

GORDON CREEK WOMAN MEETS KENNEWICK MAN: NEW INTERPRETATIONS AND PROTOCOLS REGARDING THE PEOPLING OF THE AMERICAS. *Alan Swedlund; Anderson Duane.*

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Recent discoveries - particularly those of Kennewick Man - have renewed debates on the peopling of the Americas. Our vantage point comes from research on the Gordon Creek Burial which commenced some 30 years ago. We suggest that a contrast between the conditions under which Gordon Creek and Kennewick were recovered and analyzed provides insights into current interpretations and controversies. Specifically, we argue that bioarchaeologists cannot, and therefore should not, separate the sociopolitical issues from the scientific, that biological assignments of affiliation are extremely problematic in such cases, and that prior assumptions figure strongly in the interpretations presented. If more detailed understanding of the peopling of the Americas is a common goal, then we as bioarchaeologists must be prepared to reexamine our practices and learn from our mistakes.

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In the pages of *American Antiquity*, Breternitz et al. (1971) described the human physical remains, artifacts, and associated site context of the Gordon Creek burial, identified as Paleoindian and radiocarbon dated at approximately 9700 B.P. We discussed the cultural and biological evidence for early "man" and compared our findings with other suspected Paleoindian skeletal remains known at the time. The Gordon Creek burial proved to be a woman of approximately 25-30 years of age with a fairly complete skeleton, buried with an assemblage of artifactual remains and a distinctive mortuary practice, and of good provenience. In all respects it was a significant archaeological find. As other Paleoindian candidates with which we had compared Gordon Creek were challenged under closer scientific scrutiny, Gordon Creek remained one of the earliest reported and best-documented Paleoindian burial sites.(1) However, citations of this publication are few, suggesting that it is not particularly well known and often eludes detection by scholars writing on early human presence in the Americas.

More recent discoveries of early human remains in North America, particularly those of Kennewick Man (e.g., Chatters 1997) from Washington state, revive interest in Gordon Creek and other well-established and -documented examples. It is our purpose in this comment to reintroduce Gordon Creek in the context of recent discoveries, scientific debates, and political controversies. Briefly, we (1) discuss its importance to our understanding of this period in prehistory, (2) consider the innovations in methodologies and analysis that have emerged in the intervening 30+ years, and (3) review implications for current and future dispositions of early human skeletal remains in light of the 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). We comment on recent events and situate the discovery in the larger context of current debates.

There is much that can be learned today from Gordon Creek that may inform future interpretations through the significance of the scientific data that may be acquired with further study and the way human physical remains were treated then and now. There may have been a time when we believed we could detach the scientific treatment of these remains from their social and political contexts but that time has long passed. Therefore, rather than pretend that these issues do not exist, or somehow can be separated from the scientific, we include them in our discussion.

Gordon Creek Woman

An isolated burial was discovered in an arroyo on Gordon Creek in the Roosevelt National Forest of northern Colorado in 1963. The site and the recovered remains were described in preliminary reports in subsequent years (Anderson 1966, 1967). It consisted, as noted, of a woman aged 25-30 years of age who was given primary, intentional interment in a prepared burial pit.

The body was placed on its left side with the head to the north, was tightly flexed, and was also coated with red ocher. Burial accompaniments include a large percussion flaked biface or preform, a small biface used as a scraping tool, a hammerstone, an end scraper, a preform with fire pocks, cut and incised animal ribs, and a perforated elk incisor. A radiocarbon assay of bone material from the left ilium produced an age of 9700 [+ or -] 250 radiocarbon years... (Breternitz et al. 1971:170).

A second radiocarbon assay was performed for verification and provided a date of 9400 [+ or -] 120 years (Haynes, personal communication 1987).

In the 1971 American Antiquity report, the site, artifacts, and faunal and human physical remains are described in detail and thoroughly discuss the morphology of the skeleton, its identification as Paleoindian (without further attempts to attribute ethnic affiliation or assign "race"), and, in one of the earliest published attempts, reconstruct the burial as mortuary practice or ritual event.

