Jean T. MacKay

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DENNISON PORTAGE SITE

Marshall Rice

It was a typical August day bright and sunny in the morning, later becoming gray with that haze which comes with the South West wind in the afternoon. We four adults with my grandson 3 piled into the pickup with our digging tools, screens and the necessary amount of food to feed several hungry people and were off to seek an Indian campsite we had heard about.

After an hour of being brush swiped, jolted and bounced to the roof on several occasions, confused and almost discouraged we drew up to a sort of control dam. This place known as Dennisons Portage is between Syslodobsis and Pocumpus Lakes in Washington County, Maine. We did some exploratory walking around searching for some likely place which might have been a campsite.

Much of the original land had been altered. What had been a kind of canal had been built and that together with the dam and road fill certainly changed the surrounding terrain.

We soon found chips and began an earnest search for artifacts, however we found only a few pieces of material in a very small area. Several other exploratory holes were dug to no avail. The accompanying illustrations show the materials found. Between digging, exploring and eating we had an enjoyable day. We did not feel this was a place long inhabited, but just a stopover and that the main habitation area must have been somewhere below the dam.

* *

- WE GOOFED -

Yes, even Ye Editor makes mistakes. Somehow, we overlooked the fact that Volume 11 should have ended with Fall - 1971. Result, a Volume 11 - Spring - 1972 - No. 3.

Please forgive. It should have been Vol. 12, No. 1

Thanks for not taking away my trowel.

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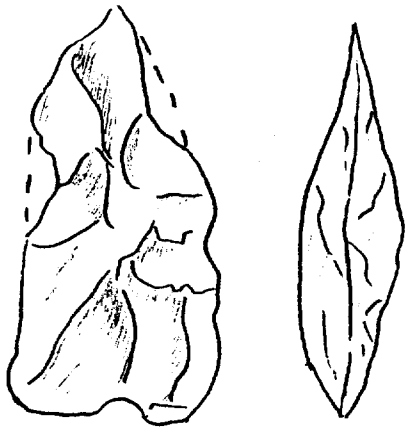

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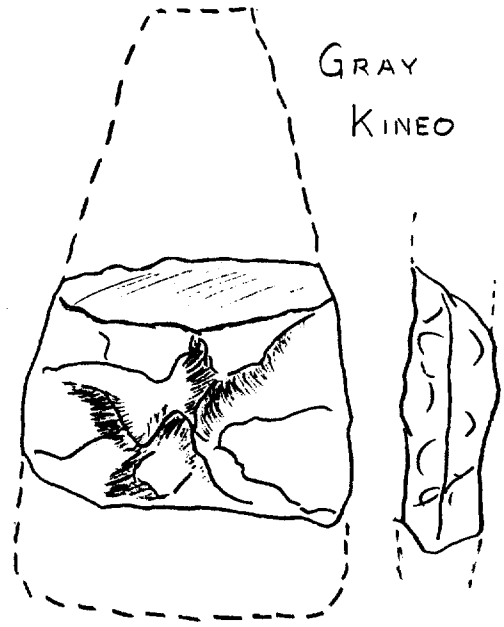

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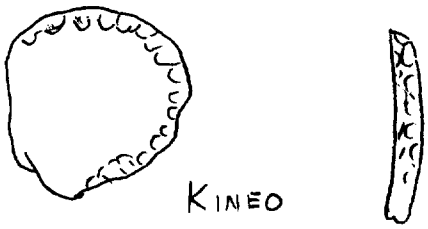

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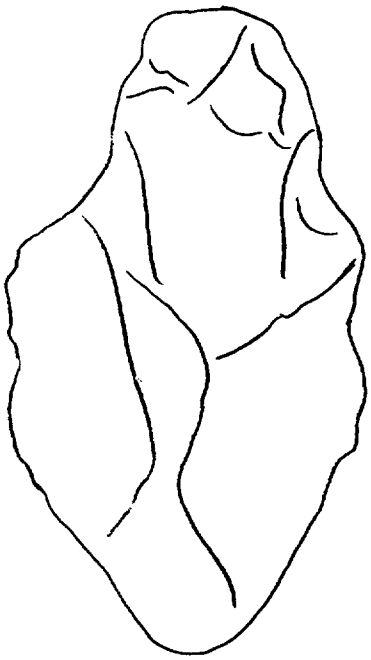

