

AN ALTERNATIVE TO “MILNESAND”

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The remarkable progress in archaeological field work occasioned in northeastern Alberta by tar sands development is generating a new regional cultural sequence of interest to Palaeo-Indian aficionados. I'm thinking here in particular about a chronology published by Nancy Saxberg and Brian O.K. Reeves in 2003 relating to the Aurora Mine North Project area. The findings described by these writers give us cause to review some of what's contained in the older literature, and to rethink what we have been saying about the Palaeo-Indian history of what are now the parkland belt and adjoining boreal forest of all three Prairie Provinces.

Back in the 1960s and '70s, it was customary for Canadian Prairie archaeologists to classify wide, lanceolate (i.e., unshouldered and unstemmed), square-based, edge-ground projectile points as “Milnesand,” named after the type site, a bison kill in New Mexico (Fig. 1). Using bison bone measurements, Matthew E. Hill cautiously estimated in 2002 that the site was 10,000 radiocarbon years old, a count that I consider reasonable.

In 1969, Archie Campbell and David Meyer published a paper in the *Saskatchewan Archaeology Newsletter* in which they described four complete lanceolate points (Fig. 2) from east-central Saskatchewan. Classifying them as Milnesand, the authors noted that all four displayed slight basal flares produced by very shallow concavities above the basal corners, giving rise to a “waisted” (constricted) effect. On two of the Saskatchewan examples (Fig 2A, C), the flare on one or both sides is sufficiently pronounced as to result in an ephemeral corner spur.

For their study area, Saxberg and Reeves present a sequence of four complexes, three of which are Palaeo-Indian. The earliest, which is assigned a time span of 9,500-9,400 RCYBP, is designated the “Fort Creek Fen complex.” It is distinguished by a point type that bears the name “Fort Hills Lanceolate” (Fig. 3), a broad-bladed form with a constricted lateral edge near the straight or vaguely-concave base. These points are edge-ground (B. Reeves, personal communication, 2008), a trait that is typical of Palaeo-Indian points in general.

In addition to the waisting also found on the four Saskatchewan points, the illustrated Fort Hills Lanceolate specimens exhibit the subdued corner spurs that also occur on the former. In 1969 I classified as Plainview, and subsequently Goshen, another waisted specimen (Fig. 4, left) surface-found in the Swan River valley of Manitoba, where similar such items are very rare.

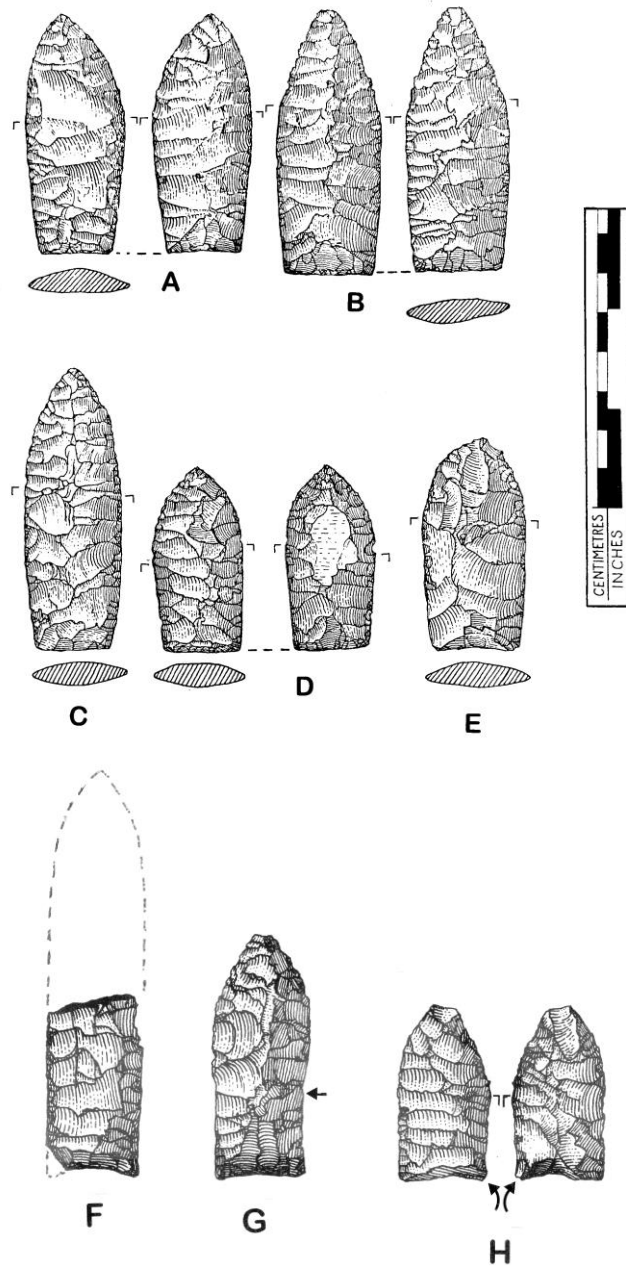


Fig. 1 (above). Projectile points from the Milnesand type site. Angle marks indicate extent of lateral grinding upwards from the basal corners. Some show evidence of waisting and incipient spurs, and others do not. Original drawings by Hal Story, adapted here from E.H. Sellards' 1955 site report published in the journal American Antiquity.