Gordon Creek Woman has been cited in very few archaeological publications (cf. Cassells 1983:66-67). We would attribute some of the lack of interest to the fact that she is female. Physical anthropology has a long tradition of considering the male as the true standard for racial classification (e.g., Hooton 1931). Often, the female of the species was thought to be less definitive of type and more ambiguous in skeletal racial features than the male. Likewise, archaeological chronologies for Paleoindians often are based on the presence of "diagnostic" artifacts presumed to be made by males, such as Clovis, Folsom, and Agate Basin projectile points. Contemporary approaches tend to be more inclusive.

New analyses or interpretations of the remains related to the peopling of the New World have included the work of Steele and Powell (1993, 1994), Powell and Steele (1994), Turner (1992), and Green et al. (1998), among others. In these works, Gordon Creek Woman has been included with the five or six known and verified cases of other Paleoindian burials, and has received consistent confirmation as to her antiquity and

validity as Paleoindian. Turner (1992, 1997) has referred to the dentition of Gordon Creek Woman as "Sinodont," suggesting similarities to populations from northeast Asia. In comparing known Paleoindian remains with other archaeological populations from North America and elsewhere, Steele and Powell locate all of the early remains as specifically Paleoindian, but suggest through comparisons of cranial measurements, using principal components analyses and other tests, that "where Paleoindians...differed from modern northern Asians, they tended to structurally resemble southern Asian and European populations" (1994:141). The fact that a few Paleoindian examples from North America can be associated with North Asian, South Asian, and European populations using a battery of different statistical approaches is, in itself, interesting. This suggests the difficulties in attempting to attribute identity to these few specimens using reference populations that vary metrically, temporally, and geographically.(2) These studies testify to the biological heterogeneity in all populations and, even when carefully undertaken with sophisticated methodologies, as in the case of Steele and Powell, still tell us nearly nothing about ethnicity, "race" identity, or cultural affiliation. But our purpose here is not to debate specifically the results of these types of studies, but rather to question some of the underlying assumptions and approaches that accompany such analyses.

Kennewick Man

Gordon Creek Woman can serve as a point of departure for considering other early examples of the Paleo-occupation of North America, particularly Kennewick Man. No remains have been contested and debated more than those of Kennewick Man, a skeleton from Kennewick, Washington, located near the Columbia River, and variously dated between 8400 and 9300 years B.P. (e.g., Morell 1998a; Preston 1997; Slayman 1997). Kennewick Man had eroded out of the river bank and was recovered by two college students. The remains were transferred by the Army Corps of Engineers to James Chatters, a forensic anthropologist and owner of a local consulting firm (Chatters 1997, 1998).

Unlike previous scientific discoveries of early humans in North America, discussion and debate of the evidence for Kennewick Man has been presented almost exclusively in nonscientific media or through commentaries in newsletters and scientific journals. Chatters and other anthropologists from surrounding institutions have consistently noted certain "Caucasoid" or European features of the skull, which suggested to them that the ancestry of Kennewick Man might be quite different from that of other documented Paleoindian discoveries (numerous sources). To date, we know of no published data or analyses and only a single instance of reporting in scholarly journals or meetings (Chatters 1999). In the absence of published data and analyses, assertions of identity are difficult to test or question.

This set of circumstances may be attributed to confusion over NAGPRA regulations, advice from legal counsel and agencies, decisions of the principal researchers involved, and (we would argue) to the very nature of scientific conduct today as compared with 30 years ago.(3) Where it would be almost unheard of in the 1960s to go public with a find like Gordon Creek - without first a careful analysis, writing a report, submitting it to

refereed scientific publications, and presenting it at professional meetings - it is now commonplace to report such findings in the public media well in advance of scientific presentation. Beyond the important considerations of data, evidence, and interpretation, this change in the nature of reporting adds a relatively new dimension to bioarchaeological research.

In a variety of publications, World Wide Web sources, and video interviews (e.g., Preston 1997, www.tri-cityherald.com/BONES/1018.html, Religious News Weekly 1997, Newsweek 1999) Kennewick Man is variously described as having a long, narrow skull; alveolar-maxillary prognathism; pronounced canine fossa; projecting nose; receding cheek bones; high chin; and a square mandible.

