

SOME ARCTIC SPEAR POINTS AND THEIR COUNTERPARTS

by

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Stone projectile points have not long stirred the hearts of Arctic archeologists. Harpoon heads and engraving styles are still reluctant to move over to make room for the large bifaced flints presumed to have tipped one kind or another of spear; yet a good part of today's speculative writing is concerned with the forms and distribution of spear points on an intercontinental scale, and the Arctic is caught in the middle. Even though some of the implications of generic relationship that go with studies of points are of very doubtful value, one may perhaps play at the game of forms without doing permanent harm to his functional approach to typology.

Before attempting a survey of the larger projectile points of the Bering Strait region, however, I wish to make two points clear. First, I regard these objects as of less value as horizon markers than tens of other categories of artifacts that we find in Arctic sites. Data on houses, on the proportions of animals killed, on devices used in cutting and scraping skins, and on parts of the ancient archery complex, for example, are generally much more useful and definitive of cultural periods. Second, the large points of western Alaska probably have no bearing on the spread of one or another body of roving hunters of big game drifting northward from the Great Plains. They were made, instead, by indigenous peoples whose activities ranged widely within the several highly special environments of the region. Yet if we are going to compare sites of the Arctic with those of distant and warmer parts of the world, we shall have to do so on the basis of a few wide-ranging styles, rather than whole complexes of culture, for the Eskimos of the tundras were never the Sioux of the Plains.

The large points do exist in Alaska. They are always more prevalent, of course, at caribou interception places, where heavy spears are used, than in sites of the coast, but they appear often enough in all of the Arctic sites to show clearly the persistence of some forms and the successions of others. For the sake of brevity, we may refer to a chart (Fig. 1) of the sites and culture phases, most of them newly proposed and incompletely reported to date. They are arranged by locality in vertical columns and by relative order and estimated dating in horizontal correspondence with a column of pre-Christian dates. The points are identified by the names applied to similar forms in the central United States and Canada.

A brief summary of the columns follows:

Column 1: Dates in millenniums B. C.

Column 2: The stratigraphy and dating have been described in some detail for the type site at Cape Denbigh (Giddings, 1949, 1951, 1955; Hopkins and Giddings, 1953). The Denbigh Flint complex here was sharply separated from later deposits by sterile layers, including the indicated dated layers (Rainey and Ralph, 1959: 372-73; samples 104, 105, 108) of peat and peaty soil.

Column 3: The beach ridge archeology at Cape Krusenstern is the subject of preliminary reports (Giddings, 1960a, 1960b, 1961). Strong local continuity is present from the Lower Bench microblade site to the Denbigh Flint complex, to pre-Choris and on to Ipiutak; but the two Palisades manifestations and the Old Whaling culture appear to represent other traditions.

Column 4: The beach numbers refer to 114 identified beaches in series at the Cape on most of which were localized archeological sites that range in time from No. 1, which is the current ocean front beach where recent Eskimos have camped, to No. 105, which is the oldest upon which artifacts have yet been recovered, and on to No. 114, which represents, presumably, the first beach to form after sea level reached approximately its present height following Wisconsin glaciation. Because of unconformities where segments of old beaches were erased at several times, sites may not always be assigned a precise beach number.

Columns 5 and 6: The successions of cultures at Cape Prince of Wales and Cape Espenberg have been briefly mentioned (Giddings, 1960b: 13; 1961: 164). The two designated Singauruk sites and the Kugzruk site are located on stranded beaches remote from the sea, but not as far back as the one bearing Denbigh deposits.

Column 7: The succession at Choris Peninsula was described after the first season's work in 1956 (Giddings, 1957) and was further illustrated in a later report (Giddings, 1961: Fig. 9). The "Late Choris" entry refers to hearths (probably tent sites) two beaches forward of Choris houses, containing check-stamped as well as linear-stamped potsherds.

Column 8: The Battle Rock site has been mentioned (Giddings, 1961: 169-70) but not fully described. It is a sealing point a few miles north of Cape Krusenstern where several cultures and phases are represented, principally in the forms of burials.

