Archeology: Far Western Boreal Forest

After a hiatus of some years, several monographs treating northern North American prehistory have been published in recent months. This volume, **Investigations in Southwest Yukon** (Robert S. Peabody Foundation for Archaeology, Andover, Mass., 1964. 520 pp., paper, $9), contains two such monographs—*Geobotanical and Archaeological Reconnaissance,* by Frederick Johnson and Hugh M. Raup, and *Archaeological Excavations, Comparisons, and Speculations,* by Richard S. MacNeish. In the substantive sense, at least, the two works are among the most instructive of those recently published, mainly because they deal with portions of the subarctic woodland, nearly all of which has remained until now an archeological *terra incognita.* They are published in the Peabody Foundation's *Paper for Archaeology,* vol. 6, Nos. 1 and 2.

The first of the two, by the prehistorian Johnson and the botanist Raup, describes and interprets archeological, botanical, and geological materials collected and observed during 1944 and 1948 in localities made accessible by the then newly constructed Alaska Highway. The geographical region primarily discussed is the country about Kluane Lake, including the nearby Dezadeash and Shakwak valleys, in southwestern Yukon Territory.

The authors, who were assisted in the field by a geologist as well as other botanists and archeologists, aim at broadly correlating human occupations of the area with geobotanical events during the period extending upward in time from the melting of glacial ice in the Kluane and adjacent basins to nearly the present. The regional geomorphology, archeology, and present major plant zones are successively described, and are followed by a historically interpretive section and an appendix. The appendix contains, as one part, extensive notes on the ethnology of the Kluane area.

Descriptive accounts of artifacts and sites, although the latter tend to be more geological than archeological, are generally excellent, as are the fascinating reconstructions of tundra, grassland, and forest development and succession. The resulting picture is one of earlier, open lands, occupied by large, herding herbivores and human hunting cultures, which slowly and with diverse fluctuations became progressively more forested. The encroaching forests resulted, presumably, in a gradual reduction of big game hunting and a concomitant increase in fishing and other food getting pursuits.

Although the geobotanical descriptions and the interpretations are clearly drawn, the reader is given only a vague impression of the correlative, regional culture history. Johnson's archeological collections are relatively small, but they reflect successive human occupations over a long time span. Yet, after presenting his fine archeological descriptions, Johnson says almost nothing specifically about what cultural changes probably or possibly occurred, through time, in response to changing environments.

Johnson's avoidance of more specific and detailed archeological interpretations is apparently due in large part to MacNeish's work, the second monograph in the volume. Following Johnson's lead, MacNeish spent five seasons in the southwest Yukon. His contribution is based on about 100 archeological sites (a few of which were stratified), including those previously discovered by Johnson and his associates.

In addition to clear descriptions of what was found, the report contains a comprehensive statement of purpose and strategy, an account of dating techniques, a discussion of prehistoric settlement patterns, and an analysis of faunal remains. Best of all, in many respects, is the major section in which MacNeish postulates regional cultural phases spanning an estimated 9000 years, and then goes on to reconstruct specific, ancient East Asian and northwestern North American ways of life and the peopling of the New World.

This highly speculative section will be criticized by many readers. However, MacNeish is to be complimented for writing it. On the basis of known and postulated spatial and temporal distributions of archeological traits or constellations of traits, MacNeish traces prehistoric cultural developments and diffusions over large portions of two continents. The result is an imaginative, but at the same time a reasoned ordering of hitherto chaotically scattered data. Thus, on the one hand, this monograph substantially contributes to the known content of boreal forest prehistory. On the other hand, it stands as a tantalizing archeological construct, one to be critically examined, but nevertheless to be paid its just due as an intelligent, pioneering effort at synthesizing diverse materials that bear on several of the more important problems in the cultural history of America.

It contains one serious, general flaw. Much of it is filled with incorrect bibliographical citations, misspelled names of archeological sites and geographical features, contradictory tables, and artifact types incorrectly assigned to archeological complexes or sites from which no such types are known to exist. For instance, MacNeish speculates that the British Mountain phase has an age of 18,000 years, but in one table it is shown as about 4400 years old. To cite one other typical example, he assigns burins (specific kinds of stone graving tools) to the north Alaskan Nayuk [*sic*] and Tuktu complexes, although burins are not known to occur in either.

Mistakes of this sort are common enough nearly to spoil MacNeish's main thesis, for they muddle its development, and worse, they threaten to make it suspect at its base. One may, therefore, hope that while he continues to pit his imaginative mind against the more Olympian problems of northern prehistory, MacNeish will, in the future, pay added attention to the garden variety requirements of scientific writing.

JOHN M. CAMPBELL
Department of Anthropology, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque