this post-glacial evolutionary history, we aimed to infer the origin of recolonization of the

Arctic lineage by comparing derived allele distributions across the genome and inside

Arctic haploblocks potentially carrying different non-recombining ancestry.

Results

Distribution of nuclear genetic variation across the North American Arctic

Nuclear genome-wide variation at 5.98 million SNPs (average coverage = 2X, Fig. S1) in

1,120 anadromous Arctic Char from 33 Canadian and Greenlandic rivers (Fig. 1a, Table

S1) displayed a strong substructure associated with rivers, which grouped into two major

genetic clusters corresponding to Northern and Southern areas. Genome-wide pairwise

F_{ST} ranged from 0.012 to 0.381 among Canadian rivers, while comparisons including

Greenlandic sites reached up to F_{ST} = 0.632 (pop. 1 and 33) (Fig 2a). The general

structure associated with longitude was visible on the first axis of a principal components

analysis (Fig 1b), explaining 63.9% and 5.5% of the genome-wide variance, respectively

before and after stringent LD-pruning (375,236 SNPs). As expected for homing salmonids,

each river system appeared genetically differentiated in an NGSadmix analysis (Fig. S2).

Pairwise differentiation among populations, both based on the F_{ST} index and allele

frequency differences (AFD), highlighted a genetic divide between the northern (pop. 1-

16) and southern (pop. 17-30) Canadian Arctic around the 67th parallel (Fig. 2a). While

populations from both regions exhibited patterns of isolation-by-distance (IBD), southern
populations were more differentiated at equal marine distances than northern populations
(Fig. 2b-c). Greenlandic populations and pop. 30 (south-eastern Nunavik) were
comparatively more differentiated than other populations and did not fit the Canadian IBD
patterns. Intra-population genetic diversity, as measured by nucleotide diversity (Θ_π), was
also higher in southern (median widowed per-site Θ_π = 1.13-2.77 x 10^{-3}) than in northern
(Θ_π = 0.72-2.09 x 10^{-3}) Canadian populations (Fig. 3d).

Admixture between lineages is a major determinant of variation in southern populations

Several lines of evidence support the hypothesis that the large intra- and inter-population
diversity described earlier in the Southern Canadian Arctic and Greenland is due to
admixture between the Arctic and Atlantic glacial lineages.

First, we realigned and genotyped data from 20 Arctic Char collected in a Swedish
population (pop. 34, Saha et al. 2024; depth of coverage = 5X) to serve as an outgroup
from the Atlantic lineage and conducted an admixture analysis (K=2, NGSadmix).
Southern Canadian and north-western Greenlandic populations had mixed genome-wide
ancestry for the two groups, distributed along a cline-like northwest-to-southeast gradient,
suggesting admixture between the Arctic (i.e., northern Canadian populations) and
Atlantic (i.e., Swedish outgroup) lineages (Fig. 3a). Within population variance in
proportions of Atlantic ancestry was low (Fig. 3a), and putatively admixed populations had
higher observed heterozygosity (Fig. 3b, Fig. S3) and nucleotide diversity (Fig. 3d),
supporting the hypothesis of secondary contact between the Arctic and Atlantic lineages.

Second, to further test the hypothesis of admixture between lineages in the

southern part of the study area, we computed f_4 statistics (Reich et al. 2009; Patterson et

al. 2012) using a Dolly Varden (*Salvelinus malma*) population from Yukon, Canada, as an

outgroup. This test provided support for introgression from the Atlantic lineage (Sweden)

toward the southern Arctic populations (Fig. 4c). Finally, using demographic modeling

performed with fastsimcoal, with the Swedish population and 8X data for COP (pop. 4)

and TJL (pop. 25), a model including ancient gene flow between the Atlantic lineage and

the southern Canadian Arctic was better supported than models with no or more recent

gene flow (Fig. 4a-b; see demographic parameter estimation in Fig. S4).

Mito-nuclear discordance in admixture and diversity patterns

To leverage an independent source of historical demographic information and to compare

our results with previous studies, we extracted mitochondrial D-loop sequences (993 bp)

from whole-genome data (Fig 1c). Consistent with previously published data based on

mtDNA, but contrary to our results using the nuclear genome, the Arctic lineage dominates

in populations of the entire Arctic archipelago outside Labrador (Moore et al. 2015;

Salisbury et al. 2019; Dallaire et al. 2021), with only one Canadian sample from the

present study carrying an Atlantic D-loop haplotype (in pop. 28). In contrast, the Atlantic

and Arctic mitochondrial lineages co-occurred in western Greenland (Jacobsen et al.

2021). As previously observed, a single mitochondrial haplotype dominated the Arctic

lineage (77.5% of samples shared the most common D-loop haplotype). In Greenlandic

populations, the individuals carrying haplotypes from either mtDNA lineages did not differ

in their nuclear genome ancestry level inferred with NGSadmix (t-test per population: p >

0.05).

Whole-mitogenome genetic diversity inside the Arctic mtDNA lineage also

displayed different trends compared to the nuclear genome. While nuclear diversity was

the highest in the admixed populations of the South Arctic and Greenland, both

mitochondrial Θ_W and haplotype diversity were higher near the westernmost population

than in the southeastern part of the study area (Fig. 3c, Fig. S5a,d). Mitochondrial

nucleotide diversity (Θ_π) and Tajima's D were lower at intermediate distances from the

westernmost population, i.e. the center of the Arctic mtDNA lineage range. Finally, the

frequency of the most frequent whole-mitogenome haplotype, present in 34% of all Arctic

lineage samples, was lower in populations at both extremities of the range of the lineage,

i.e. in Inuvialuit and Greenland (Fig. S5e).

