Written in Jan, 1990

Written in Stone:

Exploring Kaslo's Prehistory

By Craig Weir

Beachgoers at Kaslo find arrowheads from time to time, and pause to wonder just how long these intriguing relics may have lain in the sand. Nobody knows exactly; very little archaeology has been undertaken hereabouts. However, evidence unearthed at distant sites suggests that a few may be ten thousand years old, and many about three thousand. While Homer's ancient Greeks explored the mysterious Mediterranean Sea, our aborigines were probably prospecting on the shores of Kootenay Lake for the special stones they needed to make their projectile points and other tools.

What is this stone? Where did it come from?

Geologists identify it as argillitic chert. Archaeologists call it Kootenay argillite. It came from a rock formation quite high in the Selkirk Mountains; a formation that has been traced from Blue Ridge at Kaslo to the vicinity of Galena Bay north of Nakusp: the Milford Formation. Argillite, by the way, stems from a Greek word, argillos, meaning type of clay.

About 1,200 million years ago, a shallow sea covered some part of the earth's surface. We really don't know where because the face of the planet has changed a great deal since then. Anyhow, fine silt settled to the bottom of this sea, forming layers of somewhat differing compositions and shades. Over millions of years, these were compacted into banded stone under the weight of the water and other materials accumulating above them. The earth's crust shifted; the seas came and went; mountain ranges rose and fell. Subterranean heat baked the stone until certain layers became extraordinarily hard.

More millions of years passed. Eventually the mountains we know as the Selkirks were pushed upward by the forces of continental drift. These are relatively old mountains; older than the Purcells which rise to the east of Kootenay Lake; far older than the Rockies which are mere youngsters geologically speaking. You may find the fossils of quite large, complex animals high in the Rockies. But only the microscopic remains of small, soft-bodied creatures may appear in the Milford Formation, that tremendously ancient sea bottom now a part of the Selkirks' substance.

To make a long story ridiculously short, the last of the several great ice ages covered all but the highest Selkirk summits with a huge glacier. Its retreat from the Kootenays is still taking place. Remnants of it may still be seen in the high country hereabouts. Some ten to twelve thousand years ago, it had backed off to the extent that vegetation began to cloak the rocky debris it left behind. Animals soon inhabited these woodlands, and fish swam in their rivers and lakes.

Perhaps as early as ten thousand years before the present, human beings first ventured onto Kootenay Lake. They are believed to have come from the south where migration of a Siberian origin

had already spread humanity across and down the Americas from Alaska to Argentina. Countless generations as migrants inspired them to keep on looking for new territories. Among the last they discovered was what we call southeastern British Columbia - the Kootenays.

One can well imagine those explorers beaching their canoes at the Kaslo river outwash and setting up camp. Among them, somebody with a keen eye for useful stones picks up a couple of fist-sized pebbles, whacks them together, grunts with satisfaction, and begins to fashion a projectile point by chipping at a flake of a grey-green Kootenay argillite. Thus one small fragment of the Milford Formation, carried down the river in post-glacial spate, became the first local item of cultural significance.

Nearby a hunter wounds a deer with a heavy spear hurled from a socketed throwing stick. The stone tip, fashioned somewhere else during the expedition, is lost before the animal falls. But no matter! There's plenty of tool-quality material to be had right here. Expert hands soon replenish the explorers' dwindling supply of projectile points, fleshers, scrapers, knives, awls.

If any traces of such early activities remain, they have yet to be identified. However, by 3000 BP[before the present] the Kaslo district had certainly been inventoried for its animal, vegetable and mineral resources. Semi-permanent camps were sited here and there in the valley bottoms, notably near the south end of Kootenay Lake and along its west arm wherever the winter sun shone the longest. Elsewhere, summer camps stood on bluffs overlooking sheltered beaches. By and large, their inhabitants - hunters, fishers, berry pickers, woodcutters, toolmakers - preferred the east side of the lake where sun lingered long after the shadows fell on the western shoreline.

Two such campsites have been located on the north arm - at Riondel and Johnson's Landing.

Habitually the Kootenay Indians paddled across the lake to prospect for argillite on the Selkirk side. We know this because this special stone does not occur naturally on the Purcell side, and its presence there strongly suggests that people transported it; people who needed it as much as we need metals. Confusing this situation a little, ground-off chunks of the Milford Formation were deposited northward throughout the district, even in the Purcells, by the retreating ice. Seldom, however, in convenient places.

