

THE ERIKSDALE SAMPLE: A PIECE OF MANITOBA CULTURE HERITAGE

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DISCOVERY & RECOVERY

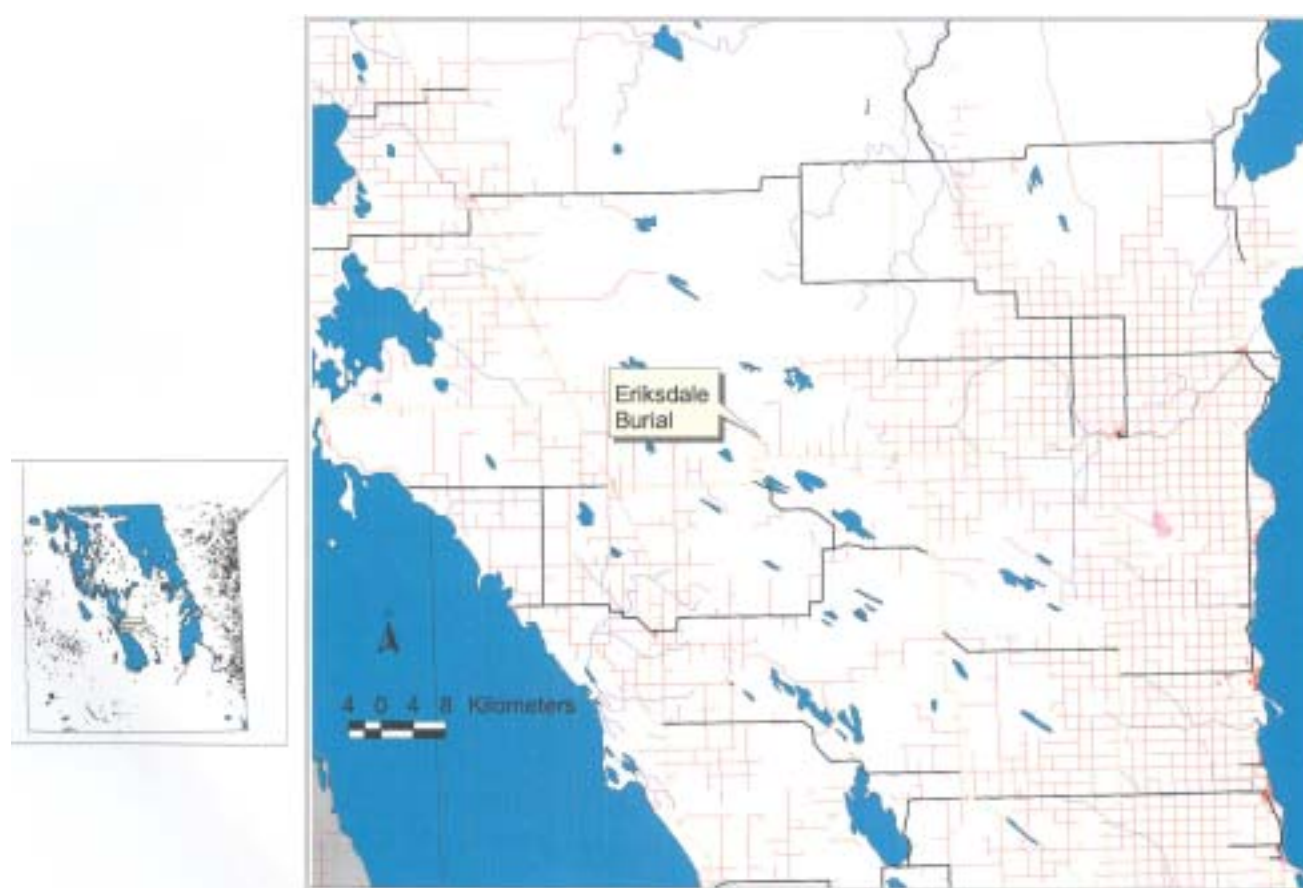
The Eriksdale burials were found accidentally in June of 1971 when a front end loader disturbed the remains, while digging gravel for highway fill. The human remains and associated artifacts were recovered from the site by local RCMP officers Corporal King and Constable MacQuarie, as well as some Highway Departments personnel.



