

ARCHAEOLOGY

Discoveries Tell of Life in Arctic Thousand Years Ago

Goggles and Knife Handles of Wood, Human Hair, All Perfectly Preserved, Dug up at Oldest Eskimo Settlement

NEW EVIDENCE of what life was like in the Far North a thousand years and more ago has been dug out of Alaskan soil by Moreau B. Chambers, young archaeologist, excavating for the Smithsonian Institution. Mr. Chambers has just returned to Washington, following a summer spent at the oldest known Eskimo settlements in America, on St. Lawrence Island.

The Arctic ice box, as the frozen soil of this region has been called, has proved more strikingly than ever its efficiency at preserving household goods and trappings of ancient Eskimo life. Out of the mound that represents a very old village, Mr. Chambers dug such things as knives, completely preserved. Handles of wood are still bound to stone blades by baleen thongs. The blades might be expected to have survived so long. To find wood so perfectly kept is an archaeological wonder.

A little brush is another relic of rare interest. The handle is a stick of wood. To this is tied a bunch of short hair—human hair.

Finger Rests

Ingenuity of Eskimo craftwork in the ancient times is shown by a knife such as women used for cutting meat and cutting out garments. These knives were the Eskimo woman's scissors. They were shaped like a modern butcher's mincing knife, and the blade of stone fitted in a slot at the base of the long handle. The unusual feature of the knife found by Mr. Chambers is that the handle has a scooped-out hole on top, where the index finger would fit comfortably. On the side of the handle are several depressions made for the fingers. A modern Eskimo who happened to be nearby when the knife was displayed said this must be a "little girl's knife" especially made so that some young Eskimo would not cut herself. The carving on the ivory handle was admirably designed to follow the contours of the finger rests.

Mr. Chambers also unearthed wooden

goggles which look like masks and which were used by the Eskimos to protect their eyes from the glare on the snow. In addition there are numerous harpoon heads of fossil ivory and any number of articles which are puzzles to archaeologists and to modern Eskimos alike. With the new expedition's discoveries, the Smithsonian Institution now has the finest collection of ancient Eskimo material in existence.

The new articles fill out the story of what happened in the Far North in prehistoric times, it was explained by

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912

OF SCIENCE NEWS LETTER published weekly at Baltimore, Md., for October 1, 1931.

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District of Columbia }
Before me, a Notary Public in and for the District of Columbia aforesaid, personally appeared Watson Davis, who, having been duly sworn according to the law, deposes and says that he is the Editor of the SCIENCE NEWS LETTER and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, to wit:

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Watson Davis,
Editor.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 9th day of October, 1931.
[SEAL]

Charles L. Wade.
(My commission expires April 6, 1933.)

Henry B. Collins, Jr., of the Smithsonian, who has made several expeditions to the same territory and who discovered the villages where Mr. Chambers has been excavating.

Another young archaeologist, James A. Ford, who accompanied Mr. Chambers on his northern expedition, is remaining at Point Barrow, Alaska, through the winter, so as to be able to spend the full season next summer in excavations. Ordinarily, so much time is spent in reaching northern points after the ice breaks up, that the digging season is brief. Mr. Ford expects to excavate at Point Barrow, which is one of the key points of ancient Eskimo culture.

Science News Letter, October 17, 1931

In prehistoric times, Polynesian natives made bamboo sailing charts and sailed their canoes over long distances at sea.

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