Heterogeneity in the introgression along the genome

To investigate the fine-scale genomic landscape of admixture between the Arctic

and Atlantic lineages, we scanned the genome for distinct patterns of genetic variation

and detected putative local ancestry tracts for both lineages.

We used local Principal Component Analyses (PCA) and multidimensional scaling

(MDS) in 100 SNPs-wide windows to identify genomic regions displaying patterns of

genetic variation that were significantly different from the chromosome-wide population

structure. We retained 117 independent regions that contained at least 10 MDS outlier

windows (e.g. Fig. 5a, see all outlier regions in Fig S6-7). These regions ranged from 98

kb to 5.26 Mb in length (median = 825 kb, total = 133 Mb). Of these regions, we visually

identified 46 that showed three clear clusters on a first PC explaining most of the variance

(e.g., Fig. 5b). We interpret these regions as putative haplotype blocks, or haploblocks,

i.e. regions of low recombination where polymorphic sites are inherited in high linkage,

creating groups of haplotypes, or haplogroups. As such, the three observed clusters

correspond to the two homozygotes and the heterozygote for these haplogroups. Using

populational-scale recombination maps based on 8X data (Fig. S8), we confirmed that the

putative haploblocks tended to have lower recombination rates than the chromosome-

wide average (Fig. S9), further supporting this interpretation.

Most of these putative haploblocks corresponded to islands of differentiation

between the Arctic and Atlantic lineages. Twenty-three haploblocks (median length = 783

kb, total = 20 Mb) were differentially fixed between the north-western Canadian Arctic

(Inuvialuit, Kitikmeot; henceforth identified as haplogroup 'A') and Sweden (haplogroup

'B') while showing heterozygotes in southern populations of the Canadian Arctic (e.g., Fig.

5c), suggesting that they may be tracts of different ancestry that are yet unbroken by

recombination. The individual distribution of heterozygotes differed between haploblocks,

supporting their independent genealogy, but haplogroup frequencies by population were

correlated with the Arctic-Atlantic whole-genome ancestry inferred earlier (NGSadmix, K

= 2). Such correlations further support a scenario of secondary contact and introgression

at the nuclear level by revealing blocks of linked polymorphic markers that appear to be

inherited from ancestral lineages, after their divergence in allopatry during past glacial

periods.

Interestingly, two other MDS outliers (e.g., win21 and win58 in Fig. S7) also

featured three distinct genotypes on PC1, but their spatial distribution did not match the

Arctic-Atlantic admixture gradient. Those could be associated with recent and polymorphic

structural variants suppressing recombination such as chromosomal inversions, allowing

the accumulation of genetic divergence in sympatry.

Inference of origin of recolonization

Directionality analysis conducted on either the whole genome or restricted to variation

inside Arctic haplotypes supported conflicting recolonization histories, respectively from

the east and west of the lineage range. Based on genome-wide data, we inferred an origin

of recolonization around the southeast of the Canadian Arctic by comparing the spatial

distribution of genome-wide derived alleles in Canadian populations through the

directionality index (ψ) and Time Difference of Arrival (TDoA) (Fig. 6a). This is

accomplished by testing every potential origin (cells on a spatial raster) for a positive

correlation between population-pairwise ψ (i.e., difference in derived allele frequencies)

and geographical distance from the origin (maximum R^2 = 0.638 before rescaling). This

inference is nevertheless to be taken with caution because Canadian populations deviate

from the single-origin assumption of TDoA analysis and are precisely characterized by

extensive introgression in the southeast.

To confirm the directionality analysis on a putatively non-introgressed fraction of

the genome, we leveraged the previously identified local ancestry tracts to compute ψ on

derived allele frequencies in homozygotes for the Arctic lineage-specific alleles (e.g.

haplogroup A in Fig. 5) of these local ancestry tracts (n = 23, total length = 20 Mb). Despite

a reduced genomic size (1.3 % of the total genome), the resulting 100 replicate runs of

TDoA weakly supported an origin of recolonization in the western part of the sampling

area (maximum R^2 ranging from 0.007 to 0.107, Fig 6b, Fig S10a), contrary to the eastern

origin of recolonization inferred using genome-wide data.

To control for the small number of non-recombining haploblocks and the difficulty

in precisely delimiting these putative local ancestry tracts, we ran the same analyses on

random genomic regions of equivalent lengths. These analyses supported a south-

eastern origin of recolonization, which was highly congruent with the whole-genome TDoA

(maximum R^2: 0.199 – 0.483, Fig. 6b, Fig. S10b). This suggests that, although our current

prediction power is low, genetic diversity inside local ancestry tracts could carry distinct

lineage-specific information that can be leveraged to elucidate more complex evolutionary

histories.

