MAMMOTH TRUMPET

Volume 23, Number 2 ▪ April, 2008

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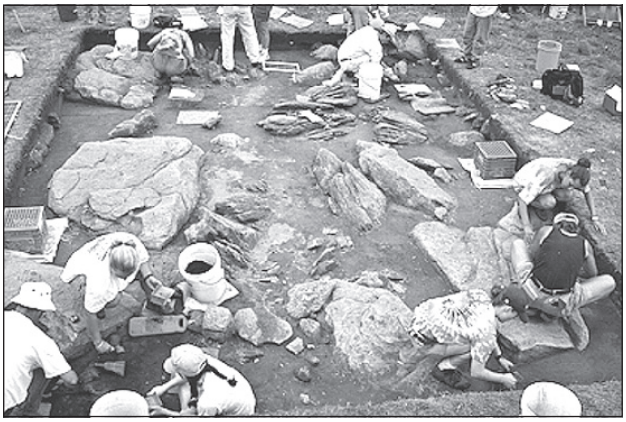
Paleoamericans in Yankee Country

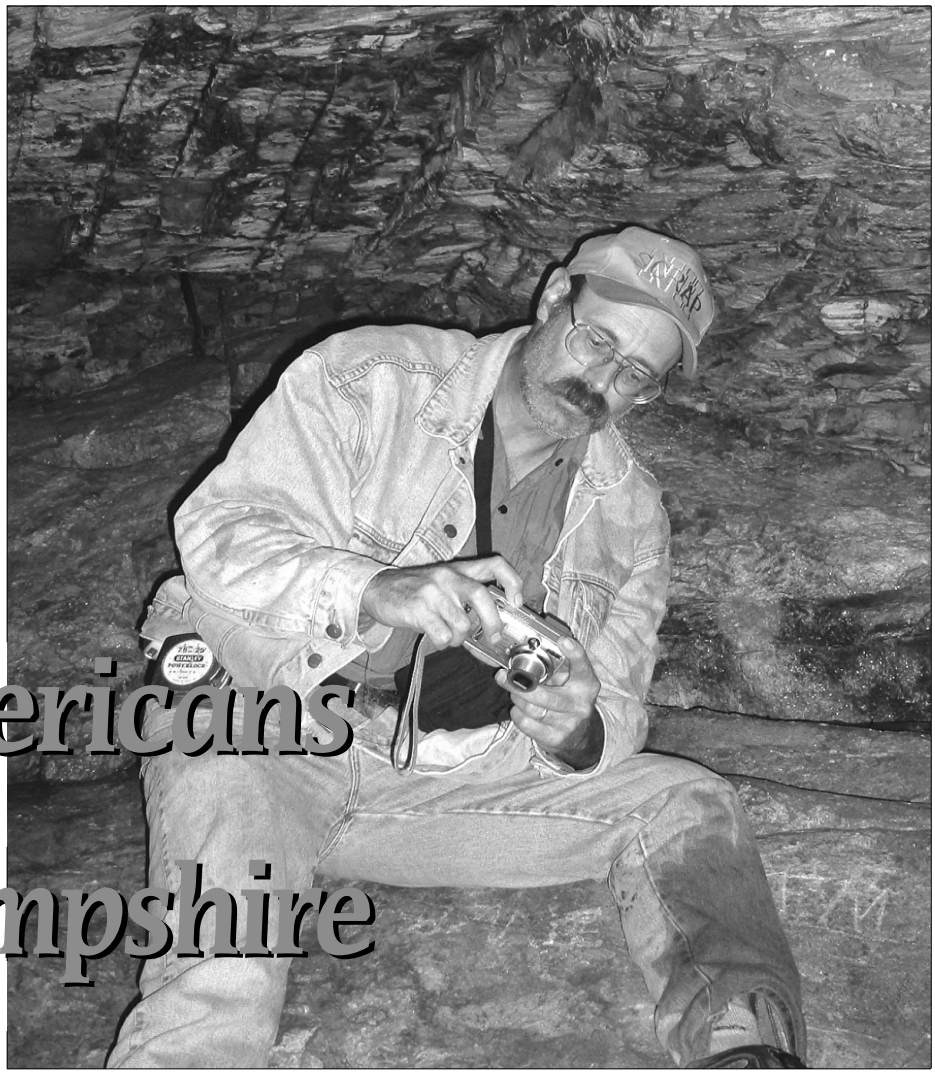


NH STATE CONSERVATION AND RESCUE ARCHAEOLOGY PROGRAM

Stony and densely forested, New Hampshire has never yielded an easy living, certainly not for people occupying this beautiful land at the end of the Ice Age. When you don't have mammoth or bison on your menu, you've got to work hard for a no-frills existence. Lucky for Dick Boisvert, volunteers like this crew excavating the Jefferson II Israel River site in 1998 haven't lost sight of the work ethic. "I'd put them up against any professional crew in the business in terms of quality," says Dr. Boisvert, New Hampshire State Archaeologist, of the workers of the State Conservation and Rescue Archaeology Program. SCRAP trains tomorrow's archaeologists. Today the eager workers give Boisvert the means to document the archaeology of the Granite State. Our story on the discoveries being made in this rocky corner of New England starts on page 9.