Columns 9 and 10: The Onion Portage and other indicated Kobuk River sites are described together in a paper now published (Giddings, 1962). While the "upper middle" layers contain opaque obsidian and other artifacts unlike any other known phase of culture, the other layers above "Old Hearth" correspond strongly to Norton and Choris coastal phases. Old Hearth materials are again unlike those of the coast, but reminiscent of far inland sites of the Yukon drainage system. The Little

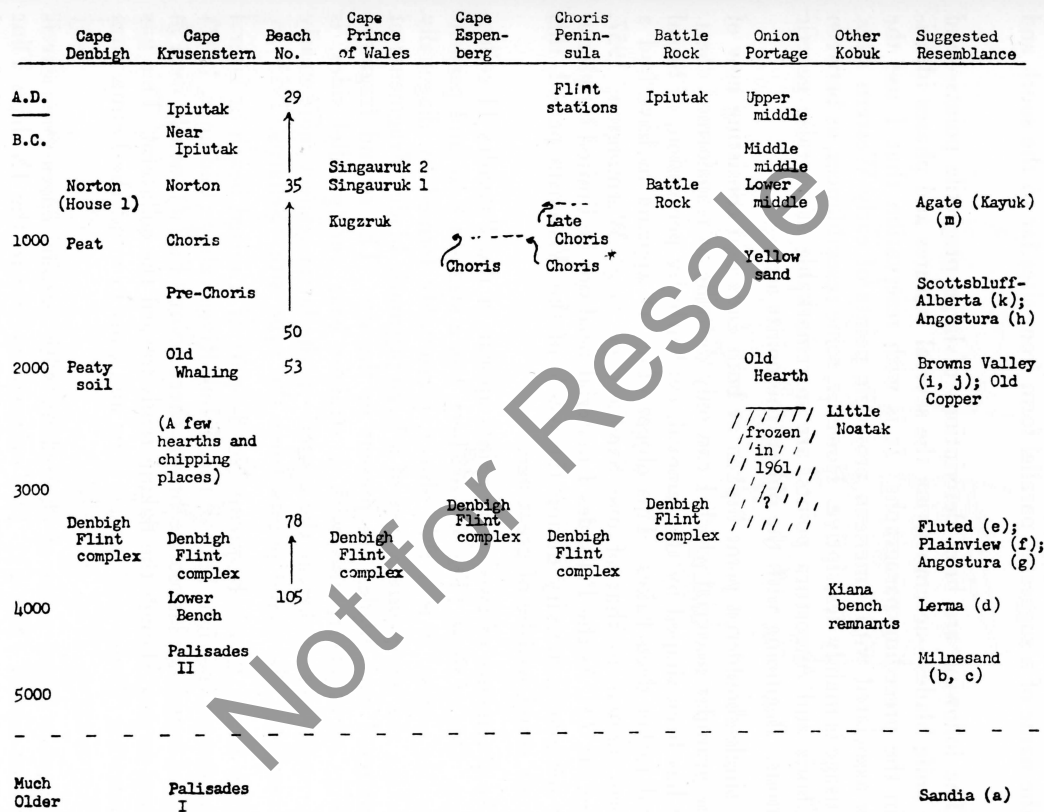


Fig. 1

Noatak site contains obsidian cortex scrapers as do the Old Hearth layer and Site KBR-8 (Kiana Bench Remnant). KBR-8 contains both microblades and stemmed and notched obsidian points, recalling those of Tuktut site (Campbell, 1961*b*).

Column 11: The points described here are identified by figure numbers and the name of a suggested parallel form from sites far to the south and east.

The following are brief descriptions of large projectile points—and some knife blades—accompanying the several cultures and phases identified in the preceding paragraphs. It is with reservation that I use the terms associated with American projectile points of early Western sites. This usage is mainly descriptive. However, some resemblances, as between pre-Choris and Angostura points, are so remarkable as to raise generic questions. Beginning with the oldest, the points are:

1. A single-shouldered point broken at both ends and consisting now of the granular material which I can only describe as transformed chert. It has been shaped by the removal, evidently by percussion, of broad and rather deep flakes. This object (Fig. *a*) appears to have had a form similar to that of one Sandia type (*e.g.*, Wormington, 1957, Fig. 30, 1). As the Palisades I material need not be limited by glacial or periglacial activity during the whole of the Wisconsin period, this point could well be of great age.
2. The fragments of two spear points appear in the Palisades II collection. One of these (Fig. *b*), of chert, has a straight base and perpendicular edges. It is a thin object, presumably formed by diagonally flaking the more convex face of a large prismatic blade. Fragments of unaltered such blades are present in the site. The second fragment (Fig. *c*) of chert, also with a straight base and parallel sides, is narrower and thicker at the center—in the latter respect more nearly resembling Milnesand points from the type site (Sellards, 1955).
3. From Kiana Bench Remnant No. 8—part of a raised beach or lateral moraine on the right limit of the Kobuk River valley (Giddings, 1962)—was found the lanceolate brown chert point (Fig. *d*), nearly oval in cross-section, though the flaking tends toward the collateral. This has somewhat “laurel-leaf” proportions and calls to mind the Lerma form (Wormington, 1957, p. 97-99).
4. A doubly fluted point of chalcedony with parallel edges (one ear is broken away) (Fig. *e*). This occurred *in situ* in the Denbigh Flint complex layer at Cape Denbigh. At least three other small fluted points approaching the Folsom type have been found in the Brooks Range of northern Alaska, two of them in surface association with microblades (Thompson, 1948; Solecki, 1951*b*). Since these were all picked up on the surface, however, one may hold in reserve their

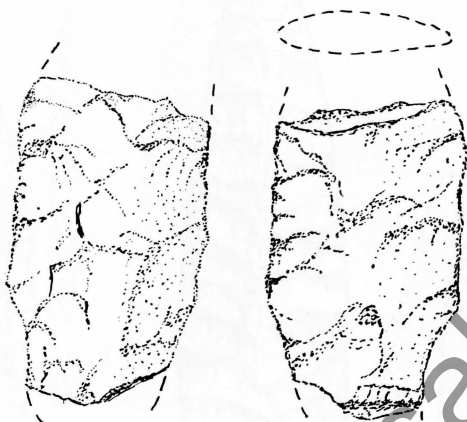


Fig. a

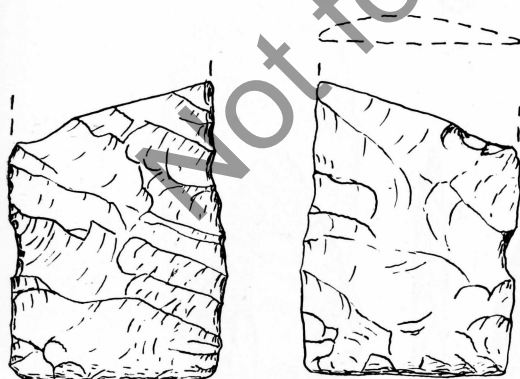


Fig. b

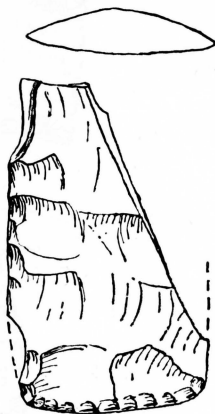


Fig. c

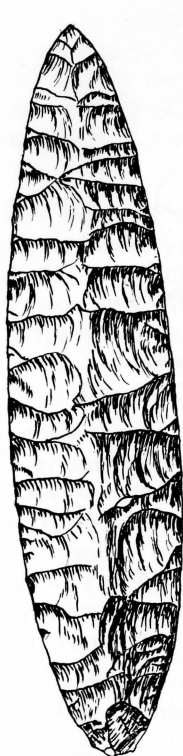


Fig. d

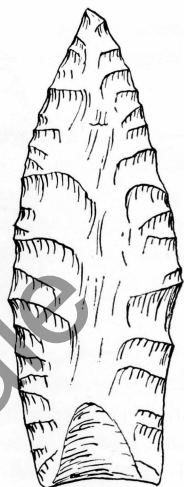
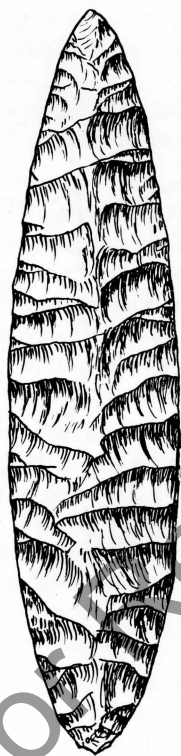


Fig. f

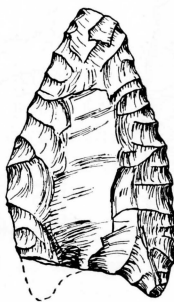


Fig. e

(Length of "d" 15.7 cm.)

