

ARCHAEOLOGY

Stone Points With Grooves Prove Puzzle to Scientists

Alaskan Slate Point Regarded as Modern While Flint Piece of Same Type is Found Under Bone of Mammoth

STONE points strongly resembling the famous "Folsom dart points," of reputed great antiquity, but with evidence of comparative recency, have been found in two localities in Alaska by Dr. Ales Hrdlicka, anthropologist of the U. S. National Museum. The new finds, shown by Dr. Hrdlicka to a Science Service staff member, are rubbed out of slate instead of being chipped out of flint like the Folsom points, but allowing for these differences of material and workmanship they show a great similarity in shape and in the basic idea underlying their construction.

When first found several years ago, associated with the bones of an extinct bison species in a New Mexico fossil bed, the Folsom points were hailed as unique among stone missile-heads, both ancient and modern, found in America. The outstanding feature, not shared by any other arrow or dart heads, was a broad groove down each side. This was interpreted at first as a "blood groove," to insure freer bleeding by the stricken game; but it is also possible that its purpose was merely to make for easier penetration by taking off a certain amount of unnecessary thickness.

But now the same kind of a groove appears on the points discovered by Dr. Hrdlicka during his Alaskan explorations last summer. There are five such points, some of them fragmentary, but all of them showing the highly specialized groove in most unmistakable fashion. One of them was found at a village site on the mainland, the rest on the Alaskan peninsula.

What gives special interest to the find and suggests a strong probability that these slate points are fairly modern, strongly though they resemble the Folsom flints, is the discovery by Dr. Hrdlicka of a blue bead, of undoubted Russian origin, within a foot of one of the points and at the same level in the earth.

Of interest in the same connection are several other points which were discovered in eastern Canada some time

ago but which were not described in a scientific publication until recently. They were found in Algonkian Indian campsites. These, like the Alaskan points, are of slate, and they bear the same shallow groove on each side. These points also are believed to be of modern date.

Right on the heels of the discovery by Dr. Ales Hrdlicka of slate points resembling the "Folsom type" of flints, but of apparently modern date, comes the discovery of another flint point, unquestionably of the "Folsom type," buried under the shoulder blade of a mammoth, and therefore apparently ancient.

Discovered in Nebraska

The new find was made in the course of excavating the skeleton of a mammoth which had been discovered in Nuckolls County, Nebraska, and is described in a report to Science Service by J. D. Figgins, director of the Colorado Museum of Natural History. The excavation was conducted by A. M. Brooking, director of the Hastings Museum, Hastings, Nebraska.

"The formation in which the skeleton was found consists of stratified layers of sand and gravel, of varying thickness, separated by thinner strata of sandy silt and dark gray clay or marl," Mr. Figgins states. The several feet of these deposits are overlaid with aeolian sand, capped with prairie loess; the overlying deposits having a total thickness of 16 feet. Layers of coarser sand and gravel are exposed below the skeleton, to a depth of about five feet, where they disappear in the sands and boulders of a normally dry stream channel. At times this channel carries a large volume of water, and through undercutting and caving both the skeleton and a vertical section of the deposit were exposed."

Mr. Brooking and his assistants went to work to remove the skeleton. Clearing the material away from the massive left shoulder blade, Mr. Brooking instructed one of his assistants, Junior Brooks, to cut passages through the earth beneath the bone, through which

to pass bandages by which it could be removed without breaking it.

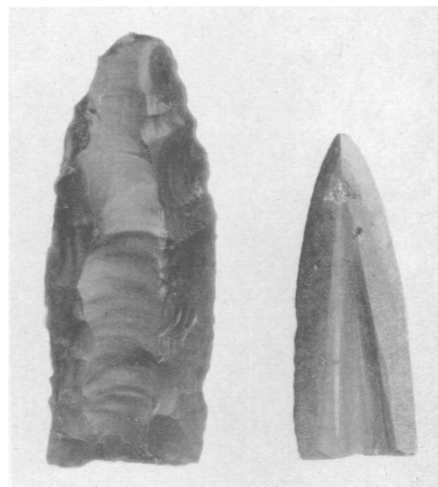
It was while at work digging these little tunnels under the shoulder blade that Mr. Brooking encountered the flint point, about midway beneath the bone. He pulled it out before he realized what he had found. Present at the moment were Mr. Brooking and another assistant, Myron Youngblood.

"While it is unfortunate that the artifact was removed from the position where it was uncovered," Mr. Figgins comments, "the nature of the undisturbed matrix, its situation and the integrity of the discoverers exclude doubt of its original association with the mammoth skeleton. It must be regarded as contemporaneous."

The point is quite similar to the original "Folsom type" dart point found associated with the bones of an extinct species of bison at Folsom, N. M., some years ago. It is of the same shape, and has the same characteristic broad groove along each side. This particular point had been badly worn and blunted, and shows signs of resharpening.

Association of human tools and weapons with the bones of extinct animals in this country was originally considered evidence of extreme antiquity of man in America—possibly a hundred thousand or over a half million years. Now there is a tendency among scientists to consider also the possibility that some of these animals—even mammoths and giant ground sloths—may have survived until a few scores of thousands of years ago.

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ENIGMATIC

Here are the two dart points which scientists are at a loss to correlate. On the left is the "Folsom type" dart point found associated with a mammoth skeleton; the other is one of the side-grooved slate points discovered by Dr. Hrdlicka in Alaska.