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THE CHARLESTON LAKE ROCK SHELTER

Excavations during the last week of May of 1967, conducted for the Ontario Department of Lands and Forests by personnel from Trent University at the Charleston Lake Rock Shelter, produced evidence of at least two short periods of occupation. The shelter is situated on the western shore of Slack Bay on Charleston Lake.¹

The natural shelter, formed by the overhang of one large rock, rises about 50 feet above the water level and is inland approximately one hundred yards (FIG. 1 and 2). The rock itself is not homogeneous but is composed of boulders of up to 10 inches in diameter set in a type of limestone formation. Over the years, pieces of the overhanging rock have broken off and fallen, with the result that much of the floor is covered with debris, especially as one moves toward the south-west end of the site. Protected as it is from the elements, the site would have provided an excellent shelter for those travelling in the area.






The depth of the dark humus topsoil varied, increasing from the south-west to the north-east of the shelter. Below the humus layer there were generally two further distinguishable zones in the area of occupation and only one in other areas. In areas of occupation, there were both a dark sandy layer and a light sandy layer, the former being absent in other areas. In the occupation area, a grey ashy layer existed. Twenty-one five foot squares were excavated (or, because they ran into the rock face, partially excavated) to a maximum depth of 6 to 8 inches or to a depth where large rocks made deeper penetration impossible. Areas and crevices too small and isolated for usual archaeological techniques were also searched for cultural remains.

The material recovered came almost entirely from the humus layer with only smaller proportions coming from the dark, sandy layer. No artifacts were found in the light, sandy zone. The excavation revealed no stratification, but rather a vertical scattering of materials from a wide time range. This is probably due to the very shallow depth of the cultural zone and to the soil

¹The precise location of the site will not be made public until all excavations have been completed.

