

Manitoba Archaeological Newsletter



C O N T E N T S

FINANCIAL REPORT

EARLY ESKIMO PREHISTORY: A MANITOBA
PERSPECTIVE by RONALD J. NASH

REMINDER

Report those sites!

VOLUME V, NUMBER 3
AUTUMN, 1968

FINANCIAL REPORT

Statement of General Operations
Period Jan. 1, 1968 to Oct. 24, 1968

RECEIPTS

Membership 1968	\$ 130.00
Contributions	49.00
Spring Conference	464.50
Miscellaneous Income	8.06
Grant - Metropolitan Corporation of Winnipeg	2,000.00
Grant - Province of Manitoba	500.00
	<u>\$ 3,151.56</u>

EXPENDITURE

Advertising	\$ 13.76
Bank Charges	5.05
Printing, Postage & Stationery	131.11
Spring Conference	413.55
Canada Pension Plan	25.20
Salaries	2,000.00
Travelling Allowances	388.60
	<u>\$ 2,977.27</u>

Surplus (Excess Receipts over Expenditure) \$ 174.29

Balance Sheet
As at Oct. 24, 1968

ASSETS

Cash in Bank	\$ 347.57
1968 Surplus	174.29
1969 Membership	30.00
	<u>\$ 551.86</u>

LIABILITIES

Accounts Payable	\$ 62.95
Surplus	488.91
	<u>\$ 551.86</u>

Publications Committee

W. M. Hlady, Chairman and Newsletter Editor

A. A. Simpson, Assistant Editor M. Romaniuk M. Bomek

The Manitoba Archaeological Newsletter is published quarterly by the Manitoba Archaeological Society for the express purpose of disseminating archaeological information concerning the Province of Manitoba and related areas. It is available free of charge upon request to institutions and professionals involved with archaeology, and any material in the newsletter may be reproduced provided proper acknowledgment is made.

All correspondence concerning this publication should be addressed to the Manitoba Archaeological Newsletter, Box 1171, Winnipeg 1, Manitoba, Canada.

MEMBERSHIP IN THE MANITOBA ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY is \$3.00 per year for adults, \$1.00 per year for students.

EARLY ESKIMO PREHISTORY: A MANITOBA PERSPECTIVEby Ronald J. Nash¹.

The northeastern corner of Manitoba contrasts markedly with the remainder of the province, for in terms of its environment, it is a part of the tundra zone extending far to the north. The tree line marks the western and southern boundaries of the tundra zone in Manitoba. In 1965, investigations by the author were undertaken at two sites in this area - Thyazzi and Twin Lakes. The Thyazzi site, originally discovered by the late Thomas Jawbone, a Chipewyan Indian, had been discussed briefly (1956) by Dr. J. L. Giddings, who had made a surface collection from the site. The Twin Lakes site was discovered by J. D. Robertson in 1954 when roadbuilding operations disclosed flint chips and tools. A surface collection was subsequently obtained and reported (1965) by Dr. W. Irving. Excavations at these sites by the author were aimed at recovering a larger sample of tools as well as finding structural features and organic material for carbon-14 datings. Work in this area was resumed in the summer of 1968 under the auspices of the Department of Anthropology of the University of Manitoba and the Manitoba Museum. In 1968, survey and excavations were done at the Seahorse Gully site where tools similar to those from Thyazzi and Twin Lakes had been found by Joe Bighead, a Chipewyan Indian who sold the artifacts to Mrs. I. H. Smith, who in turn reported the site to me. Both are residents of Churchill. The materials from these sites span considerable time and have affinities with early, more northerly Eskimo cultures.

Thyazzi is the oldest of these sites. Following the recession of glacial ice, the land around Hudson Bay began to rise so that campsites which were formerly the shore of the Bay are now either high above sea level or considerably inland. The Thyazzi site is located on a sandy ridge which may have formed either as a beachline or as an offshore bar. The Thyazzi ridge is presently situated near the North Knife River and is fifteen miles inland from the coast of Hudson Bay and about 115 to 125 feet above sea level.