Significantly, Saxberg and Reeves don't compare their Fort Hills Lanceolates to the Milnesand type. Rather, they see similarities with other types found in Montana, Wyoming and Wisconsin. Montana and Wyoming, at least, are closer to northeastern Alberta than is New Mexico. Partially on this basis, I'm inclined to agree with them that

the “closest relatives,” geographically and morphologically, to their Fort Hills Lanceolate points are to be found in the northwestern plains of the United States. I would also note that certain Goshen points display varying combinations of minimal waisting, square bases and faint to non-existent basal concavities (Fig. 5E, J, L). At least one of the illustrated specimens from the Milnesand type site displays waisting and ephemeral corner spurs (Fig. 1H).

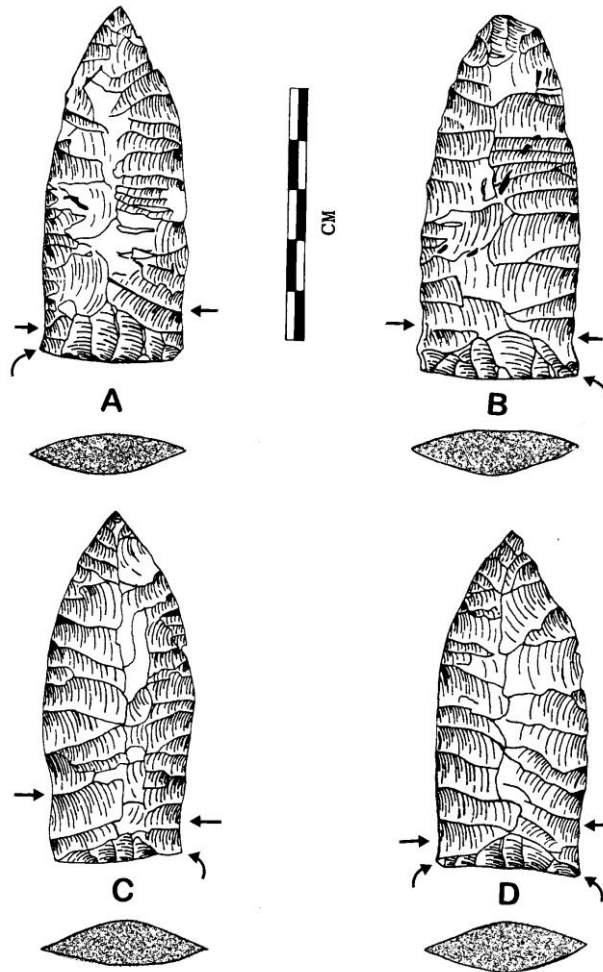


Fig. 2. The four points from east-central Saskatchewan. Straight, horizontal arrows point to the waisting; curved arrows draw attention to the corner “spurs.”

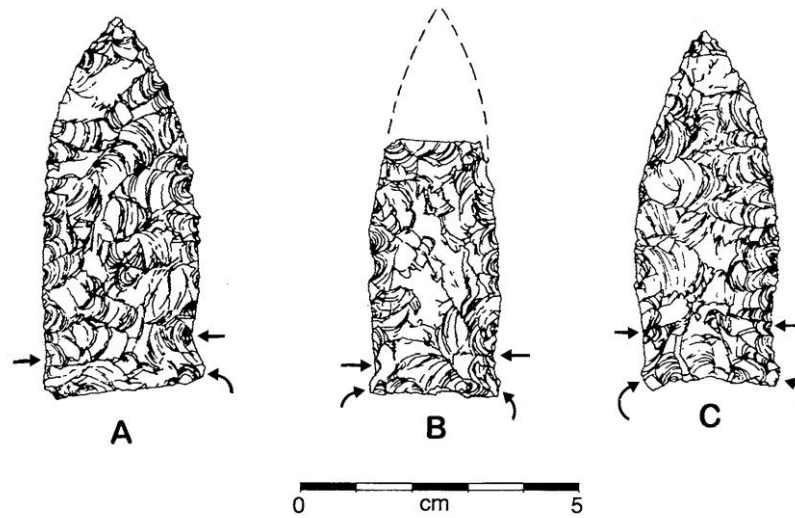


Fig. 3. Fort Hills Lanceolate points from northeastern Alberta. Arrows are as per those in Fig. 2. After Saxon and Reeves 2003.