The human remains and artifacts were then taken to the University of Manitoba. A preliminary examination and interpretation was performed by Jonathan Maas where it was determined that there were two individuals represented. All of the artifacts recovered from the site were found in association with one individual (#110-1).

LOCATION

The Eriksdale site is located in the Interlake region of Manitoba, approximately 21 kilometres east of the town of Eriksdale. This area of Manitoba is called the Manitoba Lowlands or the First Prairie Level, which is the flattest part of the province with an elevation of 260 metres.



By approximately 5000 BP the severe climate of the Manitoba Plains region had become more moderate and the vegetational zones had become more or less as they are today. This area would have been ideal for long or short term settlements, as grasslands were accessible in the summer for communal bison hunting, and forest edges, where larger game moved to in the winter, were accessible for small scale hunts during the colder months.

PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION

During his initial examination, Maas observed a Pelican Lake projectile point embedded in the left proximal femur of individual 110-1. Accordingly, this suggested that individual 110-1 lived sometime in the range of 1500 BC to 500 AD (Bowe, 1999:69). The right femur and tibia of 110-1 were later sent to the Saskatchewan Research Council with a request for radiocarbon dating. A date of 3460 ± 100 B.P was returned, implying individual 110-1 would have been alive during the beginnings of the Pelican Lake period.

HUMAN REMAINS

Both individuals are male. Individual 110-1 was approximately 168.5cm tall and lived to 25 to 30 years of age. Individual 110-2 was a relatively older man, somewhere in his mid 40's at the time of his death when he stood to about 165 cm tall. It has been suggested that the average lifespan of a prehistoric Plains hunter was 40 to 50 years of age (Frison, 1991:12).



The trauma to individual 110-1, is quite interesting and unique. The embedded point to be broken approximately in half, with a small flake of stone between the two larger pieces. This breakage may have occurred on impact, or it may have occurred during an attempt to remove the point from the individual's leg. This trauma was not the cause of this individual's death as bone has healed around the point to such an extent that he clearly lived for a number of years after the incident.

There is also evidence for copper having been associated with burial of 110-1, even though none was recovered from the site. The figure above shows the distribution of the copper staining on the bones. A reconstruction of the burial position based on this distribution is presented.



PERSONAL BELONGINGS

There were a number of artifacts found at the site, most of which were found in association with individual 110-1. The other remains were found scattered over the site and cannot be associated directly with either individual.

Lithics

All but two pieces of worked rock found at the site could have originally come from the area around the site itself. The two pieces that not local to the area are made of Swan River Chert, which is a distinctive light pink colour. This type of chert is commonly found to the west of Lake Manitoba.



Modified Faunal Remains

A single Gray Wolf (Genus species) canine was recovered with burial 110-1, which has evidence of human modification in the form of grinding at the end of the tooth root to expose the pulp chamber. It also appears that the diameter of the tooth root has been modified 5mm from its base, possibly to facilitate its suspension from a string as an ornament of some sort.

Within the collected soil matrix, over 300 shell beads of three different shapes and