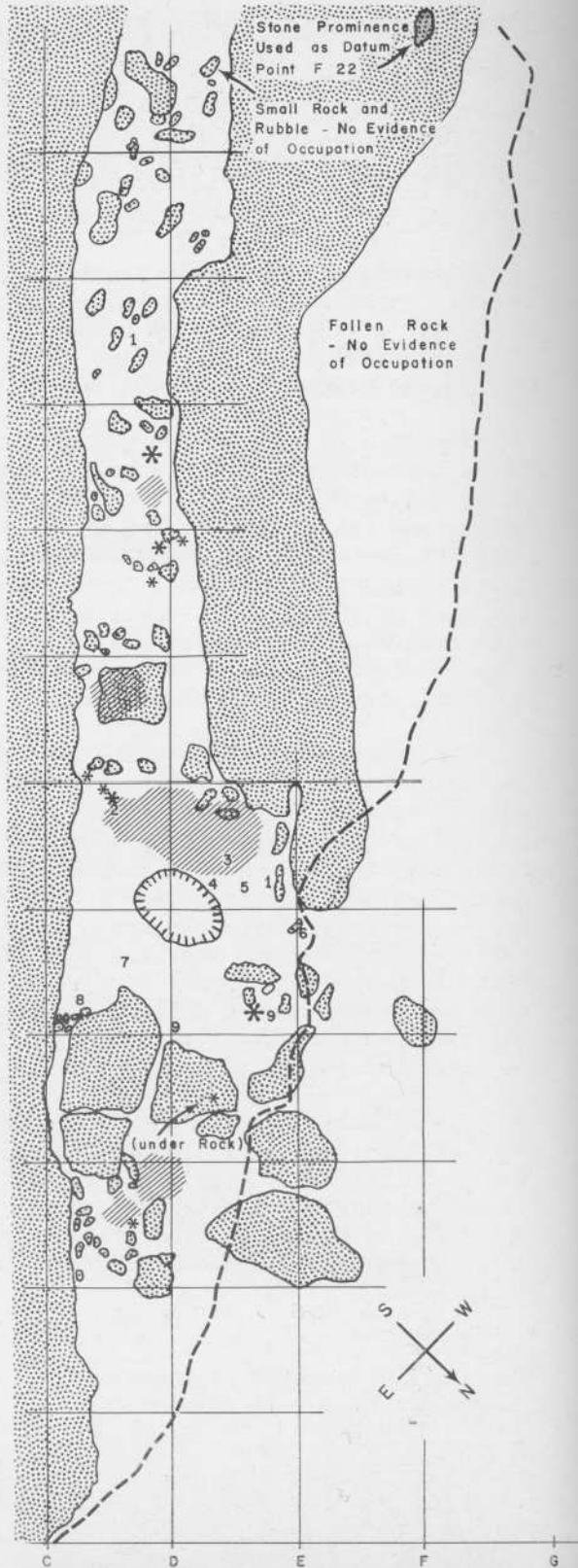
THE CHARLESTON LAKE ROCK SHELTER

NOTATIONS :

-  Limit of Overhang
-  Pottery
-  Rock
-  Fire Hearth Area
-  Pit
- 1 Bone Punch
- 2 Bone Needle
- 3 Bone Point
- 4 Bone Scraper
- 5 Round Stone
- 6 Metal Buckle
- 7 Worked Bone
- 8 Gun Flint
- 9 Musket Ball



Redrawn by the Cartographic Office
Department of Geography,
York University.



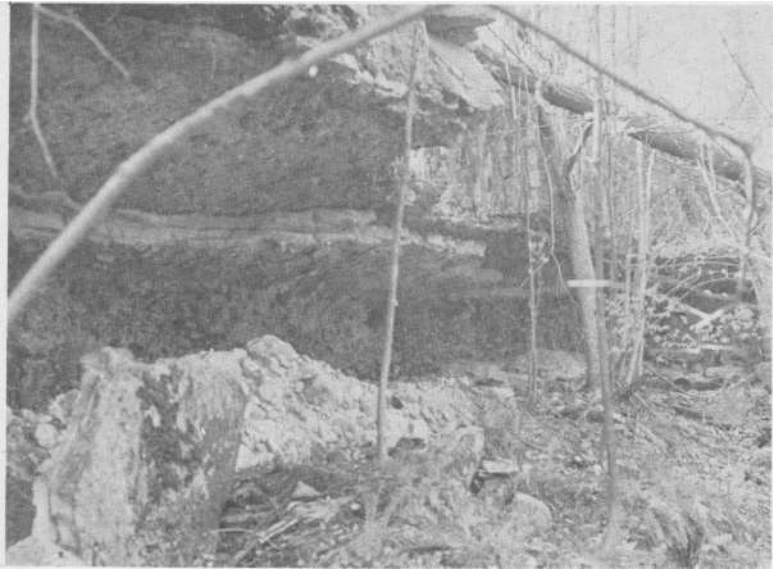


FIGURE 1
The Charleston Lake Rock Shelter

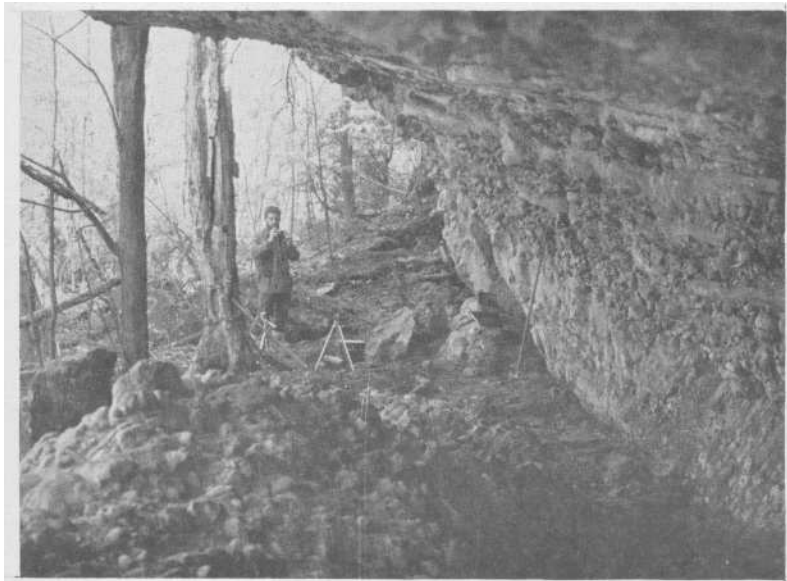


FIGURE 2
Main Area of Occupation

itself in which, because of a poorly compacted nature, artifacts could easily work their way downward.

