AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY
OF THE PINE, PIKE AND POPPLE RIVERS

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The area of northeastern Wisconsin which is located in the drainages of the Wild Rivers—the Pine, Popple, and Pike—is, like so many other regions in the Upper Great Lakes area, almost completely unknown to the culture historian. It is certainly true that the major prehistoric developments in eastern North America will never be properly understood until these uninvestigated regions have received the close scrutiny of the trained investigator. This report contains the results of an attempt to make a preliminary assessment of the archaeological and anthropological resources of one such area.

During the month of July, 1968, a survey crew composed of Beloit College students under the direction of the author and under the field supervision of Mr. J. Edson Way, was sent into the Wild Rivers area of northeastern Wisconsin with the purpose of locating and describing sites of prehistoric human activity. Surface collections of the debris resulting from these activities were made and are now housed in the collections of the Logan Museum of Anthropology, Beloit College. The survey program was run at the same time that excavations were being conducted in nearby Oneida and Vilas counties by the Beloit College Archaeological Field School. These latter activities limited the author’s opportunities to accompany the Wild Rivers survey crew, with the result that the bulk of the actual work in the field was under Mr. Way’s supervision.

One of the results of the experience derived from four years’ archaeological operations in northern Wisconsin is the knowledge of techniques which are best suited to survey procedures in a heavily-forested environment. However, the particular characteristics of vegetation cover and drainage in the Wild Rivers area made surface observation of prehistoric aboriginal remains particularly unproductive and frustrating. In addition, the widespread absence of access roads to the rivers and the small number of farms adjacent to the rivers made the work of the survey crew unusually difficult. As a result of these factors and as a result of

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limited time and funds, our 1968 survey was limited to restricted areas along the banks of the streams and lakes within the drainages of these three wild rivers. The various loci of prehistoric habitation which were located in the course of the survey do not, therefore, represent more than a fraction of the total number of such sites to be found in the area.

Not only were such archaeological sites difficult to find, but the heavy vegetation cover encountered precluded the recovery of extensive surface collections of cultural debris. Some of the sites are represented in our collections by a mere handful of the wastage which results from aboriginal stone-working techniques. Such small assemblages seldom include artifact forms which can be considered to be diagnostic of even very broad temporal or cultural divisions of Upper Great Lakes prehistory. This is a highly significant limitation of our data, particularly in view of the generally scanty and imperfect understanding of Upper Great Lakes prehistory which is now available.

Fortunately, our work in Oneida and Vilas counties and the work of Dr. Ronald J. Mason in Door County to the southeast, provide some measure of control and furnish some sort of framework within which our data may be assessed.

The following list of archaeological sites constitutes the results of our survey. Each site described has been given a site name, a Wisconsin Archaeological Survey codification number immediately following the site name, and a catalog number in the collections of the Logan Museum of Anthropology, Beloit College (e.g. LMA #) at the end of the paragraph dealing with that site. For convenience, the sites are grouped according to the particular drainage system in which they are located.

**THE PINE RIVER DRAINAGE**

The **Franknecht Site** (Fl2) is situated on the north bank of the Pine River at the confluence with the Popple River. It is located in the SW 1/4 of the SE 1/4 of the SW 1/4 of Section 23, Township 39 North, Range 17 East, in the Town of Fern, Florence County. Surface collections from the eroded bank include two quartz hammerstones, two chert flakes, 51 quartz flakes, nineteen quartz cores, six bipolar cores (Figure 1, I), and 12 irregular quartz chunks. (LMA #21460)

The **Two Banks Site** (Fl3) is located in the SW 1/4 of the NW 1/4 of the SE 1/4 of Sec. 7, T 39 N, R 18 E, Town of Commonwealth, Florence County. It is situated on a ridge on the southeast side of the stream which crosses County Road D at Emily Lake. Surface collections from the road cut consist of one welded tuff hammer-
stone, a utilized quartz flake, 38 unmodified quartz flakes, and 3 quartz cores. (LMA #21461)

The Troika Site (Fl4) appears to be confined to the north side of County Road D on the northwest side of the stream leaving Emily Lake, in the SW ¼ of the NW ¼ of the SE ¼ of Sec. 7, T 39 N, R 18 E, Town of Commonwealth, Florence County. It is possible that this site is a continuation of the Two Banks Site. One broken chert side-notched projectile point (Fig. 1, C), one broken quartz small triangular projectile point with serrated edges (Fig. 1, A), two utilized quartz flakes, one utilized quartzite flake, 11 unmodified quartz flakes, one chert flake, and three quartz cores were found on the surface. (LMA #21462)

