

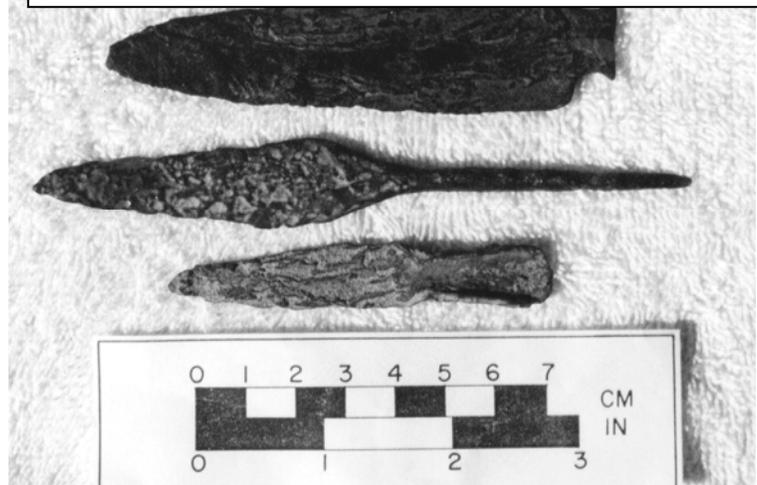
Copper Tipped Darts By Doug Miller

Not being much on the “in-the-know” of the atlatl design and construction theories, I thought I would share a bit of information about something that is a little more familiar to me. Recently, there have been some questions raised as to whether or not copper points were used in ancient times and should be allowed as “primitive” projectiles in our competitions. Personally, I have used fire-hardened wood, stone and copper and all have worked fine. The first two materials, wood and stone, performed well but didn’t seem to hold up very well, especially when I first started out throwing and spent more time hitting areas near rather than on target. I tried flat copper points after studying Ray Strischek’s darts and came up with a point that held up much better for competition. In fact, I have been reusing the same tips that I first made two years ago, even as my cane dart bodies became damaged and needed replacing.

Most of us who have become stricken with the atlatl bug also share an interest in prehistoric artifacts found here in North America, myself included. Surface hunting for artifacts has been a passion of mine for over 24 years. One of the more interesting types of artifacts to be found in the upper Midwest are tools from the “Old Copper Culture” era, 5000BC to 2000BC. Copper from the Upper Peninsula of Michigan was discovered and utilized by these archaic people for tools such as knives, pikes, gouges, spear points, fish hooks, and especially projectile points. Although this raw material was used and traded throughout the Midwest by many later cultures, its heaviest use seems to be during the archaic period when the atlatl was the premier weapon. Stone-tipped darts were probably still used to the greatest extent due to flint or chert being found in great abundance, and was still the easiest material to procure. When these early inhabitants found copper, they soon found the material to be a great improvement over its stone counterpart. Not only could copper be honed to a keen edge, but like us throwers from a later date, it was found to be more resilient at impact and perhaps even more eye appealing over most chert materials found in the Upper Midwest.

Two projectile shapes or styles seem to have been used the most. The first, as in photo 1, are points made similar in shape to many stone projectiles of the same time period, 5000 to 2000 BC. These points would have worked just fine in comparison to their stone mates..

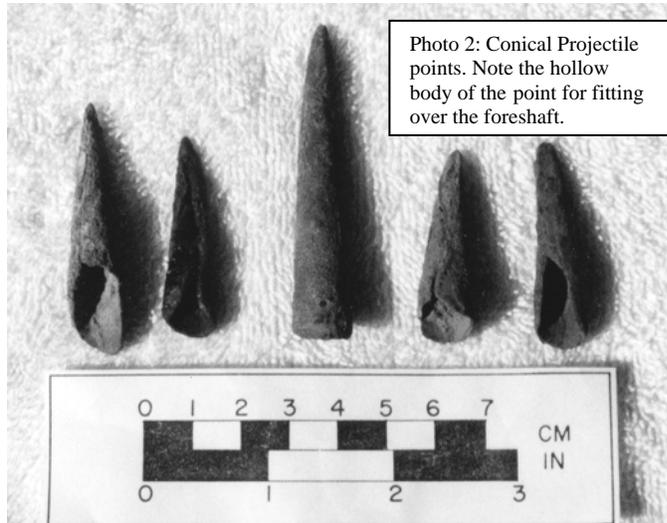
Photo 1: Table Rock style, Rat tail or Stemmed projectile, Socketed spear projectile



Points like these would have given great penetration and soft tissue damage needed in bringing down animals like moose, deer, elk, and caribou.

The second point style, which seems to be the most commonly used by the people was the conical point seen in photo 2. These projectiles seemed to be the points of choice for their discoveries greatly outnumber those of the type. These conical shaped have several advantages in design, which may have their extensive use.

The first is that they have been easier to manufacture with their limited “stone age” technology. Second, the points covers the end foreshaft rather than being in a slot in the shaft, the chance of the foreshaft



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broken at impact is greatly reduced. This is a fact I can attest to, having had to re-notch and haft my copper points in the foreshaft after they had broken at haft point.

The third reason may have been a hidden benefit which they might have discovered after the fact. I have noticed, (as a modern hunter and hunting deer with equipment of today’s technology) that when the wedge-shaped tip of a broadhead strikes a major bone, it not only cuts its way in, but also fractures the bone in radial directions, crippling the animal severely. This damage and crippling effect has also been reported in archaeological studies on the faunal remains where copper points were used to kill large game animals such as deer, elk, bison, etc. Whether or not the ancient people specifically designed these points for this effect, we will probably never know.

Hopefully this short note will give us a little food for thought. If anyone has any questions or ideas on this subject, I would be glad to visit with them.

Keep on chuckin’