ARTIFACTS

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To those collectors of stone age tools who have graduated past the stage where only arrowpoints and stone hammers can be recognized, and have arrived at the point where they compare their finds with Old World material, intriguing mysteries seem to present themselves. But those who have read the "Golden Bough" will know how easy is the path to myth and magic, starting from the same point that science begins.

The temptation to leap to the belief that human occupation here follows a pattern similar to the Old World must be held in check. Consider well the difficulties. Certainly within the last 25000 years, probably less, Saskatchewan was under the ice cap. Those granites, limestones, basalts and quartzites were moved in from the north-east by the ice, and local material went along with the other material. Between the grinding action of the ice and rock material, and the action of the water released by the ice, not much of human handiwork, even had it been there, would now be recognizable as such. Wherever glacial meltwater lost speed, deposits were formed and over very large areas the tell was buried by such deposits. Human made material found on such deposits must then be postglacial in origin. I have seen and handled thousands of crude stone tools and I have never yet seen scratches on a flake scar surface. I have, indeed, some stone tools made of basalt on which the maker left some old surface, showing glacial scatches. The rule could be laid down that an artifact is not a paleolithic situation, and there are only two small unglaciated areas in Saskatchewan where that would be possible — the Rockglen triangle and the southwest portion of the Cypress hills.

In biology the development of an individual organism from a single cell has a well established relationship with the evolution of the species. Something like this is true of the stone working process. Historically from its earliest beginnings the art shows an evolution of methods which perhaps can be described sometime in more detail.

In the making of any tool, modern Neolithic man has to start from exactly the same point as his Paleolithic ancestor, i.e., the initial breaking down of the rock material by percussion. Undoubtedly with the more advanced tools, he would cut short in his methods. As there must have been in this area a perennial shortage of first-class materials like chalcedony and flint, these would be used for the smaller and better class tools. But with the second grade materials, like quartzite and basalt which he used so extensively for the larger tools, he followed paleolithic methods. As his life in Saskatchewan was basically the same as that of his paleolithic ancestors, that is, almost purely a hunting economy, those rougher tools were just as useful to him as to earlier man.

Even of the more specialized tools it is very risky to infer too much. "We are the heirs of all the ages", which includes the methods of working stone.

The chisel-edged buoin is such a specialized tool and they are found here. One, I have, came from the Mortlach midden and thus is comparatively modern.

In dressing a water-worn quartzite cobblestone, the first flake struck off is a circular or oval flake, one side with a flat flake scar; the other side the convex old surface. Perhaps the major proportion of these were discarded, but a fair number show use and work. Some have been used as cutting or chopping tools without any retouching; some are re-chipped as side scrapers; others are further processed all round and could have been used as choppers, scrapers or hide-dressing tools. Some are used for packing purposes. When you see these flakes in a territory, you know what's been going on there and what to look for.