

Salvage excavations at Lillooet, British Columbia

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No historic burials attributable to the Lillooet Indians have been adequately described in the archaeological literature. Recent excavations by Simon Fraser University salvaged the remains of a burial site near Lillooet, British Columbia. Three *in situ* inhumations and 231 artifacts were uncovered, all that remained of an estimated original 30 to 40 burials. Associated artifacts of copper and iron suggest an early historic date for the burials. An example of reversed stratigraphy as a result of hydraulic mining operations was encountered.

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Introduction

The Murray Site (EeR1 18) is located just outside the town limits of Lillooet, British Columbia, on land owned by Dan Murray of Fort St. John (Fig. 1, 2). In the fall of 1967 Rudolph Haliday, a resident of Lillooet, noticed human bones and copper artifacts eroding from a sandy terrace bank near his home. He notified Simon Fraser University in March, 1968, by which time a large area of the bank had been disturbed by local residents "excavating" for Indian relics. The human bones, which had been thrown down the bank, were gathered, and many of the artifacts taken from the site were donated to the University. Because these local people expressed their intent to continue digging, the University decided to salvage the remains of the burial site, and in August a small-scale student excavation was conducted under the co-directorship of the authors.

The site is located on the lowest terrace along the west bank of the Fraser River about 40 m above the river's summer flood level. The site is limited to that part of the terrace which contained the burials and measured 25 m north-south by 30 m east-west. No surface features marked the site, which is situated along the wind-eroded eastern terrace edge, 50 m from the southern end. A second terrace lies 15 m above the first and forms the bed of the Pacific Great Eastern Railway and highway B.C. 12, both of which run parallel to the river at this point. Evidence of hydraulic mining is present on the upper terrace. The soil had been washed onto the lower terrace and rows of rocks covered much of the surface.

Six pits (A to C and E to G) were dug around the disturbed area to determine the horizontal extent of the burials (Fig. 3). Three undisturbed burials and two cultural features were encountered. One pit (D) was placed in the disturbed sand to reveal the vertical extent of disturbance and to recover any material which had been overlooked and reburied by local residents. Pits H to K were dug to test areas of the terrace near the site, and a long narrow trench (pit L) was excavated to give a better understanding of the terrace stratigraphy.

Stratigraphy

The natural stratigraphy can be divided into three major units. The upper unit, which contained one cultural feature and several prehistoric artifacts, was present in all pits and averaged between 0.00 and 0.85 m below surface (B.S.). It consisted of sands of varying colour, texture, and degree of consolidation and one thin stratum of pea-gravel. Six distinct layers are definable within the first or upper unit: (1) surface to 0.05 m B.S.; well-defined, unconsolidated dark-brown sand with numerous plant rootlets (the turf zone); (2) 0.05-0.20 m B.S.; well-defined, compact yellow-brown sand with some plant roots; (3) 0.20-0.35 m B.S.; well-defined, unconsolidated pea-gravel with laminated fine grey sand or silt; (4) 0.35-0.40 m B.S.; poorly defined, unconsolidated fine grey sand; this layer was not visible in all profiles and is completely absent in pits E and G; (5) 0.40-0.50 m B.S.; poorly defined, compact brown to reddish-brown medium sand; pit C at this level revealed a possible cultural layer

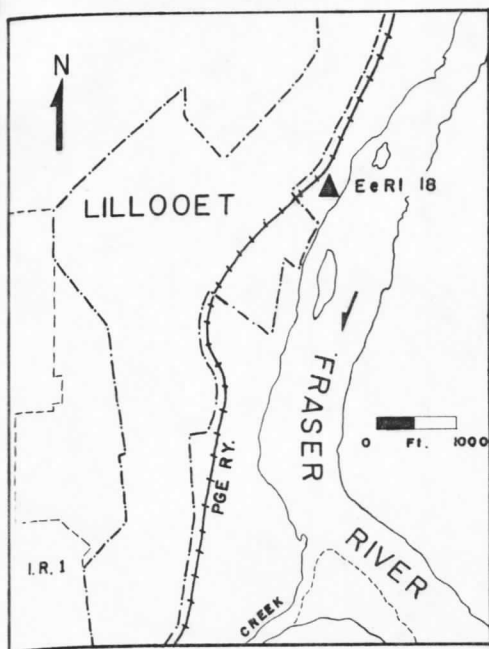


FIGURE 2. Location of the Murray Site (EeR1 18).