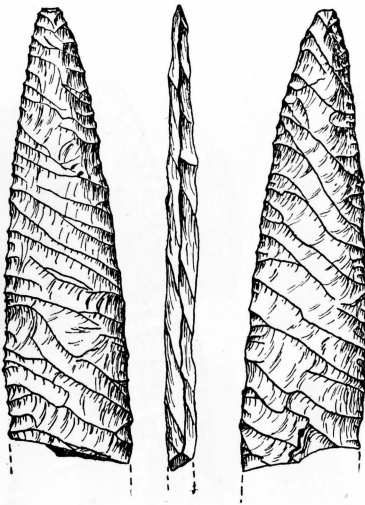


Fig. g

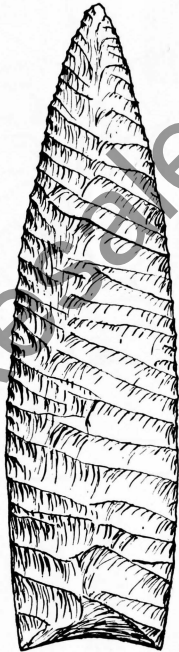


Fig. h

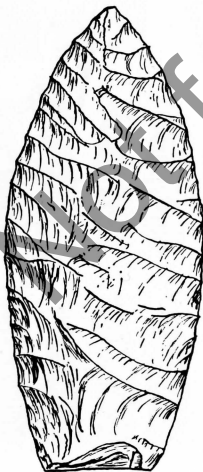


Fig. i

(Length of "h" 13.5 cm.)

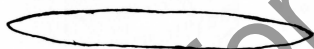
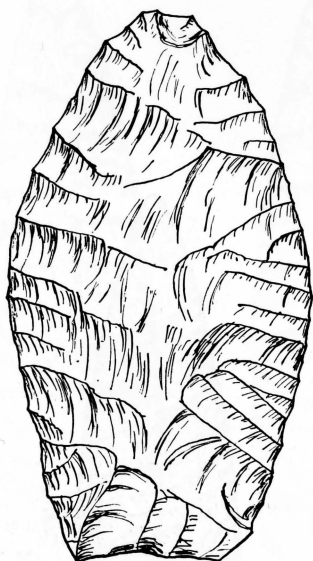


Fig. j

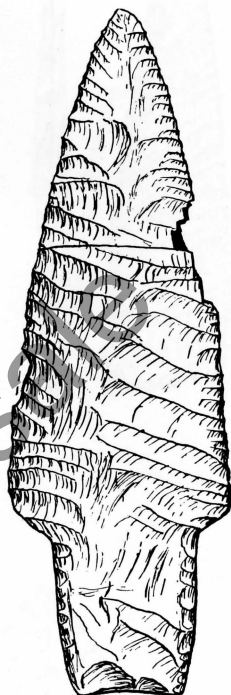


Fig. k



Fig. l

(Length of "k" 14.5 cm.)

