

notes from abroad

Editor's Note: Schoenberg, an archaeologist with the NPS Regional Office in Alaska, has worked in Alaska for 20 years. His area of research is the prehistory of arctic and boreal regions, with emphasis on adaptation and cultural ecology. In July and August of 1990, upon invitation from the USSR Academy of Sciences and with support from the Horace Albright fund, he traveled to Novosibirsk, Siberia (with a stopover in

Moscow), to present a professional paper on a Beringian archaeological site in Gates of the Arctic NP. The paper was presented at an international symposium on Chronostratigraphy of the Paleolithic of Northern Asia, organized by the Institute of History, Philosophy, and Philology of the USSR Academy of Sciences. References to the USSR were all made before recent events made that designation a dubiously descriptive title.

Scholars from the USA, Canada, France, Korea, China, Japan, India, Germany, and all parts of the Soviet Union attended the Chronostratigraphy Symposium. Papers on recent discoveries in Siberia, Korea, China, the United States and Japan showed a common interest in investigating the paleoenvironment of the north and understanding cultural adaptation to those environments.

Some of the most exciting recent finds, in relation to human migration to the New World, have been made in northern China, Mongolia, and the Amur region of Siberia (for instance the Ust-Ulma site that was excavated by Derev'anko). The evidence is good that the ancestral population pool of the human migrants across Beringia was centered in this area in the late Pleistocene.

Much of the discussion centered on methods of interpreting the stratigraphy of deep loess sites through the use of geological and pedological interpretation. It was agreed that dating sites through stratigraphy (chronostratigraphy) provides only relative dates. The need is to apply more multidisciplinary techniques, such as radiocarbon and thermoluminescence, in order to obtain more precise absolute dates for these sites.

Global Change Clues

The technological and financial resources to apply these and other scientific techniques to archaeological and geological research are lacking at present in Mongolia, China, and Siberia. These deep loess sites, however, appear to hold great potential for providing paleoenvironmental baseline data for global change research. Scholars in these countries are looking to Europe, Japan, and the U.S. for expertise, facilities, and equipment to pursue more in-depth research on these sites.

The paper I presented, "The Archaeology of Kurupa Lake: A Northern Beringian Site," describes a site just north of the Brooks Range in Gates of the Arctic NP. This site has been occupied intermittently over the last 8000 years, and shows similarities to sites in Siberia and northern China that warrant further investigation.

One key point made in this session was that Beringian research, both archaeological and biological, would benefit greatly from investigation of sites geographically close to one another, such as on either side of the Bering Strait and Chukchi Sea. Too often, especially in northern archaeology, sites that are several thousand kilometers apart are compared, and the intervening gap is ignored. There is need for a "chain of sites" that are geographically close, to provide comparative data links across the existing gaps.

Beringian Park Proposal

The Beringian Heritage Park proposal between the NPS and the Soviet Union is one attempt to facilitate

such research. The idea of the park (unknown to most of the researchers at the symposium until I presented it) was enthusiastically received. Another mechanism to sponsor Beringian research was presented by Hans Muller-Beck of Germany, who chairs a committee on human entry to the New World for the International Quaternary Union (INQUA). This committee is organizing an interdisciplinary and international research effort on both sides of the Bering Strait.

The conference revealed a basic problem in the lack of a common scientific terminology among scholars in different countries. Lack of such a descriptive and analytical framework makes communication and comparison of data and interpretation difficult. NPS is attempting, as part of the Beringian Heritage project, to address this problem through the development of a Russian-English archaeological dictionary. If this project is successful, then as the need arises, dictionaries for other disciplines could be undertaken.

I traveled with a group of colleagues from Novosibirsk to the Lake Baikal region of Siberia, visiting archaeological sites and exploring the national park areas around the lake. We met with local residents and managers and discussed resource management problems there (consumptive use of resources and anthropogenic change) as well as the impact of the park on their lives.

Field Camps Visited

After traveling to Irkutsk, our first field camp was at the southern end of the Bratsk Sea, formed by the damming of the Angara River, which is the only outlet of Lake Baikal. This area has been the scene of intensive archaeological work in the last 20 years because the formation and industrialization of the Bratsk reservoir has led to major environmental degradation of the area. About 100 meters of shoreline has been eroding every decade, exposing numerous archaeological sites.

Our hosts informed us that the environmental movement in the USSR gained its first real strength in response to environmental problems in this area and threats to the unique ecosystems of Lake Baikal. One response was the founding in 1971 of a National Park around parts of Lake Baikal.

The second field camp we visited was at the headwaters of the Lena River, near the town of Verkolensk, founded in 1641 by Russians and Cossacks as part of their conquest of Siberia. It also was the place to which the Czar exiled Leon Trotsky prior to the 1917 Revolution. The archaeological sites in this area date back at least 20,000 years, and are characterized by deep loess deposits even though the area has been heavily forested at various times.

Our last field camp was at Ulan-Hada Bay on Lake Baikal. The Geophysical Institute of Irkutsk maintains a permanent research camp (of tent frames) there. Because this part of Lake Baikal is shallow and the water warms up enough for bathing and boating, there is a long history of human occupation here. There also is a productive fishery at the boundary of the shallow, warm bay and the cold, deep waters of the main lake. The area is the main recreation area around the lake for visitors from all over the Soviet Union. Local authorities would like to see greatly increased international tourism here. Management of this complex park, which lacks an institutional park service with traditions and expertise, is evolving on a day-to-day basis.