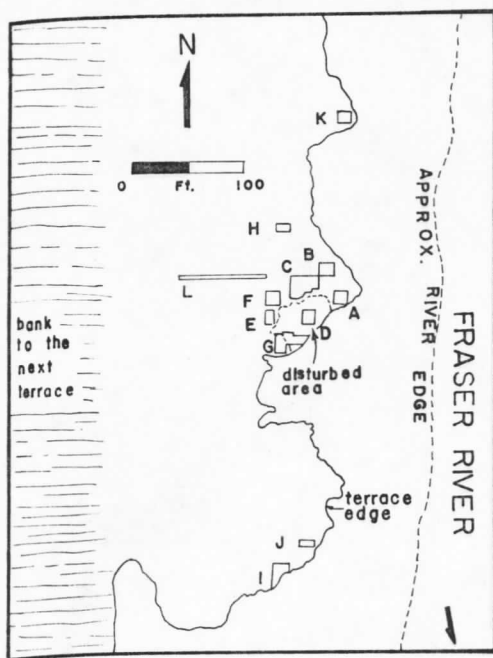


FIGURE 3. The Murray Site: location of excavation pits and the disturbed area. Excavation pits are lettered A to L.

fire-cracked, but no charcoal or unburned wood fragments were found. The "platform" extended throughout all of pit B, although the rock concentration was less dense in the southwest corner. The feature did not appear in adjacent pit E nor in pit A. Time did not permit us to define the horizontal extent of the feature, but a north-south profile through the centre of the pit did reveal that the "platform" averaged 10 cm thick, that it consisted of only one layer of rock, and that no stratigraphic pits were associated with the feature. Numerous flakes of vitreous basalt were found among the rocks of the feature, but flakes were also scattered throughout the middle unit, both above and below the "platform."

The third feature was a shallow depression lined with a fibrous material exposed 1 m below the surface of test pit I. This object may be a decomposed basketry tray or a shallow hole lined with a vegetal material. Walls were 3 cm thick and 8 cm deep with a diameter of 62 cm. It contained an unconsolidated grey sand and numerous salmon vertebræ, opercula, and other bones, but no artifacts were associated with it.

Burials

Three undisturbed burials were salvaged. All represent primary interments buried in shallow circular pits which were then filled with a rock-free fine sand. These unconsolidated grey sand pits were dug into the very compact reddish-brown sand of the middle stratigraphic unit and were outstanding clues to the specific location of the burials. No lithic grave markers were associated with the small burial pits, nor was there any evidence for the four-pole superstructure often erected over burials by the Lillooet in historic times (Teit, 1906). The three burials came from pits C and G just north and southwest of the disturbed area. They represent the maximum inward extension of the grave area from the terrace edge.

Burial 1 is an infant less than 1 year old of undetermined sex. It was interred on its back in a semi-flexed position with its feet crossed and knees drawn up to the rib cage. The trunk lay aligned east-west with the skull pointing east and facing northwest. The skeleton was enclosed in a small oval of unconsolidated fire