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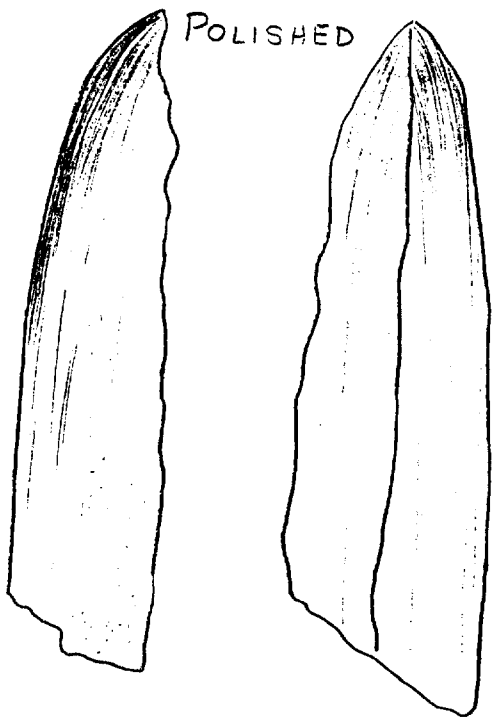

MR

WHO WERE THE RED PAINTS?

David Sanger
University of Maine at Orono

The "Red Paint People" have been immortalized in Maine Prehistory. No other group has received so much attention in both field work and in the literature. Despite this it seems that there is still a basic lack of understanding concerning these people, their origins, culture and demise. We are far from having all the answers, and I do not claim that this short article will provide them. What I would like to do is to review some of the explanations, and offer some suggestions.

Perhaps the earliest systematic excavation was that of Willoughby (1898) at several cemeteries in Maine. He was followed by Warren K. Moorehead whose 1922 book recounts the exploration of numerous cemeteries. Later archaeologists have dispaired over Moorehead's techniques; if only he had followed the example of Willoughby! Moorehead used the term Red Paint People,although he did not invent it, while Willoughby prefered the more technical sounding Pre-Algonquian Group. Both men recognized the essential differences between the culture of the historic Indians and that of the red ochre graves, and both were convinced of the great antiquity of the latter. But not all archaeologists of the time were convinced and a series of exchanges took place in journals such as American Anthropologist. Snow (1969) provided references to some of these articles which today have little but historic interest.

In the 1930's Douglas Byers and Frederick Johnson of the R. S. Peabody Foundation excavated the Nevin shell midden site, near Blue Hill, Maine. There, beneath later occupations, they found several burials covered with red ochre and accompanied by the characteristic artifacts. Due to the presence of shell in the midden the skeletons did not decay and artifacts of bone, antler, and tooth were preserved. Unfortunately, a full report on this important site has never appeared in print. The Nevin site was not the only site on the coast to yield "Red Paint" artifacts, but it was one of the best preserved.

Shortly after World War II, B. L. Smith (1948) performed a gigantic task by pulling together collections from various Maine sites and making an analysis. Smith's work is probably the most useful review of the artifacts to date, despite the many problems caused by artifacts being lost, collections mixed, etc. Smith elected to refer to the manifestation as the Maine cemetery complex, a definite improvement over the Red Paint People, because it recognizes the burial aspect of the evidence. I shall return to this important point later.

At the same time Hadlock and Stern (1948) re-excavated the Hathaway site at Passadumkeag, Maine, a site previously opened up by Moorehead. They added to Moorehead's total and established that the clusters of artifacts and red ochre were in fact burial pits.

In 1959 Byers published a review of the Archaic of the Northeast. He suggested that the red ochre burials fit into a coastal culture he called the Maritime Boreal Archaic. Together with Wendell Hadlock, Byers worked at the Ellsworth Falls sites, eventually piecing together a sequence which included some artifact forms found in red ochre burials. Two radiocarbon estimates of 1900 B.C. and 1400 B.C. were the first in Maine for Archaic materials. The Maritime Boreal Archaic has not been widely used as an integrative term although it has been revived in a slightly different form in James Tuck's Maritime Archaic Tradition.

The appointment of Dean Snow to the University of Maine at Orono opened a new era in the study of the red ochre burials. Snow began his research into the problem with a third excavation at Hathaway in 1968. Still more burials were located and Snow (1969) published a summary account of the work and the artifacts recovered. In his reconstruction Snow used the term Moorehead complex to refer to the burials and the grave goods. A year later (1970) Snow read a paper at a meeting in which he presented a seriation for the Moorehead complex in Maine. A seriation is an arranging of artifacts, sites, or anything else in an order according to age. It is based on the concept that people's ideas of

how to do things change in time. Just as the late night movie can be dated by car models, skirt lengths, or hairstyles, so an archaeologist will try to discover the styles in prehistory. Snow's seriation was based on the presence or absence in sites of certain artifacts such as plummets, particular point styles, slate points, etc. But, unless we can find the seriated objects in a site clearly stratified one over the other, there is no way of being sure which end of the seriation is "up" or more recent, and which end is the older. Unfortunately, the radiocarbon dates from the Hathaway site are confusing and ambiguous. Snow cited a date of about 3000 B.C. for the beginning of the Moorehead complex and terminated it sometime after 1400 B.C., a date based on the Ellsworth Falls sequence.

