

The ATLATL

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THE NEWSLETTER OF THE WORLD ATLATL ASSOCIATION, INC.
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PROFESSOR SEEKS TO PROVE SPEAR COULD KILL MAMMOTH

CASPER, WY (AP) -- A University of Wyoming archaeology professor is working to reveal the truth and falsity of paintings of ancient hunts.

George Frison said the small spears used by Clovis-period hunters could have killed the 15,000 pound mammoths who roamed Wyoming about 11,000 years ago.

His excavations show the short spears and lances probably could be used to kill and skin a mammoth, but the hunters probably went after young, stray mammoths to avoid facing charging herds of the huge creatures.

To prove his theories, Frison went to Africa to test the clovis weapons on the modern descendants of mammoths -- the elephant. using dead elephants for his experiment, Frison found that he could pierce the hide of an elephant with a throw of up to 60 feet.

A clovis projectile point that pierced a mammoth's lungs would probably result in death within a few minutes, Frison said. one that pierced the stomach would probably take several hours or a day to kill the beast, he said.

Artists paintings of ancient hunts show a lot of details about mammoth hunting, but Frison said most of it contains misconceptions.

Fanciful paintings, dioramas and even textbook illustrations often show mammoths up to their tusks in bogs and swamps, with hunters rushing around them waving spears and yelling, "and usually somebody being trampled to death." This almost certainly was not the typical hunting method employed by Clovis cultures, Frison said.

Assuming that mammoths had a social structure similar to african elephants, Frison said, a Clovis-culture mammoth kill would probably proceed very differently.

African elephants have a strong "family structure" in which the lead matriarch acts as the protector of the herd. At the sign of danger, the matriarch will charge, six or more tons of enraged elephant bearing down on the hunter. "You're not going to down a charging matriarch with Clovis weaponry," he said.

Consequently, Frison said, the only way Clovis hunters

could routinely have killed mammoths would be by going after younger animals that had moved off some distance from the herd. Frison theorized that hunters would work in pairs. One would distract the animal without threatening it while the other sneaked up on it from another direction and delivered the fatal wound.

The hunters then would withdraw to cover, so that by the time the protective matriarch discovered the danger, there would be nothing to direct her rage against.

When the animal died and the herd moved off, the Clovis hunters could then skin and butcher the mammoth.

Frison emphasized that no one can really know what techniques the Clovis peoples employed, but he believes that this approach is more likely than the screaming tribal charge often depicted by artists.

While in Zimbabwe, Frison also skinned and butchered an elephant using a Clovis "knife." This, too, was relatively easy and certainly possible with the technology, he said.

"Clovis really represents the development of true hunting weaponry," Frison said. Although that conclusion is controversial among archaeologists and anthropologists who have studied early humans in Europe, Africa and Asia, he said. "If you're really talking about the kind of hunting that one or two hunters bring down a mammoth, it developed in the new world."

(ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS, Feb 20, 1989) ✪



DR. GEORGE FRISON
UNIVERSITY OF WYO.

THE FAR SIDE



"You recognize this, Mr. Grok? ... We found it in the bushes near the victim's cave. Isn't this your artifact, Mr. Grok?"

**SUMMER ATLATL
CONTESTS!!!**

THE ATLATL WORLD OPEN

Wyoming's 1989 World Open Atlatl Contest is scheduled for August 19th at Fort Caspar Museum, in Casper, Wyoming. The event will feature an Arts and Crafts Fair, the contest and an evening speaker. All Flintknappers and other demonstrators are welcome and encouraged to attend. If you are on their mailing list, specific details of the event will be sent in a separate mailing.

If you have questions concerning the contest or know of demonstrators or crafts people interested in attending, please feel free to write or call:

FORT CASPAR MUSEUM
4001 Fort Caspar Road
Casper, WY 82604
phone: (307) 235-8462

1989 C. A. S. ATLATL CONTEST

The fourth annual Colorado Archaeological Society Encampment is set for July 1st and 2nd. The event will feature Native American games, fireside chats and of course the ATLATL CONTEST.