Discussion

It has long been recognized that making phylogeographic inferences based on

mitochondria alone can lead to biased interpretations (Galtier et al. 2009). However, the

non-recombining nature of mtDNA can offer advantages in specific cases since it can

'record' past events that are not blurred by generations of hybridization and admixture. At

the same time, vast amounts of nuclear data are sometimes insufficient in revealing

historical patterns if averaged over the genome, and evolutionary inferences could benefit

from identifying haploblocks that retain historical signals (Leitwein et al. 2020; Shipilina et

al. 2023). In this study, we sought to maximize the use of whole-genome sequencing data

by integrating mitochondrial and nuclear analyses, both at the genome-wide and

haplotypic levels, to assess the extent of admixture between two glacial lineages of an

arctic fish. Intraspecific hybridization between glacial lineages and the resulting increased

nuclear diversity observed in southern populations was a dominant feature of the study

system. Such introgression across lineages obscured much of the genomic signal for

post-glacial recolonization from either single lineage. We scanned the genome for regions

of distinct genetic variation and identified putative local tracts of conserved Arctic or

Atlantic ancestry. By comparing genetic variation within Arctic tracts to the whole genome,

we uncovered a putative cryptic glacial refugium for the lineage, despite a heavily admixed

genetic background.

Extensive admixture between lineages and mito-nuclear discordance

In Arctic Char, we show evidence for the genetic admixture of the Arctic and Atlantic

lineages in most of Arctic Canada under the 66th parallel. This is in stark contrast with the

previously described distribution of mitochondrial haplotypes, with observed co-

occurrence zones of both lineages restricted to Labrador (Salisbury et al. 2019) and

western Greenland (Jacobsen et al. 2022). While previous phylogeographic work on the

species hinted at the introgression from the Atlantic lineage reaching further west at the

nuclear level (Moore et al. 2015; Dallaire et al. 2021), here we inferred the presence of

Atlantic nuclear alleles thousands of kilometers away from the range limit of the Atlantic

mitochondrial lineage, both using f_4 tests and indirect detection of lineage-divergent

haploblocks.

This kind of mito-nuclear discordance has been observed in numerous natural

systems (Toews and Brelsford 2012) and could be explained by multiple mechanisms.

First, as non-recombinant haploid sequences, mitogenomes have a population effective

size (Ne) that is ¼ of their diploid nuclear counterparts (Hudson and Turelli 2003) and are

thus more impacted by genetic drift. Alternatively, sex-biased dispersal has been

suggested in Arctic Char with males appearing more mobile than females (Dempson and

Kristofferson 1987; Moore et al. 2016). As mitochondrial genomes are matrilineally

inherited, this could contribute to a discordance in the distribution of nuclear DNA and

mitochondrial DNA variation.

Local PCA reveals more than just inversions

Short-read whole-genome sequencing has become increasingly accessible in non-

model organisms. New analytical frameworks allow for the study of population genetics

questions even with low individual depth of coverage, which has opened the door for

whole-genome studies of unprecedented sampling sizes (Lou et al. 2021). However,

phasing (i.e. haplotype estimation) might be impossible in these designs without a

reference panel (Rubinacci et al. 2021), as haploblocks are most reliably defined and

delimited using long- or linked-read data (Meier et al. 2021). It has been suggested that,

when they are large and divergent enough (e.g., in regions of low recombination),

haploblocks might also be indirectly detectable through genome scans for distinct patterns

of genetic variation (Ishigohoka et al. 2024). One such method is the use of local PCAs,

an approach that has risen as a popular approach to detect large recombination-

suppressing structural variants (e.g., inversions) (Huang et al. 2020). The typical signal

expected around non-recombining haploblocks is a PCA forming three distinct clusters on

the first axes (generally PC1), with the middle cluster carrying more heterozygous sites

than the two others, and higher linkage disequilibrium among clusters than inside each

one (Huang et al. 2020).

In this study, we identified local PCA outliers by performing multidimensional

scaling (MDS) at the chromosomal level that allowed for the detection of relatively short

(250 kb to 4 Mb) candidate regions on every chromosome. We analyzed the five first MDS

axes, but Fig. S7 suggests that many additional outlier regions could be identified on

subsequent axes. PC1 shows the expected three-cluster pattern indicative of haploblocks,

i.e. the two homozygotes and the heterozygote for a region of low recombination, and

inversions may underlie some of those haploblocks. For example, one of our MDS outlier

regions indicative of a haploblock (win16) was located on the distal end of LG12, which

was recently identified as a putative inversion in Nunavut Arctic Char (Hale et al. 2021).

However, we observed that the clustering in three groups was far from perfect in most of

the haploblocks, with many intermediate individuals (e.g. Fig. 5B). This suggests a

suppression of recombination less severe than what has been observed in recent

publications investigating inversions (Huang et al. 2020; Mérot et al. 2021). Intriguingly,

some candidate haploblocks (including win16) showed additional structure inside an

inferred homozygote group on the second axis of the PCA, resulting in a triangular pattern

when considering PC1 and 2 (e.g., win50, win89, win91, and win109 in Fig. S7), which

may result from nested inversions or regions of low recombination maintaining more than

two distinct groups of haplotypes. Therefore, overall, we proposed (and confirmed for

some) that those regions are characterized by low recombination but do not further

speculate with the present data about the precise mechanism protecting the observed

haploblocks from recombination.

More interesting is the coherent spatial pattern observed in multiple independent

genomic loci, with the two alternative haplogroups being differentially fixed in the Western

Canadian Arctic and Sweden. As we expect genetic variation in these two regions to be

respectively associated with the Arctic and Atlantic lineages, this local PCA approach thus

reveals putative local ancestry tracts for either lineage in admixed individuals, which were

found mostly in the Southern Canadian Arctic and Western Greenland. This constitutes a

rather indirect method compared to phasing algorithms based on the Li and Stephens

model (Li and Stephens 2003) which requires a reference panel (e.g. HAPMIX (Price et

al. 2009) and FLARE (Browning et al. 2023)). However, no solution currently exists for the

accurate phasing of low-coverage unlinked short-read sequencing data. By exploring how

local PCAs highlight local genetic patterns coherent with haplotype structure, we hope to

spur interest in improving how lcWGS can be used to their fullest.