The ridge itself is about fifteen feet high and is largely an area of sand and gravel blowouts. Two boulder fields traverse the ridge, however, and soil and sod have occasionally accumulated to a depth of about four inches. The bulk of the artifacts were distributed over the main part of the ridge for about 1800 feet, but a few artifacts were found on extensions of the ridge to the south and east. Test pits and trenches were excavated in three heavily occupied areas on the main part of the site. The digging was done by successively trowelling through levels of sod, soil and sand. The artifacts were usually not buried deeper than four inches.

Excavations yielded great numbers of stone artifacts. Several areas had sufficient waste flakes to indicate workshop areas while one localized concentration of material terminated so abruptly on one periphery as to suggest that it marked the edge of a dwelling or shelter. Two hearths were also encountered. The small, delicately chipped chert artifacts included the burin, side blade and microblade. The burin is a cutting and engraving tool characterized by a sharp working end. The tiny stone spalls struck off in order to form this working end, were themselves frequently chipped for use at one end. The burin is thus the parent of the burin spall tool. The side

1. Curator of Archaeology, Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

blade may be rectangular or crescentic in outline or somewhere between these extremes and was used along one lateral edge. The smaller specimens may have been inset in bone or wood which was not preserved at Thyazzi. Microblades were found for the first time at Thyazzi. These are rectangular slivers of chert, usually triangular in cross-section and struck from prepared cores. It is probably that microblades were hafted on either one end or one side and used in a variety of household and hunting tasks. Other types of artifacts include stemmed and lanceolate arrowpoints; triangular points, possibly used in harpoons; a variety of scrapers for working hides as well as drills and knives.

This complex of tools is characteristic of a people who occupied the high Arctic as early as 3000 B.C. in the west and as late as 500 B.C. in the east. The tool complex has been variously termed the Denbigh Flint Complex in Alaska, Pre-Dorset culture in Canada's central and eastern Arctic or by the more general term Arctic Small Tool Tradition. On the basis of typological, geological and cultural factors, Thyazzi is probably among the earlier Pre-Dorset sites. The grinding of artifacts, particularly burins, is not characteristic of the earlier (ca. 2000 B.C.) Pre-Dorset sites or of Thyazzi, but it is a feature of the later Pre-Dorset sites. Again, microblades, which are numerous at Thyazzi are probably more frequent in the earlier Pre-Dorset sites. Such factors suggest an early date. Geological data on land uplift (e.g. Lee 1960) indicate that Thyazzi would have been a coastal location around 2000 B.C. while the possible harpoon blades might support the idea that the sea was nearby when the site was occupied. These indications are, however, at variance with a carbon-14 date of 680 B.C. ± 90 years obtained from charcoal in one of the hearths. All things considered, it is probable that the Thyazzi site was visited seasonally by small groups of people over one or two centuries beginning about 1500 B.C. If, however, the charcoal date were correct it would indicate that innovations which took place in the far north moved southward to Manitoba very slowly. The Thyazzi people probably did some harpooning of sea mammals, but arrowpoints predominate at the site and these were probably used for killing caribou during their seasonal migrations.

