

# Archaeology of the Lytton - Lillooet Area

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## INTRODUCTION

The archaeological sites in the Lytton-Lillooet area are mainly confined to the river terraces which range from 100 to 600 feet in height above the Fraser and Thompson Rivers. Some sites are located in adjoining valleys where root digging and hunting activities were conducted.

Three major physiographic and ecologic zones can be defined for this region. The first zone is the steep and narrow bedrock canyon of the Fraser and Thompson rivers. The rocky constricted sites along the river gorges were used for the seasonal exploitation of the anadromous fish.

Above the river gorge lies the terraces consisting of glacial outwash gravels and sands with a covering of bunch grass, sagebrush, rabbit bush, cactus and scattered Ponderosa pine. These terraces contain the semi-subterranean pithouses which were occupied in ethnographic times.

The third zone is the mountain valley region with the characteristic vegetation being Douglas fir, spruce, and some deciduous trees. Some evidence of aboriginal utilization in the form of summer root digging camps and fall hunting camps is found in this zone.

## ETHNOGRAPHY

James Teit is the principal authority for the ethnographic data of the Indians of the Lytton-Lillooet area. His study of the Thompson Indians (Teit 1900) and of the Lillooet Indians (Teit 1906) constitute the only determined effort of early work in the area. From his studies we are able to gather some knowledge of the early life way of the Thompson and Lillooet Indians.

Both the Thompson and Lillooet Indians are Interior Salish, speaking dialects which are to some degree mutually intelligible. Both are hunting and gathering people with great emphasis placed on the fish resource. They occupied semi-subterranean houses in the winter in groups of

related families. Teit says these dwellings were usually situated away from the river in relatively sheltered areas with a small stream or spring nearby. The house size depended on the number of people to be accommodated, anywhere from fifteen to thirty.

During winter encampment the leisure time was spent in activities related to the yearly round of hunting and gathering. Work baskets were manufactured by the women from stores of raw material gathered earlier in the year. The men manufactured nets for fishing and hunting and constructed bows, arrows and points for hunting. Some time was spent on visiting and socializing.

With the advent of spring, the semi-subterranean houses were abandoned in favour of the mat or skin lodges. These were simply a conical or rectangular frame of light poles covered with woven rush mats or dressed skins. They were easily assembled and highly portable, so that they could be used first at the root digging areas in the mountain valleys, then at the fishing spots in the river gorges, and then again in the mountains at hunting camps.

The two types of aboriginal dwellings used in the Lytton-Lillooet area are fairly well documented ethnographically, but it is the more permanent semi-subterranean winter dwelling that remains as evidence of early residence that can be examined archaeologically.

#### ARCHAEOLOGY

Archaeological investigations in the Lytton-Lillooet area are virtually limited to one locality, that of Lochnore-Nesikep, approximately midway between Lytton and Lillooet. Here a series of excavations were conducted on both banks of the Fraser river by David Sanger. It is on his reports that we must rely for specific information on the archaeology of the Lytton-Lillooet area.

Earlier excavations were conducted by Smith (1899 a) at Lytton, and limited excavations were conducted at Lillooet by Baker and Stryd in 1968. Baker and Stryd dealt solely with a disturbed burial site. Sanger's excavations are the only ones in the Lytton-Lillooet area that have dealt with a stratified occupation site.

At the Lochnore-Nesikep locality evidence was obtained delineating over 6,000 years of prehistory for the area. Sanger divides his sequence into three periods; Early, Middle and Late, with the Middle period further divided into upper and lower. Dates for these based on radio-carbon samples are respectively; about 6,000 to 3,000 B.C.; 3,000 to



FIG. 10. Seated human figurine bowl from pit house village at Rattlesnake Flats, Lytton.

1,500 B.C.; 1,500 B.C. to A.D. 1; and A.D. 1 to A.D. 1,800. (Sanger 1968 c).

The Early period is characterized by chipped points typologically very similar to Scottsbluff, Milnesand and Plainview (Sanger 1963). Other artifacts of this period are microblades, red and yellow ochre, many plano-convex end scrapers, choppers, a symmetrically bevelled antler wedge, ground marmot tooth incisor graving tools, a long antler point, a possible polished bone needle, hammerstones, bone beaming tools, large strongly recurved chipped points, triangular points and a large leaf-shaped knife (Sanger 1963).