Here, we only scratched the surface of the haplotypic structure and likely had the

power to detect only the longest and most geographically structured haploblocks. A quick

look at the structure outside MDS outlier regions (Fig. 5a, Fig S8) shows how most of the

genome segregates similarly at a finer scale, i.e. in smaller blocks. The delimitation of

haploblocks could likely be refined by tuning the window size and filtering parameters of

the MDS outlier detection. However, some of the imprecision might be linked to reasons

both technical (e.g., the uncertainty inherent to the analytical framework of low-coverage

data) and biological (the heterogeneity of recombination along the genome and among

populations, breaking ancestry tracks into regions of varying lengths). In the next section,

we discuss one possible application for such haplotypic information in datasets of large

sample sizes.

Leveraging local ancestry to disentangle multiple origins of recolonization

In cases of post-glacial secondary contact, pinpointing the origin of recolonization – i.e.

the position of the glacial refugium – of each lineage can help provide additional context,

as the process of recolonization itself and its direction can have predictable impacts on

within-lineage genetic variation (Hewitt 2000; Peischl et al. 2015). One such impact is

increased genetic drift through sequential founder effects along the recolonization front

(Hallatschek et al. 2007; Slatkin and Excoffier 2012; Braga et al. 2019), leading to a

decrease in genetic diversity and an accumulation of derived and sometimes deleterious

alleles via increased genetic drift (Koski et al. 2019; Rougemont et al. 2020; Rougemont

et al. 2023). The directionality index (ψ) and TDoA approach (Peter and Slatkin 2013)

uses this prediction to triangulate the origin of recent range expansions by comparing the

spatial distribution of derived alleles (e.g. (Prior et al. 2020; Ioannidis et al. 2021; Luqman

et al. 2023)).

In our data, applying this method to the genome-wide variation pointed toward an

origin in the south-eastern Canadian Arctic. However, the study system shows clear signs

of admixture between lineages of at least two distinct origins, as is often the case in similar

studies (Sommer and Zachos 2009; Nugent et al. 2024). This violates a major assumption

of the model (Peter and Slatkin 2013), as the high divergence between lineages most

likely overshadows any within-lineage signal of directionality. The Arctic lineage is

expected to have recolonized from a smaller source population than other lineages

(Moore et al. 2015), suggesting a demographic bottleneck that could explain the higher

frequency of derived alleles in the northern, non-admixed populations. With the goal of

revealing patterns specific to the Arctic lineage, we focused on genetic variation inside

putative local ancestry tracts identified earlier. By considering only homozygotes for the

haplogroup that we attributed to the Arctic lineage, we hypothesized that we could limit

the influence of the introgression from the Atlantic lineage and investigate the origin of

recolonization of the Arctic lineage. While these inferences had lower explanatory power

and replicability, they globally pointed in a direction opposite to the genome-wide analysis,

highlighting the interest in dissecting horizontal information present in genomes and

further refinement of local ancestry tracts.

Inferring range expansions from the distribution of derived alleles has several

limitations, as other evolutionary mechanisms can create asymmetry in two-dimensional

site-frequency spectra, such as demographic changes unrelated to the expansion (Mestre

et al. 2022). Boundary effects can also act as confounding factors, as populations on the

outer part of the distribution will experience increased drift compared to central ones,

which can create clines in ψ independently from range expansions (Kemppainen et al.

2024). In light of this and in the absence of rigorous hypothesis testing, our key takeaway

focuses less on our confidence in the inference for this specific system and more on the

potential of genetic information preserved in large blocks of known local ancestry to

unravel complex, multi-layered evolutionary histories.

Despite previously discussed limitations, other sources of data were consistent with

a post-glacial recolonization from the northwestern Canadian Arctic, such as

mitochondrial diversity being higher in this region than elsewhere in the range of the Arctic

lineage. While species are intuitively expected to have survived glacial periods in refugia

south of the ice extent, fossil and genetic evidence suggests that higher-latitude refugia

might have existed (Sommer and Zachos 2009; Premoli et al. 2010; Shafer et al. 2010;

Wójcik et al. 2010; Mee and Moore 2014). Although recent reconstructions suggest a

complete glaciation of the Arctic archipelago at the last maximum (Fig. 1) (Dalton et al.

2020), data from rodents (Fedorov and Stenseth 2002), birds (Holder et al. 1999), and

plants (Tremblay and Schoen 1999; Abbott et al. 2000) point to cryptic refugia in the High

Arctic, and Banks Island (Inuvialuit, North West Territories) has been proposed as a

refugium for caribou (Klütsch et al. 2017). Ultimately, the use of local ancestry as a lens

through which to study recolonization could offer a promising avenue for disentangling

complex post-glacial evolutionary histories of the High Arctic and elsewhere.

Conclusion

Until recently, applications of whole-genome sequencing (WGS) to population genomics

have been limited by high costs, resulting in low sample sizes and restricted study areas.