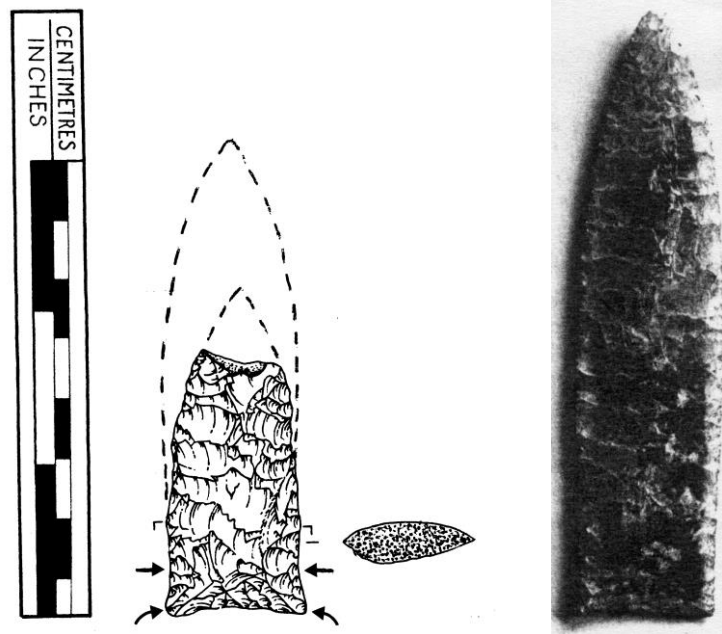


Fig. 4. Possible Fort Hills Lanceolate (left) and Goshen (right) points from the Swan River valley (SRV) and the upper Assiniboine delta (UAD), respectively. The SRV specimen has been previously classified as Plainview and, subsequently, as Goshen. In the 1960s through to the 1990s, the UAD item would have been identified as Milnesand; note the very faint waisting and the vaguely-expressed spur on the left corner. Photo by Boyd Wettlaufer.

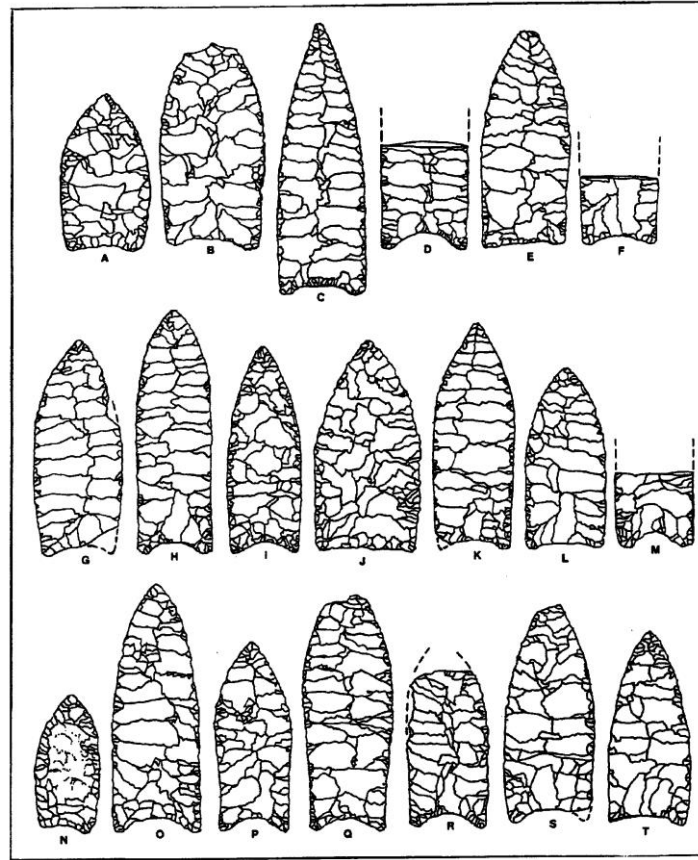


Fig. 5. Approximations of Goshen points from sites in the western US, based on drawings in the Mill Iron site compendium (1996) edited by George Frison. Not necessarily to scale. Two (E, J) are classifiable as Milnesand by virtue of their straight to near-straight (non-concave) bases. Specimens P and Q exhibit waisting.

In sum, I suggest that the nomen “Milnesand” be reserved for a projectile point type that developed out of Plainview in the southern plains, and that it be used to refer only to specimens found in that region. I further recommend that the “Milnesand” points from Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Alberta are better designated as “Fort Hills Lanceolate,” and that the Fort Hills Lanceolate form should in turn be considered a derivative of the Goshen type as the latter (e.g., Fig. 4, right) is expressed within its northern range of distribution across the Canadian Prairie Provinces.