What is frequently lacking from these anecdotal attributions are details outlining specifically what populations are serving as the basis of comparison, what measurements are available, what discriminant function tests have been run using what reference populations, and why a forensic - rather than a populational - approach was selected for assessment of the remains.(4) Qualitative features have been used to suggest that Kennewick Man is a relic of a distinctive migration into the New World, one which may have more European or Eurasian origins and that Kennewick would likely have had features that were distinctly European. Chatters has reportedly said, "On the physical characteristics alone, he could fit on the streets of Stockholm without causing any kind of notice" (Preston 1997:73). This is, indeed, a bold speculation given what is known of how poorly the skull reflects such specific regional or ethnic identification.(5)

Thus, the data and reporting of Kennewick Man provide several levels of interpretation that depart significantly from the scientific investigations of such phenomena in the recent past. On the one hand, there is the contemporary and often sensational style of reporting in the popular media that characterizes many of today's discoveries.(6) On the other, there is something very anachronistic about the racialized, typological characterization of human variation that we find disturbing and which has been noted by others (e.g., Anderson et al. 1997; Goodman 1997, 1998; Marks 1998). It is one thing to characterize the gene pool of early Americans as diverse and possibly indicative of complex population histories, and quite another to ascribe decontextualized, biological race to an isolated skull based on qualitative and somewhat subjective features. Subsequent, apparent retractions by Chatters and others of some of the earlier statements have not changed interpretations substantively.

The contrasts among our understandings of Gordon Creek Woman and Kennewick Man, the ways in which that information reached the public, and the varying interpretations of the available evidence provide an ideal context in which to view the bioarchaeologist's role in attempting to understand the peopling of the Americas.

What Do We Expect from the Evidence?

The long history of excavations and analyses aimed at the interpretation of the prehistory of the peopling of the Americas provides a legacy of both important - often brilliant - work, and also a litany of somewhat embarrassing theories and conclusions. This is how science progresses. Past interpretations, therefore, must be considered not only to build on the information regarded (by consensus) to be probable, but also to avoid the repetition of past mistakes. Therefore, to revisit earlier theories of the peopling of the Americas offers major and occasionally humbling lessons in the methods of description, inference, and theory building that inform our work today.

There have been many innovations in scientific analysis in the 30+ years since Gordon Creek Woman was first described. Radiocarbon dating was at the vanguard. There was an emerging literature on biometry, but not the statistical sophistication that exists in systematics today. Serum proteins were beginning to be used to address questions about our hominid past, but there was no sequencing of mitochondrial or nuclear DNA. Microscopic analysis of artifact use marks and tooth wear was practiced, but not the sophisticated studies in electron microscopy that are common today. Biochemical analysis of bone was in its early stages, but sensitive trace element analyses were not possible. Hence, it is exhilarating to think about what more could be known about Gordon Creek Woman today that was out of scientific reach at the time of discovery.

On the other hand, there were no NAGPRA regulations when Gordon Creek Woman was discovered, no established protocols for timely notification of interested groups, and little interest from the popular media for the "exciting" news of another (possible) Paleoindian burial. "Doing science" did not involve the obligations and accountabilities now expected, nor did precontact American archaeology constitute "late breaking news." With apologies to Dickens, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times."

New technologies, standardized data-collecting techniques (see Buikstra and Ubelaker 1994), and the existence of new protocols for the study of American Indian history before contact invite new possibilities and challenges. However, these must be coupled with the recognition that collaboration, courtesy, and respect for differing traditions are key to any future inquiries. As students of scientific method know, care in hypothesis testing is a difficult but essential step in attempting to avoid bias and improve the level of objectivity in research. Very likely, we are seldom completely free of our assumptions and biases, and our only defense is to articulate them as clearly as possible. It is thus disconcerting to see the rapid assessments and conclusions regarding the ethnic affiliation of Kennewick Man. Grover Krantz, another investigator, suggested that Kennewick Man "cannot be anatomically assigned to any existing tribe in the area, nor even to the western Native American type in general" (Slayman 1997:16). This is an exceedingly confident statement considering the lack of analyses and peer review conducted thus far (let alone published), but it is not unlike recent statements about other Paleoindian remains. For example, the Spirit Cave Mummy from Nevada, which also dates approximately 9,000 years ago, is claimed by Douglas Owsley of the Smithsonian to "...not look quite like

what you think of when you think about a modern Indian" (Morell 1998b: 192; see also Newsweek 1999).

This discussion begs the question: What is a "modern Indian"? Do we really have a scientific, biological definition on which there is expert consensus? Do we not regard modern American Indian populations to be both culturally and morphologically diverse, both between and within tribal affiliations?(7) Do we even know the specific ontogenetic pathways that determine physical size and shape of the skull in ancient (or, for that matter, modern) populations? Do the most recent studies on the developmental genetics of skull shape and facial morphology reveal clear markers for intraspecific differences in human populations? Do we have good controls on the averaged differences between other modern populations and their 9,000-year-old ancestors? And is not most of the observed variation within groups? (e.g., see Relethford 1994).

The researchers involved with Kennewick Man submitted bone samples to David Glenn Smith at the University of California-Davis, apparently in hopes of finding mitochondrial DNA haplotypes that might suggest "European" genes. Assuming these tests are eventually authorized, will they really resolve anything? Rare haplotypes occur in most populations and can be expected to occur in most ancient populations through a variety of processes that make assertions of ancestry ambiguous, if not equivocal. If we consider the mobility of past hunting and gathering populations, it should not be surprising to find considerable genetic diversity within Paleoindian samples. Attempts to ascertain the unique or distinctive haplotypes of "modern Indians" is even more problematic. We know that from the times of Columbus, Cortez, and Coronado there has been considerable admixture with European populations, and "captive narratives" from all regions of the country are replete with validated stories of Euro-Americans "becoming" American Indians and vice versa (e.g., see Demos 1995; Rowlandson 1913; Vaughan and Richter 1980).

What, then, do we expect to learn from the different lines of evidence? If our operating assumptions - and evidence - are about isolated and pristine populations maintaining their physiognomic and genetic integrity for many, many generations, then we expect biological homogeneity. If our operating assumptions - and evidence - are about the plasticity of human physiognomy, and

of the reticulated population histories of most human groups, then we expect biological heterogeneity both within and between human ethnic groups. The difficulties in being able to assign, with any high probability, the skeletal features of an unknown individual to a particular ethnic group, is the basis for more sophisticated bioarchaeological methodologies and more enlightened understandings of cultural identity than anthropologists originally envisioned. We do not need to ponder where "European genes" come from in Native Americans, or where "Native American" genes come from in Euro-American populations. We only can hope to improve our understanding of all of the processes that could be involved. If future studies add to our success in identifying the precise origin of a specific genotypic variant, that still may not eliminate questions as to the precise timing and mechanisms by which individuals or groups express that genotype.

Evidence, Identity, and NAGPRA

Most bioarchaeologists would agree that some of the most exciting, interesting, and important information to emerge from archaeological studies involving human physical remains over the past 30 years has been in the identification of ancient lifeways, environmental adaptation, dietary habits, and historical patterns relating to health and disease. The rise in the study of mortuary practices that developed in the 1960s and 1970s has exemplified the importance of collaboration between biological anthropologists and archaeologists (cf. Beck 1995; Brown 1971; Goldstein 1980; Palkovich 1980). As these studies demonstrate, the investigation of human skeletal remains in isolation of the full cultural context is always fraught with difficulties.

In the study of Gordon Creek Woman, we saw a set of cultural practices - the flexed burial, the ocher pigment, the funerary objects - that resonate strongly with the practices of some American Indian groups up into the postcontact period. The careful, detailed analysis of the remains gave us confidence of who we were "meeting" across thousands of years, no matter what the morphology. While Gordon Creek Woman presumably shared some biological similarities with her group, we would assume that it was cultural practices through which the important aspects of identity were shared. Conflation of biology with culture and essentializing biological difference are a part of anthropological history, and occur more easily when culture and biology are decoupled. We had been trained by our mentors to always regard "race" as a problematic category, and yet strive to appreciate the interactions between biology and culture.(8)

NAGPRA regulations have now redefined the protocols and rearranged the processes within which we attempt to understand the peopling of the Americas. It is in this new milieu that the discovery of Kennewick Man occurred. A lawsuit is pending, filed on October 16, 1996, by eight scientists involved with the Kennewick remains. Their argument is that incalculable and irrevocable losses to science will occur if the remains (and others) are repatriated; the data necessary to understand the earliest populations in America will never be acquired. If further study is not possible, it will be significant. Perhaps this confrontation between Native American requests for repatriation and bioarchaeologists' need for data was inevitable, perhaps not. By contrast, the relatively recently discovered Buhl burial was fully and amicably reported, and respectfully reburied (Green et al. 1998).

Kennewick Man appears to us to be a lesson - and not a particularly good one - in the problematics of interpretation and protocol. From the outset it would appear from the reporting that the discussions between American Indian representatives from the region and researchers were hostile, opinions on both sides were quickly formed, and a tone of compromise and conciliation was not in evidence. Similarly, it appears that initial analyses were quite typological and traditional, rather than opting for more sophisticated and nuanced methodologies, and the hasty conclusions were almost sure to elevate the level of hostility and mistrust among the parties involved. We assume the researchers felt they had to "go public" to avoid immediate reburial of the remains, but we cannot understand why it was necessary to make such controversial and incendiary claims before

carefully exploring all options for future analyses. To their critics, this haste to proclaim "European-ness" can appear disingenuous and be viewed as an attempt to gain control of the remains and thus avoid the NAGPRA process.

We are not suggesting that an impasse might not have quickly occurred, and that obstacles to further research may not have been rapidly deployed, but we will never know what options might have developed. In the 1960s with Gordon Creek Woman, we certainly did not face these issues. Our concern was with obtaining the most detailed, careful, and objective analysis possible. Likewise, we saw our obligations as limited to our scientific colleagues, institutions, and agencies. It never occurred to us to conscientiously share our findings with the American Indian community and invite consultation.(9) Had we had the foresight to do so, we might have found ourselves in a more positive set of professional and public relationships today.

We have cautioned that legal actions should be avoided if at all possible because of the entanglements and ill will that can ensue and the nature of courts to pick winners and losers rather than achieve compromise and reconciliation (Anderson 1998; Anderson et al. 1997).(10) As anthropologists affiliated, respectively, with a public university and a private, scientific research organization, we also know well what is at stake if we cannot enter into meaningful negotiations and partnerships with Native American scholars, tribal representatives, and others.

The spirit of NAGPRA is one of inclusion and relations have now shifted to an unprecedented extent between the scientific community and the interested public. This has not only occurred in relation to the archaeology of the Americas, but in many other scientific arenas as well. It is not only respectful, but honest, to acknowledge the differential power relations that have existed in the past and to work towards an informed and cooperative relationship with American Indians and other interested parties in the future. Whether we agree or not that Paleoindian remains should be regarded as unaffiliated under NAGPRA is beside the point. What is important is the means by which all parties involved have the opportunity for fair and open discussion. When we, as bioarchaeologists, identify human physical remains by racial or biological type we are on the shakiest of grounds scientifically. Moreover, we invite a very different kind of participation - one likely to be based on contestation rather than shared interests - from those who may (legitimately) claim to be descendants.

When data and archives on human history are lost, there is a loss to science and to the descendants/scientists/owners/curators of those archives. It is our contention that the physical and material culture remains of Gordon Creek Woman provide an important body of evidence that is of value to anthropologists and American Indians alike. We would hope that if Gordon Creek Woman were to be discovered today that bioarchaeologists, in consultation with American Indian scholars and tribal leaders, could jointly study the remains, arrive at their respective interpretations, and conduct their respective scientific and cultural practices in an environment of mutual respect. Further, we hope that opportunities for the future study of the Gordon Creek remains will continue to be available. Much can still be learned given new techniques, methodologies, interests,

and questions, as long as close attention is paid to the issues raised here, including the respect, responsibility, accountability, compassion, and willingness to compromise of all parties involved in consultation and collaboration (see Goldstein 1992; Leone and Preucel 1992; and Martin 1998, for important discussions on this topic). This may be too much to expect, but the future understanding of the past depends on such outcomes. The climate surrounding the Kennewick discovery and subsequent assertions certainly militate against meaningful collaborations and privileges some scientific questions over others. Interested parties will legitimately disagree on whether or not the course taken, and subsequent lawsuit, was worth it.

