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Editor's Note

With this issue, we return to the usual eclectic mix of articles that frequently characterizes the Bulletin. Alan Leveillee and Mark Lance start off with an important discussion on what stone piles, radiocarbon dates and diagnostic artifacts do, and do not, tell us. Bill Taylor follows with a discussion of thunderbird representations on artifacts and as petroglyphs, and provides several new examples from Southeastern Massachusetts. Chris Donta's article describes a recently discovered cache of preforms made from Jefferson rhyolite in the Connecticut River Valley and discusses the possibility that these may be of PaleoIndian origin. Finally, Jeff Boudreau and I continue our reporting of PaleoIndian sites and isolated finds, this time with a focus on Southeast Massachusetts.

This issue also marks the end of my tenure as Bulletin editor. It has been a great privilege and pleasure to work with many friends and colleagues over the past six years, and to see so many good articles find their place in the published literature. These have ranged from CRM site reports to synopses of doctoral dissertations, from the evaluation of old collections to thoughtful commentary on current topics. All are part of the healthy and ongoing effort to understand Massachusetts rich archaeological heritage and to share it with a broad audience. My sincere thanks go to all those who have contributed articles, helped get the Bulletin proofed and mailed, and to those who read and used it. I wish my editorial successor, Dr. Curtiss Hoffman, the same good luck I have had in keeping the Bulletin an active and important part of New England archaeology.

James W. Bradley
Stone Piles and a Late Archaic Date from Site SK 155, Rhode Island

Alan Leveillee and Mark Lance

Introduction

There exists at present a significant polarity of perspective regarding the origins, cultural and temporal affiliations, and functions of stone pile features across Northeastern United States. The issue is being discussed and debated among a variety of interested parties including Native Americans (Harris et al 2005; USET 2002), applied anthropologists (Leveillee 1997a, 1997b, 1998, 2001), and a range of other advocates. All have an investment in, and interpretations of, these culturally constructed piles of stone. In the interest of contributing to the ongoing dialogue through empirical data, and with the hope that those data will not be overly generalized, we offer the following summary of archaeological investigations of a Native American site within the Great Swamp in South Kingstown, Rhode Island.

The SK 155 Site

The Native American SK155 archaeological site was discovered in 2006 when archaeologists of The Public Archaeology Laboratory, Inc. (PAL) conducted a cultural resource management survey along a utility line bisecting approximately 26 miles of near-interior southern Rhode Island. This is a landscape that was Narragansett Indian Country for a thousand years prior to European settlement. Some of it still is.

After the initial discovery that indicated ancestors of today’s Narragansetts occupied the margins of the Great Swamp (Figure 1), we recommended that the SK 155 Site be subject to archaeological evaluation to determine its eligibility for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The site examination took place.

Figure 1. The Great Swamp, South Kingston, RI (source USGS).
Four (1-x-1m) excavation units were placed within SK 155. EDI was centered on the Phase I SK155 test pit, wherein a hearth feature was initially noted. ED2 was placed adjacent to Array 1-E test pit from the Phase I(c) survey; which had the highest count of argillite chipping debris among positive pits. The 1-x-1m EDI further exposed the hearth feature (Feature I), and a large stone that may have been a part of a hearth ring. The feature appeared at the Apz and Bl interface (approximately 20 cm), surrounded by a halo of reddish colored burnt B soil that extended northwesterly and northeasterly beyond the limits of the unit. EDI produced twelve pieces of argillite chipping debris, one argillite scraper, and one fragment of quartz shatter (fire-cracked), in the plow zone.

Approximately 30cm to the north of EU1, a granite boulder protruded from the ground surface. It was decided to open two additional units, ED3 and ED4, to cover the projected northwesterly and northeasterly extent of the hearth, and to connect to the large boulder that the feature may have been set against. As a result, ED3 was an odd size, 1.4-x-0.8 m, in order to more effectively cover the area of the projected hearth feature and the gap to the boulder (Figure 3, next page). ED4 was 1-x-1m, less a 5 cm corner where it intersected with EU1. ED3 indicated the hearth feature did not extend far to the northwest. In total, fourteen argillite and three quartz flakes (chipping debris) were recovered in ED3. ED4, however, showed that Feature 1 conformed to the shape of the boulder along its eastern edge. The hearth feature fill extended, in plan, into the

in the summer and fall of 2007 (Banister et al. 2007).

Forty-nine test pits were excavated across the SK 155 Site, of which thirty-three were placed on the 5 meter (m) site examination grid (Figure 2). The remaining test pits were judgmentally placed on the axis of the transmission line to provide more precise coverage of the possible locations of planned new transmission line poles. Ten of the test pits (including three of the judgmental test pits) contained cultural materials, with argillite chipping debris dominating the small assemblage. Test pit N100 E85 yielded a quartzite tool fragment. It is a blade section that was broken and then re-used as a scraper. The scraper was recovered in a disturbed vertical context and therefore may have traveled from its original or primary deposition. Judgmental test pit (JTP) 2 had one piece of chopping debris of undetermined material and one argillite preform fragment, and JTP 7 yielded one piece of quartz chipping debris. Each of these test pits yielded several pieces of argillite chipping debris as well.
EU2 contained no evidence of features. However, it did produce the largest amount of chipping debris; ninety-eight pieces of argillite, four quartzite, and one rhyolite. Some of the argillite appeared to have been subjected to burning, either having been heat-treated or discarded into a fire. EU2 also yielded an argillite tool blank and one preform from 20-30 cmbd in the Apz. An Attleboro Red Felsite Neville projectile point (Figure 5, next page) and a granitic abrader were recovered from between 30-40 cmbd, well into the B subsoils. One piece of calcined bone, too small to identify further, was also among the EU2 assemblage.

The total lithic assemblage for the SK 155 Site was 234 pieces of chipping debris, of which 219 were argillite, thirteen quartz, and two rhyolite. There were eight tools recovered; two argillite blanks, one argillite scraper, one argillite preform, one argillite biface, one quartzite biface, one granitic abrader, one Attleboro Red Felsite Neville projectile point and one quartz biface fragment. There were fifty-five pieces of chipping debris in the subsoil, along with the Neville point. Charcoal samples were taken from each of the units.