Each year this gathering of CAS chapters is held at a different camping site. This year we will meet at the Silver Jack Campground located in southwestern Gunnison County. Details on the event can be obtained from Bill Harris, 1605 Mesa St., Montrose, CO 81401. Phone (303) 249-8055.

? ? EAST COAST CONTEST ? ?

We keep hearing rumors about it, but nothing firm has come to our attention. The man to contact is Gary Fogelman, Rt. 1, Box 240, Turbotville, PA 17772. The last rumor we had was that there would be a contest on or about July 22nd.

MONTANA STATE CHAMPIONSHIP

We hear from Bob and Paul of BPS Engineering that the Montana State Championship will be held June 17th or 24th on the Dave Schwab Ranch near Helena.

Some special events are being planned to celebrate the Summer Solstice theme of the event.

If you know Dave Schwab, give him a call to confirm the date, or contact Bob Perkins at (406) 284-3307.

Please keep us informed of atlatl events set in your part of the world. **D A T E S A N D L O C A T I O N S P L U S N A M E S , A D D R E S S E S A N D P H O N E N U M B E R S O F C O N T A C T S A R E N E E D E D .** Send information to: THE ATLATL, 8800 State Highway 133, Carbondale, CO 81623.

ARCHAEOLOGY DAY IN AURORA

June 10, 1989 is Archaeology Day in Aurora, Colorado. WAA President Bill Tate is in charge. There will be guest speakers, flintknapping by Keith Abernathy, and atlatl demonstrations.

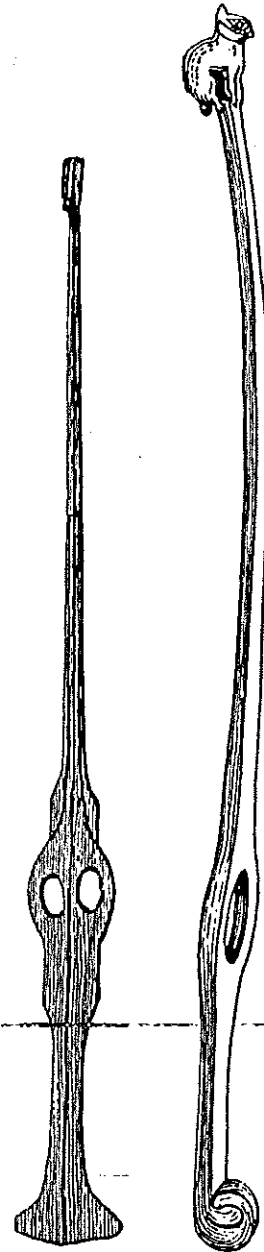
UNUSUAL SPEARTHROWERS FROM KEY MARCO ON THE GULF COAST OF FLORIDA

Among the rarest spearthrowers known in America, are several now in the University of Pennsylvania Museum which were taken in 1896 from the mud and muck of Key Marco on the Gulf Coast of Florida. The finds were the result of a joint project between the University of Pennsylvania Museum and the Bureau of American Ethnology of Washington under the leadership of Frank Hamilton Cushing. Dr. Cushing died in 1900 without completing a full report on his discoveries, however we can draw upon his preliminary report for a great deal of valuable information. Among the rare wooden objects were several spearthrowers of "remarkable and unusual types." Two of the most perfect of the four or five examples found are also the most characteristic, since one had double finger holes, and the other a single finger hole. No bows were discovered in the excavation.

The site is described by Cushing as being uncharacteristic of the Florida mainland, resembling more that of the inhabitants of the Antilles or even of South America.

Especially unusual and interesting were the wooden objects which can be preserved indefinitely in the airlessness of the mud; however, such wooden material tends to warp and twist sadly or even disintegrate completely on exposure to the air. The expedition enjoyed the services of an excellent artist and photographer who made careful copies of the unique objects, some of which were shining with

bright colors as they were carefully drawn from the mud where they had lain for centuries.



Spearthrowers from Key Marco, Florida as drawn immediately after extraction from the mud.

-more...

