



ARCH NOTES

Newsletter of

The Ontario Archaeological Society (Inc.)

P.O. Box 241, Postal Station "P", Toronto, Ontario M5S 2S8

October, 1975

75-7

October General Meeting

The Society's Symposium on Ontario Pre-Iroquois Prehistory on Saturday, October 18, replaces our usual monthly meeting.

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A FAUNAL ANALYST IN THE NORTHERN YUKON

by Dr. Howard Savage
Faunal Osteology Lab.,
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Faunal bones from archaeological sites scattered across Canada's 3,700 miles from east to west are notorious for the diversity of mammalian, avian and fish species in the site middens. A faunal analyst, well acquainted with life forms in Ontario, will truly be at sea when confronted with findings from coastal sites, until he or she has examined in detail skeletons of species native to coastal areas. There is no better way to gain familiarity with the bones of a species than to prepare a skeleton of that species for use in a faunal identification lab.

Of equal importance in understanding the significance of the presence or absence of a faunal species in an archaeological site, is knowing the nature of the surroundings of the site. Marshland, upland and mountain terrain are the choices of various species in which to live. The presence of grazing herds of bison or horses bespeaks grassy plains or sparse forest, while a multiple of muskrat and beaver bones in a site infers nearby marshland or muskey country. Until the faunal analyst has visited the site and seen its environment, his or her appreciation of the species identified in the site will be as limited as his knowledge of the site surroundings.

Nowhere is the necessity for knowledge of skeletal elements and of site environment more evident than in the Old Crow area of the northern Yukon. The Old Crow River has its headwaters in the Davidson Mountains of eastern Alaska, and then meanders south-eastward endlessly through a vast assemblage of lakes, muskeg and tundra over some 5,000 square miles known as the Old Crow Flats. At the southern edge of the flats, the Old Crow joins the Porcupine River, which in turn adds itself to the lordly Yukon River in its thousand mile journey westward through Alaska to the Bering Sea.

The Northern Yukon Research Programme, under the direction of Dr. Wa. Irving, of the University of Toronto, and with financial support from The Canada Council, the University of Toronto and Canadian Arctic Gas Limited, had its first field season in the Old Crow Basin from June to August this year. As a member of this project, it was my privilege to see at first hand much of this countryside, the fossil bones in situ, and many of the valley's present day faunal species.

A number of seemingly fortuitous circumstances are believed to have made the gravel bars and the banks of the lower Old Crow River a veritable treasurehouse of fossilized faunal bone. These fossils are capable of shedding much light on earlier life forms, including man himself, in the Old Crow Valley. The rate of flow of the river, including its floods after spring break-up, is deemed

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great enough to permit fossil bone in the river bed and banks to be picked up in the currents and subsequently deposited downstream, but not to produce gross damage or destruction of the bone.

An absence of glacier formation in the Old Crow Basin (Hughes, 1970) during the Wisconsin glaciation from circa 70,000 or 10,000 years ago, permitted the survival of cold-adapted life forms on the flats at least during the latter part of this period. Preservation of their skeletal elements by being permanently frozen and/or by fossilization, made possible their recovery and recognition in recent decades.

Two other major events in the Old Crow Valley have been the lakes which filled this basin, one before or during the early part of the Wisconsin glaciation, and a later lake somewhere a little prior to 18,000 years and until 12,000 years ago (Irving, pers. comm.). Sediments, mainly from the river which was present between the lake phases, make up the cliff banks of the present day river, up to over 100 feet high in some areas. Beneath all these sediments are the bone-rich strata. In those stretches of the river where its bed has been deeply eroded, the fossils lie exposed or are superficially covered, and are available for recovery.

The mammal species of these fossil bones are strange to the faunal analyst of Eastern Canada archaeological sites. Faunal findings from the gravel bar at Old Crow Site 14 N have come from the extinct Giant Pike, Giant Beaver, Scimitar Cat, American Mastodon, Woolly Mammoth, Western Camel and Large-horned Bison (Irving and Harington, 1973). Many of these species were also represented down-river at Site 11 A in fossils excavated by Irving in 1970 and examined by Holland and Johnson (1974). One or both of these sites also contained representatives of other species, still resident in this area or elsewhere in North America or Asia, i.e. the horse, moose, caribou, wapiti, saiga antelope, muskox, dhole, arctic fox, bear, wolverine, lion-like cat, hare, beaver, muskrat and singing vole. A period of study and comparison of reference skeletons of many of these species is necessary to become familiar with their skeletal characters.