Here, our use of low-coverage WGS data showcases how versatile this approach can be

in investigating intraspecific evolutionary processes for widely sampled organisms. The

inclusion of cytoplasmic DNA (from mitochondria or chloroplasts in plants) in WGS also

promises a more systematic comparison of markers from different independently evolving

segments of the genome, providing new phylogeographic insight while integrating earlier

research in long-studied systems. Finally, WGS data offers far more than an increased

SNP count, and we are confident that the scientific community will benefit from exploring

innovative approaches for leveraging horizontal genetic signals, like linkage and

recombination, to deepen our understanding of evolutionary dynamics.

Material & methods

Library preparation, sequencing, and data preprocessing

Anadromous Arctic Char adipose fins were collected at the mouth of rivers across Arctic

Canada and Western Greenland between 2007 and 2023 and stored in ethanol 95% (4°C)

or RNAlater (-20°C). Whole-genome libraries were prepared following Therkildsen &

Palumbi (2017). Briefly, DNA was extracted using Nucleomag kits, cleaned with Axygen

magnetic beads, quantified with AccuClear Ultra High Sensitivity dsDNA Quantification

kits, and diluted to 1.5 ng/µl. Sample extracts were then used for Nextera library

preparation: tagmentation (i.e. fragmentation and addition of adapters), 2 PCR steps to

attach barcodes, and size selection for fragments 400-700bp in length using Axygen

magnetic beads. To achieve a final depth of coverage of 2X, we performed sequencing

on lanes of Illumina HiSeq 4000, with around 96 individual libraries per lane (range of 75

to 106), yielding on average 31.6 million reads per sample for 1178 samples in 33

populations. For the medium-coverage dataset, we selected 100 random samples in 5

populations (20 per population) and repeated sequencing on 5 lanes to obtain 135.9

million reads per sample (adding ~6X).

All   data   were   prepared   following   the   pipeline   described   at

https://github.com/enormandeau/wgs_sample_preparation. In brief, raw sequences were

trimmed using fastp (Chen et al. 2018) and aligned on the ASM291031v2 reference

genome with bwa mem (minimum alignment quality of 10) (Li 2013). Note that the

reference genome used was assembled using sequencing data from a Dolly Varden

(*Salvelinus malma*) or a *S. alpinus* x *S. malma* hybrid (Christensen et al. 2021) but remains

the closest high-quality reference for Arctic Char at the time of our analysis. Duplicate

reads were then removed using picard, indels were realigned, and overlapping ends of

paired reads were clipped. The average per-base depth of coverage was then estimated

using mosdepth (Pedersen and Quinlan 2018), and 61 samples with genome-wide

coverage under 1X were excluded from analyses on nuclear DNA. For the 5 populations

targeted by additional sequencing, the 2X and 6X aligned reads were merged so that

these populations could be analyzed at a coverage of either 2 or 8X.

mtDNA and nuDNA genotyping and filtering

The depth of coverage was much higher on the mitochondrial genome, allowing us to call

haplotypes for the whole mitogenome (16,659 bp) for every individual in the 2X dataset

using angsd -doFasta 1 (Korneliussen et al. 2014). Sequences were cleaned in Geneious

2022.0.1 (https://www.geneious.com) by removing positions, then individuals, with more

than 5% missing data. We used popart (Leigh and Bryant 2015) to construct a median-

joining network of haplotypes extracted for the D-loop control region (998 bp), using an ε

parameter of zero. An individual sampled in population 30 matched the D-loop sequence

for *Salvelinus fontinalis* and was kept as an outgroup for the haplotype network but was

removed from every subsequent analysis.

Nuclear SNP positions were first detected using ANGSD v0.937 (Korneliussen et

al. 2014) (`-GL 2 -remove_bads 1 -minMapQ 30 -minQ 20 -skipTriallelic`

`1 -uniqueOnly 1 -only_proper_pairs 1 -min_Maf = 0.01`) on both the 2X

and 8X datasets independently with the following coverage filters (for 2X data: at least 1X

in 75% of samples, maximum average depth of 4X; for 8X data: at least 3X in 75% of

samples, maximum average depth of 20X). The sex of sampled fish was unknown. As

such, SNPs on sex-linked regions identified by Beemelmanns et al. (2024) were not

considered, to avoid potentially unbalanced sex ratios being confounded with population

differentiation.

The 15.6 (2X) and 21.5 (8X) million retained SNP positions were tested for their

deviation of Mendelian inheritance using the calcLR in ngsParalog (Linderoth 2018).

ngsParalog likelihood ratios were compared to a χ^2 distribution and SNPs with a P-value

(adjusted by applying the Bonferroni procedure) under the threshold of 0.001 were

considered as deviant (2X: 9.63 million, 62% of all SNPs; 8X: 11.20 million, 52%). Deviant

SNPs were removed from the site list for each dataset, as they are expected to have their

inferred genotype biased by mismapped reads related to paralogy or repeated elements

(Dallaire et al. 2023). For analyses based on site frequency spectra (SFS), we masked

the reference genome in 150bp regions centered on every deviant SNP, as well as all

coding genes and a 1-kb region around them.

We estimated genotype likelihoods for 5.98 million non-deviant SNPs in the 2X

dataset using `-doGlf -GL2` in ANGSD. We used ngsLD to estimate linkage between

SNPs within 500 kb using a random subset of half the samples and pruned the dataset

with the graph method until no SNP pairs within 200kb had an r^2 above 0.1, leaving

375,236 SNPs in the LD-pruned dataset.