The lower Middle period features points which are generally medium-sized, with expanding stems and indented bases. Lateral and basal grinding of the stems is always extensive — also in the upper Middle period there occurs a group of leaf-shaped points with a single basal notch. Corner-notched, basal-notched and stemmed forms are also common but do not exhibit ground stems. (Sanger 1967 a).

Microblades and cores are most prominent in the Middle period but have been found in the Early period. Lower Middle period sites contain few bone and antler artifacts, no microblade shafts have been recovered from any of the sites. In the upper Middle period the complete wood-working complement of wedges, nephrite celts, beaver incisors and pecked and ground stone mauls appear (Sanger 1967 a).

The late period is mainly characterized by what Sanger had termed the Kamloops Phase. This phase consists of small, side-notched projectile points, some pentagonal points and a few corner notched and basally notched specimens. A small asymmetric leaf-shaped point is common. No microblades are known for this phase. There is an emphasis on the polishing and grinding of stone. The jade celts are usually asymmetrically bevelled with straight bits. Tubular pipes of the trumpet variety are common. Stone carving, usually in the form of zoomorphic figures, is noted on hand mauls. Also present are harpoon heads and antler tine clubs. In shell there are the *Pecten caurinus* rattles, the ubiquitous *Dentalium* and a few *Olivella* (Sanger 1968 c).

The above listed artifacts give a fairly well represented picture of the archaeology in the Lytton-Lillooet area, but they by no means give the total picture, as can only be expected as they represent one small locality of the entire Lytton-Lillooet area. There are many unexcavated sites in the Lytton-Lillooet area that have yielded numerous artifacts to private collectors that are not included in Sanger's list.

