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## THE RAT INDIAN CREEK SITE AND THE LATE PREHISTORIC PERIOD IN THE INTERIOR NORTHERN YUKON

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis reports upon the results of excavation and analysis of the Rat Indian Creek site (MjVg-1), a late prehistoric-historic stratified site located on the Porcupine River, northern Yukon Territory. The major objectives of this research were to attempt to refine the existing late prehistoric sequence for the interior Northern Yukon and to resolve some of the more specific issues regarding technology and typology that were raised by previous research in this region.

Seven cultural levels were defined during the excavation phase of the project. These include one historic and six prehistoric (levels 2,3,5,6,6A, and 6B) cultural layers; only level 5, the largest and most complex, and levels 6/6A produced sample sizes large enough for detailed study. Radiocarbon dates for level 5 range from  $340^{+90}$  B.P. to  $1180^{+80}$  B.P. and two dates from level 6A suggest a time span of  $1510^{+80}$  B.P. to  $2010^{+70}$  B.P.

A combination of approaches are used in the analysis and description of the collections. The first of these involves the use of technological analyses to reveal the complexities of late prehistoric technological systems within and between cultural units at the site level. The second makes use of more traditional descriptive-comparative typological methods to explore the relationships of the Rat Indian Creek assemblages with other late prehistoric sites within and outside of the northern Yukon.

At the site level, the technological analysis of the lithic remains indicates the presence of cryptocrystalline and coarse stone industries. The former is based largely on the reduction of small (50 mm) chert pebble cores and is characterized by a fairly restricted range of tool forms. Most of the latter appear to have been destined for use in the manufacture of bone and antler artifacts. The coarse stone industry is represented by waste material and finished artifacts primarily made of rocks such as quartzite and tabular sandstones. These raw materials were used for the manufacture of a variety of spall tools and tabular bifaces.

Technological analysis of the bone and antler artifacts indicates the presence of a highly developed industry involving the systematic reduction of bone and antler cores using longitudinal and transverse grooving techniques. The resulting blanks were used to produce a range of implements through the use of secondary shaping and finishing techniques of whittling, scraping, and polishing in the later stages of tool manufacture.

Inter-level differences in the lithic industries suggests the presence of two components. This is indicated by a number of technological differences which occur at approximately A.D. 700. These include a considerable reduction in bifacial technology in the cryptocrystalline industry in the post-A.D. 700 component; morphological differences in bifacial tools and scrapers and technological differences in the use of larger primary cores for the production of blanks for the manufacture of these implements in the earlier component; techno-morphological dis-

tinctions in the use of secondary stages of shaping in the manufacture of scrapers before A.D. 700; and the much greater occurrence of pièces esquillées in the later component. Inter-level differences in the bone and antler industry are not evident because the earlier component has very few specimens.

More generalized comparative studies indicate that Rat Indian Creek can be integrated into the existing prehistoric framework for the northern Yukon and other areas of the western subarctic. Two phases are proposed to accommodate the two components at MjVg-1 and other late prehistoric sites in the middle Porcupine. The earlier has been tentatively defined as the Old Chief Phase and extends from ca. 900 B.C. to A.D. 700. It includes the 6/6A component at MjVg-1, and prehistoric components at the Old Chief Creek and Lazarus sites. The later component forms part of the Klo-kut Phase. It begins about A.D. 700 and persists until the mid-nineteenth century and the arrival of European traders. It includes the level 5 component at Rat Indian Creek, the prehistoric levels from the Klo-kut site and the latest prehistoric component at Old Chief Creek.

External comparisons indicate that the Klo-kut Phase is closely related to such well-known sites as upper component Dixthada, Kavik, and several other sites throughout the northwest. Collectively, these late prehistoric manifestations can be considered as a broadly defined technocomplex spanning the period from roughly A.D. 700 to the mid nineteenth century. Although less well represented, the earlier Old Chief Phase exhibits relationships to a more restricted range of sites in Alaska (Itkillik complex at Onion Portage; the early component at Minchumina) and southwest Yukon (Taye lake phase components).

## RESUME

Cette thèse présente les résultats de fouilles et d'analyses effectuées au site de Rat Indian Creek (MjVg-1), site stratifié occupé à la fin de la préhistoire et au début de la période historique et situé sur la rivière Porcupine, dans le nord du Yukon. Les recherches avaient pour principaux objectifs d'essayer de raffiner la chronologie de la fin de la préhistoire pour l'intérieur du nord du Yukon et de résoudre certaines des questions précises concernant la technologie et la typologie, questions auxquelles avaient donné lieu des recherches antérieures dans la région.

