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THE LOST RIVER BURIAL (24HL403)

By
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I. Site History

In the spring of 1964, Paul Patera of Havre was prospecting for gravel for the Montana State Highway Department. At a location two miles south of the Canadian border and one mile east of the Milk River in north-central Hill County, he found a piled rock ring about 6 feet in diameter. Patera noted the dissimilarity of this structure in comparison to the tipi rings common in the area. He removed some of the stones in the ring and dug a hole in the clear area of the center. About 18 inches below the surface he uncovered a mass of decayed posts. He dug through these and at a depth of about 30 inches found skeletal material and some small seed beads. He then replaced the bone and refilled the hole.

The site came to the attention of the Milk River Archaeology Society (MRAS) when Mr. Patera told Paul English, a co-worker, about the site. English discovered upon visiting the site a second structure 500 feet to the north. This structure, almost identical in size and shape, was undisturbed. English reported that both of these structures would be destroyed by the highway construction in 1965.

On October 3, 1964, a party of MRAS members consisting of Paul English, John Brumley, and Tom Molyneaux excavated the structure found by Patera, (Feature I), and left the structure found by English (Feature II) for later investigation.

The general terrain in which the site is situated is extremely rough. About 200 yards to the east lies the bottom of the coulee along which the structure is located. To the west, the gravel terrace rises gradually, until, at 100 yards, it intercepts the abrupt slope of a high ridge. The crest of the ridge, a quarter mile away and one-half mile from the Milk River, runs southeasterly until it intersects with the river one and one-half miles from the structure. Only a southerly view of any distance is permitted from the structure, allowing a good look at the Bearspaw Mountains.

The site was named after Lost River, an extensive secondary drainage tributary to Milk River, three-quarters of a mile northwest of 24HL403.

II. Excavation of 24HL403 - Feature I

The circular rock structure, was 6 feet 10 inches in diameter. The primary difference between this structure and tipi rings is that tipi rings

III. Material Analyses

Skeletal Remains

According to Dr. D. J. Almas, M.D., of Havre, who examined the material, the burial contained the remains of one human. He stated that the development of the jaw indicated an age of eight to eight and one-half years. He also noted a probable injury resulting from a blow by a sharp-edged instrument on the left temple, a blow which could have caused death. He examined the skull fragments and found the maxillae and temporal bones missing.

The skeletal material was shipped to the Smithsonian Institution, Missour Basin Survey, Lincoln, Nebraska for further study and comparison with other Plains Indian samples.

Beads and Beadwork

Approximately 550 beads were found in the burial. The largest number of beads were found individually, but some were found on segments of cord or in matrices of decayed and corroded material. Following is a description of the various bead types based on bead size, shape, and color (see Table 1).

Samples of the various bead types were submitted to Oscar L. Mallory, archaeologist, Missouri Basin Surveys, Smithsonian Institution at Lincoln. Following are his observations concerning the age and distribution of 24HL403 beads:

> These beads are varieties that were in common use by all Northern Plains Tribes during the 19th century, especially the last half. Several of the varieties were also used much earlier and held a lasting popularity so they have no value as a time marker. The group taken in toto probably dates from late in the 1800's. The lack of so-called "Pony" beads, which were replaced sometime around 1850 by "Seed" beads, suggests to me that this collection was accumulated well after the "Seed" beads had gained popularity.
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> Groups 7, 11 and 12 [Types 9, 4, 7] could predate the rest of the collection. Iridescent surfaces, such as these beads have, are caused by partial decomposition of the glass and may have come about by longer exposure to weather. A second thing that leads me to think they may be earlier is the coarser workmanship, which is more generally found in the 17th and 18th

TABLE I. BEAD CLASSIFICATION.*

Bead Types	Material	No.	Shape	Color	Diameter (inches)	Thickness (inches)	Weight (grams)	Comments**
1	glass	18	disk	white	.219	.105	.16	Mandrel wound
2	glass	2	disk	pink	.231	.104	.18	Mandrel wound
3	glass	3	disk	light green	.227	.108	.16	Mandrel wound
4	glass	35	round	black	.361	.271	.72	Mandrel wound
5	glass	2	round faceted	white	.296	.285	.46	Blown in mold
6	glass	2	round	dark blue	.305	.562	.54	Mold pressed
7	glass	5	round	light blue	.321	.264	.53	Mandrel wound
8	glass	1	round	white	.343	.285	.67	Mold pressed
9	glass	2	disk, edges round	red, white center	.402	.171	.58	Drawn from composite tubing
10	glass	103	round faceted	light blue	.149	.136	.06	Blown in mold
11	glass	1	round	dark	--	--	--	Like Type 10. No measurements taken.
12	glass	207	disk edges round	white	.079	.05	.009	Mandrel wound
13	glass	81	disk edges round	dark blue	.079	.046	.009	Mandrel wound
14	brass	80	round	brass	.155	.15	.078	--
15	brass	8	round	brass	.204	.16	.162	--
16	brass	2	round	brass	.308	.256	.52	--
17	glass	1	round faceted	brown	.298	.248	.48	--

* Bead diameters, thicknesses and weights per bead type are averages for each type.