Population structure, differentiation, and diversity

The general distribution of genetic variation and population structure was first assessed

by performing a principal components analysis on the LD-pruned 2X dataset in PCAngsd

1.10 (Meisner and Albrechtsen 2018). We then explored the hierarchical population

structure using NGSadmix (Skotte et al. 2013) on the LD-pruned 2X data to estimate

individual admixture while varying the number of ancestral populations (K) from 2 to 33.

Pairwise population differentiation was estimated using allele frequency difference

(AFD) and F_{ST} index. For AFD, we estimated allele frequency in every population for all

5.98 million SNPs (2X) using angsd -domaf 1, then calculated the average absolute MAF

difference between each pair of populations. For F_{ST}, we used ANGSD and the reference

genome masked for deviant SNPs and genes to estimate sample allele frequency (SAF)

for each population, then we used the winSFS streaming option (Rasmussen et al. 2022)

to compute two-population SFS while accounting for linkage disequilibrium. The SAF and

2D-SFS served as input for the *realsfs fst index*, *print*, *stats,* and *stats2* functions in

ANGSD to calculate genome-wide weighted F_{ST} (Reynolds et al. 1983). We tested for the

presence of isolation-by-distance through linear regression between the marine distance

between population pairs, estimated using marmap (Pante and Simon-Bouhet 2013), and

either their AFD or linearized F_{ST} (Slatkin 1993).

We estimated nuclear genetic diversity in populations with Watterson's estimator

(Θ_W) and nucleotide diversity (Θ_π), as well as individual heterozygosity. Θ statistics were

computed with ANGSD's *realsfs saf2theta* and *thetaStat do_stat* using the SAF by

population described above and a 1D-SFS produced by winsfs. To account for the variable

coverage along the genome and across populations, we compared per-site Θ in windows

of 100 kb (step of 10 kb) and excluded windows with a number of sites (denominator)

under the 5th percentile (2,600 sites) in any population. Individual heterozygosity was

estimated by computing a per-sample SAF and dividing the number of heterozygous sites

(SAF = 1) by the number of sites.

We also estimated diversity metrics on whole mitogenome sequences, after removing

haplotypes from the Atlantic lineage, those with more than 5% of missing data, and

masking positions with remaining missing values. The 1,074 Arctic haplotypes were

16,483 bp long and were analyzed by population with the *pegas* (Paradis 2010) package

in R for 1) Θ_W with *theta.s* function, 2) Θ_π with the *nuc.div* function, 3) Tajima's D with the

Tajima.test function, 4) haplotype diversity using the *haploFreq* function and the formula

corrected for sample size from (Nei and Roychoudhury 1974), and 5) the frequency of the

Arctic haplotype most frequent in the whole dataset. We tested for geographical patterns

in populational mtDNA diversity using regression models for those 5 variables with the

marine distance from the westernmost population (pop.1) as the explicative variable. We

used the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) (Akaike 1974) to compare the null, simple,

and 2nd-degree polynomial models.

Secondary contact, introgression, and demographic inference

To test hypotheses regarding the admixture between the Arctic and Atlantic lineage of

Arctic Char in Canada, we downloaded *S. alpinus* raw sequences (PRJEB62707) from an

inland lake in Sweden (Lilla Stensjön) (Saha et al. 2024), which we assumed represents

a population descending purely from the Atlantic lineage. We also acquired unpublished

data from a Dolly Varden (*Salvelinus malma*) population in Babage River, Yukon, Canada

(Labrecque et al., in prep). Those sequences were trimmed, aligned, and cleaned as

described in the "data preprocessing" section, then we estimated genotype likelihoods

and population MAF for the LD-pruned SNP list. We obtained an average depth of

coverage of 5X for the Swedish population and 2X for *S. malma*.

We repeated the NGSadmix analysis for K=2 with the Swedish population. We

converted the estimated MAF of all 35 populations of *S. alpinus* and *S. malma* to

approximate allele count by multiplying the MAF by the number of sampled alleles (twice

the sample size) to fit the Treemix file format. We computed f_4 statistics in Treemix 1.13

(Pickrell and Pritchard 2012) with *S. malma* as the outgroup (H_4), the Swedish population

as the potential introgressor (H_3), and all pairs of Canadian and Greenlandic populations

as H_1 and H_2.

Based on the previous results, we build alternative demographic models to test the

presence of ancient or recent gene flow between the Atlantic lineage, represented by the

Swedish population and the Southern Arctic Canada (see Fig. 4B, Table S). We estimated

the unfolded 3D-SFS between COP (North, pop. 4), TJL (South, pop. 25), and LLS

(Sweden, pop. 34) using winsfs. Alleles were polarized based on an ancestral reference

genome constructed by aligning WGS data from four closely related species (Atlantic

Salmon; Lake Trout, *Salvelinus namaycush*; Rainbow Trout, *Oncorhynchus mykiss*; and

Chinook Salmon, *Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*; SRA accession number in supplementary

table S6, Supplementary Material online) on the *Salvelinus sp.* reference genome

(ASM291031v2). We used the most common allele to create a consensus for each

species using *angsd -doFasta*, then merged the consensus in Geneious 2022.0.1 to keep

only positions covered in at least 2 consensuses. The fit between the observed SFS and

models with 0) no, 1) ancient, and 2) recent gene flow was compared by running 100 runs

of each in fastsimcoal 2.7 with the following parameters: `-d -C 10 -n 500000 -L 50`

`-s 0 -M`. [Parameter estimation]

Introgression and recombination landscapes

We identified genomic regions displaying distinct genetic variation from the genome-wide

signal using local PCAs as described in (Huang et al. 2020; Mérot et al. 2021). Briefly, we

scanned each chromosome independently by computing the covariance matrix between

individuals in non-overlapping windows of 100 SNPs in PCAngsd and detecting clusters

of consecutive windows presenting similar PCA patterns using the *pcdist* function and

multidimensional scaling (MDS) in the R package *lostruct*. Windows with MDS values

beyond 3 standard deviations from the chromosomal mean on one of the first five MDS

axes were kept, and clusters within 20 windows of each other were merged. We only

considered clusters longer than 10 windows.