The Center for the Study of the First Americans fosters research and public interest in the Peopling of the Americas. The **Center,** an integral part of the Department of Anthropology at **Texas A&M University,** promotes interdisciplinary scholarly dialogue among physical, geological, biological and social scientists. The **Mammoth Trumpet,** news magazine of the **Center,** seeks to involve you in the peopling of the Americas by reporting on developments in all pertinent areas of knowledge.

Boisvert, SCRAP, and the Paleoamericans of New Hampshire

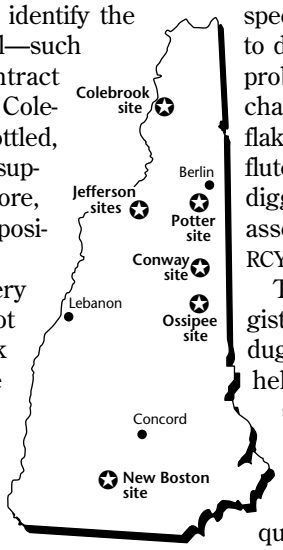


ALL PHOTOS: NH STATE CONSERVATION AND RESCUE ARCHAEOLOGY PROGRAM

Dick Boisvert at the Mount Jasper rhyolite quarry in Berlin, New Hampshire, which was exploited from the Paleoamerican period forward.

WHEN IT COMES TO UNDERSTANDING even the simplest aspects of Paleoamerican culture, archaeologists don't have it easy. It's difficult to infer behavior from the meager scraps of stone and bone most of our efforts are rewarded with, so it's a red-letter day when we identify the preserved remains of something more ephemeral—such as the ancient post-molds discovered by contract archaeologist Edna Feighner at New Hampshire's Colebrook site a decade ago. Those patches of mottled, organic-rich soil, all that remained of structural support posts that had rotted away 11,000 years before, offered the opportunity to flesh the skeleton of supposition with firm behavioral data.

While the credit for the Colebrook discovery rightly belongs to Feighner and her crew, they got an assist from Richard Boisvert. When Colebrook came to light, Dr. Boisvert was the Deputy State Archaeologist of New Hampshire, which also made him director of the State Conservation and Rescue Archaeology Program (SCRAP). Several of Feigner's crew members had previously worked as SCRAP volunteers for Boisvert, a lithics specialist whose emphasis is on teaching his charges how to do field archaeology the right way. Rigorous training probably helped sharpen their alertness in recognizing channel-flake fragments in their shovel tests. Channel flakes are a sure indicator of fluted-point manufacture, and fluted points are exclusively Paleoamerican. A little extra digging at Colebrook turned up the post-molds and an associated hearth, which all dated from 10,300 ± 170 RCYBP—a rare find indeed.



Today Boisvert is New Hampshire's State Archaeologist, and Edna Feighner works with him directly. They've dug again at Colebrook, pulling out more data that are helping them "write that part of the story for New Hampshire," as Boisvert puts it. But Colebrook is only one of the pies Boisvert and his crew have their fingers in. When an entire state is your archaeological bailiwick, you've got an excellent opportunity to get a lot of quality research done—and Boisvert has taken advan-

The 2006 SCRAP field school excavations at the Colebrook site.

tage of that opportunity in spades. His state may not be the biggest in the Union, but it's archaeologically rich, with a cultural time depth extending back to the Clovis era.

Big responsibilities

As New Hampshire's top archaeologist, Dick Boisvert oversees much of the archaeological research in the state. He considers this one of his biggest responsibilities; consequently he regularly has to sit in judgment on other archaeologists and often must assess the quality of their work without ever setting foot on the sites in question. Boisvert's office also handles Native American repatriation issues, which can be unusually complex in New Hampshire, since the state's requirements are significantly more demanding than federal requirements, as outlined in the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). That there are no state or federally recognized native tribes in New Hampshire, just a myriad of small bands, makes the work even more difficult.