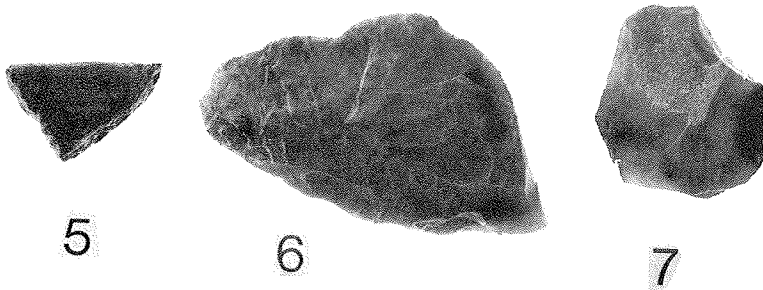
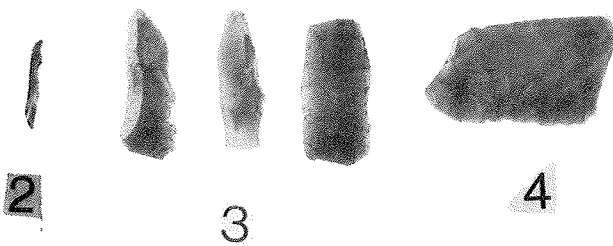
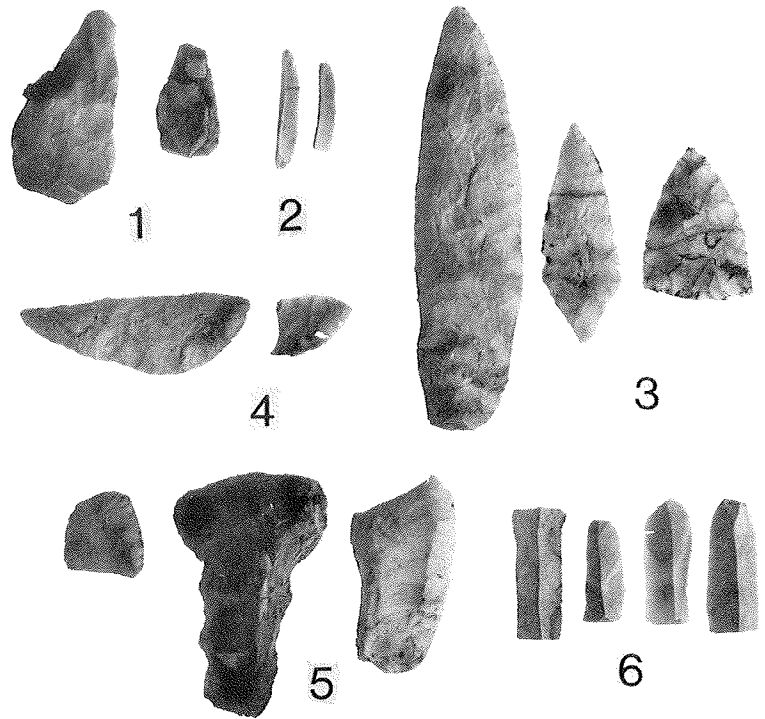
On the basis of the artifacts, the Thyazzi people would seem to be particularly close to those people who lived at Baker Lake, Igloodik and Ivugivik (Ungava), at about the same time. The Thyazzi people are also ancestral to the later occupants at the sites of Twin Lakes and Seahorse Gully.

The Twin Lakes site is located on the Fort Churchill Rocket Range, southeast of Fort Churchill and eleven miles inland from Hudson Bay. The site is just below the tree line and near the southern tip of the coastal tundra zone. The hill on which the site is located rises sharply above the sparsely wooded marsh of the Hudson Bay Lowland to a height of 125 feet above sea level.

A road had been cut through the site, but surface collecting and excavations on and off the road yielded a good artifact sample. The artifacts were concentrated in a thin sandy layer underlying sod and overlying gravel. The site was not as large as Thyazzi but it contained many of the same artifact types - microblades, knives, a triangular point, scrapers and especially burins, some of which were notched for hafting. The rectangular side blade which occurred as a minority type at Thyazzi was the only side blade type at Twin Lakes. The Twin Lakes site also contained fragments of a low soapstone dish which may have functioned as a lamp and several large bifacially-chipped, knife-like tools. Two adzes were found and these may have been used in woodworking. Like Thyazzi, there were no faunal remains and no house remains, although one disturbed hearth was found.

PLATE 1:
Artifacts from the Thyazzi
Site (Pre-Dorset).

1. Burins
2. Burin-spall tools
3. Lanceolate, stemmed
and triangular points
4. Side blades
5. Scrapers
6. Microblades



0 2 4CMS

PLATE 2:
Artifacts from the Pre-
Dorset Twin Lakes Site.