So far as the Indians were concerned, the most convenient places were the outwashes of four creeks emptying into the north arm on the west side. One, the Kaslo River outwash, may have well been favoured. It provided many good campsites insofar as flat ground was plentiful, a valley access west into the high Selkirks, a logical stopping place en route north and supplies of vital materials. A stroller on the beach today may find workable pebbles of argillite almost anywhere between the mouth of the river and the old sawmill site at the head of Kaslo Bay. Samples have been collected as far west along the river as 22 kilometres by the road from the Kaslo village limits. Significantly, few if any have been found at Fletcher, Woodbury, Cedar and Coffee creeks farther south.

Farther north, the pioneering Bacchus brothers of Birchdale observed that "Indians went to Milford for their special stones."

Why? Milford Creek is small and its outwash practically non-existent. However, the recent development there of a highways gravel pit revealed a large, high-grade argillite rocks -- the biggest and best seen anywhere in this district so far. A few were actually set aside as too awkward and flinty for mechanical sorting. But local campsites left a lot to be desired, and the cultural activities identified at Milford to date have been those of whites. So the Indians, while no doubt prospecting and collecting there, probably didn't stay any longer than necessary.

Schroeder Creek was something else. Marina and real estate developments have uncovered scattered evidence of stone tool manufacturing on its substantial outwash, still an attractive place to pick raw argillite by the pocketful. Nevertheless, a full-fledged factory site does not appear to have evolved there, probably because the sunnier trans-lake campsites beckoned. In this context, the Indians also preferred not to camp where a gorge funnelled bad weather down from the high country onto their backs as they sat, worked and scanned the lake for the approach of newcomers. The Riondel and Johnson's Landing campsites are backed by gorgeless ridges which, in any case, face the prevailing weather from the west.

Yet farther north, Lost Ledge Creek doesn't seem to have attracted Indians at all. But at present-day Lardeau, argillite washed down by Davis Creek was collected in quantity, and some was processed on the spot.

The bulk of it, however, probably ballasted canoes heading for hunting and fishing camps on the Duncan Flats, at Meadow Creek and elsewhere in the Duncan and Lardeau river systems, perhaps even up to Trout Lake. Just how much of the traffic went up in that direction is not known. But some, to be sure, flowed southeast from Davis Creek towards Bulmer, Salisbury, Gardner, Gar and Fry creeks on the Purcell slopes.

Significant quantities of the Schroeder and Davis stones were offloaded on the shore of a ~~rough~~ roughly bay half way between Salisbury and Gar creeks, the latter at Johnson's Landing proper. Weatherbeaten pilings, relics of the steamboat era, still mark the location of Gardner's Landing in this bay. Indeed, Johnson's Landing would be a place name now if Canadian Pacific had had its way and built a wharf at Walter Gardner's ranch. But a majority of residents opted for the location that bears the name of the pioneer Algot Johnson.

Modern history aside, the Kootenay Indians were soon attracted to the bay and the campsites that overlooked it. These offered long views of Kootenay Lake from the crests of low bluffs above small beaches where canoes could be landed without difficulty. The vegetation from which plant foods and useful wood could be harvested was plentiful. Deer and wapiti [elk] were drawn to an exposure of salty sand a mere arrows range from the shoreline. A mineral spring stained the rocky foreshore red with valuable pigment. A constant brook emptied onto the largest beach, a convenient source of cold, clear running water. Sturgeon, char, trout, kokanee salmon, whitefish, squawfish, and suckers could be caught by hand-lining close to shore. Ducks, geese, swans, herons, osprey, eagles, grouse, and other prized birds were frequent

flyers-by -- and victims. Small wonder the bay was popular.

Is popular. A permanent home and summer cottages overlook it now. Trollers and anglers frequent its length. Campers and picnickers enjoy its beaches. Hunters have to be discouraged, not because game is scarce but because people and pets dislike being shot over --- or at! Fruit pickers still harvest spotty crops in Gardner's senile orchard, a favourite haunt of apple-happy bears and deer.