The End of Road Site (Fl5) is on a point on the southeast side of the junction of the Pine River and the drainage of Bessie Babbit Lake. It lies in the SE ¼ of the NE ¼ of Sec. 3, T 39 N, R 17 E, in the Town of Fern, Florence County. The surface collection consists of 304 unmodified quartz flakes, 43 quartz chunks, 36 quartz cores, 2 utilized quartz flakes, and two quartz wedges (Fig. 1, E and F). Wedges are tools which are thought to have been used in the manufacture of bone tools. (LMA #21463)

The North End Site (Fl6) lies on a rise to the west of the stream which flows out of the north end of Long Lake, in the NE ¼ of the NW ¼ of Sec. 19, T 39 N, R 15 E, Town of Longlake, Florence County. The surface of the site yielded 17 plain shell-tempered bodysherd (fragments of pottery vessels), 2 plain-surfaced, grit-tempered bodysherd, and 3 unidentifiable fragments of pottery. Also collected were three burned chert flakes, one rhyolite flake, 14 quartz flakes, and two bipolar cores—one of quartz (Fig. 1, H) and one of quartzite (Fig. 1, J). The entire site appears to have been plowed at some time in the past. (LMA #21464)

The Merganzer Point Site (Fr3) is situated on the large peninsula on the northwest shore of Franklin Lake in the SW ¼ of the NW ¼ of Sec. 21, T 40 N, R 12 E, Town of Hiles, Forest County, in the Nicolet National Forest. Surface collection yielded 7 quartz flakes and one quartz bipolar core (Fig. 1, G). The site appears to have been badly disturbed by erratic digging activities. (LMA #21465)

THE PIKE RIVER DRAINAGE

The Eichenger Ring Site (Mt33) is located on the west bank of the Menominee River about one-quarter mile upstream from the mouth of the Pike River. It is situated on a high ridge in the NW ¼ of the SW ¼ of Sec. 2, T 34 N, R 21 E, Town of Amberg, Marinette County. The site is intriguing because of the presence of two low earthen “dance rings”, some small earthen mounds which
FIGURE 1. Artifacts found in the archeological survey of the Pike, Pine and Popple Wild Rivers Area. A, small, triangular projectile point, with serrated edges, from Troika site; B, small triangular projectile point fragment, from Eichenger Ring site; C, side-notched projectile point, from Troika site; D, side-notched projectile point base, from Eichenger Ring site; E and F, quartz wedges, from End of Road site; G, quartz bipolar core, from Merganser Point site; H, quartz bipolar core, from North End site; I, quartz bipolar core, from Franknecht site; J, quartzite bipolar core, from North End site.
may be burial mounds, and several regular depressions which may be graves. The site is narrow and about one-quarter mile long. Surface collection yielded artifacts which suggest that the site was occupied several times by aboriginal groups. Included are:

a broadly side-notched chert projectile point base (Fig. 1, D), a small triangular quartz projectile point fragment (Fig. 1, B),

one utilized chert flake, 3 quartz flakes, one chert chunk (burned?), and a quartz bipolar core. Historic artifacts found on the surface include bowl and stem fragments of a white kaolin pipe, a rivet-type cast brass sleigh (dance?) bell, and fragments of glass and glazed ceramic vessels. Also collected are several small fragments of both burned and unburned animal bone. Although this site technically lies outside the Pike drainage, it is included here because of the interesting information it contributes to the general area. (LMA #21466)

The Mathis Farm Site (Mt34) is located on a hill to the south and east of the old Mathis farm house in the SE ¼ of the NW ¼ of Sec. 36, T 35 N, R 19 E, Town of Athelstane, Marinette County. Due to extensive and prolonged corn agriculture between 1900 and 1935, sand from the back of the hill has been blown over the site, in places to depths of five feet. The owners report that they have found many “arrowheads” over the years on the site. Our collections were extremely meagre and include one quartz flake and one chert flake. (LMA #21467)

Twin Oaks Site (Mt35). This site is located in the NE ¼ of the SE ¼ of Sec. 3, T 34 N, R 21 E, in the Town of Wausaukee, Marinette County, on a ridge on the north bank of the Pike River about 150 yards upstream from its confluence with the Menominee River. The surface collection includes one felsite flake, 4 quartzite flakes, 28 quartz flakes, two quartz cores, two chert cores, and a chert wedge. (LMA #21468)

The Dolan Lake Site (Mt36) is located on a ridge which separates Dolan and Coleman lakes, to the southwest of a small connecting stream, in the SE ¼ of the SW ¼ of Sec. 10, T 35 N, R 19 E, Town of Athelstane, Marinette County. The site is largely undisturbed and does not appear to be very large or to have a deep deposit. The surface collection consists of 2 felsite flakes, and 5 quartz flakes. (LMA #21469)

THE POPPLE RIVER DRAINAGE

No sites were found in the Popple basin. The survey crew felt that this apparent lack of aboriginal activity may very well be explained by survey limitations. Access roads are few and widely separated and much of the river is in low, swampy areas with heavy growths of alder along the banks.
DISCUSSION

The results of our field survey are frustratingly meagre, which is not surprising in view of the limitations under which it was conducted. In spite of our small collections, however, some rather important observations can be made. The most obvious of these is the conclusion that the drainages of the Pike, Pine and probably also the Popple were clearly exploited by aborigines in both recent and prehistoric times. Also, the discovery of village and campsite debris gives an important clue to the sorts of exploitative patterns which were present. The relative lack of diagnostic tool forms which were recovered from these deposits by our survey crew makes the task of determining when and by whom these artifactual remains were deposited a difficult one.