Another of Boisvert's top priorities is finding ways to do archaeological research on a shoestring. "We don't have a lot of resources to commit to doing archaeology in New Hampshire," he points out, "so what we do have, we spend very carefully." He depends heavily on his SCRAP volunteers to help him get the work done, and despite his busy schedule, he still finds time to work with them frequently. In fact, they're a source of pride. "I'd put them up against any professional crew in the business in terms of quality," he says. "Some of our SCRAP volunteers have worked with us since the early 1990s; they're solid, reliable, and highly skilled."

Bob Potter, owner of the Potter site near Randolph, holding a point fragment from a failed fluting attempt.

Although the size of the group has varied over the years, SCRAP generally consists of a core of 50–60 dedicated volunteers. The whole point of the SCRAP program is public education; nonetheless about a third of the participants do end up either becoming professional field archaeologists or going on to graduate school, which helps spread Boisvert's brand of careful, detail-oriented archaeology unto the next generation. "We're quite proud of the SCRAP program," he says. "We do first-quality work, and we've contributed a great deal to the archaeology of New Hampshire."

The secrets of Colebrook

Serendipity can't be ignored as a major player in archaeological discovery, but the truth is that most finds are the result of careful study, the development of complex models, and lots of field testing—which involves hard slogging through all kinds of terrain, and the physically demanding work of shovel test after boring shovel test. Of course, all that's useless if you don't recognize what you've got when you find it.

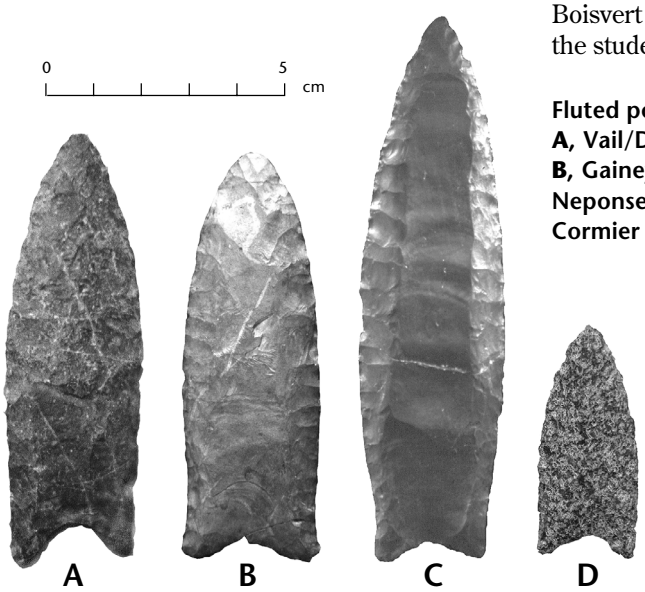
The Colebrook site turned up during a routine gas pipeline survey in 1997. Thanks partly to their SCRAP experience, when several of Edna Feighner's crew identified channel-flake fragments in their shovel tests, they knew they'd found something special. Further excavation uncovered the 11,000-year-old post-molds and hearth that made the site especially interesting.

As a result of their findings, the pipeline was rerouted, and the landowners decided to preserve the Colebrook site undisturbed—until 2006, when they allowed Boisvert and Feighner to return and conduct further excavations during that year's SCRAP field school. In the 25 m^2 SCRAP excavated, they found evidence of extensive fluted-point production, including a biface fragment and 73 channel-flake fragments, some of which could be refitted to form whole flakes. No points were recovered; they were apparently carried away for use elsewhere.

Colebrook is a small site, perhaps 8 m in diameter, but its value far exceeds its size. "We're reasonably certain that we have four identifiable episodes of tool manufacture here," Boisvert reflects. "Two distinct heavy ones, a pretty good concentration, and a dispersed episode. We're getting down to reconstructing individual behavior 11,000 years ago. I think that's cool, to use technical terminology."

An extensively reworked Michaud/Neponset fluted point from the 2004 excavations at the Jefferson II Israel River site, evidence that even 11,000 years ago the occupants adhered to the venerable New England maxim, "Use it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without." The point is 57.73 mm long, 25.33 wide, and 17.59 mm thick.

While it's difficult to tell when these different episodes of tool manufacture occurred in relationship to one another, Boisvert suspects that they all took place over a relatively short span of time; in fact, Colebrook may represent a single-occupation site. The lithic technology is clearly post-Clovis, of a subtype called Michaud/Neponset (after sites in Maine and Massachusetts, respectively). The Colebrook people manufactured what Boisvert calls "the Eastern equivalent to Folsom"—long, narrow points with extremely thin, lengthy flutes. "The thing that's really interesting is that you get this multiple fluting—flutes on top of flutes. They were very interested in getting very, very thin bases, driving off thin channel flakes on both sides and then going back for second tries."