1. Burins
2. Burin spall
3. Microblades
4. Rectangular side blade
5. Rim fragment from a
round soapstone dish
6. Large knife
7. Scraper

0 2 4CMS

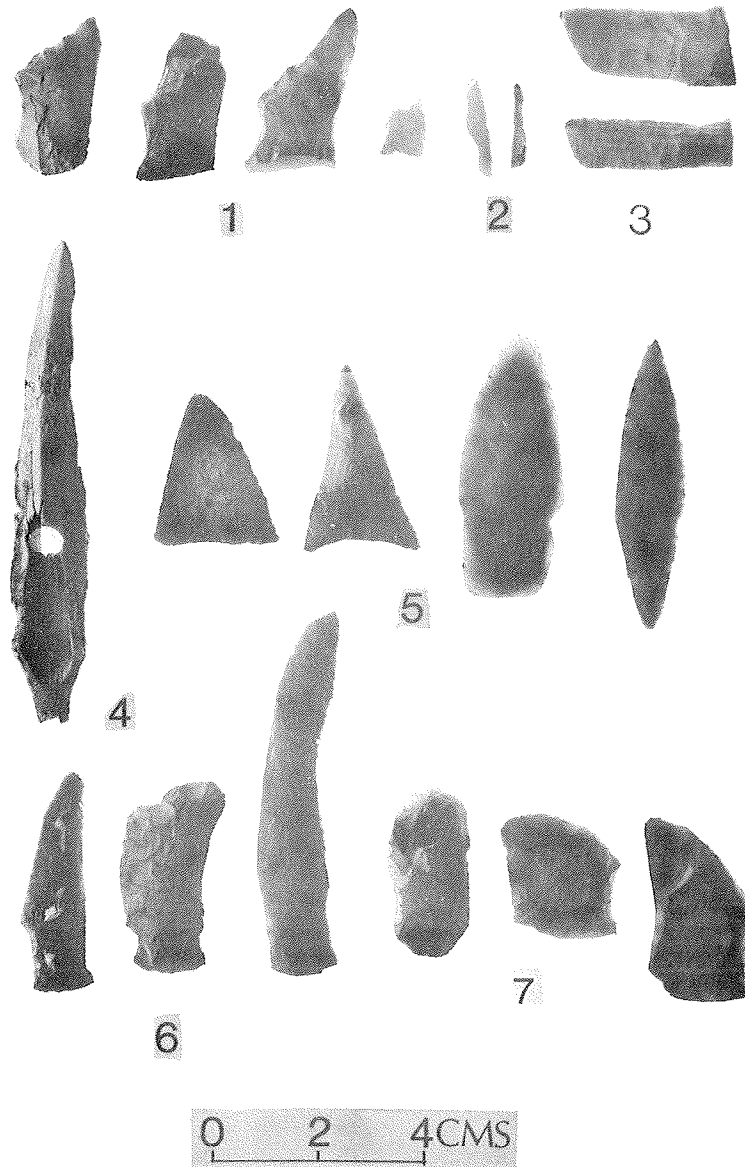


PLATE 3: Artifacts from the Pre-Dorset component, Seahorse Gully Site.

1. Burins. 2. Burin spalls. 3. Rectangular side blades. 4. Ivory harpoon head. 5. Triangular, notched and lenticular points. 6. notched knives. 7. Scrapers.

This Pre-Dorset site would seem to postdate Thyazzi, for the burins are usually ground either on the working end or the lateral edges, while the microblades are scarce and poorly made. The square bases of some of the knives and the presence of the lamp also hint at a later date in Pre-Dorset time. The Twin Lakes hill was probably an island at the time it was occupied. There are no factors favourable to game interception today, but in the period 1000 B.C. to 500 B.C., Hudson Bay would have been about fifty feet and thirty-five feet respectively from the top of the hill where the settlement was located. The site would then have been ideal for seal hunting. Thus, several factors suggest that Twin Lakes was briefly occupied in the period 1000 B.C. to 500 B.C. by people engaged in sea mammal hunting.

Presumably the Twin Lakes people also hunted caribou at some more interior location. A large quartzite knife may hint at contacts with interior forest people who used great numbers of such knives. Besides evidencing a heritage from Thyazzi, the artifacts are also closely linked with those from the late Pre-Dorset sites at Igloolik, Melville Peninsula.

