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The Red-Paint People of Maine

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THE RED-PAINT PEOPLE OF MAINE

By WARREN K. MOOREHEAD

IT is rather strange that in Maine there should recently have been discovered the evidences of an unusual culture of considerable age. We are accustomed to regard the South, the Mississippi valley, and the Southwest as sections in which one expects to be confronted by archeological problems; but it is in the most easterly portion of the United States that we have now found indications of a culture different from that existing anywhere else in this country. Excepting the strange remains of the cave-people of the Ozark mountains, explored by Dr Charles Peabody and the writer¹ in 1904, perhaps nothing found in the United States in recent years is comparable in interest with the problem of the "Red-paint People" of the lower Penobscot valley.

When Joseph Chadwick made his journey up Penobscot river to Quebec in 1764, he recorded most of the Indian sites along that stream, but these sites pertain to the occupancy of the Penobscot Indians.² In 1823 Moses Greenleaf, in a letter to the Reverend Jedidiah Morse, gave a more complete list of Indian sites from the mouth of the Penobscot to the Allegash and down the St John, but the names given are also Penobscot.³ These sites are known at the present time; they were examined by the party of the Department of Archæology of Phillips Academy in the summer of 1912, and, so far as could be ascertained, appear quite different from the sites attributable to the Red-paint People.

In 1892 Mr C. C. Willoughby, of the Peabody Museum, Harvard University, explored prehistoric burial places at Bucksport, Lake Alamoosook, and Ellsworth, Maine, finding many graves containing

¹ Charles Peabody and Warren K. Moorehead, Exploration of Jacobs Cavern, McDonald County, Mo., *Bull. I, Dept. Archæol., Phillips Academy*, 1904.

² Reprinted in *Bangor Historical Magazine*, vol. iv, no. 8, Feb., 1889.

³ Moses Greenleaf, Indian Place Names, etc., *First Ann. Rep. American Society*, pp. 49-53.

curious gouges and hatchet-blades, as well as considerable quantities of brilliant red ochre, and fire-stones and other objects. These observations are set forth in Mr Willoughby's excellent paper on the subject.¹ In a brief report the present writer cannot go farther than point out the more interesting and important features of the discoveries referred to. Although the party covered several hun-

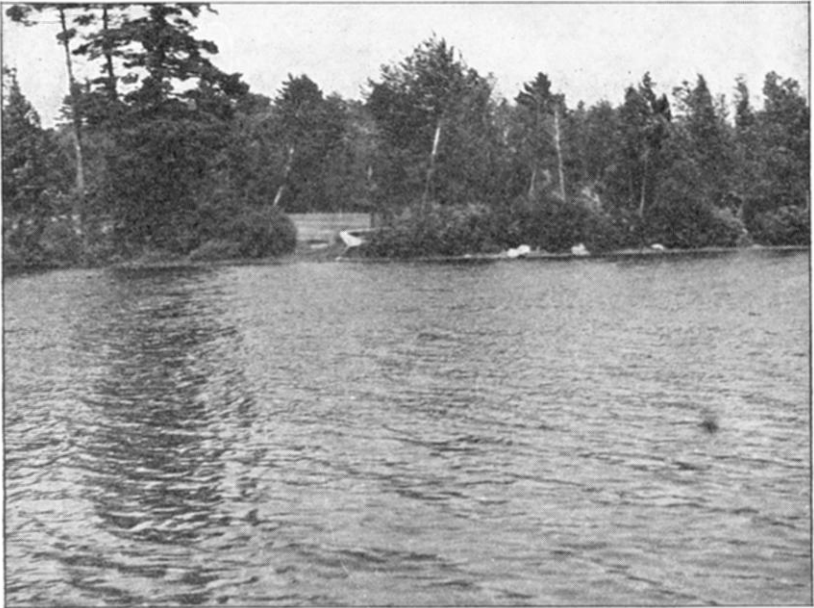


FIG. 8.—“The point” in Lake Alamoosook where Mr Frank Pierce's cottage is situated. This is the Emerson cemetery site.