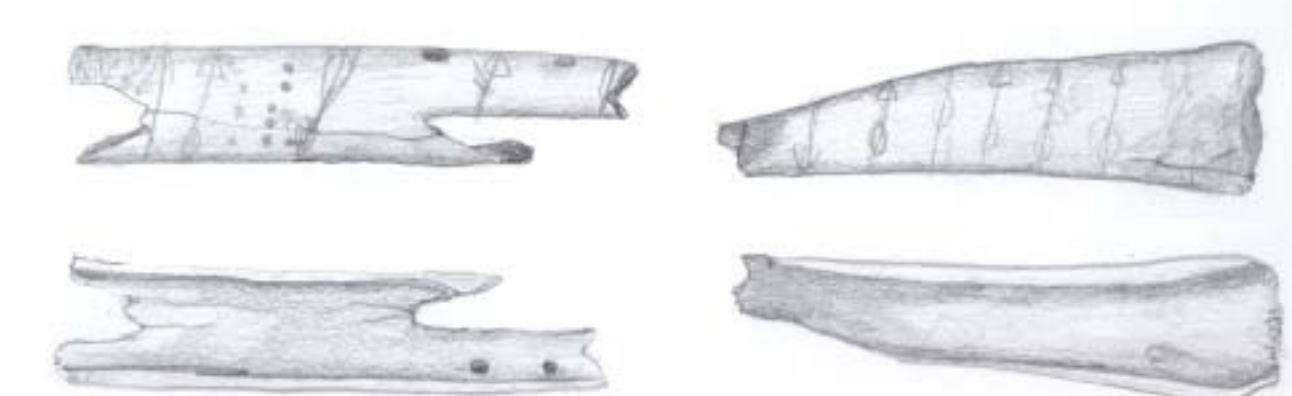
sizes were recovered. The first grouping of beads average 3mm in diameter and are round with tiny drilled holes through their center. The second grouping are also round with central drilled holes averaging 7mm in diameter. The third grouping, which only has one representative in this collection, is a cylindrical shaped bead with a hole through its center. After examining comparative specimens, it appears likely that the two groups of larger beads were made from the columella of univalve shells.



In addition, there are 10 Pelican bone tubes, all worked to varying degrees with punches, drill holes, etchings, open backs. As illustrated below, at least some of these show opposing and oblique representations of feathered arrows.



On the pelican ulna tube there is decoration on one side of the bone only. This may indicate that only one side of the artifact was intended to be seen, which would be the case if it was worn in connection to the other tubes against the body. The two tubes that are complete



with only two drilled perforations each may have been the first and last in a series of connected tubes. The bones that are ground completely away on one side, which also have drilled perforation opposite this ground area, may have been central tubes in the series, as a string or twine would have passed through one to the next. These artifacts were buried in close proximity to the chest area of individual 110-1 as can be seen from the green copper staining on a number of them. This staining is concentrated near the center of

the tubes, as it is on the ribs of the individual which could indicate they were laid on the individual's chest when he was buried. The lack of staining on the sternum of 110-1 may further suggest that there was an object present on the individual's chest area which blocked the copper from staining it.

A RECONSTRUCTION

Dating to approximately 3500 years ago, the Eriksdale site falls into the Archaic or Middle Prehistoric period of Manitoba's history. During this period, inhabitants of this area are believed to have lived in small nomadic hunting groups. Twice a year a number of smaller groups would come together for major bison drives or hunts, in the spring when the bulls were in prime, and in the fall when the cows were in prime (Buchner, 1979:00).

This has also been referred to as the Intensive Diversification Period has by Syms (pers. comm., 2001) based on the fact that during this time people made a change in their subsistence base from the mainly bison diet of the Paleo-Indians to incorporate a number of different sources of food. Though their subsistence was based mainly on bison hunting, the local population also took advantage of other local resources such as deer, bear, moose, fish, shellfish, birds and local flora (Reeves, 1970:161). This change in goes hand in hand with a diversification of tools used. New types of tools were being created in order to acquire and process the new types of foods that were being incorporated into the diet. Different types of land, previously unpopulated, were becoming inhabited as people came to identify with new types of resources in the Boreal Forest and Parkland areas of Manitoba and the rest of the Northern Plains. This period is also one of a great many migrations that saw different cultural groups moving into Manitoba from literally all directions, bringing with them ways of life and artifacts previously unfamiliar to the area.

THE NEXT STEP

The primary objective of the ongoing current analysis is to provide a modern, comprehensive anthropological analysis of the human and cultural remains. The results of this study will enhance the understanding of the Aboriginal history in Manitoba. This will include:

- 2 new AMS radiocarbon dates. The previous radiocarbon analysis implies an exceptionally early date as compared to the flint point embedded in the femur, so it is important that two new dates are obtained. AMS dating will be used to date directly the femur in which the point is embedded.
- Stable isotope analysis of nitrogen and carbon in the bone collagen
- Ancient DNA analysis to provide clues regarding population affinity and the relationship between the people represented in the Eriksdale burials and contemporary Manitoba populations.
- Cementum annulation analysis of each individual for a more precise estimate of age-at-death

LITERATURE CITED

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