

ORAL HISTORY 97-66-22 PT. 5

Edward Howard Hosley

Spring 1967

Fairbanks, Alaska

Prehistory of Alaska

Edward Hosley is introduced. Unidentified person talked about Ed Hosley working on archaeological sites at the University of Alaska and at Point Hope. Ed Hosley said he would talk about a prehistory of Alaska. He said perhaps there was a land bridge across the Bering Straits. The land bridge was actually quite wide from the Pribilofs to the latitude of Barrow, 1500 miles. The land bridge came into being because the northern hemisphere had experienced several ice ages. The snow lasted all year long. There was so much water locked up in ice that sea level began to drop. At its maximum they were 300 feet lower than they are today. The average depth of the Bering Sea is 150 feet. Earliest man, animals and plants came into the new world. The movement was probably 30-35,000 B.C. ago at the earliest. It was not a mass migration but rather a trickle. They may have been following the for game or food sources. A few bands or tribes came at a time. There were ice sheets that blocked their further migration most of the time. There were about three periods of time when the land bridge and the ice-free corridor existed at the same time. The earliest movement of man into the new world is visible at few sites. The British Mountain tradition is dated at 35,000-30,000 B.C. The weapons and tools were crude and simple. They were armed with wooden spears. They knew how to make fire and skin clothing. They crossed the land bridge and moved into the heartland of America and central America when the corridor was ice free. Shortly after they moved south the corridor closed. [at this point the recording is difficult to understand] About 14000 years ago there was again an ice free corridor and a second group of people migrated through. They were hunters of large game. The ice corridor closed again. The people developed hunting skills. It is thought they had a contribution to extinction of certain mammals. When the ice corridor opened up again animals such as the bison migrated north and people with them. This was about 7,000 B.C. At this time the land bridge began to disappear. Glaciers were melting back. This was a time of new ideas and diffusion of the ideas. Edward talks about the northwest microblade tradition. They used a very small tool that was no more than eight inches long. Sometimes they were inserted in a groove. It made utilization of raw materials more efficient. They also used a small stone chisel. Traces of this tradition have been found on the Alaskan Peninsula and the Kobuk River. Ed asked if they were Eskimo or Indian. Ed said they were found in the Interior, on the coast and in western Canada. They were neither Eskimo or Indian. They were the ancestors of the Eskimo and the Indian. They were the cultural and genetic ancestors. They were hunters, fishers and gatherers. The microblade people did not move down into North America. For about 3,000 years this culture endured in Alaska. There began a divergence between the Interior people and the coastal people. At about 3500 B.C. there developed a new tradition – the arctic small tool tradition. The harpoon was developed. The culture began to appear between Norton Sound and

Bristol Bay. Sea lion and walrus were present. There was an increase hunting of sea mammals. This led to the development of harpoons. About 3000 B.C. the people began to expand north and east. They reached Greenland by 2000 B.C. Houses and tools dated from this early period. They were called proto-Eskimo. In the Interior the northwest microblade tradition continued until about 1000 B.C. Eventually this tradition gave rise to the ancestors of the modern Indian. About 1000 B.C. on the coast was the rise of the last coastal culture – the Eskimo tradition. They began hunting whales about 1800 B.C. It originated in the Bering Straits Region. They began using iron and dog teams. He talked about the settlements in Greenland.

Edward talked about the archeological site on the University of Alaska Fairbanks campus and the significance of the site.