

POLISHING THE EDGES

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In 2011, Dr Trevor Peck of the Archaeological Survey of Alberta published an encyclopaedic volume on the Indigenous history of the northern plains. The focus is overwhelmingly on the Wild Rose province, but attention is directed to other jurisdictions as well, including Manitoba. Titled *Light from Ancient Campfires: Archaeological Evidence for Native Lifeways on the Northern Plains*, the book has justifiably become a must-have, go-to reference for Canadian Prairie archaeologists, and will no doubt continue to serve as such for quite some time to come.

By the way, although Trevor has a full-time job, *Ancient Campfires* was a labour of love: he wrote it entirely – all 508 pages of it -- on his own time after hours! I'm impressed.

In writing an omnibus document such as this (its scope runs the virtual gamut of history from prior to ca. 11,050 to 200 RCYBP), a foremost challenge is having a grasp of the most up-to-date literature. For Trevor, this wasn't always possible with regard to the earliest millennia of Manitoba history because, unbeknownst to him, I was writing the most recent rendition of this topic at the very same time that he was drafting his manuscript. As a consequence, he didn't have access to my information and his work contains a number of entries that are dated or potentially confusing to persons who aren't already steeped in the subject matter, especially students. My objective here is to smooth out a few wrinkles so that the use of certain sections of the book will be clear sailing for Manitoba archaeologists in particular. I will confine myself to the "Palaeo-Indian" chapters because they deal with subject matter with which I'm most familiar.

Clovis point finds in Manitoba are very few and far between, and all of those on record are duly accounted for in Trevor's book. Citing Pettipas 1970, one specimen (p. 36) is said to have come from the Mentmore area near the eastern edge of the Newdale Till Plain. This location, through no fault of Trevor's, is incorrect; the point was actually found on the Upper Assiniboine Delta just south of Sidney some 48 km to the southeast of Mentmore. Both loci are actually acceptable candidates for a Clovis presence and hence were part of "Clovis country," inasmuch as both were free of ice and glacial lake meltwater by 10,800 RCYBP, the widely-accepted date for terminal Clovis, and other Clovis points are reported from the delta and adjacent land areas. So finding Clovis evidence at either locale would come as no surprise.

A second Manitoba Clovis point (p. 36) came from the Brookdale, not Brookdale-Mentmore, area and a third was found on the upper terrace of the Pembina Trench south of La Riviere. Trevor states that it was made of banded limestone (p. 36), but that should read "banded limestone *chert*."

As of December 2013, the most recent and detailed treatment of Manitoba Clovis history can be found in Pettipas 2011:28-36.

During the 2000 decade, Dr Matt Boyd of Lakehead University and his colleagues published a number of excellent papers on Manitoba **Folsom** (aka **Folsom/Midland**). Trevor gives due recognition in his book to Matt's work. In 1966 Eugene Gryba provisionally identified a point from the upper Swan River valley as Midland, and Trevor has carried this assessment forward into *Ancient Campfires*. However, I should mention that the specimen in question was re-classified as a "Goshen" point back in 2004. Complementary interpretation of the Goshen and Folsom complexes in Manitoba is provided in Pettipas 2011: 37-38, 38-45.

Probably the most significant development in Palaeo-Indian research on the Prairies within the past four decades has been the conceptualization and entrenchment of the "Nipawin complex" in the literature. Back in the 1960s, all surface-found, slender, edge-ground, lanceolate projectile points were classified as **Agate Basin**. In 1970, student archaeologist David Meyer disagreed with this practice, noting that many so-called Agate Basin points differed significantly in form and style from the Agate Basin archetype. By 1977, David had coined the "Nipawin complex" taxon based on the known sample of these points from east-central Saskatchewan.

One of the key Manitoba sites of the Nipawin complex is EIMb-10 (Figure 1), situated east of Pine River. In Jim Haug's original 1981 site report, and again in the *Ancient Campfires* book, EIMb-10 is included within the Agate Basin site inventory of the Canadian prairie region. Its current position within the western Manitoba cultural chronology, however, correlates with the Nipawin, rather than the Agate Basin, complex. For a fuller summary of the Manitoba expressions of the Agate Basin and Nipawin complexes, see Pettipas 2011:45-49, 92-109.