The impression that the area contains a small number of small sites with shallow deposits should be considered a function of the limitations of surface collection techniques in a heavily forested area. Experience derived from the application of similar techniques in Oneida and Vilas counties suggests that such surface indications are seldom representative of the quantity of debris or the depth of the deposit which lies beneath the humus.

If our primary data are meagre, and do not permit a direct evaluation of local culture history, recent discoveries by Dr. Ronald J. Mason in the Door County-Green Bay area to the southeast, and in the lacustrine district of Oneida and Vilas counties to the west provide bases for at least a preliminary assessment of the broad outlines of human history in the Pine, Pike, and Popple drainages. The general chronology used here is a modified version of that used by George I. Quimby in his Indian Life in the Upper Great Lakes (1960).

The Paleo-Indian period (10,000 to 7,000 B.C.)

No direct evidence for human exploitation of the Wild Rivers area during this period is known. Indeed, intensive investigations in adjacent areas clearly indicate that only the southern margins of the Great Lakes region were settled by the mastodon hunters which moved north during the Twocreekan. In Wisconsin, occupations by these big-game hunters are found only in the southern half of the state.

The Late Paleo-Indian period (7,000 to 5,000 B.C.)

With the retreat of the Valders glacial advance, and the climatic amelioration which followed, northern Wisconsin and other areas of the Great Lakes apparently become more attractive to human settlers. While we have no evidence of occupations during this
period in the Pine, Pike and Popple basins, we do have information from adjacent areas such as Green Bay (Mason and Mason 1960) and from Oneida and Vilas counties (Salzer 1969a, 1969b) to indicate the presence of at least two phases of the cultural and temporal continuum which is identified as “Late Paleo-Indian”. In addition, a 1968 survey crew from Beloit College discovered remains which date from this period in the Upper Wolf River valley and it seems likely that future research in the Pine, Pike, and Popple area will disclose similar evidences of such occupations.

The Archaic period (5000 to 500 B.C.)

Data from our survey are inconclusive but do not rule out the possibility of occupation during this period. The Archaic period is a lengthy and complex affair in the Great Lakes and includes innovations in technology such as ground stone tools (axes, gouges) and annealed native copper tools. In the Green Bay area, the Oconto cemetery site (Ritzenthaler and Wittry 1957) has provided radiocarbon assays which range from about 5600 B.C. to 3600 B.C. On the other hand, dates from the Riverside cemetery site (Hrushka 1967) located in the present city of Menominee, Michigan, range from 500 B.C. to about A.D. 1. In Oneida County, the Squirrel Dam Site and the Burnt-Rollways Site provide additional information on domestic, rather than burial, activities during this long period (Salzer 1969a, 1969b). It is likely that the copper tools which were found some years ago near Long Lake in Florence County represent the occupation of the Wild Rivers area by aborigines at this time (Ritzenthaler 1957).

The Early Woodland (500 B.C. to 100 B.C.) and the Middle Woodland periods (100 B.C. to A.D. 500)

During the first of these periods, pottery technology appears in the Great Lakes area, and again, although no diagnostic artifacts were found in our survey of the Wild Rivers area, data from adjacent areas strongly suggest that occupations dating from these two periods will ultimately be located. These two periods are somewhat difficult to distinguish in northern Wisconsin. This is largely due to the presence of at least two distinctive local developments which have been discovered in the area and to our still meagre understanding of the details of their origins and elaboration. The recently defined North Bay Culture (Mason 1966) is found in the Green Bay–Door County area and dates from around A.D. 100–200. Its development seems to have been strongly influenced by contemporary Middle Woodland groups in Illinois, Ontario, and New York. Adjacent to our area on the west is another Middle Woodland manifestation, termed the Nokomis Phase (Salzer 1968,
1969b), which is largely affected by still unclear connections to southeastern Wisconsin, although trade with North Bay is evident also. The Pine, Pike, and Popple, together with the Menominee river, certainly served as transportation devices in contact between these two northern Wisconsin areas and we can expect that further research in the Wild Rivers area will help to elucidate the mechanisms by which this trade and contact was accomplished. It is possible that the Troika Site (Fl14) and the Eichenger Ring Site (Mt33) may eventually supply some of these details.