dred miles of waterways and dug in a hundred different places, only five cemeteries of the Red-paint People were found. One of these lay beneath a large summer cottage, hence could not be examined; but the others were excavated completely, resulting in the opening of 170 graves, from which was taken a large number of stone artifacts. It may be said that this work was undertaken at the point where Mr Willoughby's investigation ceased. He had found evidences of the Red-paint People, but we continued the

¹ C. C. Willoughby, Prehistoric Burial Places in Maine, *Peabody Museum Papers*, vol. 1, no. 6, Cambridge, 1898.

research in the lower Penobscot, and extended it as far north as Moosehead lake, thence down the west branch of the Penobscot to the main stream as far as Passadumkeag.

Although the cemeteries of the Red-paint People are readily distinguishable from those of recent Algonquian tribes, the identification of their village sites is no easy matter. With reference to the latter, nothing may now be said, as it will be necessary to devote



FIG. 9.—Grave 79, the Emerson cemetery.

two or more seasons of additional exploration before the villages or camp sites of these particular people can be determined, and even then a clear line of demarcation may be difficult to draw. While, therefore, we are not yet prepared to offer definite conclusions or to present the results of complete observations, it is probable that the culture of the Red-paint People extended as far north as Passadumkeag, about 30 miles north of Bangor.

Most of the cemeteries thus far discovered are near tidewater, and range from the valley of the Kennebec eastward as far as Bar Harbor. We have a list of several unexplored or partially explored sites, and these are to be examined during the approaching summer.



FIG. 10.—Grave 64, the Emerson cemetery. This grave contained twenty-one gouges and celts, or thin blades.

Professor George H. Perkins, of the University of Vermont, kindly invited the writer's attention to the fact that some graves containing large quantities of red ochre were discovered near Swanton in northern Vermont. It has also been said that similar graves are found on St John river on the Canadian side, a few miles above St Francis, Maine, but this has not been verified.

Cemeteries were explored at Orland, Maine, on the estate of Captain S. M. Hartford; on Lake Alamoosook, near the outlet, on land owned by Frank Pierce, Esq., and known as Emerson point; on the south side of Lake Alamoosook, on the estate of the Messrs Mason; and at Passadumkeag, on the farm of Mr S. H. Hathaway. Sketch maps of all these places were prepared, numerous photographs were taken, and the usual field records made.

The graves varied from a foot to three feet in depth. Some of them have been much disturbed by previous excavators who had dug here and there merely to satisfy idle curiosity. Arthur E. Marks, Esq., of Yarmouth, who had been interested in the archeology of Maine for many years, obtained nearly all the specimens found at the Hartford, Emerson, and Mason sites previous to our exploration, and these have been acquired recently by the trustees of the Department of Archæology of Phillips Academy, so that all the specimens gathered from these cemeteries, with the exception of 99 which were destroyed when the Bangor Historical Society's building burned some years ago, and a few others in the hands of



FIG. II.—Interior of Captain Hartford's barn where several graves were found.

a Mr Johnson, whose address is unknown, are now in the collections of the Academy.

The illustrations accompanying this paper will give an idea of the character of the objects, the position in which they were found, and other details.

Figure 8 shows the Emerson site, owned by Frank Pierce, Esq.

Figure 9 illustrates grave 79 at Emerson's. The discoloration caused by the red ochre is apparent.

Figure 10 exhibits the large deposit of 21 gouges and thin blades found about a foot beneath the surface at the Emerson's site.

Figure 11 shows the interior of the barn of Captain Hartford, at Orland. The cemetery here had been greatly disturbed. About a hundred years ago two large barns were built, one on the cemetery and the other just north of it, the angle between these buildings forming a barnyard. For many years manure and loam were taken from this yard, consequently most of the surface soil had disappeared. Rough blue clay was deposited in front of each barn in order to give a more substantial surface over which teams might pass. Although on the map of the Hartford cemetery 39 graves are indicated, the original number was probably at least a hundred. There is an open or barren space more than fifty feet in diameter and flanked by graves on either side, hence it is reasonable to suppose that the graves extended throughout this area. After uncovering all the graves near the barns and flanking the yard, we obtained permission to remove the contents and take up the floor of one of the barns. In the underlying soil about fifteen graves were found.