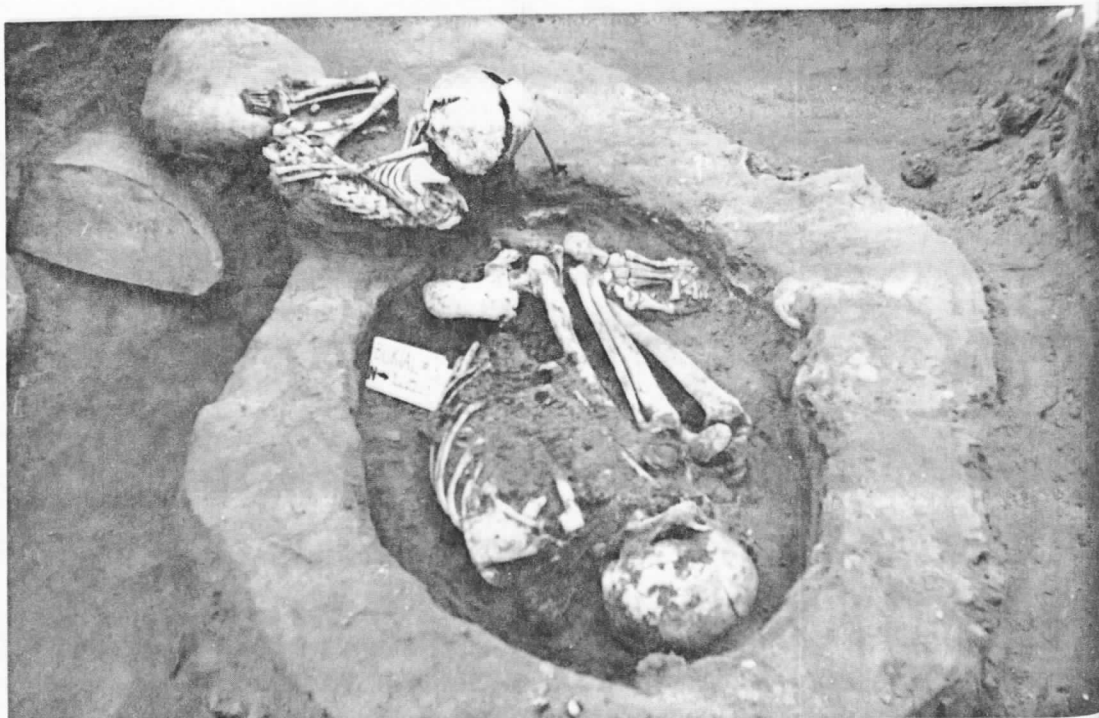


FIGURE 4. Burial 2 and burial 3, looking southwest.

grey sand 90 cm below the surface of pit C. Sagebrush basketry enclosed the left side of the infant and may be the remains of a carrier. Teit (1906) mentions infant-and-carrier burials for the Upper Lillooet, although these were infrequent in historic times. Dentalium shell beads, glass trade beads, and copper tubing were strung on rawhide to form a necklace, which was found inside a rabbit-fur pouch overlying the right arm. A copper thimble was also attached to the rawhide necklace. Two dentalium shell beads were recovered from behind the neck.

Burial 2, a 2-year-old female, was uncovered 1.13 to 1.26 m below the surface of pit G (Fig. 4). The flexed skeleton lay on its right side and was oriented east-west with the skull pointing west and facing directly down. Both feet rested on a small cobble, and one large pebble had been placed on either side of the skull. The right arm had been flexed, whereas the left arm lay extended along the trunk. The burial pit

measured 49 cm long (east-west), 40 cm wide (north-south), and 23 cm thick. Tiny charcoal specks were found throughout the unconsolidated grey sand and may be the remains of a fire used to thaw the frozen ground in winter (Teit 1906). Patches of black moss (*Alectoria jubata*) lay below the skeleton, while numerous cream-coloured nutlets of the puccoon (*Lithospermum incisum*) were scattered among the bones. Teit (1906) noted the placement of black moss over many historic Lillooet burials while Smith (1899) excavated late prehistoric burials with associated puccoon nutlets at Lytton. Small sage roots had grown between the legs and in the pelvic area but had not disturbed the skeleton. No artifacts were associated with the burial.

Burial 3 is a 30-year-old female, also from pit G (Fig. 4). The skeleton had been placed on its right side with the head pointing northeast and the skull facing west. A pebble underneath the right parietal area supported the skull. En-