The Late Woodland period (A.D. 500 to 1600)

This long time period is one of extremely complex developments and population movements in the Upper Great Lakes area, and it is very important to our understanding of the cultural processes which led to the formulation of the various Indian groups which were in the area at the time of contact with the Europeans. In Oneida and Vilas counties, this period is one of population growth. Not only are villages more numerous and of larger size, but the quantity and depth of debris and domestic garbage at these sites clearly indicates intensive and extensive sedentary life (Salzer 1969b). In the Wild Rivers area, the Troika Site (Fl4), the Eichenger Ring Site (Mt33), and the North End Site (Fl6) date from this period. Based on our experience from Oneida and Vilas counties, it is likely that most, if not all, of the sites described in this report were occupied during this period. Small triangular projectile points are diagnostic of the period and, in northern Wisconsin, crushed shell temper for pottery vessels was used only during this period.

The large quantity and universal occurrence of quartz chipping debris at the sites in the Wild Rivers area is instructive also, since in the area immediately to the west, this raw material was used almost exclusively for the manufacture of stone tools during this period. However, the low conical and linear burial mounds found to the west are conspicuously absent in the Wild Rivers area, with the possible exception of the Eichenger Ring Site. Mounds are similarly absent at Late Woodland sites in the Door County area (Mason 1966). However, burial mounds are present along the Menominee River in Menominee County, Michigan (Brose 1968). A similar situation prevails to the south along the Wolf River (Barrett and Skinner 1932), and also in the Peshtigo River drainage (Sperka 1962). The significance of these distributions can only be food for speculation until more research is accomplished in northeastern Wisconsin.

The major ceramic styles in all these areas are similar and involve round or somewhat conical jars of various size which are
covered with impressions of a cord-wrapped paddle. Decoration is common and is usually found near the rim and consists of impressions of single twisted cords or cord-wrapped sticks or strings. Such pottery will undoubtedly be found in the Wild Rivers area as more work is done.

The Historic period (A.D. 1600 to the present)

At least one of the sites located by our survey, the Eichenger Ring Site (Mt33), appears to have been occupied by Indians during the Historic period. However, the artifactual remains would seem to suggest that this occupation was quite recent and probably does not date much before the middle of the 19th century. Two sites which were located in Oneida County in 1966 are similar in that they also provide evidence of modern artifacts, low earthen “dance rings”, and shallow depressions suggestive of graves. In these instances, local traditions attribute the sites to occupations by the Potawatomi tribe in the late 19th century, and it is possible that the Eichenger Ring Site will eventually be similarly identified. The Forest band of the Potawatomi tribe have settlements in Forest County to the southwest of the Popple River. However, representatives of the Chippewa tribe have also been known for some time in the same general vicinity and they may have ranged into the Wild Rivers area in the recent past.

To the south and east of the area, the Menominee tribe has apparently maintained a relatively long-term residence, and, in fact, claims to have come into being as a recognizable social entity near the mouth of the Menominee River (Skinner 1913, p. 8). They were encountered at this locality in 1634 and they appear to have had additional villages in the general area at this time (Quimby 1960). It is probable, but by no means certain, that the Late Woodland occupations in the Wild Rivers area and in adjacent areas represent the material culture remains of the cultural ancestors of this tribe. Certainly, the Potawatomi, Chippewa, and other tribes known to have been in the area in recent times are late prehistoric and early historic immigrants and cannot account for the Late Woodland debris in the area.

CONCLUSIONS

A short-term archaeological survey of the proposed Wild Rivers area of extreme northeastern Wisconsin during the summer of 1968 succeeded in locating ten loci of prehistoric and historic cultural activities. Since the literature contains no examples of responsible excavation in this area, and, since the exigencies of surface survey in a largely undisturbed heavily-forested region severely limit the size and quality of artifactual recoveries, it is
necessary to rely upon the data and interpretations resulting from research in nearby areas to evaluate the present data. A reasonable, although tentative, sequence of major cultural events for the Wild Rivers area can be offered on these bases. This culture history begins shortly after the retreat of the Valders ice sheet and terminates in the recent past.

It is hoped that full scale excavations will be conducted in this area in the future since research of this sort can be expected to produce information on several problems of local and regional significance. For example, we can anticipate the recovery of data relating to the specific mechanisms and modes of colonization by human groups in post-Valders times. The area should also provide details of the relationships between Middle Woodland groups in adjacent areas. Hopefully, some insight into the prehistoric basis of the Menominee tribe might result from such research also. Certainly, archaeological investigations beyond the scope of our preliminary survey will be required to fully assess the scientific and educational resources of the area.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


