

THE CAMPUS SITE: A PREHISTORIC CAMP AT FAIRBANKS, ALASKA. By CHARLES M. MOBLEY. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1991. xx + 104 p., 2 maps, 44 illus., bib., glossary. Hardbound, US\$30.00; softbound, US\$20.00.

The microblade assemblage from the Campus site, located on the campus of the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, provided the first evidence of marked similarities between artifact complexes found in Alaska and Asia (Nelson, 1935, 1937). As the author notes, much has been written about the Campus site microblade cores, but the remainder of the site inventory and details of the site stratigraphy have been neglected. To correct this inadequacy, Mobley undertook the herculean task of bringing together all of the excavational data on the site and presenting a detailed analysis of the artifact collections.

The site had been excavated in 1933-35, 1936, 1966, 1967 and 1971 and was, for the most part, a salvage type of operation, occasioned as the campus of the university gradually expanded towards the edge of the bluff on which the site is located. Most of the site is today under a paved parking lot. During the early years, 1933-36, the degree of excavational control was quite variable and curation restricted mainly to finished artifacts. Better excavation procedures were instituted during the seasons of 1966-71 and all recovered specimens were retained for study. While all available artifacts from the excavations were utilized in the description of the Campus site inventory, only the collections from the excavations of 1966-71 were utilized to determine artifact frequencies within the site.

In this concise report, Mobley begins by introducing the reader to the site and provides a brief history of the excavations. In his description and analysis of the artifacts from the site, the author makes a major contribution to northern prehistory. Each artifact type is well illustrated by either line drawings or photographs. The detailed analysis of the steps in microblade core preparation, production of microblades and core rejuvenation is one of the better treatments available in the literature.

The associated faunal remains, described here for the first time, consisted of small bone fragments, many of which were burned and calcined. Identified species included bear, beaver, hare, wolf, probable bison and unidentified bird. The absence of caribou is noteworthy, but may reflect the season of occupation.

Since dating of the site with its frontal, wedge-shaped microblade core complex is critical, particularly since this technology has been regarded as the trademark of the earliest cultural tradition in Alaska (West, 1981), an appraisal of the radiocarbon date estimates is warranted. I should preface my remarks by noting that Mobley had to rely on samples that were less than ideal. All of the small fragments of bone or charcoal utilized for radiocarbon dating came from dispersed contexts. In addition, many of the bone samples and charcoal samples had to be combined to provide sufficient mass for dating. The probability for error was thus multiplied. A combined sample of five pieces of bone from 10-15 cm below surface provided an AMS date of 650 ± 200 B.P. (Beta-10879), a small charcoal sample from 15-20 cm yielded a date 2860 ± 180 B.P. (Beta-4260), while a combined sample of three pieces of charcoal from different locations within an excavation unit provided a date of 2725 ± 125 B.P. (Beta-7075) at a depth of 20-25 cm. Also at a depth of 20-25 cm a charcoal sample yielded an AMS date of 40 ± 110 B.P. (Beta-10878). From two different locations on the 20-30 cm level charcoal samples yielded dates of 240 ± 120 B.P. (Beta-7224) and 3500 ± 140 B.P. (Beta-7223). Samples from deeper in the deposit were insufficient for dating. Mobley (p. 75) states that the three young dates of 650 ± 200 , 40 ± 110 and 240 ± 110 B.P. "... may represent early university activity such as the freshman bonfires of the 1920s and 1930s, which must have produced considerable charcoal." The dates of 2725 ± 125 , 2860 ± 180 and 3500 ± 140 B.P., however, were not similarly disregarded as possibly being the result of younger carbon introduced into the site, e.g., wildfires. In a site with a cultural depth of less than one metre there is every reason to question whether the three older dates are any more reliable than the younger ones. Studies conducted by Anderson (1982) at the Washington Creek Experimental Forest in interior

Alaska clearly revealed that vegetation succession, each initiated by wildfire, was evident throughout the soil column, from the modern period to the early part of the Holocene. The question arises then as to whether the charcoal used for dating the Campus site was the result of human activity or of wildfire.

From a typological referent, the presence in the Campus site of frontal, wedge-shaped microblade cores (virtually identical to those of the Denali Complex [West, 1981] or the Paleoarctic tradition [Anderson, 1970]) at an age range of 3500-2700 B.P. doesn't fit into the technological sequence of microblade core evolution over the last 8000-7000 years. By approximately 8000-7000 B.P. conical to prismatic core types replaced the frontal, wedge-shaped microblade core type in many areas of Alaska (Aigner, 1978; Ackerman, 1987). Small blocky to roughly prismatic microblade cores are types associated with the widespread Arctic Small Tool tradition (circa 4000 B.P.) (Giddings, 1964). In other words, there were technological innovations in platform/core face preparation, e.g., from a frontal to a conical or prismatic core to increase the areal circumference for blade detachment, and rotation of the core to create multiple platforms to drive off blades from opposing directions. These and other innovations, evident in the early to middle Holocene, resulted in cores quite different from the microblade cores found at the Campus site. It is quite possible that the production of microblades continued into relatively recent times, but the technology involved would have employed one of the later microblade core types. In conclusion, the Campus site microblade core types should belong to a much earlier horizon than that suggested by the selected radiocarbon dates.

Most of the assemblage, such as the lanceolate to oblong lanceolate projectile points, is comparable to that found in component II of the Dry Creek site dated at $10\,690 \pm 250$ B.P. (Powers *et al.*, 1983). The side-notched projectile points at the site, however, undoubtedly reflect a later occupation, as they do not appear until component IV in the Dry Creek site, with age estimates of 3430 ± 75 , 3655 ± 60 and 4670 ± 95 B.P. (Powers *et al.*, 1983). This later occupation of the Campus site has, undoubtedly, been blurred by cryogenic processes.

While I disagree with the author on the age of the site and on some aspects of the site assemblage, I do not hesitate to strongly recommend this monograph to those interested in northern prehistory. It is an excellent descriptive study and presents the data on the Campus site for the first time in full detail. The data is there for all to digest and disagree or agree with as they see fit.

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