

TIPI RINGS IN SOUTHERN ALBERTA:  
THE ALKALI CREEK SITES  
LOWER RED DEER RIVER

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## ABSTRACT

A second three-month project on the lower Red Deer River was initiated to increase the knowledge of the prehistoric potential of that area. Through a contract of the Archaeological Survey of Alberta, a two-part program was established. The first part involved a saturation re-survey of the area around the mouth of Alkali Creek. This survey increased the site inventory from 32 to 321 recorded locations in 30.5 km<sup>2</sup>.

Using these sites as a data base, the second phase was concerned with excavation or testing of a variety of sites to gain a greater perception of the cultural economy of the area. To this effect, 11 tipi rings, eight cairns, one surface site and a bison kill were all either excavated or tested.

The results of the first phase suggested that the hypotheses initiated in the first season of survey were essentially true for the area. This meant that the river valley and its surrounding environs supported a high-density population. However, this population was not evenly distributed. Within any single, small area, differential patterning could be determined on the basis of environment and on the basis of site type. It was further determined that similar variables resulted in similar patterns in two adjacent survey areas in which the research was conducted independently.

The second phase resulted in some new and interesting data, particularly in relation to tipi rings. New data on settlement patterning, resource utilization, and intrasite patterning was all forthcoming. One site, EfOp-324, demonstrated how multiple use of a location affected ring configurations while another, EfOp-53, had a buried ring component that suggested Oxbow phase affinities. All ring sites indicated considerably more data were available to the investigator than was previously thought.

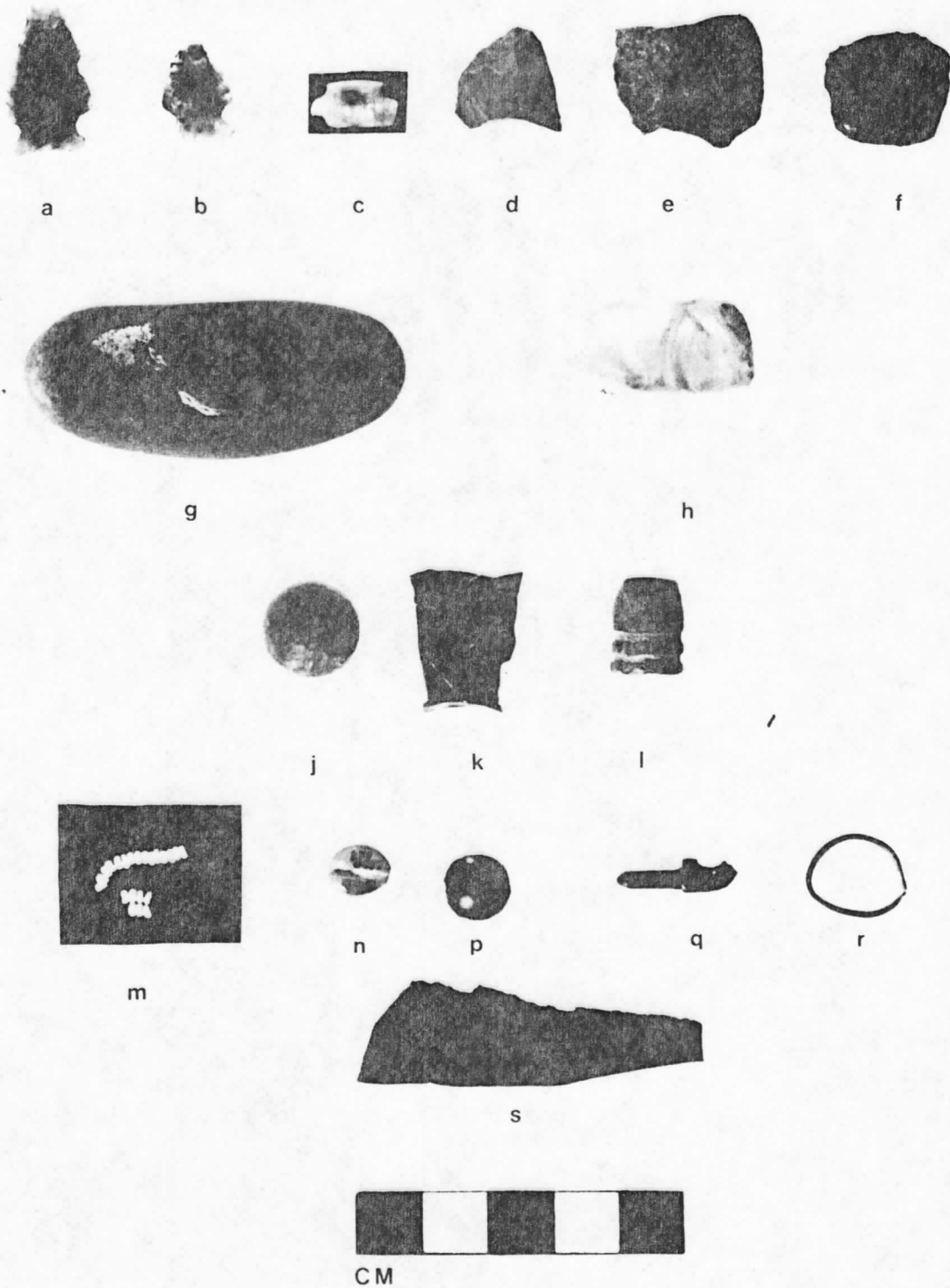


Plate 11. Artifacts from EfOp-324.

### Beads (Plate 11m, n)

There were two styles of beads represented at this site. Three large fragments of split beads were all ceramic. A half of a purple bead was 9.9 mm long, 8.3 mm wide and had a 1.2 mm diameter central hole. It was partially melted. Two blue beads had similar shapes but were more melted so measurements were not precise.

There were also 28 seed beads from the site. Two of the beads were blue and the remainder were white. Measurements have not been taken.

### ARTIFACT ANALYSIS

The limited sample of artifacts were typical of the basic lithic tool inventory of prehistoric Northwestern Plains Indians. They were most notable for the absence of tool types than for their inclusion. There were no identifiable Early Prehistoric period artifacts and no specialty tools such as awls, drills, gravers, hafted bifaces and so on. There was also no ceramic representation, no grinding tools, nor bone tools.

The correlation of artifact types with time periods was extremely tenuous. The statistical size of the sample and the incomplete collections indicated large information gaps that require further study. However, a few correlations were noted and mentioned as a purely comparative exercise. The sites with projectile points were divided into two groups: Early Middle Prehistoric (Hanna and Oxbow phases) and Late Prehistoric (Old Women's phase). Artifacts associated exclusively with the Early Middle Prehistoric within this sample were Style 2 bifaces and Style 2 end scrapers. Artifacts found only in Early Middle Prehistoric sites and sites of unknown phase determination were Style 1 bifaces and Style 1 end scrapers. Artifacts found only in Late Prehistoric sites or sites of unknown age included Style 1 side scrapers, Style 1 unifaces and pecked cobbles. All other categories were found in both phases or had unknown affinities.

Information on spatial distribution was almost as poorly defensible, as only 37 sites had tools represented. They comprised only 11.5% of the total number of sites or 18.4% of the sites with flakes. The only meaningful figure was that 26 of the 37 sites (70.3%) had unifaces. Of more significance was the difference among relative quantities of tool types. Of the 169 analysed lithic tools, 12.4% were projectile points, 10% were bifaces