Some thirty years ago, a vacationing beachcomber picked up a funny looking stone at Gardner's and ignorantly identified it as an Indian spear point. Thus began an ongoing study of the local archaeology and its implications. Valuable assistance has been provided by visiting professionals, notably Wayne T. Choquette of Cranbrook. Much reading has been done in an avocational attempt to sort out prehistoric fact from fancy. And some writing: You see, I'm the ignorant one who mis-identified that seminal artifact, shoved under my nose by a child's dam-building at MacDonald Brook.

The artifact turned out to be a knife blade, not of Kootenay Argillite or anything like it, but of agate (here the experts must excuse a term less boggling than cryptocrystalline chert). And like that mythical first lost projectile point at Kaslo, the stone came from somewhere else. Where? Montana perhaps, or even the Dakotas. According to one archaeologist, honey agate just like it was favoured by the Dakota Sioux. Be that as it may, if any of the chalcedonies [agate, jasper, carnelian etc.] materializes in the Kaslo district, its bound to be an import. One such item created no end of confusion until it was traced to a youngsters mineral collection obtained from a natural history supply house. But most were simply brought here by the Indians.

Nor does jade occur naturally in our metamorphic sedimentary rocks intruded by granitic batholiths. A local rockhound insisted that an adze blade found at Gardner's was just a that --- jade. I had profound doubts but couldn't convince him otherwise until we were able to compare it with nephrite jade from the Thompson River country. We're still not sure exactly what the blade is from , but a raw pebble of the same material, picked off the Kaslo River outwash, could easily be sandstoned into its twin.

Ah, that Kaslo River outwash! It's like a tattered old book, each dog-eared page a layer among layers which record the history of the area from its primordial beginnings to the present. But the pages have been torn, jumbled, partially destroyed; and trying to make sense of the fragments can be a challenge. For instance, a large flake of Kootenay argillite, clearly cultural material, lies beside a fragment of old "suntanned" bottle glass on a track bulldozed along the beach to facilitate reconstruction of the S.S. Moyie. A thousand years or more may separate these artifacts in time, yet they're almost touching now.

Then there was the nodule of gunflint, knapped by long forgotten hands, that lay among the debris of modern boat-building. That item and a few others of the same material, one cheek-by-jowl with an argillitic scraper, really bothered me. They wouldn't have seemed out of place in an English flint quarry -- but here in Kaslo!

Could they represent an anomaly in the Selkirk geology? One

geologist thought they might; another shook his head. An archaeologist unhesitatingly agreed that the nodule had indeed been worked. An historian suggested a white explorer whacking out flints for a very old-fashioned musket or pistol. Well... maybe; but what about the scattered items that hadn't been knapped?

Finally a Kaslo resident, Barbara Bavington, laughed and said, "Oh, that's English flint all right. They used to ship the stuff over from the Old Country and feed it into the ore grinding mills at the mines here. Those pieces probably fell off a carload being landed at the old railway slip." Hurrah! Problem solved. But consider this: A flint nodule worked by some prehistoric Briton pops up in context with Indian argillitics (never mind the welding rods) because our early miners needed exceptionally hard rock to pulverize silver ore at Sandon. Talk about jumbled pages -- one a fragment from a book "written" who knows how long ago in Europe!

Jumbled too, the prehistory of that bay at Gardner's was almost overlooked altogether. To be sure, debitage -- the useless leftovers from stone toolmaking -- continued to show up on the largest beach. Then somebody would find another projectile point, almost too blunted by being wave rolled in the gravel for positive identification, and speculate excitedly about pristine treasures buried deeply in the sands of time. Holes were dug, soon to become wading puddles or bonfire pits.

One day a cloudburst sent runoff water cascading down an old bulldozed track from blufftop to beach level. Gloomily assessing the damage, I noticed a scatter of debitage in this new mini-creekbed. Had it been bladed there? Sure enough! Where the 'dozer had bitten deeply at the edge of the bluff, I picked up three pristine points in less than ten minutes. Two were of Kootenay argillite; one was of red jasper. So let's dig!

So let's <u>not</u> dig. There was and is a law that provides for the protection of British Columbia's archaeological resources on both public and private lands. One may not destroy, excavate or alter an archaeological site without a permit. However, the regulations were much less stringent in 1966 when we undertook this dig, and Donald Abbott, the provincial curator of anthropology, allowed that cultural material in grossly disturbed ground was probably of more value salvaged than left to be bulldozed around some more.

Grossly disturbed is putting it mildly. Three 'dozer tracks connected on the first site, a small flat which included a derelict sawmill. And it had been built where the area's first settler, Don MacDonald, had located his shack, buried his trash and started a garden. The result was that much of the cultural material we salvaged came from 'dozer berms that also yielded rusty cans, shattered coaloil lamp chimneys, lost cutlery, chicken bones and eggshells. Nearby, another aboriginal site had been completely churned up by vegetable gardening that was still in progress.

Ethel and Stanley Lake, the resident ranchers, thought we were a bit daft. "Why not hill the potatoes if you're so keen on digging?" Ethel wondered. But when they saw our expanding collection of Indian artifacts, they remembered yet another site under a compost heap on the fringe of their front yard. If nothing else, Ethel welcomed the compost we peeled away to get at more

berms studded with cultural material.

This isn't the place for a detailed account of our activity. Suffice to say that, from time to time over the next twenty years or so, we salvaged thousands of debitage items and hundreds of artifacts from four distinct campsites, all disturbed, overlooking the bay at Gardner's. Apparently undisturbed, several other sites still await professional attention. After the allowable salvage work wound down, I switched to searching for the sources of Kootenay argillite, etc. (thank goodness rockhounding doesn't require a permit), and I continue to beachcomb in places where the rise and fall of Kootenay Lake still expose the occasional old-new treasure.

When an artifact is mentioned here in terms of Kaslo district prehistory, it probably surfaced on or near the Lakes' property. In view of the sheer quantity of cultural material recovered, Wayne Choquette designated this the Johnson's Landing Factory Site during a Kootenay (Indian) Legacy exhibit at the Langham Centre, Kaslo, in 1982.

Choquette credits Brian Reeves with naming Kootenay argillite. Reeves is the University of Calgary archaeologist prominently associated with the Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump project in southwestern Alberta. One of the phases uncovered there, the Pelican Lake, was carbon-14 dated from 1090 plus/minus 120 B.C. at the bottom to A.D. 25 plus/minus 80 at the top. Reeves writes in Scientific American magazine for October 1983:

"Some of the projectile points from the Pelican Lake strata have stems rather than being notched at the corners. These too were made from an exotic raw material: metamorphosed argillite from the Kootenay Lake area of British Columbia some 200 kilometers west of Head-Smashed-In. Both their source and their alien shape suggest that visitors from Kootenay Lake occasionally participated in the Pelican Lake people's buffalo drives...."

Some of the projectile points found at Johnson's Landing have stems. So, pending carbon-14 datings for Kaslo district sites, it's not unreasonable to "borrow" Reeves' data and say that the Kooteany Indians were working argillite hereabouts some 2000 to 3000 years before the present.

Archaeological work undertaken in the Libby Reservoir (Koocanusa Lake) district suppports this speculation. Choquette reports in The Thunderbird: Archaeological News of the Northwest for January 1, 1985 under the heading Inissimi Complex (ca. 3500-2000 BP):

"The defining characteristics of this complex are a high frequency of Kootenai Argillite as tool stock and a settlement pattern displaying a riverine orientation... At these sites, which are in the proposed Libby Reregulating Reservoir, the cultural deposits associated with the highest frequencies of Kootenai Argillite represent the earliest intensive cultural deposits on the floodplain terraces.... The high frequency... is noteworthy considering the distance from the source on the north arm of Kootenay Lake in British Columbia. This suggests that travel or trade by canoe and a riverine-oriented economy were responsible for the distribution of this lithic material...."

So, uninhibited by the niceties of science, I say when asked

for a "first human date" in the Kaslo district: "Oh, 5000 years ago, give or take a bunch." And you may, too, at least until somebody unearths evidence of even earlier activity. This is a distinct possibility, by the way. The "intensive cultural deposits" of the Inissimi Complex were almost certainly preceded by several thousand years during which the users of Kootenay argillite were far fewer and less likely to leave easily detectable traces of their presence on Kooteany Lake.

In any event, archaeology has pretty well demolished the oft-repeated myth that the Kootenay Indians were relative latecomers to their territory. Typically, Clara Graham's book, Fur and Gold in the Kootenays, published in 1945, states:

"According to David Thomson and other authorities, the Kooteanys, before the coming of the white man, made their home east of the Rockies, first in Montana and later in Alberta. When the Blackfoot confederacy, who lived east of them, obtained firearms from white traders the Kootenays were forced to flee to the mountains for safety...."

It appears now that Thompson et al., perhaps influenced by hostile Blackfoot propaganda, made assumptions about the Kootenays that simply aren't supported by technical evidence adduced since Graham surveyed the literature. No doubt firearms forced some Kootenays to flee to the mountains for safety. But that's quite likely where they'd just come from on one of their seasonal treks in pursuit of the plains bison.

Among the collapsed props for that latecomer myth was the notion that, because the Kootenay Indians shared a canoe design with aborigines in Siberia, a fairly recent link between the two cultures could be inferred. However, that's akin to guessing that, given the striking similarities among weapons used by tribes on separated continents, they developed the technology together. In fact, there are only so many ways in which canoes and weapons can be made, and the similarities as well as the differences are essentially functions of the raw materials available to meet basic universal needs.

Sturgeon-nosed, the Kootenay canoe did indeed resemble the Amur River one. Its stem and stern were shaped like an italic capital L, the riser angled acutely inward, compared with the roman capital C shape of modern canoe extemities. If any association existed between the designers, it harks back to a time before aboriginal Siberians migrated east across Beringia, the prehistoric land bridge that is believed to have linked Asia with unpopulated North America during the last great ice age over ten thousand years ago. Hardly a recent link!

Douglas Leechman, for many years chief anthropologist at the National Museum of Canada, states:

"(Otis T.) Mason draws a parallel between this (Kootenay) canoe and one, similar in shape but covered with skin, used in the Amur River district in Eastern Siberia. It was difficult to see a connection between the Kootenays and the Amur River people but now that we find that this was not an exclusively Kootenay culture trait but a Salish and Athapaskan trait as well, its occurrence in Siberia is less surprising...."

Writing in The Beaver (Hudson's Bay Co.) magazine, Spring 1962

issue, Leechman explains in some detail how the Kooteany canoe was made. Briefly, western white pine bark was taken from the tree in one piece and rolled into a pole. The inside of the bark became the outside of the canoe, sewn to a framework with prepared roots of spruce or other conifers. All seams and holes, especially at the two pointed ends, were made watertight with a mixture of resins from pine and fir.

"Among the more important specimens in the National Museum of Canada, in Ottawa, is one of these canoes," Leechman reports. "It is said to have come to Kaslo, on the west side of Kootenay Lake, and is, as far as I could learn, the only full-size canoe of this type in any museum, although models are common."

When he asked his Kootenay Indian informant why the tribe favoured this design, the reply was: "Because that's the right way to make a canoe." Widespread in western North America, it fell into disuse soon after whites introduced the design familiar to us in pictures of the voyageurs paddling and portaging in the wilderness.

Other cultural traits -- tipi design for instance -- have been cited in attempts to assign a Plains origin to the Kootenay Indians. Again the evidence is woefully weak. A canvas tipi erected at Gardner's quite recently looked for all the world like the Kootenays' skin ones, yet the campers had no knowledge of its antecedents (or the fact that it stood on a prehistoric site). They simply made the logical connection between an expanse of fabric and some poles in creating a shelter. So did the Indians whenever an expanse of animal skin and some poles were obtainable. If not, or if severe winter weather dictated, the more substantial, semi-subterranean lodge was preferred.

Waterways were the Kootenay Indians' roads. The Kootenay River probably bore an offshoot of the tribe downstream from an ancestral home in the Rocky Mountain Trench to Kootenay Lake country. If a little devious compared with our highway system, the route wasn't especially difficult, and our Lower Kootenay bands no doubt maintained frequent contacts with their Upper Kootenay counterparts.

One notable difference: The Upper Kootenays adopted the horse for transport soon after neighbouring tribes to the south and east acquired horses and equestrian skills, but the Lower Kootenays didn't. Much of their territory, craggy and densely forested, simply wasn't suitable for horses. Today, the terms Horse Kootenay and Canoe Kootenay are sometimes used to distinguish between the branches.

As for the name Kootenay (Kootenai in the U.S.), I hesitate to rekindle an academic debate that isn't going to change what these Indians now call themselves. It may derive from a Blackfoot-Piegan word, ktunai, which some authorities have dissected and mispronounced coo-tinneh, meaning water people or people of the lakes. Let's leave it at that.