A point of confusion is found in Cushing's description of the double-holed spearthrower. He states that it measured 16 inches in length in one place, but then goes on to say, "The first was some eighteen inches in length, delicate, slender, slightly curved and originally, quite springy. It was fitted with a short spur at the smaller end and was unequally spread or flanged at the larger or grasping end. The shaft-groove terminated in an ornamental device, whence a slighter crease led quite to the end of the handle, and the whole implement was delicately carved and engraved with edge-lines and when first taken from the muck exhibited a high polish and beautiful rosewood color."

The second was even finer. Cushing describes it as "somewhat longer, slightly thicker, wider shafted, more curved, and, as I have said before, furnished with only a single finger hole. At the smaller end was a diminutive, but very perfect carving of a rabbit, in the act of thumping, so placed that his erect tail formed the propelling-spur. This instrument was also fitted with a short shaft-groove and was carved and decorated with edge and side lines, and the handle end was beautifully curved down and rounded so as to form a volute or rolled knob... Its length was nineteen inches and it was made from fine, springy hard wood--like rosewood in appearance--probably the heart portion of the so-called ironwood of the region."

The carved rabbit at the distal end with its tail forming the spur is strongly reminiscent of the 15,000 year

old spearthrowers from Europe. These more ancient implements made of antler or ivory often used a carved animal as the spur. There can hardly be any historical connection between the two regions, and the tail spur is probably purely coincidental, but may stem from similar views on hunting "magic."

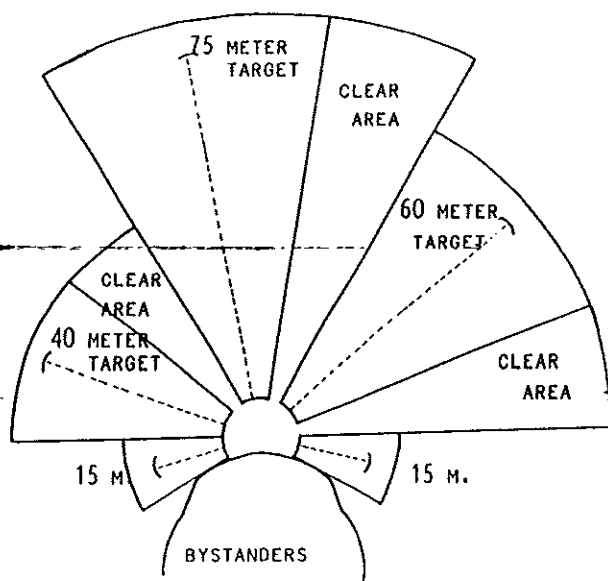
The condition of these two artifacts has changed much since drying out. Today, they are badly warped and considerably shrunken from their original pristine condition. The wood of both is hard, firm, and unusually flexible and now of a dark brown color approaching black.

The single-holed spearthrower is of superior workmanship and decoration. The broad groove for the reception of the spear on the upper side ends some three inches short of the finger hole where it is replaced by a slight ridge, the transition being marked by a transverse groove of chevron shape. On both sides the medial groove bifurcates on approaching the finger hole. The two ends of the specimen are of greatest interest. The handle terminus ends in a graceful volute knob like that of a violin which probably prevented the grasp from slipping down too far. ~~the animal "clinging" to the~~ other end of this thrower is admirable and indicates an excellent knowledge of anatomy. the spaces between the forelegs and between the fore and hind legs are hollowed out and the legs themselves are perfectly shaped. Even the toes are carefully portrayed. The entire figure is only an inch and a half high, an inch long and half an inch wide.✱

RAMBLINGS

Bill Tate

Over the past few months, I have spoken twice to Bob Perkins of BPS Engineering. We discussed a couple of elements of Atlatl contests which have not surfaced in print before. First, is the element of SAFETY. The possibility of a competitor being struck by a flying dart is very real, especially if we continue to hold our contests using the "safari" or (golf course) style of shooting. Both Bob and I feel that we should look into a new format. The obvious choice is shooting from one central area at targets in a semi-circle as illustrated in the diagram below. We feel that not only can we add a degree of safety not currently present, but we also place the contestants closer to the fans. Let us know what you think. Better still, let the organizers of the events hear your thoughts.