Figure 12 is typical of the disturbed graves. This lay near the surface and contained but three implements. With very few exceptions all graves more than 18 inches in depth produced from five to seventeen objects. Graves lying near the surface and containing from one to four objects were considered as having been previously disturbed.

Figure 13 illustrates two interesting gouges, and another on which are eight pronounced knobs. These are shown about one-fifth size.

Figure 14 is a typical grave at the Mason cemetery on the shore of Lake Alamoosook.

Figure 15 illustrates the graves at Hathaway's and shows the character of the implements found—gouges, long pendants, "plum-mets," and celt blades. The dark mass in which these are lying is brilliant red ochre.

Figure 16 shows grave 141 at Hathaway's, similar to the graves illustrated in figure 15.

Figure 17 illustrates grave 142 at the Hathaway cemetery. In this grave a number of implements were massed in nearly half a bushel of brilliant red ochre. The photograph does not show all the implements found in this deposit.

Although many of the graves had been disturbed, as previously stated, a sufficient number of the 170 uncovered were in their

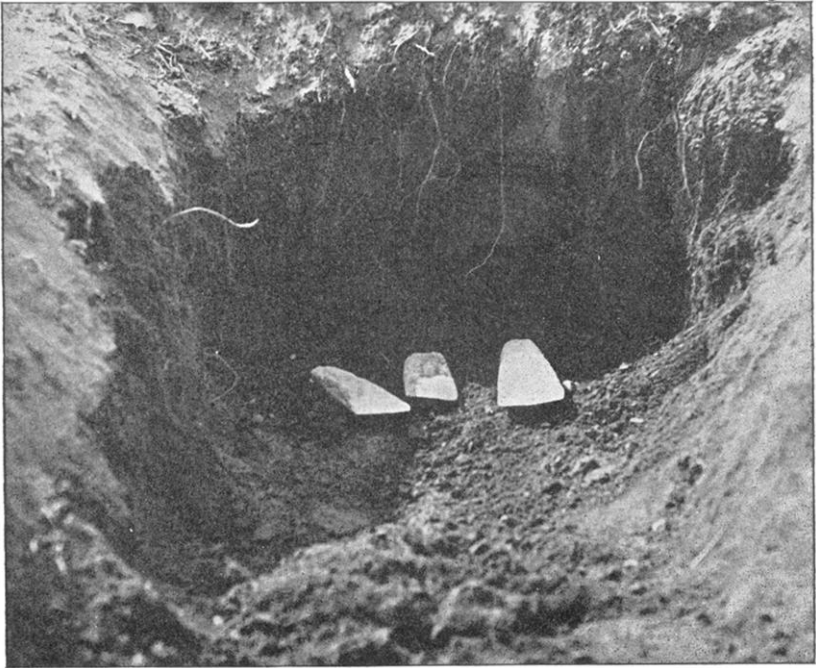


FIG. 12.—Grave 2, the Hartford cemetery, Orland, Maine.

original state so that we were enabled to make accurate observations respecting them. These have resulted in the following conclusions:

First. Our studies warrant agreement with practically all the results of the observations presented by Mr Willoughby in the able paper on his explorations in the same region.

Second. It is our conviction that the graves represent an ancient and exceedingly primitive culture, totally different from that of the later Algonquian tribes inhabiting the region.

Third. The absence of human remains from these graves, and the disintegration of fully a fifth of the stone implements, point to considerable antiquity. This condition resulted from the fact that the burials were all in sand or gravel or gravelly loam. The water percolated beneath the implements, leaving them dry. Under such conditions in the Middle West, where the writer has made extensive explorations, the skeletons are usually fairly well preserved and disintegrated stone implements never occur.

Fourth. There is a total absence of the following well-known Penobscot or Abnaki types: The grooved axe; grooved hammer; pottery; soapstone dishes and ornaments; pierced tablets of the common forms; few, if any, thick celts; mortars and pestles; pipes; beads; bone implements. There are very few of the small, ordinary, chipped arrowheads. Chipped spearpoints and an occasional arrowhead are found, but most of the projectile points are of polished slate.