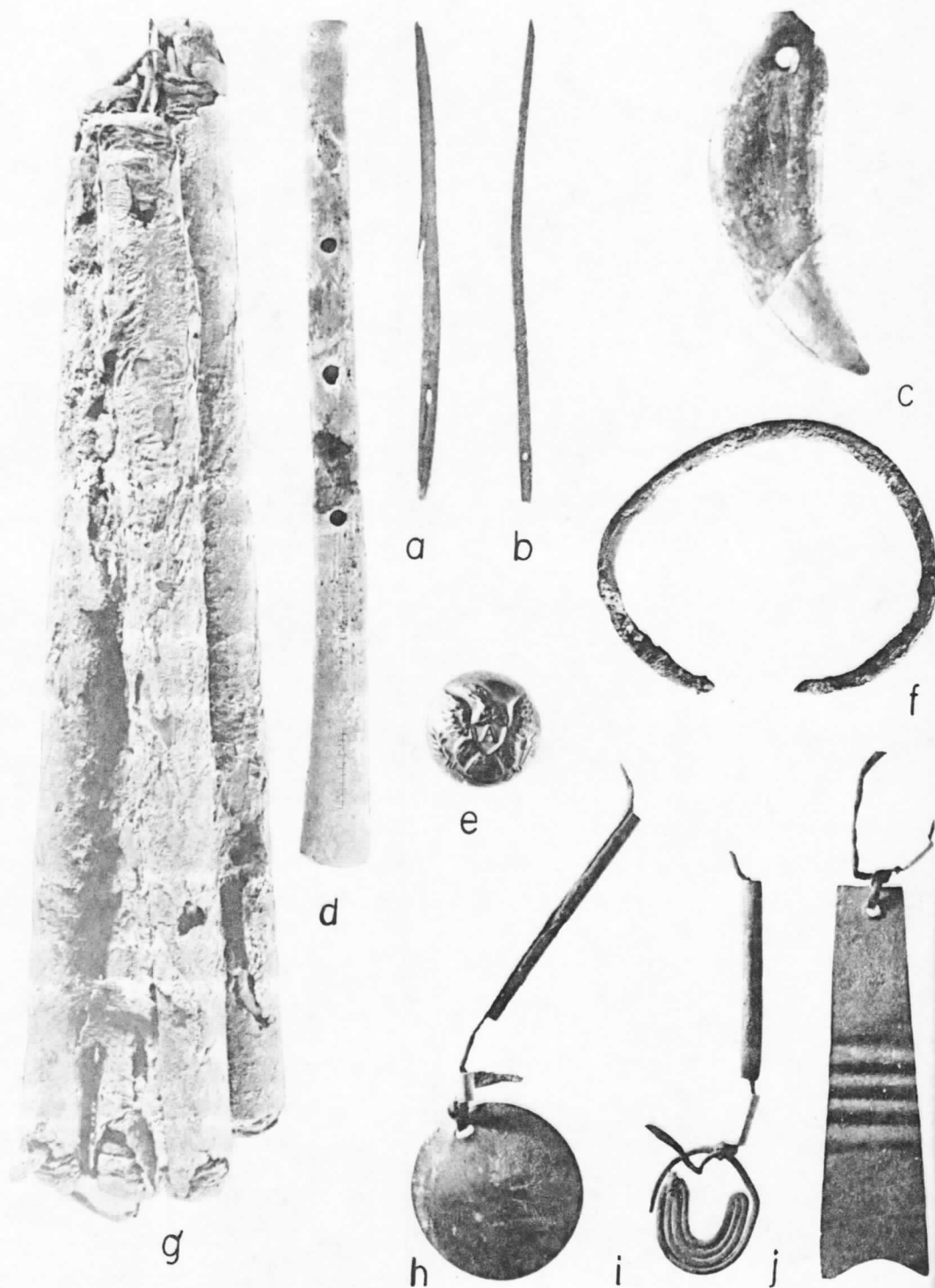


FIGURE 6. Artifacts recovered from the disturbed sand and donated by local residents: *a*, bone needle; *b*, copper needle; *c*, perforated mammal tooth; *d*, 3-stop bird-bone whistle; *e*, brass button; *f*, copper bracelet; *g*, copper-jacketed rod armour; *h*, circular brass pendant; *i*, coiled copper wire pendant; *j*, corrugated copper pendant. Length of *a* is 10.5 cm.

- (34) A circular whorl of heavy copper wire with a cut dentalium bead and one copper bead on a rawhide thong (Fig. 6). The thong has been broken but may have formed a loop.
- (35) Three cut dentalium beads and one copper bead threaded on a rawhide thong 10.5 cm long which is knotted at one end and broken at the other.
- (36) A piece of 8-strand braided cord 9 cm long and 0.5 cm in diameter.
- (37) A split bone knife handle without the blade. Two iron rivets join the two bone halves and incised lines radiate from the rivets on both faces.
- (38) A piece of tanned hide with rotten or torn ends 11 cm long and 5 cm wide.
- (39) A heavy brass object, possibly a drawer knob.
- (40) The corroded remains of a copper sheet 15.5 cm long and 4.5 cm wide.

Plentiful artifacts without association include 35 cut dentalium shells, approximately 150 glass beads of various sizes, shapes, and shades of blue, including two white glass beads, and a small quantity of powdered red ochre.