Les fouilles ont permis de délimiter sept niveaux culturels, dont l'un datait de la période historique et les six autres de la préhistoire (niveaux 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 6a et 6b); seuls le niveau 5, le plus grand et le plus complexe, et les niveaux 6 et 6a ont livré des échantillons assez gros pour permettre une étude détaillée. Pour le niveau 5, les dates obtenues par la méthode de datation au carbone 14 varient entre  $840 \pm 90$  B.P. et  $1180 \pm 80$  B.P. et les deux dates obtenues pour le niveau 6A donnent à penser que celui-ci aurait existé de  $1510 \pm 80$  B.P. à  $2010 \pm 70$  B.P.

A fourth shell case has no head stamp, but is exactly the same size as the .44 caliber shells. Logan (ibid.) illustrates a similar specimen which is described as a black powder, .44 caliber Smith and Wesson Russian. One of these has also been reported for the Klo-kut site (Morlan 1973a:369). This type of cartridge was "...first introduced in 1870 and listed in the catalogues of 1908" (Stephens 1972, cited in Morlan 1973a).

Two other cases, neither of which is head stamped, are larger than the .44 caliber cases and may be .45-70 shells. One of these (Plate 99:e) contains a wooden shaft which is broken off just above the top of the case neck. A wad of tabby weave blue fabric was found inside the cartridge; this was presumably used to wedge the shaft in place. Morlan (1972:15) has described similar objects from the historic period Cadzow Lake site, which is located on the Porcupine River midway between Klo-kut and Rat Indian Creek. Ethnographic examples have also been recorded for the Han. Osgood (1971:134) reports that he

was told at Moosehide in 1930 that after breech-loading guns came into use, empty cartridges were substituted over the ends of arrow shafts as a replacement for the aboriginal blunt-end arrows whittled from a single piece of wood.

The second large cartridge case appears to have exploded (Plate 99:f). Nearly one-half of the case has peeled back almost to the base. The open end of the case appears to have been cut, presumably before destruction of the shell occurred.

#### Buttons (N=4) Plate 99:j-l

Four metal buttons were recovered from level 1. Three of these were made of pressed metal. One is painted with gold or brass coloured paint, and has the designation "Our Own Make \*" stamped on the surface surrounding four holes; the latter are arranged in a square configuration in a recessed dimple in the centre of the button. Measurements are: dia. 13.6 mm; t. 1.6 mm. The second specimen (Plate 99:l), which is painted black, has a similar arrangement of four holes. An illegible designation is stamped into the rim surrounding the holes. Measurements are: dia. 16.6 mm; t. 1.2 mm. The third pressed metal example (Plate 99:k) is flat with edges crimped over onto the rear; two centrally placed holes resemble slots. Measurements are: dia. 15.0 mm; t. 1.4 mm. The fourth button consists of a plain riveted specimen with a central post (Plate 99:j). Measurements are: dia. 14.8 mm; t. 5.3 mm. Workman (1978:360) and Morlan (1972:21) have mentioned similar types of buttons. Morlan (ibid.:) suggests that they may be from overall pants and straps, and indicates that they have been manufactured since the late nineteenth century.

#### Glass Beads (N=36) Plate 99:b-d

An assortment of various kinds of glass beads was found in level 1. These have been classified on the basis of size categories ["seed" (less

than 3.0 mm in diameter), small (3.0-5.0 mm in diameter), and large (greater than 5.0 mm) (modified after Morlan 1972:22 and Workman 1978:356-58)] and the colours represented (Table 126).

The 36 beads in the collection include 18 seed, 11 small and 7 large. Four of the latter are red with white centres and are known as Cornaline d'Allepo. These were "...widely distributed among Indians of North America in the nineteenth century" (VanStone 1970:84-85). Morlan has recently summarized some information bearing of the distribution and chronology of these beads (1972). In addition to white-lined forms, there are green and brown-lined varieties. These have been reported in northern Yukon sites such as Klo-kut (Morlan 1973a:370) and Cadzow Lake (Morlan 1972), and I have seen unpublished examples from the Old Chief Creek site, which is situated just upstream from Klo-kut (Cinq-Mars 1974). Morlan (1972:47) cites evidence (Woodward 1965) that indicates that the green-lined forms are earlier than the white-lined types. Stratigraphic information from the Cadzow Lake site seems to indicate a similar situation in the northern Yukon. At this site, only green-lined and brown-lined examples were present in layer 3, which is dated to approximately A.D. 1850. The succeeding layer 2 unit (ca. A.D. 1880) yielded Cornaline d'Allepo varieties of all three types. For various reasons, Morlan (1972:70) feels that the source of all of the Cornaline d'Allepo beads was more likely to be British than Russian.