Fifth. The presence of problematical forms of the winged class brings up the interesting question, Was the winged problematical form first made by the Red-paint People and from them spread westward?

Sixth. The interments are characterized not by the usual small quantity of pigment found elsewhere in graves, but by generous quantities of iron oxide, usually red and occasionally yellow. This occurs in such large masses as frequently to discolor the soil for several inches above and below the implements and throughout a diameter of as much as three feet; indeed in some of the graves at least half a bushel of pigment was placed.

Seventh. The existence of wide variation in the form of the "plummets," which range from the rough, natural, ovoid pebble, grooved at the top, to effigies probably representing the whale or the porpoise. Occasionally these objects are grooved at each end, and often they are polished. They are slender, or thick, or tapering; sometimes they are flattened on one side, occasionally on both sides. They range in size from an inch in length to one seven inches long and weighing about four pounds. When Mr Blodgett excavated for the foundation of his cottage at Alamoosook, he dug out of a grave a "plummet" weighing at least five or six pounds.

Eighth. It would appear from the position in which the implements are found that they were buried when attached to their handles, but there is no absolute evidence of this. No discoloration

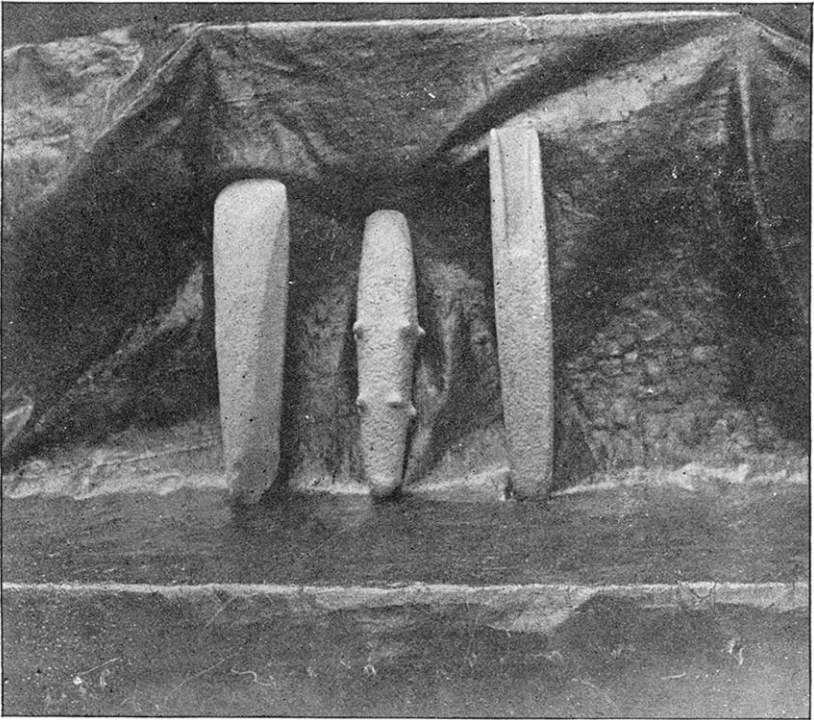


FIG. 13.—The knobbed gouge was found in grave 68 of the Emerson cemetery, as was the beveled gouge to the left. The long slender gouge to the right is from the Mason site. (1/5.)

of the soil due to decay of wood is observable. Where the objects are massed, there is a slight space between them. By turning the handles outward it would have been possible to bury the objects with their original fastenings.

We may now consider the cemeteries as a whole. More than half of the implements found therein are colored brown, crimson, or bright red, because of long contact with the ochre. The gouges are of metamorphic slate, limestone, and granite, and their edges are exceptionally fine. The top, or poll, is not always worked out

carefully, but the edge is very sharp; indeed, it would be difficult to grind stone to a finer edge. Some of the gouges are fluted; some



FIG. 14.—Grave 128, the Mason cemetery.

have an ordinary concave cutting edge; others are angular. The finest gouges have a V-shaped groove extending about a third of the distance from the edge toward the top. Several are as much as 15 inches in length, and two are $15\frac{3}{4}$ inches and $15\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, respectively.