In each outlier cluster, we tested for the presence of patterns on PC1 indicative of the

three genotypes of a chromosomal inversion or other types of nonrecombinant

haploblock. The R package *dbscan* allowed for the grouping of individuals based on their

density distribution on PC1 while allowing for uncategorized individuals between clusters.

We iteratively ran *dbscan* while increasing the ε parameter by increments of 0.005,

starting from 0.01, until three groups were detected or ε = 0.15 was reached. We further

cleaned the *dbscan* results by setting individuals with PC1 values outside 3 standard

deviations from the mean of any group as intermediate genotype. The three remaining

groups were labeled haplogroup AA, AB, and BB, starting from the most frequent one,

and the intermediate genotypes were labelled A0 and 0B.

To test if the putative haploblocks were associated to lower recombination rates, we

estimated recombination using LDhat for each chromosome and population in the 8X

dataset. To produce the bcf file in input, we genotyped previously identified non-deviant

SNPs in ANGSD using `-doBcf 1 -doGeno -4 -doPost 1 -postCutoff 0.95`

with more stringent filters (population MAF > 0.05, minimum of 4X in 90% of individuals).

Population-scaled recombination rates (ρ/kb) was estimated in LDhat 2.2 (Auton and

McVean 2007) while controlling for demography with LDpop (Kamm et al. 2016) using a

θ estimate of 0.001, a block penalty of 5 and other parameters set following the pipeline

in (Brazier and Glémin 2024). The LDhat output was cleaned by removing plateaus of

invariable recombining rates longer than 22 kb (99th percentile of the length of all

plateaus). The weighted mean of recombination rates inside each putative haploblocks

and other MDS outliers was compared to the chromosome-wide average through mixed-

effect models with the chromosome and population set as random effects. Chromosomes

and haploblocks were only considered in recombination maps that covered at least 60%

of their length.

 Inference of the origin of recolonization

To triangulate the origin of the recolonization after the last glacial maximum, and thus a

putative glacial refugium, we computed the directionality index (ψ) for each population pair

from their genome-wide unfolded 2D-SFS, following Peter & Slatkin (2013). Ancestral

alleles private to either population were excluded. We then used the Time Difference of

Arrival algorithm (Gustafsson and Gunnarsson 2003) on the ψ matrix following Prior et al.

(2020). Briefly, a pairwise comparison of ψ and geographical distance between focal

populations and the assumed origin was performed for every possible origin, using a 0.5

decimal degrees step across the study area. For origins with a positive slope between ψ

and geographic distance, we rescaled the coefficient of regression (R^2) from 0 to 1, and

origins with a higher R^2 were considered more likely. For this analysis, we excluded

populations out of Canada, as well as population 30, which had a high level of Atlantic

lineage ancestry.

To test how introgression from the Atlantic lineage impacted the inference of the

origin of recolonization, we repeated the *ψ* and TDoA analyses while focusing on the

diversity inside the Arctic alleles for the putative haploblocks identified using local PCAs.

For each population pair and haploblock, we randomly selected 10 homozygotes for Arctic

allele (AA) by population and computed their SAFs and 2D-SFS. We then summed the

per-haploblock SFS where both populations had at least 10 AA individuals and computed

a directionality index from the summed spectrum. TDoA was performed on the resulting

ψ matrix as described above.

To assess the robustness of this analysis, we repeated this process over 100

replicates on resampled AA individuals and a random subset of 90% of putative

haploblocks, as well as over 100 replicates where each haploblock was replaced by a

random genomic region of equal length on the same chromosome. TDoA R^2 maps from

the putative haploblocks and random regions were each rescaled as above, then

averaged and compared to the genome-wide TDoA signal.

Data Accessibility Statement

Part of the *Salvelinus alpinus* sequencing data analyzed in this manuscript is available on Short Read Archive as part of projects PRJNA1031558 (Canada and Greenalnd) and PRJEB62707 (Sweden). Following submission, all new genetic data will be deposited on SRA. Sequencing data on *Salvelinus malma* is also planned to be deposited as part of a separate publication, presently in preparation.

Acknowledgment

This work was supported by a Large-Scale Applied Research Project grant from Genome Canada named "FISHES: Fostering Small-scale Fisheries for Health, Economy and Food Security". Sampling was made possible by the collaboration of Fisheries and Ocean Canada; Ministère de l'Environnement, de la Lutte contre les changements climatiques, de la Faune et des Parcs (Québec; Julien Mainguy); Government of Nunavut; Makivik Corporation (Nunavik) and numerous Inuit communities, organizations, and local fishers across Canada and Greenland. Thanks to Anne Beemelmanns, Charles Babin, Isabeau Caza-Allard, Louis-Philippe Collin, Alysse Perreault-Payette, and Gabriel Piette-Lauzière for their help with laboratory work and coordination. We also thank Rennes Metropole, ECOBIO (Université de Rennes), and ISEM (Université de Montpellier) for providing support, funding, or access to their facility which were invaluable in the completion of this work.

