

A Surface Collection From the Klein Site at Melfort

By ROBERT W. NERO
Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History

The scientific excavation of archaeological sites, as exemplified by the Mortlach Site report (Wettlaufer, 1955, *The Mortlach Site*, Dept. of Natural Resources, Regina, 113 pp.*), will provide us with a wealth of information about past peoples of Saskatchewan. The introduction of the scientific method in excavations in this area, with its emphasis on painstaking methods of study, need not, however, deter individuals with little training or time from contributing to the unfolding of the remarkable drama of human history which we are witnessing. One of the most fruitful archaeological tasks for which persons qualify is the collection of material found on the surface of the ground. That this material has a real and significant value is indicated by the statement by Will and Hecker (1944, *Upper Missouri River Valley Original Culture in North Dakota*, *D. Hist. Quart.*, 11:117) that their objective was to "... locate and list as many village sites in this area, before their surfaces have become either obliterated by cultivation or erosion and to preserve samples of potsherds and other artifacts from each individual site." Surface material, especially pottery and bone, is constantly undergoing deterioration through exposure and through manipulation by machinery. The need for the recovery of this material is far more pressing than for the excavation of that which lies deeply interred in the earth.

Surface finds occur as the result of exposure of the subsoil through wind and water erosion, farming practices and other human activities involving movement of soil, e.g. road-building or grading, sand and gravel excavation, etc. The one thing which most surface archaeological materials have in common is a lack of relative position within the soil, and, whatever stratigraphy existed, has been lost. Consequently, in most instances surface collections represent a mixture of cultures. Sometimes it is possible to determine on the basis of similarities of shape and

slight shoulder; A7 broad side-notch-substance that surface finds represent a single culture. Nevertheless, even where this is not so, surface material supplies valuable data on the geographic distribution of particular cultures. Wettlaufer stated: "Not only does this material reveal the location of archaeological sites but it is an important and necessary factor in plotting the distribution of any group of people over the province in prehistoric times." (1951, *An archaeological survey of Saskatchewan No. 1*, unpublished).

A surface collection recently donated to the Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History by Dennis and Larry Klein of Melfort, Saskatchewan may be used as a demonstration. The collection received by the museum consists of: 4 fully grooved hammers or mauls; 5 notched slab "hoes"; 35 projectile points; 8 projectile point fragments; 6 scrapers; 8 flake knives; 17 ovate blades; 1 musket ball; 1 brass projectile point; 1 large iron knife (Hudson Bay trade); 90 flint flakes.

All of this material was reported to have been found on the surface of a field on the edge of Stony Creek near Melfort, Sask. E¹/₂ 24, 46, 19, W2nd), by Mr. Erwin L. Klein and sons, Dennis and Larry. A series of projectile points, etc., from this collection may be seen in the photo. They have been arranged in a sequence based on their form, with some older types in the upper row and some more recent material in the lower row. The sequence of material in between does *not* indicate any known cultural relationship. Note the variety of point shapes. Generally speaking, these points may be classified as follows (using purely descriptive terminology): A1, 2 lanceolate; A3 indented base, stemless; A4, 5, 6 parallel-sided stemmed,

* Copies of *The Mortlach Site* may be obtained on request from the Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History.

ed; B1 to 7 side-notched, some with concave base; C1 to 8 corner-notched or stemmed; D1 to 3 variant side- and corner-notched; D4, 5 notched triangular; D6 brass point; D7 lead musket ball.

This variety of projectile points clearly indicates that a number of different peoples occupied the site, presumably over a long period of time. Some of the points illustrated are so distinctive as to be diagnostic of particular "cultures." For example, A1 and 2 resemble types of points which have been found at a number of "Archaic" sites in the eastern United States; A4 matches "Yuma" or specifically "Scottsbluff Points," again, an "early man" type of artifact. Points C1 to 8 look very much like the "Pelican Lake" points shown by Wettlaufer (1955. The Mortlach Site, p. 107) and D4 and 5 have much in common with his "Prairie Side-notched" (p. 22).

The brass point, D6, represents the historic period, as does the lead musket ball. It would seem, then, on the basis of this collection of artifacts, that this site has been occupied by man from the very early period to late historic times. The discovery of this variety of points at a site on the very edge of the forested area of the province is exciting news and extends our knowledge of the distribution of prehistoric Plains cultures. This material points further to a need for archaeological surveys in the north as well as in the south.

A further utilization of surface material is obtained by inspection of

the stone material involved. At excavated Mortlach Site, 272 out of 1606 flakes (or 16 per cent) from all levels were brown flint (Klein River type) or "chalcedony." At Klein site the stone used is mainly a kind of chert, chalcedony being presented only by one scraper, ovate blade and two flakes, a mere three per cent of the chipped stone artifacts and flakes which were collected. This difference in the use of a particular material is probably based on availability, the primary source of this flint being in North Dakota. A simple distribution of the percentages of this kind of flint in collections throughout the province would be of particular interest. Thus, some evidence of the use and distribution of stone materials might be gained. Distribution studies of material of specific limited origin as well as of type of artifacts would be extremely useful and could be done on the basis of surface materials alone.

There is undoubtedly a considerable amount of information which might be obtained on the basis of collections already made by interested individuals throughout the province. To the extent that this material is made available for study our knowledge of the distribution of prehistoric peoples in this province will be greatly advanced. With a sufficient number of collections such as the one described above, it would be possible even now to draw many conclusions regarding the history of past cultures.

Complementary Roles of the Professional and Amateur Archaeologist

An abstract by R. W. Nero of William A. Ritchie's article "Each to the Other" published in *American Antiquity*, 22:169-170, 1956, as No. 1 in a series of articles on the role of the professional and amateur archaeologist.

"... the growth of interest in prehistoric man within the population as a whole . . . seems to reflect an intellectual curiosity which may temper in some measure the predominantly technological and commercial bent of our civilization. A large supporting public interest, furthermore, serves to sustain the professional archaeologist in his investigations

"But there is an inherent grave

danger here, too, for this surge of interest and activity on the part of ever increasing numbers of people, imposes a threat of early destruction of the limited, precious, and often unique sources of our data of prehistory.

"It must be obvious to all that the means of mutually supporting behavior between amateur and professional workers must be found and explored together and agreed upon. In