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The University of California Archaeological Survey

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15. THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF A PAIUTE VILLAGE SITE IN OWENS VALLEY

By Harry S. Riddell

INTRODUCTION

The site with which this report is concerned was designated as Iny-2[1] by the author during an archaeological site survey in Owens Valley in 1946. This site was chosen for excavation because it appeared to be a village of considerable importance as exhibited by the numerous house pits, bedrock milling places and undisturbed cultural deposit. Also of importance in considering this former village for excavation was the fact that the site had yielded historic glass trade beads. It was believed that this site might define, at least in part, the proto-historic and historic culture periods of the Owens Valley Paiute.

Iny-2 is located within the boundaries of Inyo National Forest and a permit for excavation was obtained on March 28, 1950 through Mr. Clare Hendee, Regional Forester, United States Forest Service through the offices of Dr. Robert F. Heizer, Director, University of California Archaeological Survey. The Survey was the sponsoring institution of my project.

Persons to whom I am indebted concerning the excavation and research of this site include the following persons: Olline, my wife, who aided greatly in the excavation and in the preparation of this report; Mr. Donald H. Euler, District Ranger, U. S. Forest Service, Lone Pine, California, who extended many courtesies; Mr. Dick Shutler, Jr., Preparator, University of California Museum of Anthropology, who assisted in the examination and description of the pottery; Mr. Clement W. Meighan, Archaeologist, University of California Archaeological Survey, who identified the glass trade beads; Mr. Francis A. Riddell, who aided me throughout the project.

Iny-2 is situated on Diaz Creek near its junction with Cottonwood Creek. Cottonwood Creek flows into Owens Lake on the west side of the valley. This site is approximately 4 miles up Cottonwood Canyon and lies at an elevation of about 5700 feet. The steep canyon walls rise an additional 1,000 feet and the mountain peaks tower nearly 4,000 feet above the site. The location was well chosen for a winter village since it is sandy and well drained, receives the maximum winter sun, is in close proximity to oak and piñon groves and a constant water supply. Although the winter sun sets much earlier in the canyon than on the valley floor the snow and ice melt quite rapidly on this sunny location. This is the most favorable location in the canyon for a winter village. The site occupies the lower part of the Upper Sonoran zone which Steward regards as being favored for winter villages.[2] It is possible that Iny-2 may be the historic village of Hudu matu recorded by Steward;[3] however, Iny-63, which is also an historic site as evidenced by glass trade beads, also must be considered as possibly being Hudu matu. Iny-63 is located near the mouth of Cottonwood Creek and also contains house pits.

An Indian trail to the Kaweah River in the San Joaquin Valley via Cottonwood and Coyote Passes passed by Iny-2.[4] This too, would add to the importance of a village in Cottonwood Canyon.

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1. See "Notes" at end of article.

Type V1aI. This bead, apparently of Tivela stultorum, has a diameter of 8 mm. and is 7 mm. thick. It was picked up on the surface.

Type V1b. This type is represented by a quarter section of a clamshell disc bead that originally was more than 25 mm. in diameter. The evidence of a single central conical (?) perforation remains. This bead occurred in the 9 to 12 inch layer.

Type V1h.[13] This disc bead fragment is apparently of Tivela stultorum and probably had an original diameter of about 30 mm. Instead of having a square, milled edge as in Type V1g it has a thin edge. Short lines have been incised at an angle to the radius and occur on the border of one face of the specimen. The maximum thickness of the specimen occurs at the central perforation, it is slightly more than 4 mm.

Haliotis bead: A single specimen made from Haliotis shell was recovered in the excavation of Iny-2. It is 5 mm. in diameter with a single central perforation 2 mm. in diameter. This bead, which may be made from the shell of Haliotis cracherodii, has a thickness of 1 mm. The specimen came from the 3 to 6 inch level.

FRESHWATER MUSSEL

A single fragment of freshwater mussel shell (possible Anodonta) was found on the surface. Since the site is at an elevation of about 5700 feet it is not surprising that mussel shell is virtually absent from the deposit. The lack of mussel shell, however, is in contrast with many sites along the Owens River which have a considerable quantity of mussel shell as a component element of their mass.

GLASS TRADE BEADS

A total of 9 glass trade beads were recovered from Iny-2. Seven were picked up on the surface and two were excavated from the 0 to 6 inch level. Types assigned to the glass beads from Iny-2 are those determined by Meighan.[14] The following is a list of sites and/or counties from which beads of the same type occur.

Type 65. Also occurs at Sac-1.

Type 105. This bead type occurs in 33 other sites in California and is considered universal in time and area. This type also occurs locally at Iny-38, near Lone Pine, California.

Type 146. Also occurs in the following counties: Yolo, Napa, Madera, Kern, Sacramento, Modesto, Siskiyou, Shasta, Humboldt and Fresno.

Type 178. Two beads of this type came from Iny-2, both from the 0 to 6 inch level; one was excavated from a house pit (Feature 6). This type also occurs at Fort Ross, and in Napa, Shasta, Marin, Sacramento and Tuolumne Counties.

Type 200. Also occurs from Sac-1, Sac-127 and in Butte County.

Type 204. This type also occurs on Santa Rosa Island, Santa Catalina Island, Kern Lake, Ker-74, SFr-1 (Farallone Islands) and Sac-56. Meighan gives a date of 1810 to 1830 for this bead type.

