

# PLEISTOCENE CARIBOU IN CENTRAL WISCONSIN

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In the summer of 1985, Jack and Mona Zelenka found an antler while excavating their peat bog 6 miles southeast of Coloma, on County JJ in the township of Richford, Waushara County, Wisconsin. The antler was stained and heavy with mineral replacement, obviously of great age, broken at all distal aspects (during excavation), and was shed from a Late Pleistocene caribou (*Rangifer tarandus*). The bog, which had been previously excavated 10 to 12 feet in some places to create a pond, was deepened

to nearly 30 feet. Subsequently the antler was discovered in the excavated sediments of marl and peat; its depth in the peat was estimated at between 12 and 25 feet. The bog is sited near the proposed Ice Age Trail along the Wisconsin terminal moraine in Cary drift. This is the first record of the caribou from central Wisconsin, and one of but a few for the state.

The antler (all in one piece) consists of a brow tine (or "shovel") with tip broken away (length 153 mm); a main beam approx-



Fig. 1. Antler of caribou excavated from peat in Richford Township, Waushara County, Wisconsin.

imately 625 mm measured to the terminal palmate expansion, broken off and hollow; from the burr about 150 mm to the base of the first palmate tine; and along the beam 260 mm beyond to the next and opposite tine (entirely broken away). The length from tip of brow tine to the broken expansion is approximately 700 mm. The first palmate tine on the main beam measured 350 mm from the beam to the deepest notch of the palm, which was 205 mm across. Its greatest length was 392 mm. The diameter of the ovate base, shed from the pedicel, is about 42 to 47.5 mm in diameter, and of the burr approximately 61.5 mm (see Fig. 1).

Never common in Wisconsin and Upper Michigan in historic times, caribou wandered into these areas from muskeg habitats in nearby Minnesota and Ontario. A. W. Schorger (1942) reviewed the records and reports of caribou, listing several from the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and questionable ones for the Brule area in northwest Wisconsin, probably escaped animals from the Pierce estate. Among prehistoric bones found in Polk County, also northwest Wisconsin, a few were reported as caribou (Eddy and Jenks, 1935).

The caribou apparently wandered into lower Michigan after the Wisconsin glacier receded. Specimens were dated at 11,200 and  $5,870 \pm 200$  years BP. Baker (1983) suggests that historical records represent the woodland caribou, whereas the prehistoric caribou were of a larger Arctic form (but the woodland caribou is a large form). Sub-specific characters are hardly obvious in broken and fragmentary remains of antlers. Even the sex is impossible to know. Banfield

(1974) and other Canadian workers considered all the large woodland caribou to belong to one subspecies, *R. t. caribou*. Apparently all the caribou in Wisconsin belonged to this species and descended from the same stock.

The antler herein described is slightly smaller but very similar in form to that figured by West (1978) from southeast Wisconsin. The nearest of his records is approximately 150 km southeastward, in Sheboygan County. The other is from Wauwatosa, near Milwaukee.

West (1978) assigned his specimens to Late Pleistocene age, one antler dated by its sediments to about 12,500 years BP. In summary, all known prehistoric caribou from Wisconsin are scattered along the front of the Wisconsin moraines in Polk, Wau-shara and Sheboygan counties, and near Milwaukee. I acknowledge with thanks the cooperation of both of the Zelenkas.

#### LITERATURE CITED

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