The SK155 Site contains two features. Feature 1, the hearth, is set between a large boulder (1.4 m diameter) and a line of stones. Associated cultural material included chipping debris and bifacial-flaked tool fragments. A fragment of charcoal was submitted for radiocarbon (AMS) dating, yielding an age for the feature of 4340 ± 40 years BP (Beta-233667).

Feature 2 is the ring of stones placed upon the same glacial boulder that is proximal to Feature 1. The piled stones that constitute Feature 2 were near the surface, surrounded by and within a plowed soil stratum. It is an apparently intentional grouping of stones, all of which are too small to have been set aside during field clearing or plowing. Narragansett
Tribal representatives in the field interpreted the stone cluster feature as ceremonial, based upon its locational attributes in relation to the swamp and the alignment of several of the perimeter rocks lining the feature fill, generally toward the southwest. The southwest being significant in Narragansett oral tradition as the location of Cautantowwit's House, the place of spiritual origin of the Tribe, and the place to which the spirits of the dead return (Simmons 1986).

It is important to point out that, while it may be reasonable to speculate that Feature 2 and Feature 1 are related spatially (horizontally if not stratigraphically), they are unlikely to be related chronologically. The vertical separation between the [dated] hearth in intact subsoils, and the [undated] ring of stones atop the glacial boulder within and surrounded by plowzone topsoils, raises serious doubt about shared temporality. While one might argue that the two features *could hypothetically* have been constructed during the same site occupation, the disparity in their verticality, especially on a site with evidence for multiple temporal components, supports that they result from depositional events separated by many years. Those who would use the SK 155 Site as a case for the confirmation that constructed stone piles have been definitively demonstrated to be ceremonial and that they can now be dated as early as 4,340 years ago, would be interpreting the data beyond reasonable limits. It is difficult to sustain a scenario where the Feature 2 ring could remain intact throughout periods of plowing. It is more likely that the stones atop the boulder postdate the plowing episodes. The stones of Feature 2 appear to drape over the boulder top; a position difficult to maintain (for several thousand years) if the ground surface was as low as the adjacent hearth the date from Feature 1 indicates (see Figure 4).

The SK 155 Site can be attributed to the Late Archaic Period, based on the Feature 1 radiocarbon date of 4340 ± 40 years BP (Beta-233667). The Attleboro Red Felsite Neville projectile point might indicate occupation in the Middle Archaic Period, but may also reflect Late Archaic collection and reuse of the artifact. Non-local lithics (hornfels, rhyolite) suggest another Native American reoccupation into the Woodland Period. Site activity represented by the assemblage includes a concentrated focus on stone tool maintenance, hunting, and collecting. The site is situated topographically in an ideal location for observation of the swamp margins and lower elevations. Based upon the concentrated foci of deposits and limited features, we believe the site was created during short-duration occupations, likely measured in hours rather than days. As noted above, the site may also have been occupied during the Middle Archaic and Woodland periods. Also noted is the Narragansett Indian DTHPO's interpretation that Feature 1 reflects ceremonial importance, marking a relationship between the swamp ecosystem and the site's landscape and topographic aspect orientation to the southwest, towards Cautantowwit's House.

**Interpretations and Actions**

The SK 155 Site is a concentrated deposit of low to medium density lithics and two features that are proximal to one another. One of the features

![Figure 4. Stones (Feature 2) placed atop the glacial boulder on the SK 155 site.](image-url)
Figure 5. Neville point of Attleboro red felsite is a hearth. It is set between a large boulder that is visible above and extends beneath the surface to a depth of approximately 1 m. Several stones outline the perimeter of the feature, at approximately 40 cm below the surface (Figure 3). The second feature is a ring of stones placed on the top of the large glacial boulder, beside which the Late Archaic hearth had been built (Figure 4).

The SK155 Site is situated topographically in an ideal location for observation of the swamp's margins and lower elevations. It was possibly occupied during the Middle Archaic, Late Archaic, and Woodland periods. The identified features on the site are of concern to the Narragansett Indian DTHPO, who has indicated that they may reflect ceremonial activity marking a relationship between the swamp ecosystem and the direction, to the southwest, where tribal oral tradition places Cautantowwit's House.

The SK155 material culture is spatially concentrated and of relatively low density. It was created as a result of short-duration use by hunters and collectors who targeted the resources of the greater swamp ecosystem. It is possible that hunting parties in the Middle Archaic Period and again during the Late Archaic Period maintained their hunting kits at this location. The Middle Archaic occupation is not definitive, being represented by a single projectile point. The Attleboro Red Felsite Neville point is the only artifact of this material recovered from SK155. It may reflect a brief occupation during the Middle Archaic, but could also have resulted from later occupants (Late Archaic) incorporating earlier artifacts into their assemblages.

A small group of people built a fire in the shelter of the boulder in this location, where it provided a vantage point over the swamp below sometime during the Late Archaic. Today, the archaeological evidence of this limited occupation is evidenced by diagnostic Small Stemmed Tradition tools and through radiocarbon dating of charcoal from within the hearth, which dates to 4,340±40 years B.P. This site is contemporaneous, and similar to, other Late Archaic sites in the region. Recovery of hornfels chipping debris may indicate a brief occupation during the Woodland Period.

The SK155 Site provides supportive data related to the locational and chronological use of small, limited-duration campsites along the near interior Pawcatuck River drainage of southern Rhode Island. Previous research demonstrates that Late Archaic exploitation of this drainage was relatively extensive with short duration campsites spread in high density across the region (George et al. 1993; Waller and Leveillee 2002). The SK155 Site contributes to refinements of the Late Archaic settlement and subsistence model, and in doing so has made a contribution to this research topic.