Working with some of the same sites Bruce Bourque also produced a seriation (Bourque 1971). This seriation differed in order from that of Snow, possibly because Bourque used a different range of artifacts. Bourque correctly noted that a presence or absence type of analysis for seriation purposes presuposes that all burials in a site are of the same age, something which cannot be taken for granted. To sharpen the technique Bourque did a seriation on grave lots, that is, he used presence or absence of artifacts in individual graves and arranged those in a seriation. Again, the results differed. Recently I have seriated the Maine sites with additions from Canada on the basis of percentages of tools within a site. As might be expected, the results differed from those of both Snow and Bourque.

In other parts of the world the seriation technique has worked out well. Why is it that three archaeologists get as many seriations out of the same data? First, we cannot be sure of the basic data in so many instances. The early workers did not realize the importance of keeping proper association records and we cannot be very confident of their graves lots. To further compound the problem they made little attempt to keep the collections together so that today it is hard to be sure what the contents of any one cemetery was.

Second, we have a dating problem. No Maine cemetery, with the exception of the ambiguous radiocarbon dates for the Hathaway site, can be securely dated. Given these handicaps, it is little wonder that the seriations produced differing results.

Recent discoveries in Canada have helped the situation. In 1968 and 1969 James A. Tuck excavated the Port au Choix site in western Newfoundland (Tuck 1970, 1971). The red ochre covered skeletons and characteristic Moorehead complex tools linked the Port au Choix cemetery with the Maine sites. Especially close relationships are seen between the Port au Choix and the Nevin sites, the latter near Blue Hill, Maine. In both instances skeletons and bone artifacts were preserved. At Port au Choix the burials were placed into a sandy beach with old sea shells and the bodies were covered with limestone slabs. It surely was fortunate because we have bone daggers, needles, harpoon heads, and other perishable items preserved because of the sandwiching effect of two sources of carbonate - the shells and the limestone. Several radiocarbon dates were received and an average date of about 1850 B.C. is indicated.

At the same time Donald MacLeod was excavating another Moorehead complex site in eastern Newfoundland, the Curtis site near Twillingate. Skeletal preservation was lacking but the stone implements and the red-ochre graves clearly pointed to a close relationship to the Maine sites. Radiocarbon dates from the Curtis site are a little more recent than those from Port Au Choix and the stone tools are a little different.

In 1969 a letter from an amateur archaeologist resulted in a major excavation in New Brunswick. Lionel Girouard, of Minto, New Brunswick, advised me of a Moorehead complex site on the Thoroughfare between Grand Lake and Maquapit Lake in central New Brunswick. I visited the area in 1969 and decided to bring in a crew the following summer. Lionel agreed not to dig the site any more himself and we were able to conduct a proper excavation in which 60 graves were examined and 400 stone pieces recovered. This is another example of how archaeologists can cooperate with each other to maximize the efforts.

In the final report (Sanger n.d.) there is a detailed discussion of the site, its contents, and its implications. Radiocarbon dates on the last burials averaged around 1800 B.C. No charcoal was found with the earlier graves and they may be a century or two older.

In summary, three Canadian sites have produced artifacts and graves types like those of Maine, and a very close cultural relationship is indicated. These sites date between 1400 and 2000 B.C. and it seems likely that the Maine cemeteries should date similarly, except that I doubt if any of the latter are as recent as 1400 B.C. Hopefully, we will someday be able to date the Maine site with greater dependability.

What do we know about these people after close to 100 years of research? I think it is most important to realize that nearly all of our data come from cemeteries. It has been most difficult to locate and excavate the habitation sites of these peoples. In Maine there is the Ellsworth Falls sequence but specific cross ties with the burials are few. Bruce Bourque may have a habitation of these people at the Turner Farm site on North Haven Island and we look forward to more excavation at that important locality. At the Hirundo site on Pushaw Stream there is a component which has artifacts reminiscent of those found in cemeteries, but again specific ties are still lacking. This data bias from burial sites has too long clouded the issue. We can no more reconstruct the culture of 1800 B.C. from burials alone than someone in the future could work out our civilization on the basis of our cemeteries. We must have a number of habitation components before we can begin to make sweeping cultural generalizations.

