

ARCHAEOLOGY

Most Delicate Flint Work

► MORE than 1,500 tiny, delicate flint objects, unearthed on Cape Denbigh overlooking Norton Bay, most northwesterly extension of Bering Sea, were the work of a Stone-Age people who lived there thousands of years ago. The find was made by Dr. J. L. Giddings, Jr., of the University of Alaska, and was reported in New York to the New York Academy of Sciences.

These delicately worked objects are the "most meticulous work in flint" known, Dr. Giddings said. One thin stone blade, less than an inch and a quarter long (smaller than a paper clip), is worked with more than 20 parallel, diagonal scars on each face. Of the 1,500 objects, there is not a single large stone tool—no hammer, no adze, no grinding slab. Eskimo guides of the expedition believe the objects must have been the work of a race of "little people" who lived there in ages past.

The tiny objects have little or no simi-

larity to the work of Eskimos of the region, Dr. Giddings said. They do, however, resemble the work of Stone Age Man in the Old World. Some of the points are very much like the famous Folsom and Yuma points, work of the oldest inhabitants of America's Southwest.

At the surface of the site where these ancient objects were unearthed, Dr. Giddings found a thick layer of sod and bunch grass. Few cultural remains were found in this layer. But directly below it he found polished slate and other objects of a people Dr. Giddings calls the Neo-Eskimo. The Neo-Eskimos lived there for several centuries and disappeared about 300 years ago.

Below this layer and separated from it in some parts by sod, he found a bed of fine-grained loam containing stone lamps and flaked stone tools of basalt which were the work of the earliest known Eskimo people, called the Palae-Eskimo.

Digging deeper, Dr. Giddings found a layer of sandy silt seven feet deep. In this silt, no sign of human occupation whatever was found.

Under the silt was bedrock coated with

a pencil-thin layer of clay. On the surface of this thin clay layer is where Dr. Giddings found the tiny flint tools made by such skilled workmen thousands of years ago.

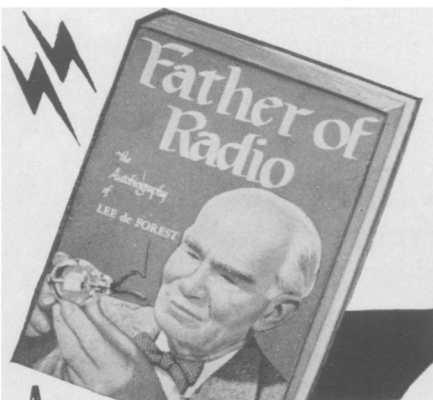
Examination of the geology of the site shows, Dr. Giddings reported, that the little flint tools were dropped there in a long-ago day when Alaska was permanently frozen and had a climate more like that of the glacial age than that of the present. Since then there has been a warmer period and a second cold period before the relatively stable climatic conditions marking the appearance of Eskimo cultures.

Folds in the clay layer form a "solifluction lobe" formed by the thawing of a fine-grained soil below an elastic sod cover and above the hard-frozen permafrost. The Denbigh flints were already there when these solifluction lobes were forming.

The digging by Dr. Giddings this past summer was under the auspices of a joint "Bering Straits Expedition" of the University of Pennsylvania Museum, the Danish National Museum and the University of Alaska with a Viking Fund grant.

Dr. Giddings has brought back materials suitable for dating on the radioactive carbon calendar and has submitted them for dating by this means. These people are much more ancient than the Palae-Eskimos, who are not older than 1,000 years as dated by the radiocarbon calendar.

Science News Letter, November 11, 1950



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