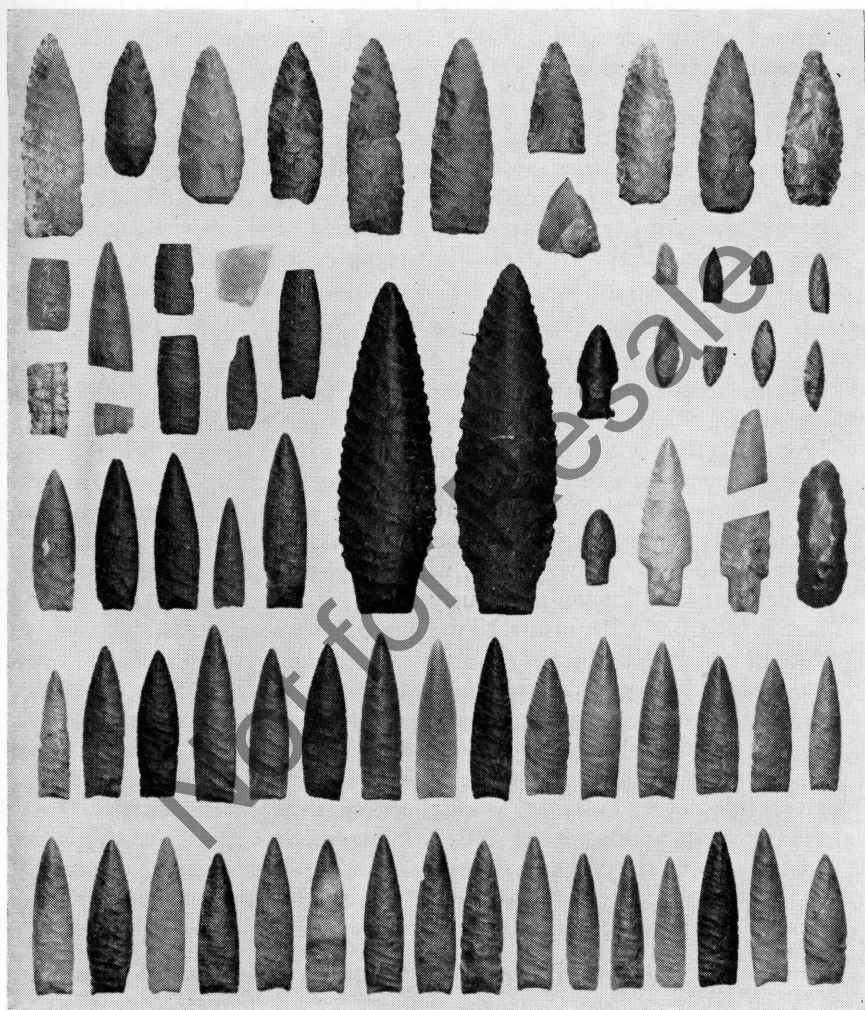


PLATE 1.

assignment to the Denbigh or another microblade culture, while at the same time remembering that fluted points have not turned up in this greater region in association with artifacts known to fall outside the microblade configuration.

5. A sizeable point of chert (Fig. *f*), basally thinned, concave-based and ground at the edges, also in the Denbigh Flint complex in place. It is readily compared with certain Plainview forms (esp. Krieger, 1947: Pl. 5, *1*).
6. Another specimen from the Denbigh Flint complex in place (Fig. *g*), along with several concave bases of presumably similar pieces. This falls into the Angostura category (Wormington, 1957: 138-41). The Angostura form appears to have continued, almost without change, from the time of the Denbigh Flint complex to that of pre-Choris and Choris, and even to late Choris phases of culture.

A remarkable cache, evidently the belongings of one man at one time was excavated from a small area beneath the crest of a beach between the beaches of Old Whaling and Choris culture proper. In this cache (Pl. 1) were 36 complete chert projectile points of Angostura form, together with fragments of 8 others, and several other forms. These Angostura-like pieces are oval in cross-section, usually concave based, sometimes delicately serrated at the edges, and treated with an overall diagonal flaking as fine, perhaps, as any on record. With them were 10 whole or nearly whole, wide, diagonally flaked spear or knife blades of a kind known previously from Trail Creek middle levels and houses at Choris Peninsula. Two enormous spear heads, between 18 and 19 cm. in length, are stemmed and provided with wide diagonal flake scars proportionate to the smaller ones of the knives. Included in the same cache were two broken, stemmed spear points (see below). These, but not the points of Angostura form, are edge-ground. Other points are a small stemmed one like those known from Choris culture and a side-notched point of black chert identical, except for its diagonal flaking, with points of the Old Whaling culture. Seven coarse, thick side blades of the inset variety (or small knife blades) made up the remainder of this remarkable cache. A single point of Angostura form from this cache is shown in the drawing, Fig. *h*.

7. The large collection of flint projectile points and knife blades from Old Whaling culture contains obvious parallels with long slender, notched points not commonly placed in the same categories with those of the early Plains. Referring to a plate of Old Whaling flints (Giddings, 1961: Fig. 7) and to archaic manifestations of the Great Lakes region, especially Old Copper forms (*e.g.*, Wittry and Ritzen-thaler, 1956: Fig. 71, O-T), resemblances between projectile points and scrapers become striking.