Most remarkable of all are the slender, flat, perforated, ornamental stones, of which seventeen were found in the Passadumkeag cemetery. These would appear at first glance to be too heavy for use as personal ornaments. One of them measures $15\frac{3}{4}$ inches in length. The perforations are polished or worn smooth by the abrasion of thongs. There are some paddle-shaped problematical forms a foot or more in length.

The common thick celt is almost entirely absent, while on the other hand adze or celt blades occur in profusion. After careful study of the specimens from the Red-paint graves no difficulty is encountered in distinguishing them from the Algonquian types.

Regarding the presence of iron pyrites, fire-stones, pebbles used as paint grinders, and so-called "lucky stones," much might be

said. In every case the pyrites was much disintegrated and oftentimes was reduced to powder. The paint grinders consist of ordinary pebbles, but the small, lighter ones are interesting. In most of the graves we found yellow, or bright red, or gray pebbles from half an inch to an inch in diameter, apparently too small for use as paint grinders. We never found more than one in a grave, and frequently none. Their purpose is a mystery, and the term "lucky stones" applied to them by our workmen may not be inappropriate.

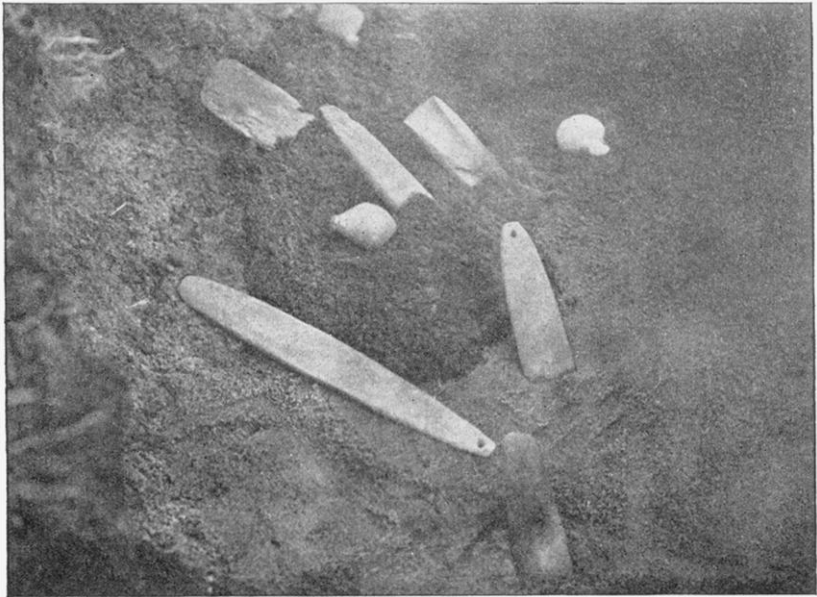


FIG. 15.—Grave 141, the Hathaway cemetery.

Mr Willoughby was fortunate in his exploration of the little mound on Lake Alamoosook. It was covered by a growth of timber, and thus was well preserved. Above many of the graves were fire-pits. All the cemeteries explored by us, save that at Passadumkeag, were on gently sloping ridges or on ground that had been plowed. We found but three or four fire-pits, and it was impossible to trace the outlines of the graves; indeed even most careful work with a trowel failed to reveal where the disturbed

area ended and the natural or undisturbed soil began—another indication that these graves are by no means modern.

All implements were noted with reference to the position in which they lay, and it was found that no rule was followed by the aborigines in the matter of uniform placement by the cardinal directions, since as many were found pointing southward as eastward. Sometimes the specimens were a foot apart, but usually they lay within a few inches of one another.

The Mason cemetery occupies a low, sandy ridge along the shore of the lake. Sixty years ago lumbermen built a dam which raised the level of the water five feet; therefore if any graves lay on the slope of the Mason site they could not be satisfactorily explored. We dug numerous pits (although the water entered after we had penetrated to a depth of two feet) and felt about in the muck, but could discover no graves save those located on our map.