In the late 1960s, it looked like there were no convincing sites of the stemmed Plano (**Alberta** and **Cody**) complexes in the Agassiz basin below the elevation of the Upper Campbell strandline, that is, within the Manitoba Lowlands. Only a few possible Cody-diagnostic points (Scottsbluff or Scottsbluff-like) had been recorded within the basin, and their identity and/or provenience were in doubt. By contrast, the countryside above the Upper Campbell had yielded abundant evidence of the stemmed Plano series. It was therefore proposed that the presence of Lake Agassiz prevented people of that culture from occupying the lake basin below the level of the Upper Campbell. This is the scenario that is presented in *Ancient Campfires*.

Since the mid-1990s, a number of indisputable Cody points reportedly from below the Upper Campbell have come to light, and the cultural/historical model currently in favour sees people responsible for the Cody complex descending onto the higher elevations of the Manitoba Lowlands. For further information on the Alberta/Cody stemmed point Plano tradition in Manitoba, see Pettipas 2011:73-90, 2013:11-12).

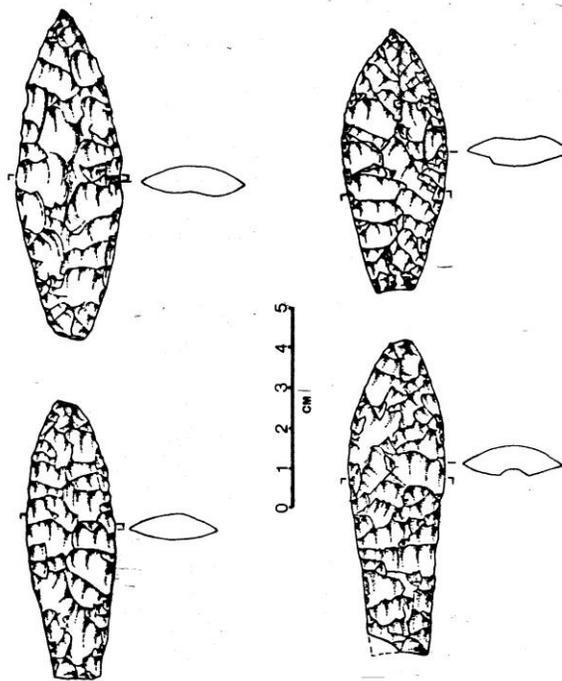


Fig. 1. A sample of the Nipawin points from EIMb-10. The angle marks near the sides indicate extent of lateral grinding upwards from the corners – another typical attribute of Lusk points.

Trevor uses the term “**Lusk**” in reference to a certain Late Plano projectile point type belonging to the Lusk cultural complex. This complex is part of his “Early to Middle Prehistoric Period Transition” dating to ca. 8,600-7,500 RCYBP. To the Lusk point type he appropriately assigns the descriptive term “lanceolate.”

“Lanceolate” means a form that is shaped somewhat like an elongated triangle or else a willow leaf: variously slender with uninterrupted lateral edges. There is no notching or shouldering on either side of the specimen. This is consistent with how Dr Henry Irwin described the Lusk point type when he first named it that back in the 1960s. Figure 2 shows a good example of what I consider to be a lanceolate and, specifically, a Lusk point.

Figure 3 illustrates an assemblage of 16 projectile points drawn from several excavated Alberta sites. This image is a facsimile of Plate 9 in Trevor’s book, where it’s implied in the caption that all of the points in the collage are Lusk. But it’s obvious that not all of these artifacts are lanceolate-shaped and hence cannot be not Lusk points; I would suggest that only items **c**, **h**, **j**, and **k** through **p** can be so classified. It’s also obvious that Trevor draws a clear distinction between lanceolate and notched points; in his description of the Alberta sites that contain true Lusk points, he notes that “sites that exhibit Lusk points often have them as the sole diagnostic point in the component; however, *they occasionally occur with notched point forms*” (italics mine). Thus, it seems to me that the

caption to Plate 9 would be better worded to read something like “Lusk points (c, h, j, k-p) and associated stemmed and notched forms from Alberta sites ...”