The rest of the large beads consist of pale blue examples (Plate 99:b-c) and may be of Russian derivation. Osgood (1971:128), for example, mentions the "...large Russian blue bead..." as being one of the most "...important precontact trade articles..." among the Han.

There is little information regarding the "small" category of beads (Plate 99:d). Seed beads are considered to be modern by Morlan (1972:47). Their earliest known occurrence in the northern Yukon is from layer 2 of the Cadzow Lake site, which Morlan (ibid.:48, 73) dates to about A.D. 1880.

#### Clay Pipe Fragment (N=1) Plate 99:a

This specimen consists of a bowl fragment which includes a portion of the rim and one side. Measurements are: l. 25.4 mm; w. 13.2 mm; t. 3.8 mm; wt. 1.1 gms.

#### Miscellaneous Pieces of Metal (N=10)

This category includes two strips of steel and eight pieces of sheet metal; two of the latter may represent the remains of a tobacco can. The two pieces of steel include one small, irregularly shaped fragment (l. 36.2 mm; w. 16.1 mm; t. 2.2 mm; wt. 2.7 gms) and a narrow strip-like section (l. 140.1 mm; w. 15.6 mm; t. 2.2 mm; wt. 18.2 gms). The latter has an edge which may be cut and a pointed end which definitely is cut; chisel (?) marks are visible on the surface adjacent to this end.

The sheet metal is represented by the following specimens. One rectangular piece (l. 48.3 mm; w. 42.2 mm; t. 1.1 mm; wt. 4.9 gms) has a ridge running across it near one end. A roughly rectangular example is