The successors to the Twin Lakes people, the absence of preserved faunal remains and the absence of houses were persistent problems which brought our crew of three to the Seahorse Gully site in 1968. Pre-Dorset, Dorset and historic period cultures were found at this site. These prehistoric settlements are situated on the northernmost segment of a high bedrock ridge on the west side of the Churchill River, opposite the town of Churchill. Most of the Pre-Dorset occupation occurs just north of Seahorse Gully and at elevations of 100 to 110 feet and occasionally as low as eighty feet above sea level. The Pre-Dorset materials extended over an area nearly one mile long, but only about 400 feet wide. They occurred on or near a cobble mantle running the length of the ridgetop. Since the sod had been burned off during a fire in 1966, the artifacts are seldom buried more than a few inches. Surface collections were made from all of the ridge, but excavations were done inside the houses.

Two dozen Pre-Dorset houses were found and eleven of the undisturbed ones were excavated. The houses consisted of circular, square or sub-rectangular boulder outlines, the boulders probably having served to hold down the edges of a skin-covered house. There were two varieties of square houses depending on the number and size of boulders used and one house appeared to have a "mid-passage" or boulder corridor bisecting the interior of the house. The squarish houses tended to be about fifteen or sixteen feet on a side and the circular houses about fifteen or sixteen feet in diameter.

The artifacts are most similar to those from Twin Lakes, but also include a number of tool types not found elsewhere. Arrowpoints include stemmed and bipointed forms while the triangular points may or may not have been for arrows. Two fragmentary, open-socketed harpoon heads were found. Ground burins, scrapers, knives notched for hafting and rectangular side blades are common, whereas microblades have nearly vanished from the tool inventory. Several low, circular soap-stone vessels were recovered. In addition to the small chert tools, a complex of large tools is characteristic of the Pre-Dorset component at Seahorse Gully. These tools are frequently of a soft reddish stone and include gouges, adzes, picks, scrapers and knives, some of which may have been used in woodworking. One large tool fragment was found at Twin Lakes, but such large tools are almost non-existent in other Pre-Dorset sites.

The northern segment of the ridge was probably an island when it was occupied by the Pre-Dorset people. The maritime setting, the harpoons and the faunal material all testify to the importance of sea mammal hunting, while the arrowpoints and a stone netsinker suggest that fish and probably such animals as caribou and ptarmigan were also taken.

Thyazzi, Twin Lakes and Seahorse Gully were all occupied by peoples whose material remains are grouped together by archaeologists under the term Arctic Small Tool Tradition. Sites of the Arctic Small Tool Tradition began to emerge for the most part after the discovery of the Alaskan Denbigh Flint Complex in 1948. The recurring complex of small, delicately-chipped tools was of interest not only as a new type of culture, but for its promise of shedding new light on the enduring problem of the origin of the Eskimo. Today, sites of the Arctic Small Tool Tradition are known from many parts of the Arctic and show a cohesive and persistent way of life at an early time period. These sites usually contain side blades, burins, burin-spall tools, microblades and lenticular, lanceolate or triangular points. Many other types of artifacts were also used, some of which define local or regional variations within the Tradition. Pottery is found only in a few late sites in the western Arctic, whereas ground artifacts and notched burins are more easterly traits. The earliest sites in the Western Arctic date to about 3000 B.C., while the earliest eastern Arctic sites are only slightly later. The Arctic Small Tool people were primarily coastal people frequently occupying ovoid, semi-subterranean houses. They subsisted by hunting a wide variety of foods, although concentrating on caribou and seal.

The most westerly Arctic Small Tool sites are in Alaska, but similar materials have been found in eastern Siberia and Japan. The Japanese materials date too early to have close connections, but a few traits may have developed in this area to be later adopted by more northerly peoples. Siberian sites in the Lake Baikal and Lena River areas show good similarities, but more easterly sites on the Kamchatka and Chukchi Peninsulas appear to be immediately ancestral to the Alaskan sites. The formation of the Arctic Small Tool Tradition probably took place in the Bering Strait area in the fourth millennium B.C.