The site's principal importance may also be as a place of past Native American ceremony, as suggested by on-site representatives of the NITHPO. The Narragansett Indian peoples are linked to the Great Swamp physically and spiritually, as indicated by oral tradition and the written historic record of the region. As such the swamp and its margins are of cultural importance to the Tribe. The importance of the archaeological deposits and the boulder-related features (Features 1 and 2) has been acknowledged. Project proponents redesigned construction to take place outside of the
concentrated site area in consultation with the DTHPO. PAL archaeologists and Narragansett tribal representatives monitored subsequent construction and there was concurrence that the area of concern to the Tribe is being avoided and preserved in place. Any future improvements in proximity to the glacial boulder will take into consideration the continuing interests of the Narragansett Indian Tribe as a possible area of past ceremonial activity.

PAL has recommend that the boulder and cobble remnants of Features 1 and 2, as represented by the existing stones left in-situ, be considered significant elements of the site and preserved in place as a location of interest and concern to the Narragansett Indian Tribe. The larger Great Swamp (or specific portions therein) is of historic and cultural significance to the Tribe and pending future study could potentially constitute a Traditional Cultural Property.

We support preservation of Features 1 and 2 of the SK 155 Site because of their importance to the Narragansett Indian Tribe as a perceived ceremonial site and for their potential to contribute to a consideration of the larger Great Swamp as a Narragansett Indian multi-component archaeological element of a Traditional Cultural Property. We would however caution against using the SK 155 data as precedent for ceremonial stone piles extending back into the Late Archaic. As argued in this article, any such interpretation would exceed any reasonable use of the archaeological evidence.

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United South and Eastern Tribes (USET)

Waller, Joseph N., Jr., and Alan Leveillee
Thunderbirds in Southeast Massachusetts

William B. Taylor

Introduction

In the cosmology of Algonquian peoples, the stratum above the earth is perceived as the home of Thunderbirds, sacred and powerful beings. These mythical sky creatures are said to flash lightning from their beaks and eyes, and produce thunderclaps with the flapping of their wings (Time Life 1992). Supernatural beings, they are often portrayed as part bird and part man or, sometimes, as a human figure with a sharp beak or wings (Bragdon 1996). Although not common, depictions of thunderbirds occur across New England both on artifacts and as petroglyphs. Four examples from Southeast Massachusetts are discussed.

Background

Artifacts with thunderbirds scratched, or incised, on them first appear during the Early Woodland Period. Willoughby illustrated a blocked end tubular pipe with an incised thunderbird from Swanton, Vermont (1935:93, Figure 50a). Thunderbirds also occur on ceramic pottery, suggesting that this motif was used over a long period of time. Bouck and Richardson illustrate two examples, one from Martha’s Vineyard and another from Long Island (2007:16-17). Most dramatic are the copper thunderbirds that have been found on Historic Period sites. Best known is the large example found at Amoskeag Falls in Manchester, New Hampshire. Willoughby illustrates this piece (1935:242, Figure 130) as do Bouck and Richardson, who discuss other similar examples (2007:17).

Thunderbirds also occur as petroglyphs, images cut or pecked into rock ledge, glacial erratics or small, portable stones. Thunderbird petroglyphs have been reported across New England with examples from near Brattleboro, Vermont (Willoughby 1935:169, Figure 94) to Machias Bay in Maine (Hedden 1989). While the well-known Dighton Rock petroglyph, located on the eastern bank of the Taunton River near Assonet Neck, has a wide variety of motifs, no obvious thunderbirds are included (Willoughby 1935:168, Figure 93). In addition to the depictions of thunderbirds on large rocks that appear to have been markers on the landscape, small portable versions also have been found. A good example is the fragmentary thunderbird scratched on a piece of slate and found near Blue Hill Bay in Maine (Hedden 1991). These smaller petroglyphs are of particular interest to me since they are similar to the one described below.

Examples from Southeast MA

The Hammond Petroglyph This artifact came from the Frank Hammond collection. Hammond lived in Taunton and collected from many sites along the Taunton River during the early 1900s between the Three Mile River and Tiverton, Rhode Island. Unfortunately, we do not know the specific riverbank location of the site from which this artifact was collected. However, the petroglyph has long been known and described by Willoughby (1935:169, Figure 94) and Bouck and Richardson (2007:17). Although the petroglyph is fragmentary, the缺损处 suggests a beak or wings. The description by Willoughby (1935:169) states, "It is scratched on a piece of slate found near Blue Hill Bay, [Maine]."

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not know exactly where he found this particular piece. It is fragment of red brown slate with a single perforation and delicately incised petroglyphs on each side. The piece is somewhat irregular in shape - 4.25 inches long, 2.25 inches wide and 3/16 inch thick. On the obverse is a thunderbird figure oriented vertically and facing left (Figure 1). The figure itself is 2 and 1/16 of an inch high and 1 and 3/16 of an inch wide across the wings. This thunderbird image is remarkably similar to that illustrated by Willoughby on the tubular pipe from Swanton. The reverse side has a horizontal, ladder-like motif with splayed sides. This may be a fragment of what had been a larger thunderbird depiction. It is very similar to the thunderbirds scratched onto ceramic sherds illustrated by Bouck and Richardson.

The Wapanucket Petroglyphs. Two small petroglyphs with thunderbirds, or closely related figures, have been recovered from the Wapanucket site in Middleborough. Located along the northern shore of Lake Assawompsett, this large and complex site has produced evidence for a Native presence from PaleoIndian to Historic times. The MAS conducted extensive excavations at eight different loci on this site between the 1950s through the early 1980s. The results are best summarized in Maurice Robbins' monumental report on Wapanucket (Robbins 1980).

Small petroglyphs were recovered from two areas of the site. One is a smooth cobble recovered from Locus #3 that measures roughly 4 inches long by 2 inches wide. It is numbered '4957' and has a thunderbird-like figure pecked into the obverse side (Figure 2, left). This figure faces right and has a triangular 'face' and wings. The figure is 2 inches high and 1 and 3/8 inches across the wings. The reverse side is unmarked. Unfortunately, no additional information is available as to where, specifically, this artifact was found at Locus #3.