The second element of discussion concerned the requirement for all natural vs anything goes type of contest. We know there are a lot of "purists" who would hotly challenge the use of aluminum or fiberglass on the atlatl field. "Modern" materials may or may not improve the effectiveness of atlatls or darts. As far as we know, there has never been a study which proves one way or the other which is superior. What difference does it really make anyway. Modern materials have been used with this equipment by aboriginal peoples in the Arctic, Australia, Southeast Asia and Mexico. Unlike Latin, a dead language, the atlatl is not dead, and never has been. Its use is well documented in many parts of the world and continues to this day utilizing what ever materials are available. I see no real reason for restricting use of the materials from which the atlatls or darts are used to only "natural" stuff. Even some truly natural materials are excluded--Gold, silver and copper are all naturally occurring metals which were found by aboriginal peoples and made into tools. Since spear slings were used continuously since about 25,000 years ago they have passed through the Bronze Age, the Iron Age, and other periods when so called "modern" materials were available. So why cut our use of these materials for contests. Even I draw the line at nuclear tipped darts, however. Let us hear from you on this and any subject.✧

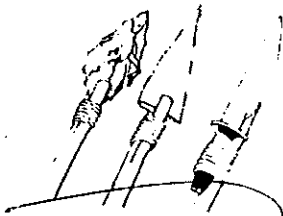
The old sage says: It is always darkest just before it becomes totally black.

This issue's feature article on the Key Marco spearthrowers was excerpted from THE MUSEUM JOURNAL, Sep. 1928.

WAA ANNUAL MEETING NOTICE

The Annual Meeting of the World Atlatl Association will be held Sunday, July 2nd, 1989, at the Silver Jack Campground in Colorado during the Colorado Archaeological Society Encampment and Atlatl throw. All members are welcome to attend.

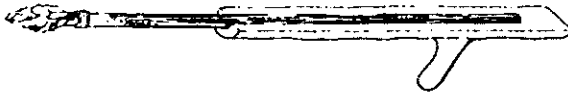
Several articles for inclusion in the newsletter were sent to us from T. Moore of Aurora, IL. The most interesting was an unusual atlatl from a publication titled "SURVIVE SAFELY ANYWHERE" by John Wiseman. The thing looks rather awkward to say the least. Maybe some member of the organization will make one and report on its effectiveness.



To make a spear more effective add a point of flint, knapped to sharpness, or a flattened cone of tin, set into the end -- or securely bind on a knife. However, if you only have one knife do not risk it, it could too easily be lost or damaged.

Spear thrower

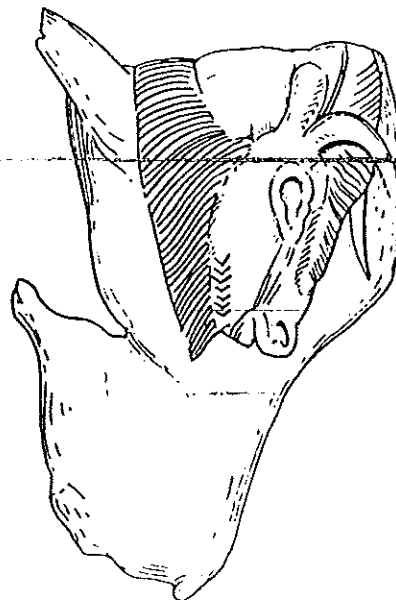
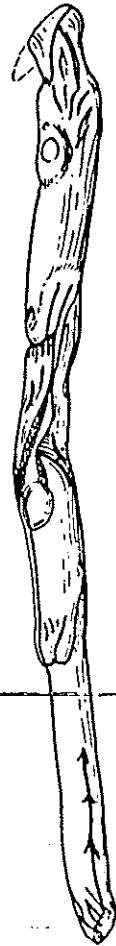
Spear sits in a groove which runs along most, but not all, of the upper face of the thrower. The end stop adds thrust to the spear.



To make the thrower choose a tree limb that is at least twice the width of your spear and with a branch stump which can become the forward sloping handle. Split down the centre using a knife as a wedge. Gouge out a smooth channel for the spear. Make sure it is cleanly cut, leaving a solid portion as a buffer. Experiment to match the thrower length to that of the spear and to suit your own balance.

Held at shoulder level, aim the spear at the target, bringing the holder sharply forwards and then downwards. As you move downwards the butt of the groove adds to the thrust behind the spear.

Another excerpt was from "THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF EARLY MAN" by J. M. Coles and E. S. Higgs, pub. by Frederick A. Praeger. The report referenced the brief introduction of the spearthrower during Magdalenian times and included several drawings of ancient artifacts. Note the similarity of the use of the carved animal for the hook or spur of the atlatl fragments to that in the Key Marco atlatl elsewhere in this issue.



Also submitted was this artistic rendering of a Native American ceremony. Note the weighted atlatl in the hand of the central figure:



From the same publication come the following illustrations of a weighted atlatl:

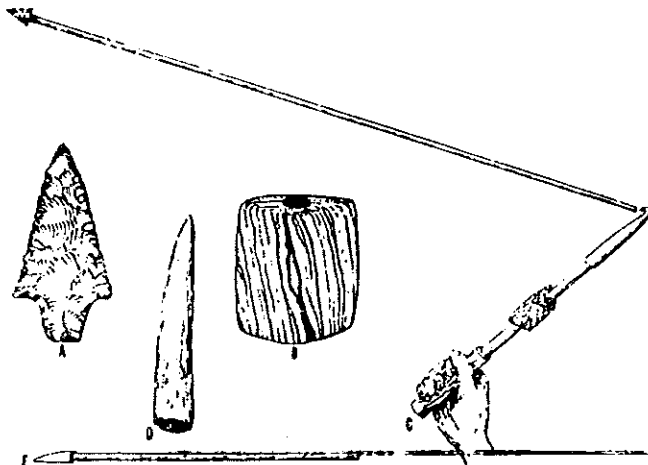


Fig. 8. Archaic weapons: A, Hidden Valley type spearhead; B, prismatic atlatl weight of polished red shale; C, throwing a spear with an atlatl; D, socketed antler spearhead; E, short thrusting spear or javelin. A, B, and D are from Modoc Rock Shelter in Randolph County, Illinois.

From "THE AUSTRALIAN ABO IN COLOR" by D. Baglin and R. Robinson is the following
WEAPONS AND IMPLEMENTS

....The spear-thrower and the spear may be likened to the bow and its arrow, or the rifle and its

ammunition. The spear thrower is usually about three feet long. The Roper River one is made of ironwood, flat, smooth, about two inches wide, and tapering at its hooked end. The other end is shaped for the handgrip. The hook, or spur, against which the hollow end of the spear-shaft fits, is fastened on with hardened gum or resin.

To throw the spear, the spear-thrower and spear-shaft are gripped with one hand. The ten-foot-long spear is sometimes held up with the extended left forearm or wrist. When the spear is hurled, the spear-thrower is retained in the hand. The spear-thrower's three-foot extension to the throwing arm, and the fact that the spear is propelled from the end of its shaft, gives the weapon considerable impetus and range.

The spear-thrower is also used as a weapon to ward off or deflect spears in fighting when a man's spears are expended. In such cases the tribesman may recover spears hurled against him and, with his spear-thrower, hurl them back at his opponents. The sharpened end of the spear-thrower can also be used as a stabbing weapon or for a digging-stick.

At Port Keats in the Northern Territory most of the tribe took part in a contest to demonstrate how far a spear could be hurled. They used light mangrove spears. I did not step out the distance, which ended in mangroves, but it seemed something like 300 yards. The heavier and longer spear would not be thrown this distance. I once asked a Roper River tribesman to demonstrate his accuracy with the spear. Without seeming to take aim, and without undue force, he embedded his iron-blade spear in the thick bark of a gum-tree some fifty yards off.

The spear-thrower of Central Australian tribes is wide, almost an oval, and concave. It can be used for carrying food, or fire coals. It will be recalled that, in the myth of the wandering ancestor of the Aranda tribe, the old man fed his sons by filling his womerah with his blood and letting his sons eat from it.

Spears used in north-eastern Arnhem Land may be divided into four main types, according to each type of spearhead. They are the stone, the wooden, the sting-ray prong, and the iron.

**AGE AND TREACHERY
WILL OVERCOME
YOUTH AND SKILL**