At about 2500 B.C., Arctic Small Tool people were living on Baffin Island and by 2000 B.C., large portions of the central and eastern Arctic were occupied by these people. Sites in the eastern Arctic are only slightly later than those in Western Arctic and their artifacts are very similar, so that it is probable that there was a rapid movement of people eastward across the Arctic. This movement may have been facilitated by a climatic amelioration in the period 5000 B.C. to 2500 B.C. Again, it is probable that in the Bering Strait area, the Arctic Small Tool people learned to exploit the resources of the sea and this coastal adaptation permitted their eastward spread along the coastal zone - an area of no particular importance per se to the few people already in this area.

About 1500 B.C., the climate became increasingly harsh in the Keewatin-Manitoba area and the tree line shifted slightly south. About this time, people began moving south from the Melville Peninsula area, eventually reaching the peripheral area of northeastern Manitoba and locations such as Thyazzi.

The vast distances, low population and fragmenting effect of the Arctic islands encouraged the growth of regional variants in the Arctic Small Tool Tradition. Sites in the Victoria and Bank Islands area have a high incidence of quartzite bifaces, while at 2000 B.C. in northeastern Greenland, a distinctive muskox hunting culture had developed. Considerably later, a variant called the Sarqaq Culture appeared on the western coast of Greenland. Sarqaq sites contain a number of distinctive types of tools which are often heavily ground. By about 500 B.C. a variant with a complex of large tools appeared in northeastern Manitoba.

A number of factors suggest that the Arctic Small Tool Tradition was a basal stratum of Eskimo culture from which the later Eskimo traditions of Inuk and Dorset developed. These three "Traditions" are simply cultures occupying a great deal of time and space. There has been no human skeletal material recovered from Arctic Small Tool sites, but Eskimos of essentially modern type extend at least

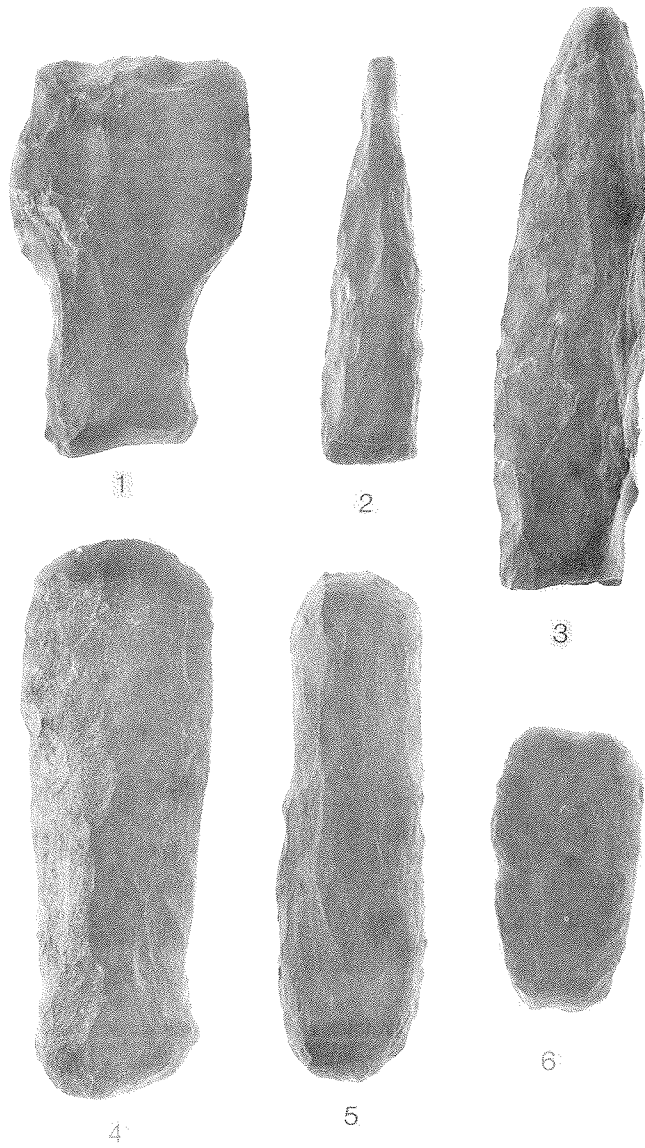


PLATE 4: Large tools from the Pre-Dorset component, Seahorse Gully Site.