Excavated materials included sherds from three pottery vessels several bone points, bone scrapers, one piece of worked stone, large amounts of unworked bone, two musket balls, a broken gun flint, and a metal buckle.

Two of the three vessels represented on the site closely resemble Jack's Reef Dentate Collar type (FIG. 3 to 8) (Ritchie and MacNeish, 1949: 106). Using the above classification, the pottery may be described as follows:

- Paste:*
- Temper: -Grit of medium to large size.
 - Texture: -The sherds are well fired but exhibit a tendency to exfoliate.
 - Colour: -Dark with some light tan and orange pieces.
 - Surface: -The surfaces are smooth with interior
 - Finish: -channelling present.
- Decoration:* -Oblique dentate stamp decorations occur on the collar. The neck and body do not have a constant design. Instead they have a variety of oblique and mostly horizontal designs which have been made by using a push-pull method and a straight stamping method. The bases of the pots appear to have been smooth with some straight line incisions.
- Form:* -The lips of the two pots differ, one being flattened while the other is pointed. The rims are slightly excurvate. The neck and sides appear to be straight with elongated and conoidal bases probably.
- Temporal Range:* -Late Point Peninsula (circa 500 - 700 A.D.).
- Geographical Range:* -Central New York and Eastern Ontario.

The third vessel represented (FIG. 9 and 10) can be classified as very like the Owasco Herringbone of Ritchie and MacNeish's classification. It can be described as follows:

- Paste:*
- Temper: -Grit of generally small size.
 - Texture: -Flaky and crumbly (this is characteristic of the early period of this type).
 - Colour: -Generally a reddish colour. Because of poor firing, there is an abrupt change in colour near the center of the pottery in cross section.