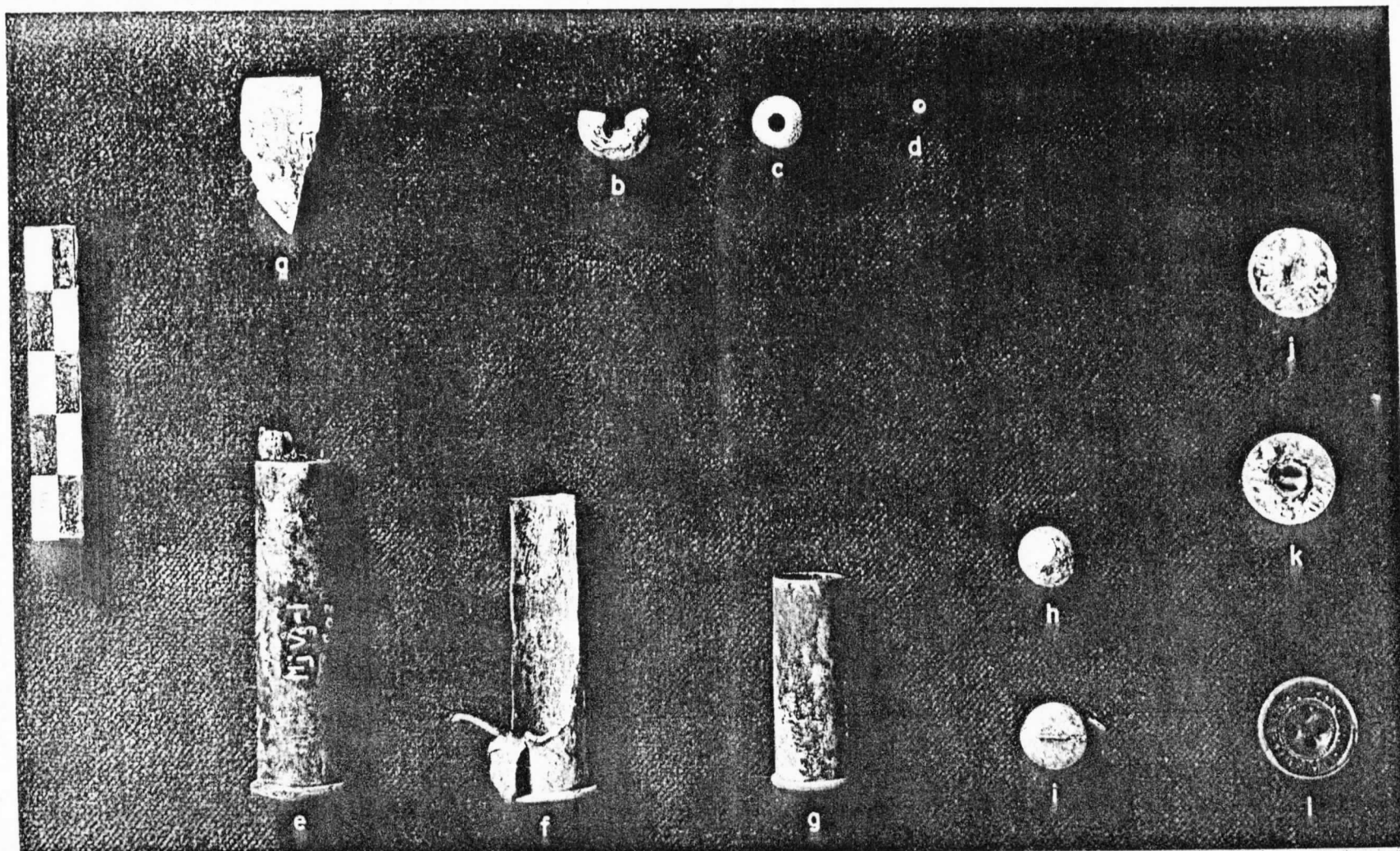


Plate 99. Euro-Canadian Artifacts. (a) 4876, Level 1, Clay Pipe-bowl Frag.; (b) 1426, Level 1, Broken Large Pale Blue Glass Bead; (c) 3612, Level 1, Large Pale Blue Glass Bead; (d) 1098, Level 1, Blue Glass Seed Bead; (e) 903, Level 1, Cartridge Case with Wooden Shaft; (f) 1137, Level 1, Exploded Cartridge Case; (g) 1127, Level 1, W.R.A. Co. 44 W.C.F.; (h) 1410, Level 1, Slug; (i) 1162, Level 1, Collapsed Slug; (j) 1159, Level 1, Riveted Button with Central Post; (k) 1150, Level 1, Pressed Metal Button; (l) 1415, Level 1, Pressed Metal Button

Catalogue number	Length	Width	Diameter	Thickness	Weight
2922	13.3	-	4.3	-	0.05
3740	32.5	-	6.6	-	0.3
1231	37.2	12.9	-	5.6	0.3
1320	112.9	15.9	-	7.0	3.1
2195	38.0	31.3	-	3.1	1.4
2415	68.4	11.2	-	5.2	1.4
1235	42.6	13.4	-	5.3	1.1

Table 124. Metrical Observations on Wood Artifacts from MjVg-1

Catalogue Number	Calibre	Length	Diameter	Head Stamp
1157	.44	33.2	10.8	W.R.A. Co. 44 W.C.F.
1536	.44	33.4	10.7	None
1423	.44	33.3	10.4	W.R.A. Co. 44 W.C.F.
889	.44	33.1	10.0	W.R.A. Co. 44 W.C.F.
903	.45-70 ?	53.5	11.8	None
1137	.45-70	47.9	11.0	None

Table 125. Metrical Observations for Six Brass Cartridge Cases

Bead Types	N	Diameter			Length		
		$\bar{x}$	s	r	$\bar{x}$	s	r
Opaque white seed	10	2.0	0.3	1.6-2.4	1.3	0.3	1.0-2.0
Opaque blue seed	7	2.3	0.5	1.6-2.9	1.4	0.4	0.8-2.0
Yellow seed	1	1.4			0.8		
Pale blue small	8	3.6	0.6	3.1-4.8	2.2	0.5	1.6-3.0
Pale blue (frags.)	2	4.8	0.3	4.6-5.0			
Green small	1	3.0			1.8		
Pale blue large	2	10.2	2.4	8.5-11.9	7.6	0.3	7.4-7.8
Blue large (broken)	1	7.4			6.6		
Cornaline d'Allepo							
White lined red (comp.)	2	5.1	0.1	5.0-5.1	3.2	0.3	3.0-3.4
White lined red (broken)	1	7.4			6.6		
White lined red (frag.)	1	-			-		
Totals	36						

Table 126. Metrical Observations for Various Sizes of Glass Beads