1. Hafted adze.
2. Small pick.
3. Large pick.
4. Gouge.
5. Scraper.
6. Adze.

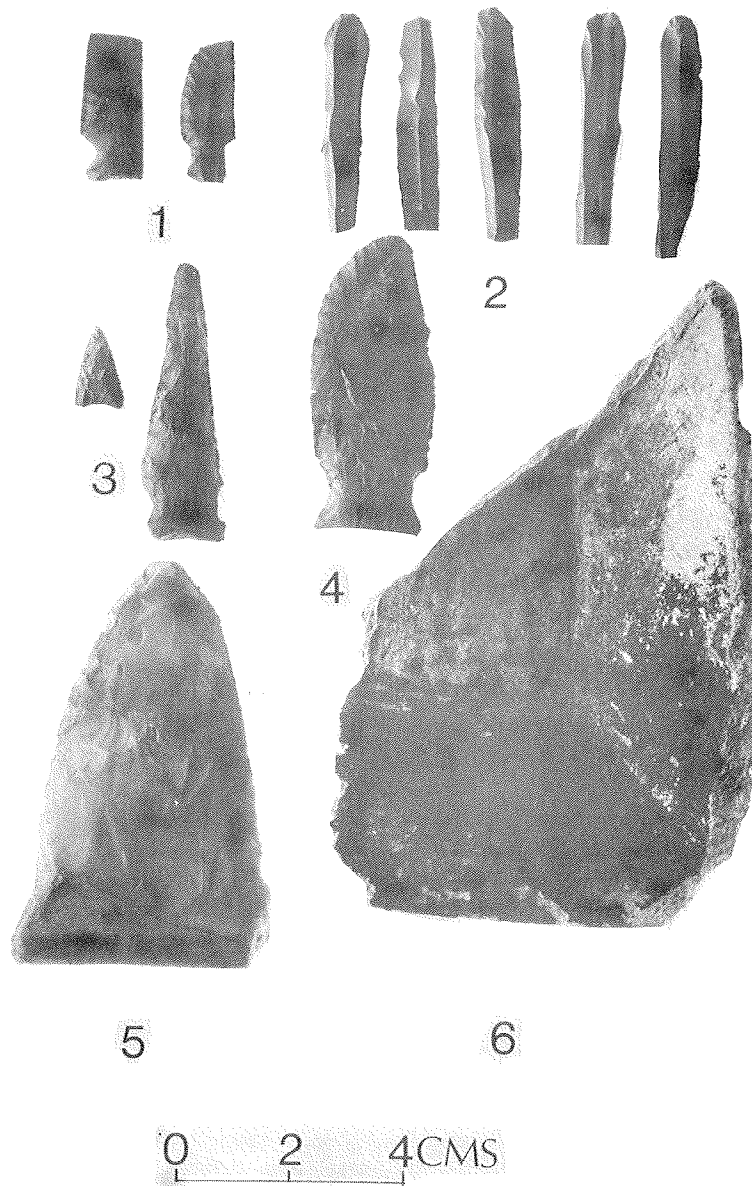


PLATE 5: Tools from the Dorset component of the Seahorse Gulley Site.

1. Burin-like tools. 2. microblades. 3. Triangular and notched points. 4. Notched knife. 5. Large knife. 6. Incomplete rectangular soapstone vessel. Charcoal adheres to the inside surface.

as far back as the first millenium B.C. Some scholars believe that the formation of the Arctic Mongoloid racial group (which includes the Eskimos) may have occurred in the Bering Strait area perhaps 5000 years ago. The language of the Arctic Small Tool people is unknown, but it has been suggested (Dumond 1965) that the Arctic Small Tool Tradition arose after the separation of the Eskimo and Aleut languages from a common parent language (Eskaleut) and that the Arctic Small Tool people were Eskimo speakers.