The second small petroglyph from Wapanucket was recovered from Locus #6. It was found near, but apparently not associated with, cremation feature #3. This oval cobble is 3.75 inches long and 1.75 wide and, unlike the Locus #3 example, is worked on nearly every surface. The obverse has a thunderbird-like figure pecked deeply into its surface. This figure faces left and also has a triangular 'face' and wings (Figure 2, right). The figure is 1.5 inches high and 7/8 of the inch wide. The reverse side has three longitudinal grooves, possibly for sharpening bone tools. The left side of the cobbles has a series of seven narrow grooves, often called 'tally marks', while the right side had three shallow grooves. Both ends have been deeply pecked. This cobble is cracked, but not broken, and appears to have been exposed to high heat. It does not have a catalog number. Robbins provides some additional information on these two artifacts (1959:50 and Figure 14; 1980:112).

The Nemasket Thunderbird. In 2007, a hiker noticed a series of marks on a large granite boulder overlooking the Nemasket River in Lakeville. This glacial erratic is roughly ten feet long and five feet high (Figure 3, next page). On the east side, the thunderbird-like figure, similar to that found at Locus #6, has been cut...
deeply into the rock (Figure 4). Another petroglyph, a cross within a circle, is located on the north side (Figure 5). On the opposite (south) side of this boulder, a section of stone roughly 15 inches by 30 inches was removed at some point in the past. A series of star drill holes, now covered with moss and lichens, suggest that originally there may have been additional figures carved into this boulder, ones removed by a previous collector.

Conclusion

Thunderbird petroglyphs help to document, not only the spiritual side of Native American culture in New England, but its strong ties to specific places of the landscape as well. Although depictions of thunderbirds are rare, more are being discovered as older collections are studied and as hikers and hunters locate examples still in place on the land. I hope this article will inspire other people to report thunderbird petroglyphs that come to their attention so that these important markers can be protected and preserved.

Acknowledgements

My thanks to Ken Alves for his help and to Jeff Boudreau, as always, for his fine photography.

Figure 3. The Nemasket petroglyph rock.

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Figure 4. The Nemasket thunderbird

Figure 5. The Nemasket circle
A Raw Material Cache in Northfield, Massachusetts

Christopher L. Donta

Introduction

Over the past 15 years, the University of Massachusetts at Amherst has conducted several archaeological surveys along the banks of the Connecticut River in Northfield and Gill (Donta and Mulholland 1997; Donta 2005; Donta and Barker 2006). These surveys build on earlier reconnaissance work by UMass (Dincauze and Eldridge 1984; Holmes et al. 1991). Recent surveys have been conducted in conjunction with work by FirstLight Power and its predecessor Northeast Utilities to halt erosion along on the banks of the river. During these surveys, twenty-eight areas of Native American activity have been documented along a 13 km (8 mile) length of the river, between the French King bridge and the Vermont border. Large portions of the riverbank in this section have not yet been surveyed. While additional details of these surveys will be forthcoming, this paper presents a brief description of one particularly interesting find.

Durkee’s Landing Ravine (19-FR-347)

The Durkee’s Landing Ravine site is located in the southern part of Northfield, on the east bank of the Connecticut River. The riverbank in the site area is a wooded strip of land bounded on the north side by a small perennial stream. The site was first identified in 1990 as part of an initial reconnaissance survey of the riverbanks between Montague and Vernon, Vermont. Members of the Norwottuck chapter of the Massachusetts Archaeological Society report finding yellow jasper flakes and pottery (Holmes et al. 1991: 72).

During survey work in 2000, this site was tested with seventy-seven shovel test pits and six 1 by 1 m units (Donta 2005). Native American artifacts were found in thirty-three of the total eighty-three units excavated, with a concentration located in a 100 m long area that included twenty-three of the thirty-three positive units. A total of 180 artifacts were collected from the excavations, along with another twenty-two artifacts from the base of the erosion front at the water line, below the site of the excavations.

The artifacts collected consist of 115 lithic flakes, fifty-six pieces of fire-cracked rock, seven sherds of pottery, one ground stone adze fragment, one pecked cobble, one grooved maul, one long pestle, one piece of ground slate, and nineteen large rhyolite rough preforms. The flakes are primarily rhyolite, consisting of a banded and speckled tan to maroon red material, representing 57% of the debitage found at the site. Quartz represents 26% of the flakes, followed by chert (8%), quartzite (5%), other rhyolites (3%), and one piece of jasper.

Of greatest interest was a cache of roughly worked rhyolite preforms found in a single test pit (Figure 1, next page). All of the preforms were made of the same tan banded and speckled material that was found in twelve other test units across the site and on the beach. The top of the cache was found at 36 cm below the ground surface, in the fourth of a series of flood deposits. All nineteen of the artifacts were found in the northwest corner of a 50 x 50 cm unit, from 36 cm below the surface to a bottom depth of 47 cm. The cache occupied an area measuring 17 x 23 cm. The test pit also contained five pieces of fire-cracked rock and one possible hammerstone.

The nineteen artifacts in the cache range from large, only slightly retouched flakes, to bifacially worked preforms (Figure 2, next page). The largest artifact measures 17.5 cm in length, 9.9 cm in width, and is 2.4 cm thick.
Interpretations

The presence of a few ceramic sherds indicates a Woodland period occupation at the site, although additional earlier components may also be present. The depths of the artifacts from the cache and surrounding test pits show no clear separation between the ceramic sherds (20-50 cm below the ground surface), and the Jefferson rhyolite (10-70 cm), although the rhyolite was concentrated slightly lower (30-50 cm) than the pottery.

Based on the artifact types and their distributions, it appears that the rhyolite was brought along the river from its source, and left at this location after some of the material had been worked. No finished tools of this rhyolite were found made, and no features were identified at the site. At this point, interpretations of site function must be limited to some degree of lithic reduction along a transportation corridor, with indications of at least some late period domestic activity.