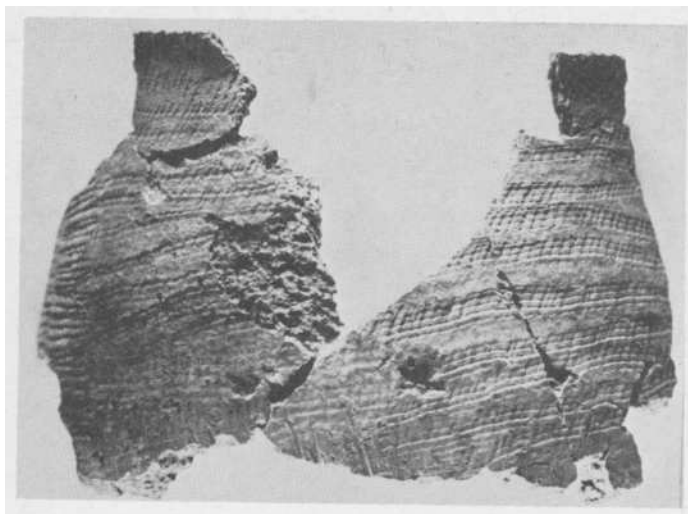


FIGURE 3
Pottery Vessel No. 1
Exterior View

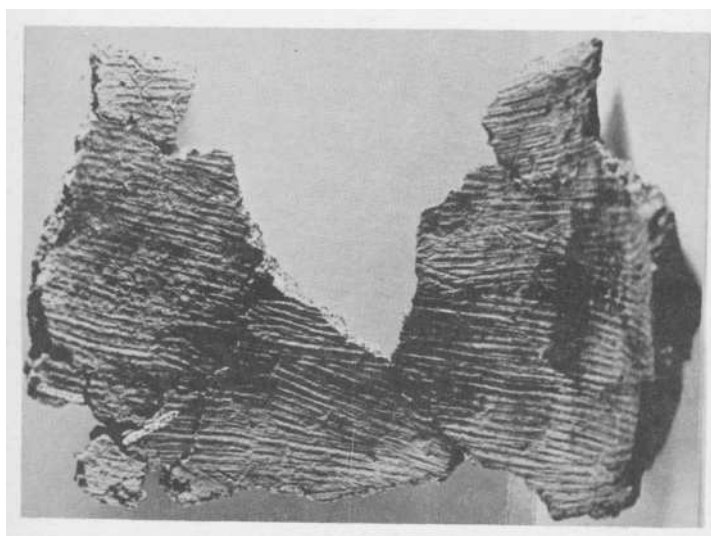


FIGURE 4
Pottery Vessel No.
1 Interior View



FIGURE 5
Pottery Vessel No. 1
Cross Section

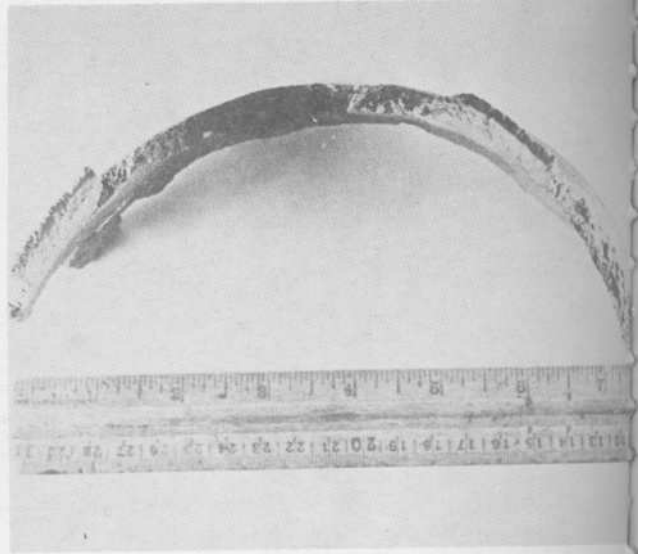


FIGURE 6
Pottery Vessel No. 1
Top View



FIGURE 7 Pottery
Vessel No. 2 Exterior
View



FIGURE 8 Pottery
Vessel No. 2 Cross
Section

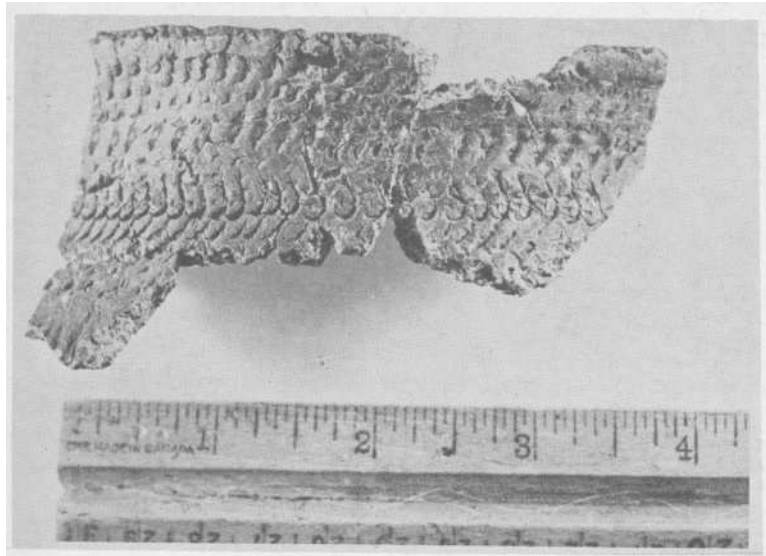


FIGURE 9 Pottery
Vessel No. 3
Exterior View

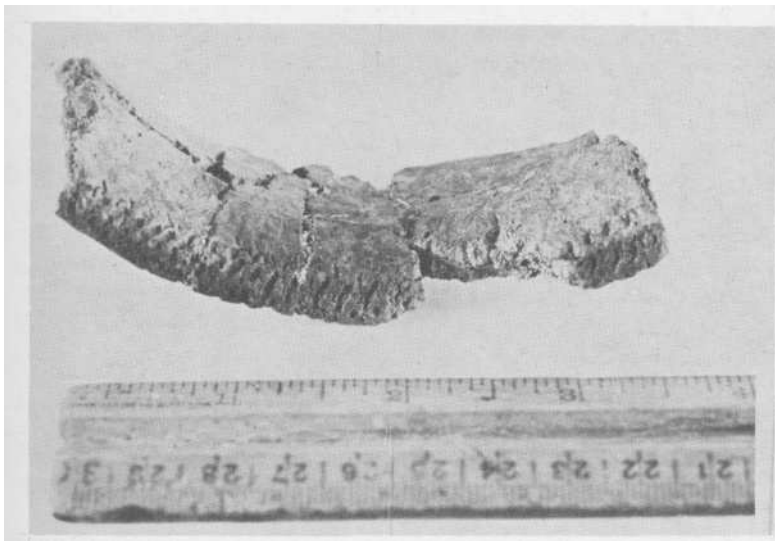


FIGURE 10
Pottery Vessel No. 3
Interior View

- Surface: -Coarsely cord marked on the body and then slightly smoothed over. Interiors are smooth.
- Decoration: -Extending down from the lip in a herring-bone pattern consisting of parallel horizontal rows of elements which are oblique in alternate directions. Dentate design occurs on the lip and rim and there are oblique impressions on the rim interior.
- Form: -Rim - Outflaring
Lip - Flattened and roughened by a corded tool.
Neck - Constricted.
Body - Elongated (probably)
Base - Rounded or conoidal.
- Temporal Range: -This type occurs throughout Owasco times and is also present in Late Point Peninsula period (circa 600 - 900 A.D.).
- Geographical Range: -This type has a wide distribution in New York State, Northern New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. It also appears on the Ontario peninsula and in Coastal New England.

The bone material from the site included a bone punch, a bone scraper, a bone point and other pieces showing signs of human workmanship. The bone point was the best preserved as it had been partially burnt and thus hardened in the fire. The remaining pieces were very fragile and easily broken.

Apart from bone artifacts, there were a great many of unworked, broken pieces of bone - the remains of some long past meals. Represented were bird and fish bones in small numbers, and, most commonly, beaver and deer. There were also bones from some larger animal, possibly moose. As is usual in finds of this nature, all of the bones had been broken for the extraction of marrow. The concentration of bone was greatest around the largest fire hearth area in a space of about four squares.