Of great interest are the evidences of early North American man in the Old Crow Valley, contemporaneous with the extinct mammals. Of note are numerous examples of extremity bones of mammoths, horses and bison showing large flakes split off, spiral fractures characteristic of controlled breakage of bone from recently killed animals, and a recurring pattern of fractures through heel bones in order to avoid butchering through the incredibly tough heel tendons. Mental reference was frequently made to the flesher made from a caribou leg bone, found in 1966 by Harington and Lord, and itself radiocarbon-dated at approximately 27,000 B.P. (Irving, 1971). In August 1975, a fossilized caribou antler portion, bevelled at one end and tapered at the other, was recovered from a fossil-bearing stratum of the Old Crow River by Dr. Francesco Fidele, of the University of Turin, as a member of the crew of the Northern Yukon Research Programme.

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The faunal analyst from eastern and central Canada is accustomed to receiving the material for examination neatly catalogued according to one metre squares and ten centimetre levels; the accompanying plan of the site is similarly neatly gridded. Great contrast is provided in the Old Crow River material where exact location data is invalidated by the strong probability that finds have been brought downriver an uncertain number of miles during an uncertain time period. The dating provided by radio carbon assay is more invaluable than ever, in the absence of a firm association with archaeological strata and their contents.

In brief, the wealth of faunal material from the gravel bars and the banks of the Old Crow River remains today a tantalizing puzzle. Once identifications have been made, to as small taxa as is possible with confidence, and inferences re the nature of the countryside made, there still remains uncertainty concerning its antiquity, when not established by radiocarbon assay. Hopefully, in the coming field seasons of the Northern Yukon Research Programme, some answer to this problem will be forthcoming.

Literature Cited

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Hughes, O.L., 1972. Surficial Geology of Northern Yukon Territory and Northwestern District of Mackenzie, Northwest Territories. Geol. Sur. Canada, Paper 69 - 36. 11 p. and map.

Irving, W.N., 1971. Recent Early Man Research in the North. Arctic Anthropology, Vol. 8 (2): 68 - 83.

Irving, W.N. and C.R. Harington, 1973. Upper Pleistocene Radiocarbon-dated Artefacts from the Northern Yukon. Science, Vol. 179, No. 4071 : 335 - 340.

22 September, 1975

H.G.S.

The University of Toledo Anthropology Department and the Toledo Area Aboriginal Research Club are issuing a joint publication entitled "A Bibliography of Arctic and Sub-Arctic Prehistory and Protohistory".

This is categorized into the topical sections of archaeology and physical anthropology for each major geographic region of the far north. It is 60 pages long and sells for \$1.50.

Order from: Dr. Metress, Toledo Area Aboriginal Research Club,
c/o Anthropology Department,
University of Toledo,
Toledo, Ohio 43606

TAUROMEE

At the invitation of the Wyandotte tribe of Oklahoma, whose ancestors formerly lived in Ontario, O.A.S. past-president Charles Garrad visited and addressed the tribe's Annual Council in September. He presented a number of gifts at the time from several of his Ontario colleagues and from the Simcoe County Historical Association.

During his stay in Oklahoma he met and interviewed a number of Wyandotte people and found them almost totally acculturated, with very little knowledge of the "old way". An exception was an 83-year-old matron who adopted him into her family, and into the Big Turtle Clan, as her Indian son, giving him the name TAUROMEE. This lady is reportedly the last still alive to recall this practice or to have any knowledge of the names owned in former times by the Wyandotte clans, hence this adoption was probably the very last of its kind. The previous Tauromee (John Kat) died in Kansas some 115 years ago.

The cost of Garrad's 29-day, 4,065-mile trip was assisted in part by donations from the Imperial Tobacco Company and from interested individuals.

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E.S.A.F. Annual Meeting 1975

The 1975 Annual Meeting of the Eastern States Archaeological Federation will be held 13-16 November at the Sheraton-Columbus Inn in downtown Columbus, Ohio (43215). The programme is designed to highlight (1) Hopewell studies and (2) the U.S. National Bicentennial. There will also be a State-by-State Review of 1975's major new prehistoric and historic archaeological research results.

The preliminary program schedule is as follows:

Thursday, November 13: 4.00 p.m. registration begins, followed by the Executive Meeting and at 8.30 p.m. a General Business Meeting.

Friday, November 14: 9.00 am. to 11.30 a.m.: Opening Address, followed by the Hopewell Symposium; 1.00 p.m. Visit to Mound City Archaeological District; 7.30 p.m. Ohio Historical Society Openhouse.

Saturday, November 15: 9.00 a.m. State Research Review; 1.00 p.m. Bicentennial and Archaeology; 7.30 p.m. Annual Dinner.

Sunday, November 16: 9.00 a.m. to noon: General Session.

Further information concerning fees and registration is available from John Reid, Department of Anthropology, University of Toronto.
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Stone Age Discovery in the U.K.

Wide publicity has recently been given to this summer's work at Fengate, near Peterborough in England, by Francis Pryor and his team, mainly under the auspices of the Royal Ontario Museum. They have been digging the site since 1971, and the team includes students of the University of Toronto and Trent University. (For an earlier report, see ARCH NOTES for November 1973.)