Lacking horses, our Canoe Kootenays used shanks' mare a lot. Foraging afoot was often necessary, and Kootenay Lake could cut up rough enough to discourage the boldest boater. It still does, even in the Evinrude age. So it's hardly surprising that traces of Indian activity have been noted far up in the Kaslo district

highlands.

Choquette refers to an argillite quarry "located by Harlan I. Smith in the early 1900s atop Blue Ridge on the west shore of Kootenay Lake." And I hold in trust several projectile points found on a small flat far higher above Johnson's Landing than most people venture today except in four-wheel drive.

Speaking of rough, I was amused recently to read in BC Outdoors magazine that, according to writer Doug Leighton, the Indians shunned the north arm because it was so stormy. Hah! He should have joined me on a tiny beach far up the arm, gathering pounds of evidence to the contrary.

A small child could throw a stone from one end of this beach to the other, or toss it back against a cliff that offers nothing in the way of level campsites. Nevertheless the shingle was speckled with debitage flakes of argillite. Shelter from sudden blows out of the northwest was the attraction -- for the Indians and for me.

Scenario: One calm morning, a foraging party launched a canoe at Gardner's and headed for Davis Creek at Lardeau to collect tool stone. Successful as always, they loaded up and headed home, but a storm swept in. The "black line" of rough water coming up astern (if they didn't notice it, they had a nasty surprise when it caught up to them) sent them ashore with minutes to spare. Nastily surprised, I followed them onto that tiny beach.

Now what? Well, they could always stumble home along the rocky foreshore and probably did if the weather refused to improve before dark. Or they could wait out the blow and pass the time doing something useful, like flaking argillite pebbles. Repeat this scenario many times over the millenia, and the debitage accumulates significantly in a small area.

After many excursions by boat and afoot, my tally of debitage items and, very rarely, an artifact stands at 542 for that area alone. On less sheltered beaches nearby, I'd be happy to have accumulated a dozen. The main beach at Gardner's is, of course, exceptional. Home base for those prehistoric boaters, its 200 yards or so were speckled with more debitage and artifacts than you and I could carry between us.

Quite rare among the argillitics, fragments of a somewhat less flaky, blackish material were puzzling until Choquette pronounced them imports. He'd identified quarry sources of this Purcell siliceous siltstone (renamed tourmalinite after detailed analysis) in the Moyie River valley near the international boundary. Yet raw chunks of it or of a very similar stone kept showing up here and there beside Kootenay Lake, and I couldn't stretch my imagination far enough to see an Indian packing small boulders of the stuff all the way from Kingsgate and then dumping them unworked among others at Lardeau or wherever.

As it turns out, Choquette's tourmalinite and my Selkirk siltstone are both represented locally. The latter may materialize almost everywhere that Kootenay argillite does but the quantities, relatively small, seem to increase the farther north from Kaslo one looks. Davis Creek was probably the prime source. And the material persists up the Lardeau River at least as far as Rapid Creek, well beyond the useful limits of argillite rockhounding.

Rarer still were a few artifacts reminiscent of agate but different somehow. Choquette readily identified them as made from Top of the World chert, he having located a prehistoric quarry high in the Rocky Mountain pass of that name. Some Kootenay argillite was represented among the lithic materials found but not quarried there. It no doubt arrived with the Canoe Kootenays as they accompanied their Horse Kootenay cousins to the Alberta bison ranges. After the hunts, of course, some Top of the World chert was brought back to the Kaslo district.

The presence here of lithics from distant sources provides us with clues to the Canoe Kootenays' travel and trade patterns. It appears that they seldom ventured far beyond their traditional ambit, especially westward. Downstream egress from Kootenay Lake towards the Columbia River was inhibited by a series of unboatable rapids and falls, now dammed, between their territory and that of the not-very-friendly Salishan Lakes Indians. Archaeological evidence unearthed at the Vallican site, on the Slocan River near its confluence with the lower Kootenay, suggests very limited contact between the tribes. Northward, the Canoe Kootenays may well have encountered Shuswaps, some of whom are known to have travelled the Kinbaskit route via the Columbia River, Trout Lake, the Lardeau River and Earl Grey Pass through the Purcells to the Invermere district. However, no indisputable evidence of contact between these people has been found so far. Lithic asssemblages in the Thomson River district, at least those that I have seen, do not include Kootenay argillite, nor do Kaslo district ones include the typical Shuswap basalts and cherts.