Stone material from the site was almost non-existent except for one small rounded stone which may well have served as a whetstone and a broken gun flint.

This brings us to the small collection of artifacts which dates from post-contact times. These include the above-mentioned gun flint, two musket balls and a buckle. The gun flint is made of a greyish-yellow European flint and the musket balls are approximately sixty calibre. One might hazard a guess that they belonged to early French travellers but this limited amount of information makes such a statement very unsatisfactory.

One of the most interesting features found on the site was a

large pit. It measured about one and one-half feet by three feet by about one foot deep. The pit contained no artifactual material but instead was filled with stones about five inches in diameter and very dark sand. It was beside a large fire area and one possible explanation of its use may be that at one time it was lined with some waterproof substance, possibly birch bark and pitch, and used to heat water by immersion of fire-heated rocks.

We can conclude, then, that there were at least two distinct periods during which this rock shelter was used as a short-term camp by travellers in the area. The first was during the Late Middle Woodland period. These were the people who have left the pottery and bone tool remains. They must have come before several of the largest rocks fell from the ceiling covering this material. The second group left musket balls, flints and a buckle and must have arrived sometime after the contact period. Neither group could have stayed long since the cultural accumulation was slight, but both were there long enough to leave evidence of their stay for future archaeological investigations.

REFERENCES

- Ritchie, W.A. and R.S. MacNeish (1949). Pre Iroquoian Pottery of New York State. *American Antiquity*, Vol. 15, No. 2: 97-124.