Steatite carvings form a distinctive group of artifacts. Examples of this

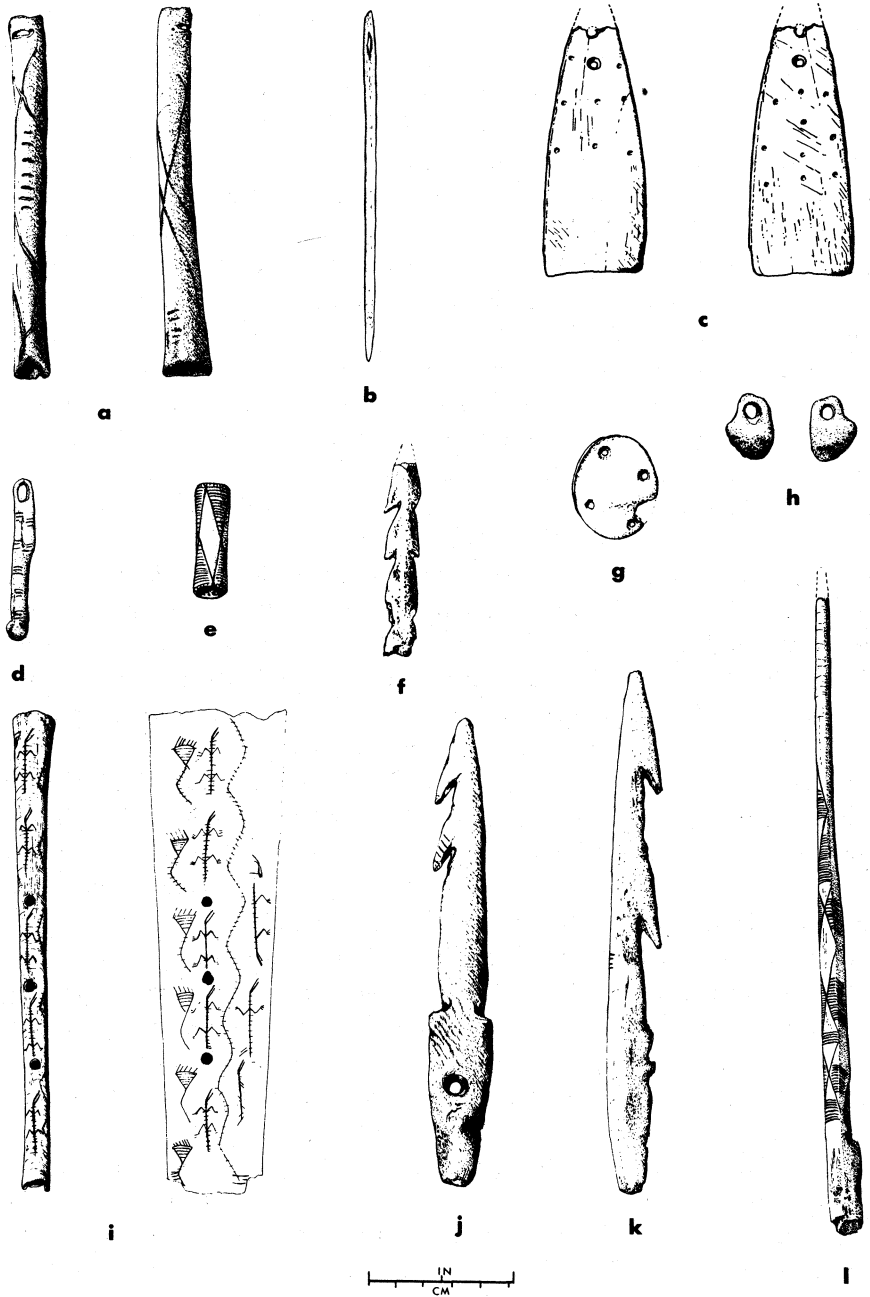


FIG. 11. Artifacts from within 19 miles of Lillooet. *a*, drinking tube of bird bone; *b*, bone needle; *c*, *d*, bone pendants; *e*, bird bone bead; *f*, bilaterally barbed antler harpoon head; *g*, bone ornament; *h*, tooth pendant; *i*, bird bone whistle with incised design from Murray site, EeRi 18 dating to ca. 1,840 A.D.; *j*, *k*, harpoon heads of antler; *l*, bone awl.

art form have been recovered from sites on both the Thompson and Fraser rivers. Seated human figure bowls (Fig. 10) are part of this cultural complex. Other artifacts not included in Sanger's descriptions are the composite toggling harpoon head, one of which was found at Lillooet, and large basalt knives or scrapers which are reminiscent of Old World hand axes, found both at Lytton and Lillooet. Carved and incised bone and antler artifacts (Fig. 11) have been found in considerable abundance in the Lytton-Lillooet area and as far as is known belong in the Kamloops phase.

Another class of artifacts which were not excavated at Lochnore-Nesikep are those associated with the European contact period. Glass trade beads, non-native copper, and iron artifacts have all been found in the Lytton-Lillooet area. The excavation conducted by Baker and Stryd at Lillooet recovered artifacts which for the most part were made from post-contact trade materials. Copper pendants and bracelets, brass buttons and pendants, copper tube beads, copper sheathing for rod armour, glass beads, and iron fashioned into a knife with a bone haft were all recovered associated with the burials at the site (Stryd and Baker 1969). Aboriginal artifacts including an incised bird bone flute (Fig. 11) and an antler war club (Fig. 12) were recovered from the site.

Apart from the trade goods listed above which were recovered in relatively good archaeological context, in as much as the site had been previously disturbed, there is very little archaeological information obtained from those artifacts which were recovered from unexcavated sites. In the Lytton-Lillooet area there are over fifty sites of varying types; pit-house sites, burial sites, blowout sites, pictograph-petroglyph sites, and camp sites which should be excavated.

Excavations could be limited to those sites which have yielded to private collectors artifacts of a type not recovered by Sanger's excavations. It is obvious from these surface collections that there is much more to be learned of the archaeology of the area and that there is no dearth of sites from which this information can be obtained.

Arnoud Stryd has plans for a summer of excavation north of Lillooet and more information will be forthcoming from his reports, but the area between Lytton and Lillooet will remain relatively untouched and it is this area that is most likely to reveal information on the artifacts mentioned for the Lytton-Lillooet area that were not recovered by Sanger.