Fengate is one of the most important prehistoric sites in Britain. It covers about 20 acres, and has produced evidence of continuous settlement from before 3,000 B.C. to 300 A.D. Much of the material has been sent to the R.O.M., although this season's most spectacular find (the body of a neolithic man with an arrow between his ribs and a child at his feet, one of four bodies in a single grave) is too fragile to cross the Atlantic. The whole grave was removed and is now being studied at Cambridge University.

Discoveries at Fengate include the earliest British wells, and insights into the living pattern of the people on the site.

The most important conclusion from these excavations is that some of the material from the site, originally believed to be Roman, has in fact proved to be up to 4,000 years older. This would indicate that experts must give considerable reappraisal to material found on other Romano-British sites in order to ensure that such material is ascribed to the right era.

With the introduction of widespread use of scientific aids in archaeology, knowledge long considered established has been proved capable of further refinement. Indeed, the discovery of inaccuracies in C-14 dating, by work done with comparative dates from the bristle cone pine, has emphasized that knowledge is anything but static.

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BANQUET

The O.A.S. Annual Banquet has been scheduled for Saturday, December 6, 1975. It will be held in the Dinosaur Den of the Royal Ontario Museum. A preview of the new Ontario Prehistory Gallery will be included in the festivities. Details of speaker, menu and cost in our next issue.

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Initial Reflections on the Salvage Excavation at the Draper Site

Bill Finlayson, of the Anthropological Department of the University of Western Ontario, spent the summer directing salvage excavations on the Draper Site, on the lands of the then proposed Pickering airport. He summarized his summer's work for members of the O.A.S. at the September 17 general meeting.

His opening remarks briefly covered the work of others on this site, which has been dug at various times over the last 20 years or so.

There was a degree of urgency over this summer's excavations, Finlayson explained, because the schedule for the construction of the airport may not have allowed another season on the site. He felt therefore that as much should be excavated as the season would allow. A generous grant from the Ministry of Transportation and Communication enabled him to hire sufficient labour and mechanical equipment to do this.

Finlayson had decided on specific areas of research: the number of houses on the site, their length and orientation, and the palisade. His co-director, Peter Ramsden, was undertaking exploration of the middens, and they both wished to gain information about the subsistence pattern of the inhabitants of the site.

Finlayson started his excavation by cutting a north/south test trench. The next step was to clear the plow zone by bulldozer and then to eradicate the dozer tracks with a grader. When the living floor was cleared, postholes were plotted by triangulation with fixed points, and then marked on cards for computer plotting of the floor plans. The material from the living floor was screened, and samples tested by flotation.

Finlayson excavated all or part of 31 houses on the site, and determined that there were three distinct sizes. He stated that there were probably more in the unexcavated areas of the site, which may cover 12 to 15 acres. He also determined that there had been three palisades, but it was too early to say whether this was caused by the expansion or contraction of the village.

Concerning the middens, 15 were excavated in various parts of the site by Peter Ramsden. The deeper ones were taken out in 10 cm. layers, the shallow ones entirely, and all material was put through one-half or one-quarter inch screens. For the flotation samples, a one-eighth mesh was used. Much of the washing of material was done by pressurized spray, which the team found very efficient.

Features found included probable steam baths inside some of the houses, and a few burial pits, all in houses, many of which contained the remains of children.

Bill Finlayson told members that the use of heavy equipment and other mechanical aids on this salvage excavation enabled him and his team to move more overburden for the time expended than

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traditional methods. He could follow post mould lines across the ground to determine house dimensions.

Much of the information gained from this site will be fed into the computer, which can then provide useful statistical information. It is, however, a very expensive tool, and is one of the benefits of a \$250,000 grant from the Ministry of Transport. When the final evaluation of the Draper Site is published, it is possible that it will run to several volumes.

C.L.K.

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N.B.: It is ironic that within days of Bill Finlayson's talk, the federal Government announced the abandonment of Pickering airport, for the time being at least, and even "The National" on C.B.C. carried pictures of the site, and a few apposite comments, in a broadcast in late September. Perhaps it will now be possible to continue the excavation of this site in a more leisurely manner in the coming seasons.

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Nominating Committee

A Nominating Committee has been formed to accept nominations for the 1976 Executive of the O.A.S. Members wishing to submit names to the committee for next year's officers must:

- a) obtain the nominee's permission (nominee must be a member of the O.A.S.);
- b) have the submission signed by a member, and seconded by another member;
- c) send the submission (not forgetting nominee's name and position for which he/she is nominated) to:

Nominating Committee,
O.A.S.
Box 241, Station "P",
Toronto, Ontario M5C 2S8

The deadline for mail-in nominations is November 19, 1975.

ARCH NOTES is published 7 - 10 times a year by the Ontario Archaeological Society. All enquiries and contributions should be addressed to the Chairman, Arch Notes Committee, c/o 29 Tournament Drive, Willowdale, Ontario M2P 1K1

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