Discussion and Conclusions

The Murray Site is located within the territory inhabited ethnographically by the Fraser River band of the Upper Lillooet. James Teit (1906) is the principal ethnographer of the Lillooet and adjacent tribes. Charles Hill-Tout (1905) and Verne Ray (1939) have also contributed to the study of Lillooet culture.

Inhumation was the dominant form of disposal of the dead (Teit, 1906, p. 269); tree burials were occasionally used for temporary disposal (Ray, 1939, p. 61). Corpses were often tied into the flexed position and placed on their left side in shallow circular graves with the crown of the skull pointing west (Teit, 1906). The bodies were frequently wrapped in animal skins and mats or were covered with birch-bark sheets and grass. Graves were generally scooped into soft sandy terraces or promontories (Sanger, 1968) some distance from the village or summer camp. Three types of grave markers were most frequently used by the Upper Lillooet: a circle of rocks, a rock pile, or a four-

pole wooden superstructure erected over the grave, from which was suspended the deceased's property (Teit, 1906, p. 270).

Archaeological burial data come nearly exclusively from sites belonging to the late prehistoric and ethnographic period. No excavations have been conducted in Lillooet territory, but some investigations have occurred in adjacent areas. Initial archaeological work was conducted by Harlan I. Smith (1899) at Lytton and in the Thompson River-Nicola Valley region (Smith, 1900). Excavations of major significance did not occur until the work of Charles Borden and David Sanger in the Lochnore-Nesikep locality in the early 1960's.

Archaeological evidence from these adjacent areas for the disposal of the dead supports ethnographic data. Flexed inhumations dug into sandy terraces or promontories are the dominant pattern. Grave inclusions emphasize personal ornaments and implements. Pierced animal teeth, bone and shell beads, animal-teeth and animal-claw necklaces, and dentalia have been recorded. Such historic artifacts as copper sheets and bracelets, iron knives, glass beads, buttons, and copper tubing have been found in younger graves. Red and yellow ochre, pierced scallop shells and puccoon nutlets have also been noted (Smith, 1899).

The Lillooets were prodigious traders in aboriginal times and had well-defined trade routes via the Lower Lillooets to the Fraser Valley and Howe Sound, and with the Chilcotin and Carrier to the Bella Coola Valley to the north. Initial trade with Europeans began around 1790, when trade ships were active on the Pacific Coast. That the Lillooets did have European trade goods traded from the coast was noticed by Simon Fraser in 1808: "... we observed several European articles among them, particularly a new copper Tea Kettle, and a gun of a large size and which, perhaps, are of a Russian manufacture" (Lamb, 1960, p. 83).

No trading-posts were immediately established in the Lillooet area as a result of Fraser's journey. The earliest and the nearest posts with which the Lillooets could have traded on a large scale were at Kamloops and Alexandria, both of which were established by 1813. The Lillooets remained relatively unacculturated until 1858, the year gold was discovered on the Fra-

ser. By 1860 there were over 5,000 miners on the banks of the Fraser and its tributary creeks in the Lillooet-Bridge River region. Such an influx of white men resulted in the rapid acculturation of the Lillooet Indian.

Stratigraphic evidence at the Murray Site suggests that the upper stratigraphic unit was deposited by the wash from hydraulic mining activity on the higher terraces. The typologically prehistoric artifacts of the upper unit were carried with the sand. The burials were dug into the middle stratigraphic unit (which also contained prehistoric artifacts) from the top of this unit when it still was the terrace surface. The burials are definitely not intruded through the upper stratigraphic unit.

The burials date to no earlier than 1813, the beginning of intensive trade in the area. If the upper stratigraphic unit is definitely associated with hydraulic mining, the burials must predate 1893, when hydraulic mining began on the terraces around Lillooet. In the late 1880's Dawson noticed graves with associated iron fragments on a wind-eroded terrace overlooking the bridge at Lillooet, and he suggested that these date to no earlier than 1840 (Dawson, 1891). We think that the Murray Site interments date to that or the subsequent decade. Irrespective of their exact date, the burials resemble the burial practices attributed by Teit (1906) to the Lillooet Indians and the site conforms to the general historic pattern as defined for south-central British Columbia by ethnographic and archaeological data.

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