One bead from Iny-2 does not have a type number assigned in Meighan's series at present since it is unique to Iny-2. This bead is similar to Types 205 and 209 but is a slightly lighter shade of blue.

CHARRED MATERIAL

Two acorn halves were excavated from the 0 to 12 inch depth of the single excavated house pit, Feature 6. As mentioned above this same house pit yielded remains of carbonized willow poles. From the 6 to 12 inch level in Pit 1R-1 a carbonized seed of Pinus monophylla, the piñon pine, was recovered. The seed had been shelled.

POTTERY

On the basis of over 900 sherds recovered from Iny-2 (Table 1) it is considered feasible to name a new ware in which pottery from this site and certain pottery from Owens Valley and neighboring regions would be included. A study of sherds from other sites in Owens Valley and from neighboring regions gives full support to the naming of a new ceramic ware.

The following pottery description is of specimens recovered from Iny-2 but applies equally well to pottery specimens occurring over a rather extensive area whose known range is given in the description below and illustrated in Map 1. The criteria given by Colton and Hargrave[15] for naming a new ware have been followed in setting up the following ware. The methods and techniques in the manufacture of this new ware and how these methods and techniques differ from ceramic manufacture in bordering areas are the basic criteria for the definition of the new ware described below.

Owens Valley Brown Ware

Synonyms: Northern Paiute pottery of Owens Valley.[16] (See also "Comparison" infra.)

Illustrated: Steward, 1933, Fig. 1a-i; Pl. 5a, b, d. Lathrap and Meighan, 1951, pl. 3a.

Type specimens: On deposit at the University of California Museum of Anthropology, Berkeley and the Museum of Northern Arizona, Flagstaff.

Type site: Iny-2, on Cottonwood Creek, Inyo County, California.

Stages: Certainly historic and proto-historic but extending into the prehistoric period for an unknown distance. (See also "Discussion" infra for additional comments on the possible age of this ware.)

Construction: Coiling with thinning by scraping. (See also "Remarks" infra.)

Fired: In oxidizing atmosphere, although often uncontrolled as exhibited by numerous sherds that range in color from grey to black.

Core color: Variable; exterior often ranges from light red to browns while the interior will often range from light grey to black. Sometimes the core of some sherds will be entirely in the red and brown range while other sherds will be within the grey and black range.

for this ware will be differentiated by such criteria as fingernail indentation, punctate designing, incised designing, presence or absence of surface striation and similar criteria. These differences have been noted and an attempt is now being made to define the several types of this ware.

The distinctive features of this ware are the interior and exterior surface striations on the vessel, the thick base, the uneven surface, the wide mouth, the uneven rim and the often coarse texture of the vessel.

As a matter of some importance it has been noted that potsherds are used to scrape the surfaces of the vessels as indicated by the two scrapers of this type recovered from Iny-2. It is also significant to note that a similar scraper was picked up from the surface of Mon-13, the northern limit of the presently known range of this ware.

It is of interest to point out that vessel fragments often have the remains of a carbonized crust of food adhering to their interior surfaces. The exterior surfaces are often quite black from contact with charcoal and soot from the cooking fires. Repair of pottery vessels by crack-sewing is rather common as exhibited by the number of sherds recovered that have been drilled along a break in the vessel.

DISCUSSION

Iny-2 can be classed as being a good example of a historic Owens Valley Paiute winter camp, at least as regards its upper levels. The midden deposit has a maximum depth of about 30 inches. Due to the presence of numerous boulders in the soil the deposit in a portion of one pit might only be a few inches deep, while another section of the same pit might extend to 30 inches in depth. The average depth of the site is approximately 18 inches. It is from the first 18 inches that the majority of artifacts were recovered. No pottery was recovered below the 18 inch level and only 4 steatite beads and no projectile points came from below this level. The paucity of artifacts with a depth of more than 18 inches may be explained in part by the fact that the deposit is, on the average, no deeper than 18 inches. However, this does not explain why pottery and projectile points do not occur where the deposit reaches a depth of 30 inches or more. The fact that Olivella beads also were not recovered from below 18 inches indicates that recency of introduction need not be the reason that a particular type of artifact is found only in the upper levels of the deposit. If pottery alone had this restricted distribution in the culture deposit one might rightly guess that pottery was a recent introduction to the site. The same reasoning could as well apply to other artifact types from the site. A partial answer to the paucity of artifacts from the lower levels of the site deposit may lie in the fact that due to the amount of boulders on the original surface of the site area there would be less volume of deposit in the lowest 15 inches of the site mass than in the upper 15 inches.

Since the deposit of the site was so shallow it was quite difficult to obtain any delicate or refined differentiation in depth/artifact relationships, except, of course, the gross and obvious differentiation at the 18 inch level. If the site is considered to have had a continuous seasonal occupation, and there is no reason to believe it has not, an estimate of about 200 years for the length of occupation of Iny-2 would seem adequate. The terminal date of occupation could correctly be placed shortly after 1850. Since pottery did not occur at the base of the culture deposit it is difficult not to suggest that pottery was either

absent or quite scarce at that time. Until other sites are excavated in the Owens Valley region it will not be possible to state just when pottery appeared there. It is very likely that future excavations of stratified sites will bear out the findings at Iny-2, namely that pottery making extends but a short distance into the prehistoric past.