

A REVIEW by R. W. Nero, Ph.D.

A Flint Site in Northernmost Manitoba

By J. L. GIDDINGS, Jr., *American Antiquity*, 21:255-268:1956

A small collection of flint artifacts evidently relating to material found at early Alaskan and Greenland sites was recently found near the North Knife River west of Churchill, Man. The site was first located in 1952 by a Chipewyan Indian named Thomas Jawbone, who brought 13 flint artifacts to J. H. Smith of Churchill. In 1953 the author visited the site with Jawbone and another man and obtained an additional four dozen flints. These 55 or so pieces plus "thousands of raw flakes and cores" examined in the field and laboratory form the basis for the paper. Detailed descriptions and excellent illustrations of the flints add much to the value of this contribution from a practically unknown area of the country. The article includes observations of archaeological interest made in the Northwest Territories but it is primarily concerned with the material from the North Knife River. This report has particular significance in regard to Saskatchewan archaeology since the Knife River connects with one of the main waterways between Hudson Bay and this province. It seems likely that similar material will be found along the course of the Churchill River.

Dr. Giddings is well-known for his studies on the archaeology of the far north. He has a personal acquaintance with several of the sites he discusses and especially with the unusual implements which characterize the Knife River Site and which have also been found at various Arctic sites. Generally, the artifacts from these early sites tend to be small in size and rather finely worked. The most prominent kind of artifact at the Manitoba site is the "burin". This term comes from Old World archaeology and has been applied to similar tools only recently reported in North America. (Burins are variously-shaped flints with a stout angular point on one end obtained by striking a vertical blow at the point of a blade or flake, thus releasing a narrow flake down the length of the implement. The resultant flake-scar is called the

"burin facet." The chisel-like acute angle formed at the tip or corner is the burin point or working edge. Burins frequently show signs of removal of successive flakes as if for resharpening. Presumably, burins were used as gouging or shaping implements. Burins have also been called "gravers," but in North America this term has been mainly applied to a flake or blade bearing a point produced by unifacial pressure flaking on both sides of the point, the underside remaining untouched.)

The 13 pieces found by Jawbone included burins and "side-blades" ("knives" with one edge more finely retouched, as if for side insertion rather than base insertion) and this fact encouraged the author to visit the site. The area in which the artifacts were found was called in Chipewyan *Thyazzi* (sandy), and according to Jawbone was a traditional place for intercepting migrating caribou herds. The site lies about 20 miles up from the mouth of the North Knife River and about one mile away from its banks. The total count for the site includes 17 burins, 13 burin spalls (the flakes removed in preparation of a burin); 8 bifaced side-blades, and a few generalized end-blades and scrapers. "Microblades" (very small, minutely-flaked blades found at several Arctic sites) were absent, as was material representing later cultures, e.g., polished slate, potsherds, and lamp or stone dish fragments. On the basis of the presence or absence of the above items, the author compares the Knife River site with sites in Greenland, the Canadian Arctic, Alaska and Asia, all these sites seeming to be among the earlier ones found in the Arctic region. Giddings tentatively classifies the Arctic sites according to the emphasis on these distinctive tools. The North Knife River site is considered to be a "burin, side-blade site", matching a site at Sarqaq in Greenland.

It should be pointed out that Giddings' report is based mainly on surface material found in a number
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A FLINT SITE IN N. MANITOBA (continued)

of sand blow-outs. The apparent similarity of stone-working technique plus the limited number of artifact types were interpreted by the author as indicating a single culture and a single period. As Giddings said, a great deal more digging and analytical work will have to be done to test the cultural relationships he has proposed. Nevertheless, it is apparent that examination of surface material from similar sites across the continent will help to trace both the time and paths of diffusion of persistent cultural traits. Surface material has played an important role in archaeological progress in the past and will continue to do so for several reasons. Many sites consist of surface material only, owing to erosion of soil by wind and water. In "pure" sites, i.e., sites of single people at a single time, all the material is related and little is lost by its reduction to a surface position. At mixed sites, where 2 or more cultures have become mixed by loss of stratigraphy, separation is often still possible on the basis of typological information obtained at other stratified sites. Distributional information based on point types, etc., accrues from surface material regardless of the nature of the site and distributional data is one of the important goals of archaeology. (Where and when did these people come and go? With what environmental features

can we associate the distribution of a particular culture?) To a large extent, owing mainly to the amount of land surface disturbed by man and nature, our knowledge of the distribution of prehistoric peoples will have to be based on surface material. In agricultural areas much of this information is being rapidly lost due to destruction of fragile material, particularly pottery. Pottery, because of its original plasticity, is our most cogent link with the near past. Unfortunately, it is subject to deterioration upon exposure to the elements and upon continual transport by farm machinery.

Remnants of former cultures are a part of our heritage and may well be considered a natural resource, though intellectual rather than physical. Conservation of this resource is an increasingly important need. Actual protection and preservation of sub-soil for study by future workers is an obvious need; the accumulation and safekeeping of surface material for future study may be less so. Collection of surface material (numbered and catalogued for future reference) from sand blow-outs or from cultivated lands, is an important conservation activity. It is in this respect that the non-professional archaeologist can make the greatest contribution to the knowledge of early people in the province and in North America.

TREASURER'S REPORT by E. L. Fox

As of May 1, we have taken in \$1560.00, a sum considerably below what it costs to publish the **Blue Jay** for the year. To make up the remainder, we must have new members or renewals for 1956. We have tried several ways to get new members and renewals, but the personal approach seems to be the best. There are still over 400 people who were members last year who have not sent in their dollar. Sorry, but we cannot send them the **Blue Jay** until they do. If you know one of them, or if your neighbor is interested get his dollar and send it in for him. There are extra copies of the first issue and we would be pleased to send them out. So let's get down to business and each one of us get a new member and maintain the present size and standard of the **Blue Jay**. See you all at the summer meeting.

ANNUAL MEETING at Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History, Regina, October 27, 1956

Dr. Douglas Leechman, Director of Western Canadiana has tentatively accepted to be our guest speaker. He will speak on the migration of man from Siberia into North America. Dr. Leechman has devoted most of his time during the past ten years to this subject. It is of particular interest to us because the western prairies were on the earliest route of migration.

Plan to attend our annual meeting. If you wish to present a paper or bring up any question, write to our president, Mr. W. Yanchinski, Naicam.