The Durkee’s Landing Ravine site is only one of several known Native American sites from this immediate area. Directly across the river, a distance of approximately 220 m, is site 19-FR-300. This site has produced pottery sherds, a large quartz triangular projectile point and slate scraper, along with lithic debitage (Holmes et al. 1991: 71). Testing by UMass in 2005 produced over 200 sherds of pottery, two triangular projectile points and numerous features, including hearths, living surfaces and at least one pit. Several distinct areas of artifact concentration were found, with site deposits extending over a distance of approximately 500 m. Additional site designations, including 19-FR-301 and 19-FR-303, encompass portions of this large plain, and include much of the riverbank further to the north, while the east
The Connecticut River served as a transportation corridor for many thousands of years. The cache of partially reduced rhyolite serve as one illustration of the long-distance movement of materials along this corridor. Sites in the vicinity show a large Woodland Period presence, with indications of activity in the preceding Archaic and Paleoindian periods at a much lower rate of visibility. Although the timing of the cache deposition is not certain, the raw material may indicate a date very early in the human occupation of New England. Durkee's Landing Ravine lies less than 4 km upstream from the Turners Falls site (Binzen 2005), with the DEDIC site 18 km to the southwest, and the Whipple site (Curran 1984) situated approximately 34 km to the northeast. Hopefully, additional research on and dating of sites along the Connecticut River in Northfield and Gill will provide more data on the layout of settlements over time and better links with geological studies on alluvial deposition. A clearer definition of pre-Woodland occupation locations and the raw material types utilized might help us inch toward a better understanding of trade and transportation, and associated changes in social organization.

Interested researchers are urged to contact the author at <cdonta@anthro.umass.edu>.

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Additional PaleoIndian Sites and Finds in Southeast Massachusetts

James W. Bradley and Jeff Boudreau

Introduction

While the available literature suggests that, aside from the well-known Wapanucket #8 site, there is little evidence for a Paleoindian presence in Southeast Massachusetts, this impression is incorrect. Re-examination of older collections, plus recently reported finds, indicate that both fluted points and Late Paleoindian non-fluted forms occur frequently across the region.

Fluted Point Sites and Isolated Finds

Although fluted point sites remain rare in Southeast Massachusetts, the evidence for them is growing. At least three localities south of the Boston Basin have produced sufficient evidence to be considered likely Paleoindian sites. In addition to these, three well-documented isolated finds are reported here (Figure 1).

The Wapanucket site. A recent reassessment of the Wapanucket site in Middleboro indicated that at least two Paleo components were present. These include Locus #8, which has produced an assemblage that is morphologically similar to that from Bull Brook, and the 'Beach locus', which remains poorly understood (Bradley and Boudreau 2006b). Ongoing collections work at the Robbins Museum has recently uncovered additional Paleoindian material from Locus #8 and the Beach as well as one, possibly two, Paleo components from Locus #2.

Locus #8. Six additional artifacts from Locus #8 include three biface tips and three channel flakes (Figure 2, next page). These pieces are consistent with the specimens described previously and provide new details on the style of fluting used by the PaleoIndians who occupied Locus #8. All six are made from the same buff to light gray Normanskill chert, often with a greenish tint, that characterized the majority of the Locus #8 PaleoIndian artifacts.

One of the tips (#8-1424) is ground on the distal end and appears to have suffered a hinge fracture failure during the attempt to flute the reverse side. It is 3.4 cm in length, 2.7 cm wide and .4 cm thick. A second tip (#8-1884) is not ground and appears to have been the result of a snap fracture. It is 2.1 cm in length, 2.4 cm wide and .6 cm thick. This piece shows no evidence of fluting. The third tip (#8-7415) is also not ground and appears to have been snapped off. On the observe side, fluting extends off the tip; the reverse side is not fluted. It is 1.8 cm long, 2 cm wide and .4 cm thick. This piece was listed in Bradley and Boudreau 2006b:61 (Table 2, #9) but with an incorrect catalog number.

The first of the channel flakes (#8-1269) is a midsection 3.5 cm long, 1.8 cm wide and .2 cm thick. It is notable for two reasons. One is the presence of a previous flute on the dorsal surface, evidence that the point from which it was detached was the subject of composite fluting. Second, this channel flake fragment also...
The Paleo-Indian presence at the Beach locus remains poorly defined, in large part because most of the diagnostic artifacts have been re-deposited. However, artifacts continue to be found. An example is a large, prismatic blade recently found by a local resident (Figure 3). The blade is 10.4 cm long, 4.5 cm wide and 2.1 cm thick. It is made of Wakefield “salt and pepper” felsite, with its distinctive mix of white and black phenocrysts. This blade appears to have been detached from a larger core and also shows the flake scars of two smaller previous removals. Although not as diagnostic as a fluted point, blades of this size and style are distinctive PaleoIndian artifacts (Collins 2002).

Locus #2. While examining several boxes of artifacts excavated by Arnold Staples in 1953, Boudreau noticed the presence of five unifacial tools. Checking these against the excavation records, we realized that they had been found in Locus #2, on the opposite side of the Wapanucket site from Locus #8 (Figure 4). Further investigation indicated that these pieces were found in two different sections within Locus #2, roughly 50 m apart.

Two of the unifaces were recovered from Section A (Figure 5 A & E, next page). One is a large, thick endscraper (#2800) with small but distinct lateral spurs. It is 4 cm long, 4.5 cm wide and 1.2 cm thick and appears to have been made from a large blade. There is a distinct arris down the center of the piece. There is also some fine bifacial retouch along the right side. It is made of red Munsungun chert. The second uniface is a flake knife or scraper. It is 4.9 cm long, 2.9 cm wide and .6 cm thick, and is also red Munsungun chert. It appears to have been made from a large bifacial thinning flake and shows some bifacial reworking towards the tip.
Figure 3. Prismatic blade from the Beach locus

The other three unifaces were found in Section B (Figure 5 C, B & D). One is a large, thick endscraper (#2074) with distinct lateral spurs. Although similar in form to the example from Section A, this artifact was probably made from a large bifacial thinning flake and is a patinated gray felsite with glassy quartz phenocrysts, probably from the Blue Hills area. This piece is 3.3 cm long, 3.4 cm wide and 1.5 cm thick. The second uniface is another large ovate endscraper (#2040) made from a regional felsite. Also made from a large bifacial thinning flake, it is 5.3 cm long, 3.5 cm wide and 1.3 cm thick. The lithic material is a heavily patinated gray felsite with white phenocrysts, probably from the Lynn-Newbury series on the north side of the Boston Basin. The last piece is a unifacial flake knife or scraper (#2865) of red Munsungun chert. Made from a bifacial thinning flake, it is 3.7 cm long, 2.1 cm wide and .7 cm thick.