The evidence, it seems to me, suggests that we are dealing with a highly specialized burial cult, which extends from the Kennebec River in Maine, through New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and thence to Newfoundland. The particular combination of red ochre graves in cemeteries and the characteristic artifacts has not been located in Labrador or along the north shore of the St. Lawrence River to date. The burial cult, which I have called the Moorehead burial

tradition, has its roots in an interest in burial ceremonialism which is found in middle to late Archaic stage traditions from the Great Lakes east. It reaches a peak, or florescence, in our area for reasons as yet unknown. If the Canadian dates are right, the Moorehead burial tradition may have been relatively short-lived, spanning perhaps 1000 years in its classic form. I hypothesize that its demise might have been brought on by the influx of a new culture, and quite possibly a new population, moving eastward along the coast from Massachusetts around 1600 B. C. As our work at sites like Hirundo continues I suspect we will find that the Moorehead burial tradition represents the mortuary ritual system of people participating in what Ritchie (1965) has called the Laurentian Archaic.

The Moorehead burial tradition includes the following traits: burial either primary (articulated body) flexed or extended; burial secondary (disarticulated) or bundle; interment in cemeteries away from habitations and overlooking water; inclusion of much red ochre in the grave; a particular set of artifacts stressing ground stone forms over chipped stone; no apparent association between nature of inclusions in a grave and the age and sex of the body; and the inclusion of many non-utilitarian tools.

When the archaeologist attempts to analyze this pattern in sociological or psychological terms he can only speculate. So let it be understood that this is sheer speculation based on some fact and much thought.

Part of the burial practice involves the lavish use of red ochre. How is this to be interpreted? A commonly-seen interpretation is that the color red represents blood or life. Yet these people knew that their kin were dead and surely they realized that sprinkling red powder over the corpse would not restore life. With this in mind my students and I searched the literature for Indian groups in North America who associated the color red with death. We found the Objibwa (Cree) of the Canadian Boreal Forest associate red with "the land of the setting sun - the land of the shadows of the dead."

Further north, the Koyukok Athapascans do not wear red in a cemetery because red is the color by which one can contact the "spirits of the dead." Perhaps we have here the reason for red ochre in the graves. By covering the deceased with red ochre the mourners were assisting their kinsmen into the land of the spirits. Speculation to be sure, but more reasonable I think than believing that the Indians thought they could restore life by the act of including red ochre.

The particular choice of artifacts is confusing. We are accustomed to thinking in terms of a tool kit which the deceased could use in the spirit world. Yet some of the inclusions are strictly of a non-utilitarian or ceremonial nature. There is no pattern visible between kinds of objects and sex of the individual, and there is the emphasis on ground stone when in their life they used chipped stone tools so extensively. It does not seem to me that this tool kit was included for use in the spirit world, or if it was, the new surroundings would be far different from the one just left. At this time I have no answer save the suggestion that factors other than a concept of the after-life guided the kinds of grave inclusions.

To return now to our title, "Whl Were the Red Paints?",
I have tried to show how our research had lead to the conclusion that there never were any such people. What we as archaeologists have been guilty of doing is excavating the physical remains of a specialized burial cult and treating that evidence as if it pertained to their entire culture. No wonder they have remained so mysterious! I suggest that we consider the Maine-Maritimes area occupied by Laurentian Tradition people who moved in here from the west around 3000 B.C. These people brought with them an interest in burial ritualism which included red ochre. In time they adapted their culture to the new environment and, to judge by the number of artifacts left behind, they proliferated. Towards the end of the Laurentian Tradition an concern for the dead manifested itself in the spectacular Moorehead burial

tradition, a cultic mortuary ceremonialism which spread rapidly throughout the Northeast among groups with the Laurentian Tradition cultural heritage. There is no need to invent the arrival on our shores of European groups responsible for the red ochre burials. Such ideas are totally irreconcilible with the facts. By 2000 B.C. the Moorehead burial tradition reached a climax as represented by the red ochre cemeteries. Encroaching groups from Massachusetts appear in Maine by around 1500 B.C. Their arrival coincides with the end of the Moorehead burial tradition and the Laurentian Tradition way of life.

(References - next page)

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SPRING MEETING

April 29, 1973

12 noon - 1 p.m. Exhibits and Lunch
12:30 p.m. - Executive Board meeting
1 p.m. - BUSINESS MEETING

Central Maine Power Co.

Service Bldg.
off
Western Avenue, Augusta

GUEST SPEAKER: Mr. Wendell S. Hadlock, Curator
Farnsworth Museum, Rockland

His Subject: "The General Overall Picture of Maine Archaeology."

Bring a lunch - Coffee available. *Tables for exhibits.*

Bring a Fridne!!!

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The Maine Archaeological Society is a non-profit Educational organization, with a stated purpose of fostering amateur archaeological activity and knowledge in the State of Maine.

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Classes of membership are:

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Institutional	*$3.00 per year*

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Any article not in good taste or plainly written for sake of controversy may be withheld at the discretion of the editor and editorial staff.

The author of each article or paper that is printed will receive two copies of the bulletin in which his work appears.