Nevertheless, our Canoe Kootenays acquired such items as beads of green slate which originated on the lower Columbia River, and pieces of obsidian (volcanic glass) from such remote locations as Anahim Peak in central B.C., or Glass Buttes in Oregon. These and a very small selection of other exotics, probably obtained in trade with neighbouring tribes, strike me more as aborigianl curiosities than conventional tool stocks.

Typically, an attempt at Gardner's to work obsidian into a projectile point ended unsatifactorily. This very brittle material simply shattered when whacked like the local argillite. Pressure flaking as opposed to percussion was not a canoe Kootenay skill, it seems. Practically all pressure flaked tools recovered in the Kaslo district to date were made from exotics, almost certainly before they fell into local hands.

Those of you interested in an overview of prehistoric tool making and use in British Columbia might read Blood From Stone by David L. Pokotylo (Museum Note No. 11, UBC Museum of Anthropology). On a somewhat more technical level, The Role of Lithic Raw Material Studies in Kootenay Archaeology by Wayne T. Choquette (BC Studies, No. 48, Winter 1980-81) is recommended for its emphasis on the Kootenay Indian culture.

Our Canoe Kootenays were homebodies, I imagine. Between periods of foraging for food and collecting raw materials, picture them on a sunny summer afternon with just the routine camp chores to occupy their time.

A meal is being prepared. Stone bowls (mortars) and pestles are processing a variety of fruits and vegetables. The stone of

choice was granite which could be shaped by pecking yet which could withstand considerable abrasion. Baseball size pebbles are being heated in a campfire. Sizzling hot, they're transferred to watertight vessels of bark or wickerwork already half filled with fluids, lumps of meat and the peeled, starchy roots of bulrushes flavoured with wild onions. One or two heatings and dunkings crazy-crack the pebbles. The cooks toss them aside. They accumlate within meters of the hungry campers enjoying the stew. Centuries later, an archaeologist spots the unnatural fragments and is suddenly alert.

Nearby he picks up a large flake of Kootenay argillite, one edge smoothed by natural tumbling and the other still sharp enough to.... He envisions the user gently scraping soft tissue from a streched beaver skin. A companion is making holes for bindings in a piece of processed hide with a T-shaped agate awl. Discarded moments earlier when its stem snapped, a siltstone awl lies in the dust underfoot.

At brookside a croucher, just back from fishing in the lake with a bone hook on a line of processed tree roots, cleans and fillets a catch of fat char. A wooden handled knife of argillite slices easily through the firm flesh. A helper places the fillets on a drying rack of poles cut and trimmed with a hafted adze of serpentine.

Souvenir of a hunting trip far up the Kaslo river, the tool is propped up against a handy tree trunk. One of the camp dogs cocks a leg, knocks the adze flat, scatches dirt over it and wanders away. Its haft long since rotted to dust, it resurfaces under the archaeologist's trowel.

He sprawls near the edge of the low bluff where the tipis once stood behind a thin, sheltering screen of trees, poking in the soil around an almost buried boulder. Beneath layers of moss and leaf mould, his steel strikes tinkling stone. Argillitic flakes and chips by the hundreds still lie where they fell from pebbles smashed against that natural anvil. For a moment the archaeologist becomes the smasher -- whack! whack! Ouch!

Sucking a bruised finger, an Indian elder sorts through the debris and selects a prettily pot-lid fractured flake of grey-green argillite. Good! A small child watches as he taps the edges of the flake with a a tool that's crescent shaped from much notching, and the arrowhead is ready to be bound into a split shaft of dogbane or syringa wood. Another artisan will take care of that, then fletch the arrow with trimmed duck feathers.

You try now, the elder tells the child. As its first lopsided point takes shape only to break half finished -- never mind; here's another nice flake -- the elder tells a story.

Do you know how Bear lost his tail? No! Well, one cold winter, Bear met Coyote fishing through the ice. Beside Coyote lay many large fish. How did you catch them? asked Bear. I put an extra hook on my tail, Coyote said. So Bear made a hole in the ice, put some hooks on his own tail, ~~the way Coyote did,~~ sat down and fished. and it soon became frozen fast. Bear tried to stand up but couldn't. Finally he had to leave his tail behind him."