Fluted points from New Hampshire: A, Vail/Debert style, New Boston; B, Gainey style, Ossipee; C, Michaud/Neponset style, Conway; D, Nicholas/Cormier style, Jefferson.

Impressive as the evidence of fluted-point manufacture is, it's not so unusual for stone artifacts to survive 11,000 years in the ground. What's more exciting is the fact that structural remains survived, specifically a total of 20 post-molds. Finding post-molds is exceedingly rare in the East, given the cool, relatively wet environment, not to mention the opportunity for mechanical destruction due to factors like root growth and animal burrowing. "The post-molds give us some perspective on both behavior and the structure of the site," Boisvert says. Unfortunately, it's hard to point to specific domestic structures based on the post-molds. "Essentially," he says, "post-mold interpretation should be a connect-the-dots operation—but I don't feel like we can connect the dots yet to point toward a particular type of structure. The post-molds may represent something besides domestic structures; say, more on the lines of roasting spits or drying racks. Some are close to hearths, and may be for cooking props or supports. I'd prefer not to come to any judgment until we've conducted more in-depth analysis."

In any case, the presence of the post-molds suggests that people were doing something besides just making stone tools at this riverbank encampment 11,000–11,300 years ago, and it gives Boisvert and his crew something to work with besides the lithics. In addition, some of the features contained identifiable botanical remains, including seeds; a student at Northern Arizona University is writing his thesis on them at the moment. This research is still in its preliminary stages, however, and Boisvert prefers to keep mum about it until the student publishes his results.

Other Paleoamericans in New Hampshire

As intriguing as Colebrook is, it isn't the be-all-and-end-all of Paleoamerican sites in the Granite State; in fact, it represents just one of a number of Paleo sites on Boisvert's plate. For example, since 1996 he and his SCRAP associates have been working at five Paleoamerican sites on the Israel River near Jefferson, New Hampshire, all of which are crowded into a strip of land about half a kilometer wide and a kilometer long. Local archaeologist and SCRAP alumnus Paul Bock identified the first three sites in this archaeologically rich area in late 1995 while searching tree throws for artifacts after an especially fierce storm. The sites, which cover areas from one-half hectare to about four hectares in size, exhibit the full range of Paleoamerican remains known for New Hampshire, starting with post-Clovis Gainey points and continuing on through 1,500–2,000 years of occupation. Oddly enough, none of the sites is located near a water source; Boisvert suspects the occupants were ambushing caribou.

Since 2003, Boisvert has also directed fieldwork at the Potter site near Randolph, New Hampshire; it's located about 12 miles from the Israel River Complex and appears to be related to them, at least on a cultural level. Like the specimens from Israel River,

Boisvert at the Colebrook site. The dated hearth lies directly in front of him.

dart points found at Potter match those inferred from the channel flakes collected from Colebrook; they all belong to the Michaud/Neponset subtype. Potter is a single-component site, but in this case, single component doesn't mean single use. According to Boisvert, "The Potter site is a patchwork of totally different kinds of artifact concentrations, all located very close together. One reflects woodworking; another biface production, specifically fluting of dart points; and a third, general biface production. We've got three vastly different functions in a site that's basically 100 meters square." In another example of the practical value of the SCRAP program, Boisvert was able to gather a group of 35 volunteers to dig at the site in October 2007—a crew size many field archaeologists would kill for. They were able to complete 1,000 person-hours of work in just 3 days.

Although most researchers don't consider New Hampshire a hotbed of Paleoamerican research—for one thing, the state is exceedingly mountainous, and was still under the ice for centuries after the First Americans arrived—Boisvert is quick to point out that there's still some great Paleoamerican stuff in the Northeast. "People get all excited about the big dead animals in the Southwest," he says wryly, "but we do have some good material here. It's hard to get to—we have these pesky things called trees that get in the way, and we have to work through glacial outwash—but we've got some impressive stuff that we're trying hard to bring to light. There's some first-rate work to be done in New England." Fortunately, Boisvert has the right tools to do the job: an excellent group of volunteers and professionals, with a powerful lever for clearing obstacles: "The asset we have in New Hampshire is the fact that the state is my sandbox. I can direct research anywhere I want in the state. I have to justify it," he says, "but I have remarkable freedom."

He laments, however, that more researchers aren't working in New Hampshire, a fact he attributes to a scarcity of home-grown archaeologists. "We lack graduate programs in northern New England; there are no graduate archaeology degrees to be had in Maine, New Hampshire, or Vermont. Even in the Ivy League schools, the emphasis on local stuff is remarkably thin. Luckily, we've had reasonable success at offering some good data and research opportunities to researchers from elsewhere who want to look at it. It's slow, it's brick by brick, but sooner or later the building gets built."

–Floyd Largent

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