At Mason's we found three interesting interments. These were placed at an unusual depth, being more than three feet below the surface. Two and a half feet down, a thick layer of charcoal and charred sticks was observed, but no trace of red ochre. From two of the graves we exhumed bits of deerskin, small pieces of decayed copper beads, and two cylinders of fine-grained sandstone about five inches in length, the opening large at one end and quite small at the other. In the third grave, or fire-pit, we found a fragment of a human femur six inches in length, a great deal of deerskin, and numerous disintegrated copper beads. Although the work was very carefully done, no trace of skeletal remains, excepting the fragment of femur referred to, was discovered. These three interments may or may not be intrusive.

From an extended examination of the literature of the subject, based on a bibliography of about 360 titles relating to the Indians of Maine, it is safe to assert that the part taken by this territory in the prehistoric life of the country has been underestimated. The facility with which one can travel by canoe in Maine, even at this late date, is surprising. In no other section of the country is it possible to go farther or more conveniently by means of a small craft. It is practicable to ascend the Penobscot from the ocean to

Lake Chesuncook, a distance by water exceeding 200 miles, and after making two or three short portages, reach the headwaters of



FIG. 16.—Grave 147, the Hathaway cemetery. Three "plummets," found near by, are included in the illustration.

the Allegash and descend to the mouth of the St John. One may ascend the Kennebec to Moosehead lake, proceed to its head, cross the Northwest carry, and reach the headwaters of the St John more than 100 miles northwest or west of the mouth of the Allegash. The numerous lakes, ponds, and streams carry sufficient water for the average twenty-foot canoe. Accompanied by Frank Capino, an experienced Penobscot Indian guide, the writer journeyed in such a canoe, with 250 pounds of luggage, from Northeast carry, Moosehead lake, through a chain of lakes and streams and down the Allegash to Fort Kent on the St John, a distance of more than 200 miles.

The older guides and settlers of Maine say that fifty or sixty years ago the state was well-stocked with moose and bear, and that caribou were found in many places. Even at the present time, although the moose are well-nigh exterminated, there are un-

numbered thousands of deer, and I myself have seen as many as twenty-two in a single afternoon. The beaver have been protected for some years, and we observed on the Allegash trip upward of a hundred beaver houses. Naturally Maine was the great hunting preserve not only of the Red-paint People but also of the natives from the coast and possibly from New Hampshire and Massachusetts. No other State is better adapted to the propagation of species of game. Taking these things into consideration, and the



FIG. 17.—Grave 142, the Hathaway cemetery.

fact that there are hundreds of large shell-heaps along the coast,¹ the region must have supported a considerable aboriginal population. There is evidence that the cliff of flint at Kineo, Moosehead

¹ Professor Arlo Bates, of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, has already mapped four hundred of these.

lake, was worked for a considerable time and that blocks of the material were transported in quantities to various parts of the State. The natives who went north to hunt naturally brought down to the coast not only Kineo flint in their canoes, but quantities of moose, caribou, and deer skins, and dried meat. The character of the implements found in the cemeteries of the Red-paint People indicates that hunting and not agriculture was their chief occupation.

I have covered, in somewhat desultory manner, the essential facts with reference to the discoveries last summer. Rev. Moses Greenleaf, in his narrative above cited, says that "Olamman stream" was known as the "place where paint is found." We understand that near the headwaters of this stream are quantities of iron oxide, soft hematite, or ochre, and plan to explore the region next summer. Whether the quantities of red paint used by the ancient people came from the upper waters of Olamman stream, I am not yet prepared to say, but analysis may determine this point. Nor has our research proceeded far enough to warrant comparison of the Red-paint People with the extinct Beothuk of Newfoundland, who in 1497 were reported by Cabot to observe the custom of painting themselves with red ochre.

It is planned to continue the archeological researches in Maine during the next three years, bearing in mind the need of extending the work northward and eastward from our operations of last summer. The study will be carried on more intensively than was possible during the first season, much of which was necessarily devoted to reconnoissance. The writer will appreciate any suggestions from students of archeology respecting the possible origin of the ancient inhabitants whom for want of a better name we have designated the "Red-paint People."

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