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Figure 1: A highly structured distribution of genetic variation across the Arctic

a) Sampling sites for 1140 Arctic Chars (Salvelinus alpinus) sequenced at a coverage of 2X (circle), 5X (triangle), or 8X (square). Colors indicate sampling regions, and the same color coding is used in all figure panels. Dotted blue lines delimit the ice margin at the last glacial maximum (18 ka, Dalton et al. 2020). b) Principal components analysis based on 396,113 independent SNPs. 95% confidence interval ellipses are drawn around each sampling site. c) Median-joining haplotype network for the mitochondrial D-loop control region (993 bp), showing divergence between the Arctic (left) and Atlantic (right) mitochondrial lineages. For each haplotype shared by n>1 individual, colored sections of the pie chart indicate the proportional representation of individuals from each region.

Figure 2: A North-South divide in genetic variation

a) Pairwise genetic differentiation among populations estimated using allele frequency difference (AFD, above diagonal) and genome-wide weighted FST (below diagonal). Greenlandic and Canadian populations above and below the 66th parallel are divided by solid white lines, and dotted lines divide regions defined in Figure 1a. b-c) Isolation-by-distance as estimated by the linear regression between genetic (either b) AFD or c) linearized FST) and marine distance between populations 1-29. Population pairs were categorized based on their inclusion in the North (blue, pop. 1-16) or South (red, pop. 17-29) group, or including a Northern and a Southern population (green).

Figure 3: *Higher nuclear diversity in admixed populations*

a)

Genome-wide Arctic ancestry, estimated by admixture proportion in NGSadmix (K = 2), of individuals (smaller points) and sampling sites (mean ancestry, circled points) along a spatial gradient from Inuvialuit (left) to Sweden (right). b) Individual autosomal heterozygosity (heterozygote sites per kb) is higher in the secondary contact zone (intermediate ancestry), as visualized by a fitted quadratic equation. c) Per-site Watterson's estimator (Θ_W) in mitochondrial haplotypes of the Arctic lineage by population. d) Per-site nucleotide diversity (Θ_π) and Watterson's estimator by population, estimated in 100 kb windows along the nuclear genome. The median (point), 25th, and 75th percentiles (error bars) are shown. The Northern (pop. 1-16) and Southern (pop. 17-30) Canadian populations are highlighted by 95% confidence interval ellipses and a dotted line follows $\Theta_\pi = \Theta_W$ (Tajima's D = 0).

Figure 4: Evidence for gene flow between the Atlantic and South Arctic

Model	Min. AIC (10⁸)	Median AIC (10⁸)	Min. Δ_Lik (10⁷)	Median Δ_Lik (10⁷)
0 – No migration	4.82	4.82	2.77	2.78
1 – Ancient migration	**4.59**	**4.78**	**2.27**	**2.70**
2 – Recent migration	4.61	5.20	2.33	3.61

a) Simplified demographic model showing ancient divergence between the Arctic and Atlantic, followed by isolation with migration of the North (COP, pop. 4) and South (TJL, pop. 24) Arctic. b) Support (AIC and Δ_Lik, i.e. difference between observed and predicted likelihood of the SFS) for alternative fastsimcoal models (100 runs per model) for 0) absence of gene flow, 1) ancient or 2) recent gene flow between the South Arctic and Atlantic lineage (represented by the Swedish population), as highlighted in red in panel a). c) f₄ test for introgression from the Atlantic lineage (represented by the Swedish population), where a negative f₄ statistic supports introgression in population H₁ (only tests with populations from northern regions are shown) and a positive f₄ supports introgression in population H₂ (detailed on the y-axis). Similar lcWGS data from Dolly Varden (Salvelinus malma) was used as an outgroup.

Figure 5: Local ancestry inferred through local PCA

Representative case of a low-recombining diverged putative haploblock corresponding to a local PCA outlier region (win8) on LG9 (NC_036849.1). a) Position of the MDS outlier region (red) on the linkage group (above) and standardized PC1 coordinates in PCAs for successive non-overlapping 100-SNP windows inside and around the outlier region (below). Each sample is represented by a line colored according to their haplogroup inferred from panel b). b). PCA for SNPs in the outlier region where the three major clusters found on PC1 are attributed to the 2 homozygotes (AA, blue, left; BB, yellow, right) and their heterozygote (AB, green, middle). Intermediate genotypes (A0, light blue; 0B, light green) were assigned to individuals outside of the cluster distributions. The histogram (above) represents the density of individuals along the first axis of the PCA. c) Proportion of inferred haplogroups for the win8 haploblock across sampling sites.

Figure 6: Genome-wide and Arctic lineage-specific inference of the origin of recolonization

a) Time Difference of Arrival (TDoA) analysis for inference of the origin of recolonization, where red color indicates a higher correlation (R^2) between distance from the putative origin and whole-genome directionality index (ψ). b) TDoA for ψ calculated in Arctic haplogroup homozygotes (10 individuals per population) in 23 putative local ancestry tracks (total length = 20 Mb). The mean rescaled R^2 for 100 replicate runs is shown in blue, and the mean rescaled R^2 for 100 runs on 23 random genomic regions (total length = 20 Mb) is shown in red.