Although these artifacts are not as diagnostic as fluted points, they do suggest an additional

Figure 4. The Wapanucket site. Open circles in Sections A and B of Locus #2 indicate the location of PaleoIndian material.
The Ponkapoag area. Several probable PaleoIndian artifacts have been reported from the area around Ponkapoag Pond in Canton, MA. Most of these were recovered during MAS-sponsored fieldwork from 1962 to 1966, and again between 1973 and 1975 (Martin 1977). Several artifacts from those excavations are discussed here. The first is a series of at least four spurred end-scrapers. Martin describes some of these as made of exotic chert or jasper; others appear to be local felsite (ibid. pp. 59, 69 Figure 22. E, G, J and K). Unfortunately, we have not been able to locate these specimens in the collections at the Robbins Museum. However, two other probable PaleoIndian artifacts, not reported by Martin, have survived. These include a unifacial side scraper (N17-E10A) made of Saugus jasper and a large backed knife (S3-E21) of Wakefield felsite (Figure 6, left). The side scraper is 7.5 cm long, 3.8 cm wide and .9 cm thick. Made from a spall of Saugus jasper, a natural cleavage plane defines the backside. The backed knife is a deceptively simple-looking implement. It is 10.9 cm long, 6 cm wide and .9 cm thick. Made from a large flake or spall, it was carefully trimmed to remove the bulb of percussion and regularize both the shape and thickness. As a result, though bifacially trimmed, this is still essentially a unifacial tool. The entire circumference of this implement shows use although the edge angle and degree of retouch vary considerably. This suggests to us that this piece was a multi-purpose tool, one that could be used for a variety of cutting and scraping purposes. Similar backed knives have been reported elsewhere in New England. For a comparable example and discussion, see the Sawtelle biface (Bradley 2007:14-15). Similar tools, also made of regional felsites, have also been found at the Bull Brook site (Figure 6, right).

The Annasnappet Pond area. In her recent dissertation on Middle Archaic components at Annasnappet Pond in Carver, MA, Dianna Doucette also noted the presence of two PaleoIndian artifacts (2003:86, 91-92). One was the proximal end of a channel flake made of Saugus jasper. Doucette notes the platform had been carefully prepared by grinding and isolating a small area where the force of the blow could be struck. She also reports that a small fluted point, also of Saugus jasper, was found in the same area by a local collector. This point appears to be a re-tipped base approximately 2.8 cm long and 2 cm wide. It has a shallow basal concavity and slight basal ears. Stylistically, this point could comfortably fit into the Bull Brook assemblage.

Early PaleoIndian presence at Wapanucket, one unlike that at Locus #8. Not only are the lithic preferences different, the overall form of these tools is more robust than those recovered at Locus #8. Prior to fieldwork by the MAS, the Middleboro Archaeological Society conducted extensive digging at Locus #2 during the 1940s. Artifacts from those excavations still turn up and, with luck, we may still learn more about the PaleoIndian occupation at Locus #2.

Figure 5. PaleoIndian unifaces from Locus #2
One additional artifact confirms the presence of PaleoIndians in the Ponkapoag area. This is a late stage biface that failed during an attempt to flute the obverse side. It was found near Ponkapoag by William Bowman and appears to be made from the local Blue Hills felsite. This piece is 4.2 cm long and 2.7 cm wide, and has been described briefly by Bill Hallaren (1988:33, Plate 22, left). Although the lithic material is different, the shape of this piece and the type of overshot failure that caused its discard are quite similar to several of the fluting failures from the nearby Neponset site (Carty and Spiess 1992).

Isolated Finds. Three fluted points have also been reported from Southeast Massachusetts (Figure 7, next page).

- The Taylor point, West Bridgewater. This small, robust point, possibly a re-tipped base, was found by David Taylor in 1977 on a site in West Bridgewater near the Hockomock River. It is 4.7 cm long, 2.8 cm wide and .7cm thick. It has short flutes on each sides, distinct basal ears and well-defined basal grinding. It is made of a coarse-grained regional felsite, possibly from the Blue Hills.
- The Hallett Point, Mansfield. This spectacular point was found by Leaman Hallett near the site of a new sewage treatment plant then under construction. It is 8.8 cm long, 2.6 cm wide and .6 cm thick. Both sides are fluted by well-placed single flutes. On the obverse, the flute appears to have extended off the tip of the point; on the reverse, the flute extends nearly to the tip. There is no evidence of composite fluting. This point has prominent basal ears, heavy grinding along the basal edges and a deep basal concavity that has been carefully trimmed out. It is made of a brown to buff chert with blue-gray mottling and may be a variety of the western New York Onondaga chert. The tip appears to have been snapped off in antiquity and use wear (extensive rounding) suggests this piece was reused as a knife or scraper. With its long gracile form, precise fluting and prominent basal ears, this point is an excellent example of the Mid PaleoIndian Michaud-Neponset form.

Figure 6. Backed knife from Ponkapoag, left. Similar biface (#1480) from the Bull Brook site, right, courtesy of the Peabody Essex Museum. Both of made of Wakefield felsite.
The Hall Point, Narragansett Bay drainage. This small, delicate fluted point represents the opposite end of the Michaud-Neponset size gradient. Found by Milton Hall during the early 20th century, this point (#267) is from somewhere in the northeastern portion of the Narragansett Bay drainage. It is 3.5 cm long, 2.2 cm wide and only .3 cm thick. It is fluted on both sides. Here again, the flute extends off the tip of the point on the obverse. On the reverse, the fluted hinged out roughly halfway down the piece. Slight basal ears are present and only hints of grinding. The lithic material is a platy gray green chert, possibly Normanskill. While it tempting to say that this is a reworked piece, careful examination indicates that this point, like the Dakin’s Brook point from Concord, MA, was made to be this size (Bradley 2007:12-13).

