

LAS April 2015 Headlines:

OVER 1,000 ANCIENT STONE TOOLS, LEFT BY GREAT BASIN HUNTERS, FOUND IN UTAH DESERT

Posted by Blake de Pastino on April 2, 2015

An array of stone tools discovered in northern Utah — including the largest instrument of its kind ever recorded — may change what we know about the ancient inhabitants of the Great Basin, archaeologists say.

Researchers exploring the desert flats west of Salt Lake City have uncovered more than a thousand tools, such as spear points, a type of rectangular implement that hasn't been reported before, and objects that an archaeologist describes as "giant scrapers coming out of the ground ... fresh as daisies."

One of the spear heads found at the site is the largest Haskett point yet found, measuring 22.6 centimeters, or about 9 inches. (Courtesy of Far Western Anthropological Research Group)

"We collected a thousand-some artifacts on this survey, and those are tools, not just [stone] flakes," said Dr. Daron Duke, lead researcher of the team that made the finds. "There are *tools* lying out there."

"It's a virtual blitzkrieg when you're walking. I had to be careful about how people stopped and recorded things."

The tools were found in 2012 on the grounds of the U.S. Air Force Utah Test and Training Range, where Duke's firm, the Far Western Anthropological Research Group, was hired to conduct a survey before a section of the range was developed.

"I've driven around down there and have found a few things, and I was always interested to be there," Duke said, who stresses that removing artifacts from federal lands is illegal.

"Then lo and behold we have a project right where I always want to be. So I was telling people, 'Better keep your eyes peeled — I think we're going to find some cool stuff.'

"But I couldn't have predicted the scale at which we did."

Based on ecological evidence and radiocarbon dates of organic matter in the area, laid down when this desert was a wetland, the oldest of the artifacts date to between 12,000 and 13,000 years ago, Duke said.

The most striking of the tools are 55 long, slender spear points and fragments, fashioned in a style known as Haskett — a tradition that's associated with the Great Basin region, but rarely found.

One of the complete spear heads is the largest Haskett point yet found, measuring 22.6 centimeters (about 9 inches).

And another was found to contain a residue of elephant proteins, making it the first likely evidence of mammoth-hunting in the Great Basin.

Together, these finds help clarify a picture that has remained hazy for archaeologists: the life and times of the Great Basin's earliest inhabitants, who may have been contemporaries of the ancient and widespread Clovis culture.

"Haskett is very rare, anywhere," said Duke. "Like Clovis, it relates to the earliest folks."

"They were probably moving around with a sort of condensed tool kit, and I guess you could say they were low visibility. There weren't many people around, and they didn't leave much of a record."

"But we just got lucky here."

The archaeologists' good fortune was probably the result of a bit of bad luck for ancient hunters, Duke pointed out.

"If you're slinging these [spear points] at an elephant in a marsh, you'll probably lose some of them," he said.



One of the spear heads found at the site is the largest Haskett point yet found, measuring 22.6 centimeters, or about 9 inches. (Courtesy of Far Western Anthropological Research Group)



“And that’s what I think we’re finding — things lost in action.”

Haskett points are thought to be part of the larger Western Stemmed tradition of tool-making, whose artifacts are found throughout the Great Basin.

And mounting evidence, including the new findings from Utah, suggests that the people who fashioned Western Stemmed tools were contemporaneous with the Clovis culture.

“There’s no doubt that the people who made fluted [Clovis] points are not those people who made Haskett points,” Duke said.

“Even though they accomplish the same thing, they’re just completely different in their design.”

While several Clovis tools have been found in clear hunting contexts, the mammoth proteins detected on one of the newly found Haskett points is a first for this tradition, Duke added.

“There’s definitely no site that has an association with mammoths and the Western Stemmed tradition,” he said.

“So this residue evidence, if you want to consider it valid, is a smoking gun.”

In addition to these many revelations, the patch of barren Air Force land has also turned up other compelling finds, such as large scrapers that seem to have eroded out of the ground only recently.

“There was one big scraper in particular that was actually sticking out of the ground,” Duke said.

“When I pulled it out, the top half had a light sheen from weathering, and the bottom half looked like it was flaked yesterday.”

The team also found a type of tool that doesn’t seem to have been recognized previously by archaeologists.

“There’s a class of artifacts that’s pretty much defined [by this locality] that I’ve never even heard of before,” Duke said.

His team found 19 extremely sharp, double-sided tools that they call rectangular bifaces, fashioned from broken Haskett stems, he said.

“Let’s say you break a point so you have one of these — you rework one end and rework the other, using a special flaking technique that creates an acute angle, so they’re very sharp.

“They appear to be used for some sort of intensive gouging of hard material, like bone or wood,” Duke added.

“These are artifacts that are not recognized in any of the other Paleoindian assemblages.”

These preliminary findings from the Utah Test and Training Range have shown enough potential that Duke has already secured permission and funding to excavate the site.

His aim, he says, is to uncover more new insights into the lifeways of the Great Basin’s earliest inhabitants, from what they hunted to when exactly they made this now-vanished wetland their home.

“I’m going to go out there and do everything I can to find some buried artifacts,” he said.

“It’d be nice if they’re Haskett points, but if I’m getting big scrapers that you scrape hides with and they come up with mammoth residue on them, well, we’re really getting somewhere.”

Duke reports his team’s findings in the journal *PaleoAmerica*.

LAS Find of the Month, April 2015:

Members can bring an artifact to be entered into the competition at the monthly meeting, which will be judged based on the following rules:

1. Must be a member of LAS in good standing.
2. The artifact must be a personal find.
3. It must have been found within the specified time frame, i.e., within the month prior to the meeting.
4. The artifact doesn’t have to be a Colorado find—all that matters is that it was found in the last month.

There was a tie for Find of the Month. Here are the Co-Winners for April 2015 Find of the Month:

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Loveland Archaeological Society, Inc.

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Co-Winner:

Helene Bindner
Type: Cache, probably Clovis
Material: Chalcedony
Location: Grand County, Utah



Co-Winner:

Lary Pachner
Type: Firstview
Material: Agatized Petrified Wood
Location: Morgan County,
Colorado



LAS News and Upcoming Events:

Speakers Needed!

Really!! We need speakers for our 2015 meetings! If you would like to give a presentation or know of someone who would give a great program please contact Andy Coca, Jean Steinhoff or Kevin Zeeck. No experience is necessary. All that is needed is a passion for our hobby and a willingness to share that passion. Thanks!

- May 5, 2015 May meeting. Program: Kaitlyn Simcox, 2014 Robert Lundt Scholarship recipient, will give a presentation on her research of the tool assemblage from the Kaplan-Hoover site in eastern Larimer County. You won't want to miss this program!
- May 16, 2014 2015 Spring Into Archaeology Fair, Poudre Valley REA Building. If you plan to exhibit please call Andy Coca at (303) 286-7711 for table space. Directions to the REA Building is attached. See you there!
- June 2, 2015 June meeting. Program: To be announced

- Sponsor of the Annual Loveland Stone Age Fair -
www.stoneagefair.com