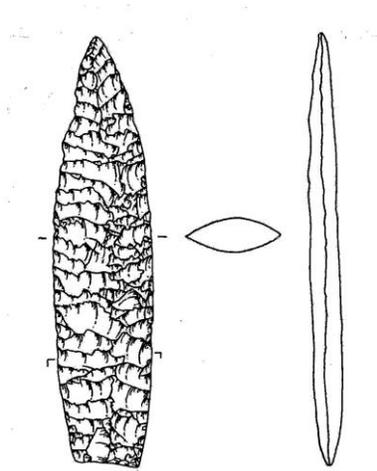


Fig. 2. A good example of a Lusk lanceolate point, this one from the Swan River valley of Manitoba. The specimen is 9.8 cm long.

The Jacobean poet John Donne wrote in 1623, “No man is an island.” The same applies to a region of North America like Manitoba, whose history had direct connections with those of Alberta and with points (no pun intended) in between. It therefore behoves Manitoba archaeologists to be familiar with the discipline as practiced in adjacent areas whose histories had a bearing, directly or indirectly, upon long-ago developments in Manitoba.

Thankfully, Trevor Peck has provided us with a “one-stop shopping” resource for the archaeological record of Alberta in particular. It’s hoped that the fine-tuning that appears in the foregoing paragraphs will enhance in some small measure the wealth of information contained in Trevor’s book.

References

Pettipas, L., 2011, "An Environmental and Cultural History of the Central Lake Agassiz Region, with Special Reference to Southwestern Manitoba 12,000-7,000 BP." *Manitoba Archaeological Journal* NS 21(1&2): i-152.

Pettipas, L., 2013, “Agassiz Basin Scottsbluff.” *Manitoba Archaeological Newsletter* NS 25(3&4:11-12).

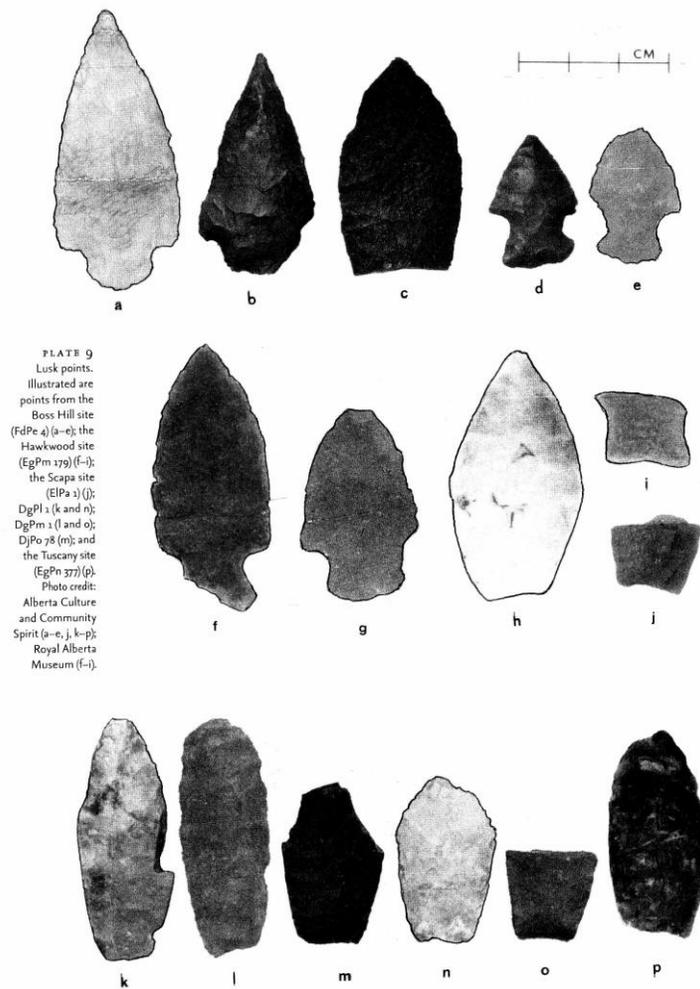


Fig. 3. Trevor's Plate 9, with slight modifications to the individual images for clarity.