Finally, we cannot help but raise the question: What if Gordon Creek Woman did actually meet Kennewick Man (forgiving, for a moment, their separation in years and geography)? The lack of archaeological preservation precludes our knowledge of the various features of clothing, body decoration, and other cultural augmentations that may have served as ethnic markers of the groups to which these two individuals may have been affiliated. What of their physical characteristics? Would they really have looked so different? We think not, but the science of bioarchaeology, regardless of the number of measurements taken, or races/ethnicities assigned, is really mute on this question. Likewise, it is one thing to say that the ancestors of American Indians may ultimately derive from migration waves of groups or individuals that originated in different parts of Asia, South Asia, or even Central Eurasia. It is quite another to single out one or two of a small number of Paleoindian skulls, refer to them as possibly Caucasian or European in appearance, claim they represent Paleo "americans" who may have become extinct and who do not resemble "modern" American Indians. The former is within the boundaries of an empirically testable model, the latter is not.

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Notes

1 In 1997 Duane Anderson made a return visit to the archaeological site and found that the arroyo has filled in several feet with no new remains exposed. Also in 1997, Alan Swedlund reevaluated the human remains to update our notes and recollections. The materials are curated at the University of Colorado Museum.

2 In his most recent, and yet unpublished work, Powell (1999:224) finds that 18 Paleoindian remains from North and South America fit closer to northeast Asians and Polynesians than to "modern" European and Native Americans.

3 Chatters (1998:21) states that detailed measurement of Kennewick Man has been prohibited, yet a complete skull cast was made. DNA measurement awaits the outcome of a pending lawsuit (Bonnichsen et al. v US); the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has held that "outside scientists" cannot study the skeleton, whereas the National Park Service has assembled an outside team who conducted a nonintrusive study in February and March 1999 (McManamon 1999). It is not clear to us whether the lack of publication of the findings initially made through observation and measurement of the skeleton was due to attempts at suppression by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Chatters's own decision, or both. The National Park Service is on record stating that NAGPRA does not prohibit scientific study of ancient skeletal remains (see Schneider 1998a; also see Schneider 1997, 1998b).

4 One clue might be the assertion by Chatters that he first suspected that the remains were of a recently deceased individual (Preston 1997), but this does not explain why one would persist in this mode of analysis. By forensic approach, we refer to the attempt to assign racial affiliation to isolated human remains. By populational approach we refer to the attempt to compare physical remains to a number of reference populations through careful measurement, and to make probabilistic statements about the relative biological distance the subject represents with respect to each of the reference populations.

5 Alternatively, we can imagine that it might be quite possible to encounter a person of Asian or Eurasian ethnicity on the "streets" of a Scandinavian city, even several thousand years ago. But this is not what Chatters is referring to.

6 We wish to make it clear here that we find much of the popular reporting on Kennewick to be thoughtful, careful, and responsible. If we have an issue, it is with the tinting and means by which Kennewick became known, rather than with those reporting on him.

7 We recognize the fact that some groups and individuals prefer to be referred to as American Indian whereas others prefer Native American. We use the terms interchangeably with no intentions of disrespect.

8 Even though our biological mentors did not necessarily agree on the definition of race, by studying under Drs Alice Brues and A.J. Kelso, we felt we had the best of alternative views. However, we wish to make clear that we are not suggesting here that the cultural evidence would allow us to make a specific ethnic or tribal affiliation either.

9 Until the American Indian Movement (A.I.M.) activism of the late '60s and '70s, few anthropologists knew Native Americans cared or had taken the time to find out they cared.

10 It is not our intent here to assign all blame to specific individuals, agencies, or the American Indian community. Rather, the reporting suggests a flawed process, one reflecting much resistance on all sides.

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