Laughing, the child holds up another arrowhead, unbroken this time. The elder nods approvingly. A youth looks up from shaping

But he didn't know he should wag his tail the way Coyote did,

a spearshaft with a pair of sandstone rasps. Well done, Little Fish! That should kill a big elk, eh? And then Ghost Raven can make a new tipi cover from the skin. Nodding, the child hurries in search of a toy bow made, like his brother's, from wild cherry wood. As he runs, the arrowhead drops out of sight into long grass.

The archaeologist smiles. Five minutes of a child's time lie in the palm of his hand; a timeless child whose descendants through twenty generations -- who knows! -- will sit on this very spot and scan the lake for signs of a strange canoe paddled by amazing people. Can they be true, these tales of men with skin as pale as weasel bellies who carry long sticks that go bang! and throw little stones so hard that even mighty hump backed Bear falls dead? Can it be possible that the little stones are conjured out of the shining chicamen rock at the big campsite farther south?

A whitish pebble rolls under the archaelogist's boot. He picks it up, shrugs and almost tosses it away. Wait! It's awfully heavy for its size. His penknife scratches through a crumbly surface. Galena! The blue-grey metallic sheen is unmistakable. His nose twitches; the smell of lead sulphide roasting wouldn't have been very pleasant....

Phew! Sputtering, a Canoe Kootenay Indian pokes among the embers of a large fire and drags out a blob of something soft that flattens under his schist-stone maul. Ahhh! The white newcomers who revealed the secret shall be told of this, and perhaps a gift will be given for leading them to the place where much chicamen lies. Maybe even a bang-stick and a pouch of... bullets? Yes, that's what the newcomers call them: lead bullets. Grinning, the Indian places some chunks of unsmelted ore in his canoe and starts out on the long, difficult journey to Fort Colvile.

An era, at least five millenia in the making, ends with the dip of a paddle carved from clear cedar with an argillite blade.

The first white person of record to inspect the site of the future Bluebell Mine at Riondel was a trader named Archibald McDonald. Chief factor for the Hudson's Bay Company at Fort Colvile (near present-day Colville, Washington), he made the trip in the summer of 1844 with several Bay men and two Indians.

Samples of the lead ore they collected were assayed at Fort Vancouver, near the mouth of the Columbia River, and in London, England. But the company lost interest when no precious metals were detected. Readily obtainable in much less remote mines, the lead was merely bothersome. The Indians soon learned how to make bullets from it, and no longer had to obtain them from the traders.

McDonald's journey and the adventures -- misadventures would be more appropriate -- of other early speculators are recounted by Elsie Turnbull in the B.C. Historical Quarterly for July-October 1956. However, the Bluebell, West Kootenay's first mine, did not see active development until 1882. Its ups and downs thereafter constitute a modern mining saga which has been recorded in various issues of Cominco Magazine prior to 1972.

A Horse Kootenay Indian, Pierre, is credited with the discovery of the St. Eugene Mine at Moyie near Cranbrook in 1893. This lead-zinc producer was developed into the largest of its kind in Canada if not the British Empire, but ore reserves had been

depleted by the time World War I was declared. This prompted Cominco to invest heavily in the future of the famous and long-lived Sullivan Mine at Kimberly.

As I close this story, a projectile point of Kootenay argillite lies beside my typewriter. A playful dog scuffed it out of the shingle at Gardner's less than an hour ago. I can picture its maker, distracted by a call for help in beaching a Kootenay canoe, setting it aside and failing to find it later in gravel churned by the waves of a sudden squall. Well, today it is found, and another page of our prehistory turns.

###

Biographical Note: The author, now a freelance writer, worked in Montreal and Vancouver as a journalist before joining Cominco at Trail in 1952. There he edited Cominco Magazine and The Cominco Orbit until 1972 when he returned to public journalism as publisher and editor-in-chief of the Trail Daily Times newspaper. He resigned in 1979. Shortly afterwards, he moved to Johnson's Landing on Kootenay Lake. His home, for many years a vacation retreat, stands in the midst of ancient Indian campsites which inspired his abiding interst in the prehistory of the Kaslo district.