** See Murray 1964 for a discussion of bead manufacture and the classification upon which 24HL403 bead description is based.

century beads; however, workmanship did not greatly improve on all beads after 1800 and beads of these and similar varieties were still common until at least 1900. It is also possible that conditions within the burial could have caused the differential preservation. In the Mouat collection, beads that were in contact with the body were in a more advanced stage of decomposition than those that were only in contact with the soil.

Groups 1 and 2 [Types 12 and 13] are commonly known as seed or pound beads. They were introduced into the Indian trade ca. 1850 and became an item of high demand. They can still be purchased today.

Groups 6, 8, 5, 11 and 12 [Types 8, 6, 5, 4, 7] are a late type of faceted bead of probably a post 1850 date, cf. MBP collections. This type of bead was a very early trade item and continued in popularity until the very end of the trading period. They are frequently included in medicine bundles of all Northern Plains Tribes.

Group 7 [Type 9] is a bead style variously known as Hudson Bay, Cornaliene, etc. They were used extensively by the Hudson Bay Company beginning as early as the 17th century. Sizes range from as small as 2.0 mm. in diameter up to about 10.0 mm. in diameter. Colors were usually red over white as in this bead but they were also made using black, green and yellow and possibly other colors as well.

Group 9 [Type 1, 2, 3] we don't have any specific information about but judging from the type of glass and workmanship it is probably late.

As previously stated, some of the beads were found on segments of cord or in matrices. Cotton cord coated with some substance to stiffen and strengthen it, and leather, probably rawhide, were used in stringing these beads. These "strings" were too large to have been used with Types 12 and 13 which were seed beads. Of the several matrices found in the burial pit, all contained beads. Four of these had leather strips three-fourths inch long, three-sixteenths inch wide and one-eighth inch thick adhering to them. Each of these leather strips had four equidistnat perforations. An X-ray of these four matrices disclosed four strands of beads in each matrix parallel to one another and perpendicular to the leather strips from which it appears they were strung. The beads in the strands were small, light blue, faceted, glass beads (Type 10) and small, round brass beads (Type 14). One strand began with one glass bead (Type 11), identical to Type 10, but dark blue instead of light blue. This bead was

PLATE II.

Figure 1. (2/3 actual size)

Figure 2. (1/2 actual size)

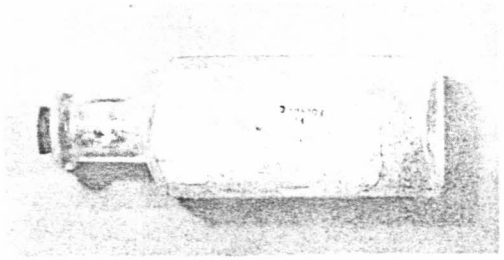

Figure 3. (3/5 actual size)

Figure 4. (2 times actual size)

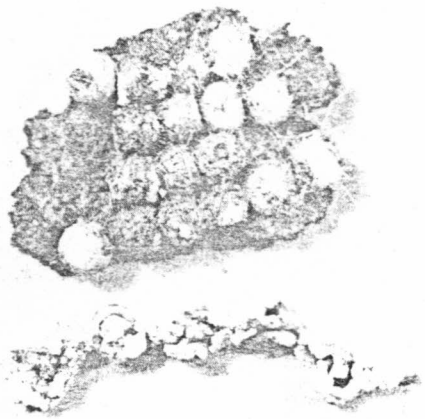

Figure 5. (1.6 times actual size)

Figure 6. (2 times actual size)

Photos by Dr. H. R. Larson

the first bead in the strand next to the leather strip. Possibly all the strands had a dark blue bead in this position, but this is the only one not encased in the matrix.

Beads strung from the leather strip consisted of three or four glass beads followed by three or four brass beads, etc. (Plate II, Figure 5). It was not possible to determine whether the strands of beads were strung from one leather strip to another or whether the strands were attached to a leather strip at one end, hanging free at the other.

Segments of a strand of large black beads (Type 4) and a strand of white disk-shaped beads (Type 1, Plate II, Figure 6) were found in some of the matrices. These two different strands appear to have been strung continuously with no change in bead types. A segment of leather cord 2 inches long containing four large beads (Plate II, Figure 4) was found. These beads were strung in the following order: white faceted (Type 5), large brass (Type 16), red with white center (Type 9), and brown faceted (Type 17).

Textiles

Cloth fragments representing four differing types of material were found throughout the burial pit. Mallory examined the textiles. His descriptive and identifying comments follow (personal communication, October 11, 1965):

Sample 1.--This sample is common calico with a blue pin stripe print. The print is a 1/4 inch wide band of five stripes separated from adjacent bands by 1/4 inch of unprinted material. Each stripe is 1/32 inch wide and runs parallel to the selvage.

Weave: plain (over one - under one)
Warp: 1/128 inch diameter, 1 ply, S-twist cotton, 60 strands per inch.
Fill: (weft) 1/128 inch in diameter, 1 ply, S-twist cotton, 60 strands per inch.

Sample 2.--A bright red flannel shirting material. The impression derived from examination is that it is the cloth known as outing flannel. (Outing flannel is a loose woven, knapped cotton cloth of solid color or patterned print used primarily for children's clothing.)

Weave: plain
Warp: 1/128 inch diameter, 1 ply, S-twist cotton, 36 strands per inch.
Fill: 1/64 inch diameter, 1 ply, S-twist cotton, 28 strands per inch.