The Lytton-Lillooet area, though very rich in archaeological sites and artifacts has received very little archaeological attention. The pristine state of sites in the area cannot remain indefinitely due to encroachment

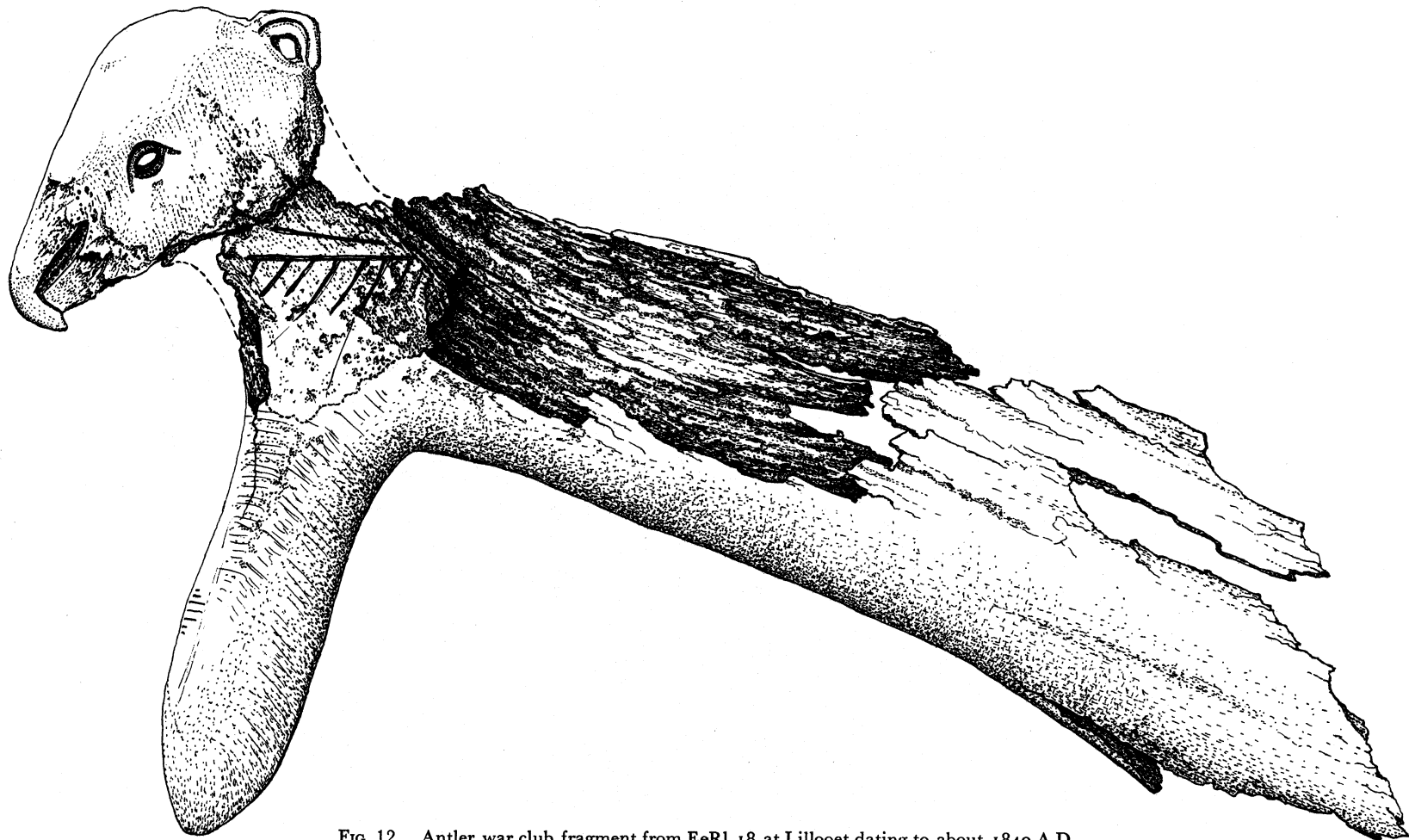


FIG. 12. Antler war club fragment from EeRl 18 at Lillooet dating to about 1840 A.D.

of logging and construction and indeed, some of the sites have already been completely destroyed, and more are in danger of being destroyed. Full scale archaeological investigations should be conducted in the area before the information that exists there now is irredeemably lost.