In spite of gaps in the known sequence of cultures archaeology provides the best evidence for thinking that the Arctic Small Tool people were Eskimos. In Alaska, a good number of artifact types link the Denbigh Flint Complex of the Arctic Small Tool Tradition with what are termed the Choris and Norton Cultures of the later Inuk Tradition. The Inuk Tradition is definitely Eskimo and includes the Thule Culture which developed in Alaska and then spread eastward late in prehistoric time.

The Inuk Tradition did not develop in the central and eastern Arctic, for in this area, the Arctic Small Tool Tradition was succeeded by the Dorset Tradition which begins to appear about 900 B.C. The Dorset Tradition was delimited in 1925. It too, is Eskimo although of course, it differs in specifics from the Eskimo culture of historic times. The origin of the Dorset Tradition has remained a subject of debate. Some archaeologists believe it derived rather directly from the older Arctic Small Tool Tradition, while others stress the similarities with early Indian cultures of the northeastern United States and eastern Canada and postulate an origin in this area.

One of the difficulties with the Dorset Tradition was that prior to the 1968 investigations, there were only the slightest hints of Dorset culture on the west coast of Hudson Bay. Our surveys located a Dorset settlement at the Seahorse Gully site about three quarters of a mile southwest of the main Pre-Dorset occupation and about sixty feet above sea level. The five Dorset houses found contrast significantly with the Pre-Dorset houses and consist of stone slabs arranged in a straight or "L-shaped" pattern. The slabs are sometimes set on edge. These flagstone "pavements" appear to have been inside the house and to have been the focus of indoor activities. One house had a hearth in the center of the pavement. The walls of the houses are usually not well defined. One house has a definite squarish outline, but the others contained only a few stones on the peripheries and sometimes are bounded by bedrock outcrops. The use of ice or sod in the walls is a good possibility. The two small Dorset houses are about fifteen feet long while the three, larger houses are between twenty-three and twenty-eight feet long and probably contained more than one family.

Artifacts in and around the houses were found either on the surface of the gravel which covers the area or to a depth of a few inches. Bone material and occasionally artifacts were frequently disposed of by placing them under the slabs of the pavement. The artifacts are typically Dorset and include: small bone harpoon heads with partially closed sockets; notched and triangular points; notched knives; burin-like tools; long, narrow microblades and rectangular cooking vessels of soapstone. None of the slate implements frequently found in Dorset sites were encountered.

The five Dorset houses were occupied about the same time, possibly about the time of Christ. Their spatial distribution suggests that only the two small houses were likely to have been occupied at exactly the same time, however. These people like their predecessors were sea mammal hunters. The difference between the Pre-Dorset and Dorset culture remains substantial, but the continuity between the two seems slightly stronger on the basis of their Seahorse Gully representatives. Besides a number of general continuities, the Pre-Dorset culture at Seahorse Gully contained several notched points, many notched knives and a slate implement - artifacts usually associated with Dorset culture.

At about 1000 A.D., the early Eskimo history of the central and eastern Arctic began to draw to a close. The Thule Eskimo whose culture had evolved in Alaska, began to spread eastward, gradually replacing the Dorset people and their culture. The Thule people were immediately ancestral to the modern central Eskimo. In Manitoba, the Thule culture is represented by only two harpoon heads. The Eskimos of the last few centuries are more strongly represented, however, and great numbers of their tent rings, kayak rests, caches and traps are found along the lower sections of Seahorse Gully ridge.

References:

DUMOND, D. E.

1965 On Eskaleutian Linguistics, Archaeology and Prehistory.
American Anthropologist, Vol. 67, No. 5, pp. 1231-1257, Menasha.

GIDDINGS, J. L.

1956 A Flint Site in Northernmost Manitoba. American Antiquity,
Vol. 21, No. 3, pp. 255-68. Salt Lake City.

IRVING, W. N.

1965 Preliminary Report on the Twin Lakes Site. Manuscript.
University of Manitoba.

LEE, H. A.

1960 Late Glacial and Postglacial Hudson Bay Sea Episode.
Science, Vol. 131, No. 3412, pp. 1609-1611. Washington, D.C.

RETURN REQUESTED

MANITOBA ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY,
Box 1171,
Winnipeg 1, Manitoba, Canada.