Besides notched points, however, the Old Whaling culture contains spear points more like those of early Plains varieties. In the Old Whaling plate just mentioned, the large point of chalcedony, in the upper right-hand corner, together with the chert point and the one of chalcedony shown in Figs. *i* and *j*, define, with others not illustrated, a form recalling that of Browns Valley.

8. The stemmed, diagonally flaked chert point, Fig. *k*, recalls one Scotts-bluff form (Wormington, 1957: Fig. 40, 7) or, because of its relatively long stem, the Alberta form of Plains point (*ibid*: 132-35). This and another like it were found in the above-mentioned cache (see Pl. 1). This object is ground at the edges, diagonally flaked with precision, and lightly serrated. It was found in two pieces, the notch on one edge of the blade representing series of burin blows struck after the break on each of the pieces. This use of broken spear points for makeshift burins is characteristic of Choris and the related Middle Trail Creek technology (Larsen, 1951: Fig. 14). Significantly, the same practice has recently been recognized by Dr. Jeremiah F. Epstein (personal communication, 1960) as a means of treating broken paleo-Indian, or Plano, points of Texas.
9. In the "middle middle" level at Onion Portage (Giddings, 1962) was found the base of a black chert point (Fig. *l*) which appears to be identical with those of some Kayuk points (Campbell, 1959: 98; Fig. 1). As the base of a somewhat contracted and slightly convex collaterally flaked spear point, this appears similar also to the more common type found at Agate Basin (Wormington, 1957: Fig. 46).

These specimens by no means exhaust the possibilities of correlation with forms of large projectile points from the Great Plains, but they perhaps suffice to show that parallels exist in the coastal zone as well as inland. The greatest numbers of close resemblances between the western Alaska points and the Plains, "Plano," or paleo-Indian points of the temperate zone fall within the period post-Denbigh and pre-Norton. Points of the pre-Choris beaches, taken together with those of Choris sites and their contemporary middle Trail Creek levels, show a remarkable variety of diagonally flaked forms.

As to what these correlations of form may prove to mean, I can only guess. It seems enough at this time to record their relative order, as a kind of warning to us all against too hastily assuming that projectile points of Plano forms are always to be crossdated with their counterparts 2,000 miles away. Preliminary reports on archeological sites are often at fault because they inadvertently give wrong impressions about what has been found. I seem to have misled some readers by saying too little about things found at Cape Krusenstern.

In his first footnote (p. 13), Collins observes that while a few animal bones occurred with Palisades II implements, bony material was lacking in the Denbigh sites. I neglected to say in previous publications that bone fragments in a better state of preservation than the six eroded deer bones from Palisades occurred just under the surface with microblades on the "Lower Bench" site, a lagoon-edge Denbigh-related site on the same hillside with the Palisades. The preservation of bone at both of the presumed older sites clearly depends upon the soil of locally disintegrated limestone in which the materials are buried. On the other hand, it is true that the Denbigh hearths lying just under the sod on the beach ridges at Cape Krusenstern yielded no bone except for a few charred fragments too small for identification, while the Old Whaling summer lodges, also just under sod, held all manner of animal bones in good shape for classifying.

On another aspect of the same subject, I find that Irving (p. 66) reads me as "contending" that Palisades II is different from the Old Whaling culture. I had thought that I was only reporting. This is the first time anyone has suggested to me that Palisades II is closely similar to Old Whaling. If others who have not examined the materials from Cape Krusenstern confuse the Old Whaling with the Palisades materials, perhaps a study of the scale of illustrations will help until I can offer more details in a full report on the beach ridge archeology which I hope to complete during this sabbatical year in Denmark.

In conclusion, let me point out that internal consistency exists between the several kinds of stratigraphy, vertical and horizontal, at Cape Denbigh, Cape Prince of Wales, Cape Espenberg, Choris Peninsula, Cape Krusenstern, and Onion Portage in the upper Kobuk River valley. While many questions remain to be answered in this coastal region, it seems wise to compare the unstratified sites of the interior as well as any other stratification in the general region first with the stratigraphy of the coast and only then with a hypothetical time scale based on tenuous typological threads between middle North America and Central Asia.

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