Though less distinctive, another Paleo-Indian artifact of Normanskill chert has also been reported from the Ten Mile River drainage. This modest unifacial endscraper is from the John Richardson collection. Made from an end thinning flake, it is 4.3 cm long, 2.7 cm wide and .5 cm thick. While there is a well defined endscraper at the distal end, this piece has fine retouch along virtually all its edges. At present, the Hall point and this uniface are among the very few PaleoIndian artifacts reported from the upper Narragansett drainage.

Late PaleoIndian Sites and Isolated Finds

A significant number of unfluted, Late PaleoIndian points have also been recovered from Southeast Massachusetts. The majority of these are the thin elongated points with parallel sides that have often been referred to as “Eden” points (Fowler 1972; MHC 1984:58-59). These are now more appropriately termed Ste. Anne-Varney points (Bradley et al. 2008:156). Six site areas where these points have been found, as well as six isolated finds, are reported here (Figure 8). The large lanceolate points frequently called “Plano” points are the other Late PaleoIndian style previously reported from...
Southeast Massachusetts (Bradley and Boudreau 2006a). The preferred name for these is now Agate Basin-related points. These points occur less often than Ste. Anne-Varney points; one example is reported here.

The Ponkapoag Area, Canton. In addition to the PaleoIndian artifacts described above, several Late PaleoIndian points were recovered during the MAS excavations at Ponkapoag. These include one Agate Basin-related point and three Ste. Anne-Varney points (Figure 9). The Agate Basin-related point is 9.8 cm long, 3.5 cm wide at midsection and 2 cm wide at the base. It is unground and appears to have snapped during final thinning. It appears to be made of local Blue Hills felsite and is very similar to examples previously reported from Southeast MA (Bradley and Boudreau 2006a). While Martin illustrates this point (1977:69, Figure 22 B), we have not been able to locate it in the surviving collection from the site.

On the other hand, while Martin illustrates two Ste. Anne-Varney bases from the Ponkapoag excavations (1977:69, Figure 22 C and D), we identified three examples in the collection. Two of these appear to be unfinished points. The first (N3W4A) is 7.3 cm long, 1.9 cm wide and 1.2 cm thick. Made of a coarse volcanic, probably from a local source, this point was abandoned after it proved impossible to thin it further. This point is important in that it indicates the shaping process started at the basal (proximal) end and then continued towards the tip. The second unfinished point (N2-W5A) is made from Blue Hill River felsite and may have snapped during thinning. It is 4.7 cm long, 2.6 cm wide and .9 cm thick, and shows even less evidence of finishing than the previous example. The final point (N3-W8) is a finely made base of gray quartzite. It is 5.1 cm long, 2 cm wide and .5 cm thick. It has some grinding along the lower lateral edges and base.

The North River Eden Site, Marshfield. Hallaren reports a large assemblage of Ste. Anne-Varney style points, (at least nine bases) plus a range of other tools including drills, unifacial and bifacial scrapers as well as preforms, from a site along the North River in Marshfield (Hallaren 1988:19-22, Plates 1-3). All the points have straight, parallel sides, flat squared-off bases and have been snapped off between 2 cm and 4 cm from the base. Hallaren describes the predominant lithic

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Figure 8. Late PaleoIndian sites and isolated finds.

Figure 9. Late PaleoIndian points from Ponkapoag.
material as Marblehead felsite, which apparently is found in cobbles near the site, with Blue Hills felsite also present. Gramly and Finneran (2003) have published a second report on this complex, multi-component, site. In 2004, PAL, Inc. conducted a survey of this site (19-PL-348) and recovered some evidence of Late PaleoIndian occupation (Ives and Ritchie 2004). Clearly, this was an important site, comparable to the Varney Farm in terms of the quantity and range of artifacts recovered. We hope that, at some point, a more complete report will be available.

**Annasnappet Pond, Carver.** As with the Ponkapoag area, excavations at Assasnappet Pond have produced evidence of Late PaleoIndian occupation in addition to the fluted point described above. Doucette reported two fragmentary Ste. Anne-Varney points from Locus 1. These include a base made of Attleboro Red felsite and a mid-section made from a volcanic visually similar to Hingham felsite (Doucette 2003:91, and Figure 3-6). Both fragments appear to be from small points approximately 1.5 cm wide.

**Eel River Area, Plymouth.** Three Ste. Anne-Varney points have been found along the Eel River in Plymouth and may all be from the same site (Figure 10). The first (BR #6925) was found by Charles Sherman. Fowler illustrated this piece in his 1972 article on “Eden” points and noted that it was found in two pieces “in the yellow sandy subsoil, about three inches up from the underlying white sand” (1972:29, and Figure 14, #1). The late Fred Carty examined this point in 1980 during the MHC survey of the Bronson Museum collections, and identified the lithic material as Blue Hil River felsite. This point is 10.7 cm long, 2.1 cm wide and .8 cm thick. It shows some evidence of grinding along the lower lateral edges and its slightly rounded base. The distal end appears to have been reworked at least once. Sherman appears to have found a second point in the same area around 1969, although the record on this piece is less complete. This finely made point is snapped off just above the base, and appears to have had slight shoulders. It is 10.3 cm long, 1.8 cm wide and .6 cm thick and made from a porphyritic felsite, probably from the Marblehead series. The third point from the Eel River was found by Eric Lott. It is a smaller, possibly uncompleted, point 7.2 cm long, 2.3 cm wide and .5 cm thick. It is made from a fine grained felsite. Although carefully shaped, this point lacks fine pressure flaking along the edge and shows no evidence of grinding.

**The Titicut site, Bridgewater.** This site is well known from the extensive excavations sponsored by the MAS during the 1950s. Less well known, but of equal importance, was the concurrent fieldwork conducted by Fred Johnson on behalf of the R. S. Peabody Museum of Archaeology in Andover. While Johnson prepared an excellent draft report (Johnson 1953), it was never published due to funding constraints. Among the many important recoveries were one, and possibly two, Ste. Anne-Varney bases. The first (#173/21861) was recovered 38 cm below the surface at the junction with the underlying yellow subsoil. It is 5.3 cm long, 1.7 cm wide and .5 cm thick. It is made from a heavily weathered, fine grained felsite as Blue Hill River felsite. The second point (#21862), also from the same site, was snapped just above the base and is 5.2 cm long, 1.6 cm wide and .6 cm thick.

**Figure 10.** Late PaleoIndian points from the Eel River area. Note base on right is restored.
felsite, possibly a variety of the "Melrose Green" that occurs in the Middlesex Fells. The second piece (#173/22179) was found in the loam and is also a snapped off base. It is 5.8 cm long, 3.2 wide and .7 cm thick. Made from a light gray quartzite, this piece is characterized by superior quality workmanship that resulted in a perfect lenticular cross-section, parallel flaking and very fine edge control. Although this piece is unusually large for a Ste. Anne-Varney point, the overall form and quality of the work suggest it is of Late PaleoIndian origin.

The Wapanucket site, Middleboro. At least four Ste. Anne-Varney bases have been recovered from Wapanucket (Figure 11). All have been snapped off near or below mid-section. Two have catalog numbers that suggest they were recovered from Locus #8; the other two appear to have been found at the Beach locus. The two examples from Locus #8 were photographed and recorded by Fred Carty in 1980. The first is #8-2320 - a base 4.1 cm long and 2.1 cm wide, and made of Blue Hill River felsite. The second is #8-3516 -a base 3.4 cm long and 1.7 cm wide, made from a heavily weathered light tan/gray felsite. We also examined the two specimens from the Beach locus. Both are labeled "8-B" and were listed in Robbins' Wapanucket monograph (1980:285). The first is a finely made base 3.7 cm long, 1.7 cm wide and .45 cm thick. It is made from a glossy black chert and has light grinding along the lower lateral edges. The second base has similar dimensions - 1.4 cm long, 1.7 cm wide and .4 cm thick. It too is made from a glossy dark gray chert. The base of this point shows more damage but no evidence of grinding.

Isolated Finds. In addition to the examples reported by Fowler (1972), at least six other Ste. Anne-Varney style points have been reported from Southeast Massachusetts (Figure 12, next page).

- The Back River Point, Weymouth. This distal fragment was found in the mid 1960s at a depth of 24 inches (Figure 12 B). It is 7.7 cm long, 2 cm wide and has slight shoulders. The base is missing and the tip shows evidence of rounding. It is made from a heavily patinated Boston Basin felsite, possibly Saugus jasper or Melrose green. Hallaren mentions this point but does not illustrate it (1988:31).
- The Trotta Point, Norwell. This point was found at the Henderson Site (Figure 12 C). It is a finely made midsection 6.3 cm long, 2.5 cm wide and .7 cm thick. Although broken, this piece also has distinct, if slight, shoulders at the place where the point snapped. It is made from a fine grade of Blue Hill River felsite.
- The Benson Point. This nearly complete point was found at the Swan Hold site in Carver (Figure 12 D). Fowler describes its recovery noting that it was located "at a depth of 19 inches below the loam" in yellow, sandy subsoil (1976:52). Fowler also illustrated this point (ibid. p. 49, Figure 9, #5) which is virtually identical to the first point recovered by Sherman along the Eel River. Found in three cross-mending pieces, this point has well defined parallel sides and a flat base. Fowler estimates that it is missing roughly 1" (2.5 cm) of its tip. It is approximately 3 3/4" (9.5 cm) long and 5/8" (1.5 cm) wide, and made of a "medium" grade felsite.
- The Hawes Point. This basal fragment was found at the Hawes site in Lakeville (Figure 12 A). It appears to be an unfinished Ste.
Figure 12. Late PaleoIndian isolated finds: The Hawes point (A), The Back River point (B), The Trotta point (C), The Benson point (D).

Anne-Varney point that may have snapped during pressure flaking. It is 3.2 cm long, 1.9 cm wide and .4 cm thick. It is made was Blue Hills felsite.

• The Peddie Point. This point was found by Anne Peddie while digging in the sand at Crescent Beach in Mattapoisett in 1979 (Figure 13 C). It is a large Ste. Anne-Varney point with a broken base. It is 9.6 cm long, 1.8 cm wide and .8 cm thick, and is made from a fine quality brown chert, possibly from eastern New York. The tip is rounded and this piece may have been used as a drill.

• The Miller Point. This small midsection fragment from a Ste. Anne-Varney point was found by Joanne Miller along the Taunton River in Berkeley, MA. (Figure 13 A). It is 2.3 cm long, 1.9 cm wide and .6 cm thick. It is made from a dull brown chert visually similar to that used at the Varney Farm site in Maine.

Figure 13. Additional Late PaleoIndian isolated finds. The Miller point fragment (A) and Peddie point (C) compared with outlines of points from Varney Farm (B).
Conclusions

While the primary purpose of this article has been to report rather than analyze, a few concluding comments are in order. In terms of both fluted and unfluted points, it is clear that there was a stronger PaleoIndian presence in Southeast Massachusetts than usually has been assumed. While lithics from distant sources such as New York’s Hudson Valley and the Munsungun formation in Maine predominate, the PaleoIndians who made fluted points also experimented with and used regional lithics as well. During Late PaleoIndian times, the situation was reversed—while some Ste. Anne-Varney points made of chert have been found, the majority of are made from regional felsites and quartzites. It is our hope that, by calling attention to these artifacts, additional specimens in existing collections will come to light and help us fill in the picture of Massachusetts’ earliest people.

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