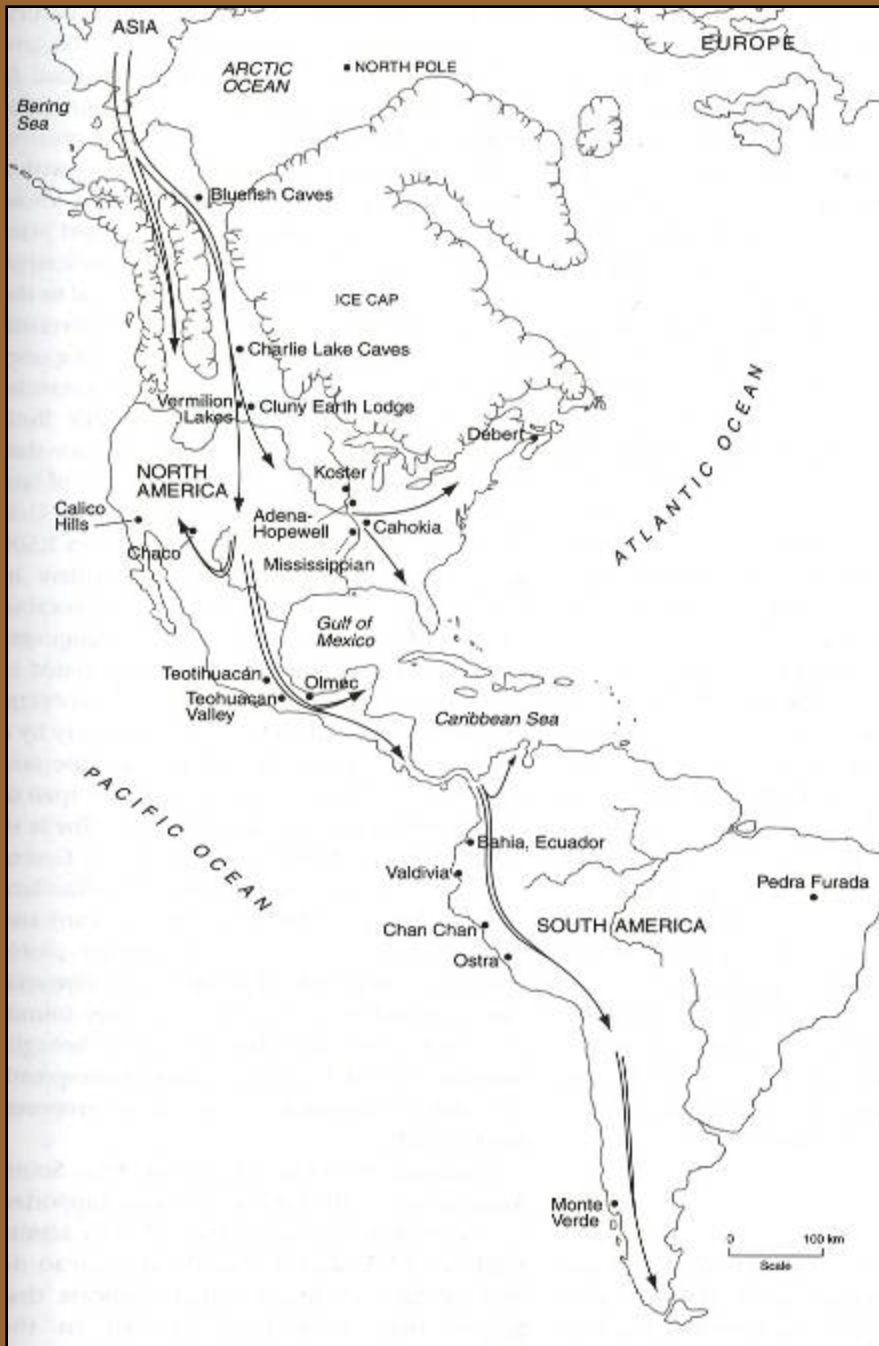


The Archaeological Story of Early Canada

Archaeology's 'Origin' Story (Ice Free Corridor)





Legends of Beringia

In the mythology of Yukon First Nations are echoes of the distant Ice Age. As temperatures warmed at the end of the Ice Age, massive amounts of meltwater were released from the rapidly retreating glaciers on the borders of Beringia.

According to myth, it was from this flooded land that the creator, Crow, made the world we see today. And at the beginning of the world, the Gwitchin culture-hero, *Ch'itahuukaii*, the Traveller, and the Tutchone hero *Soh Jhee* or *Asuya* (Beaver Man), journeyed across the land to change the animals from giants and man-eaters to the familiar species of today. Perhaps these stories recall distant memories of the Ice Age megafauna and giant predators of the Beringian landscape.

Canoes: Halin de Roquentigny

Ch'itahuukaii, the Traveller

Carved Cedar Panel: Keith Wolfe Smarch

Crow Makes the World





inside the beringia centre

tales of the Giant Beaver



Step into a time
when giants roamed the North...

The Giant Beaver measuring up to 2.5 m (8 ft) in length and weighing 218 kg (480 lbs), about the size of a black bear today, is the largest rodent known from the Pleistocene Epoch. Skeletal remains were first discovered in 1837 in Ohio by geologist J.W. Foster who later named the beaver *Castoroides ohioensis*.



Size comparison between the Giant Beaver, an Austin Mini, and today's Black Bear

Flourishing in lakes and ponds bordered by swamps, the Giant Beaver may have lived in Beringia during interglacial periods when the warmest conditions occurred. The Giant Beaver had sharp cutting teeth up to 15.24 cm (6") long and as a herbivore probably ate the surrounding vegetation of roots and cattails. In comparison to the beaver we know today (*Castor canadensis*), Giant Beavers were outfitted with much larger bones and narrower tails but were considered equally good swimmers.

Evidence of "Castor" has been uncovered in fossil finds ranging from the Yukon to as far south as Florida. Fossils in the form of jaws, teeth, vertebrae and leg bones, dating

from 130,000 to 60,000 years ago, have been found in the Yukon's Old Crow basin region. The Giant Beaver, like the Woolly Mammoth, became extinct 10,000 years ago; probably due to its inability to adapt in the changing climate.

Beaver Tales

North American First Nation legends and folk-tales indicate respect and reverence for the water-wise beaver. The industrious creature helped to build the world by diving into the sea and returning with mud for the Creator to make the land masses. Other stories credit the beaver with building huge dams in the rivers resulting in an endless chain of lakes for all water creatures to inhabit.

There is no proof to suggest that Giant Beavers were hunted by early humans. In fact, some legends tell a story of these Ice-Aged giants hunting humans in their need to satisfy a carnivorous appetite.

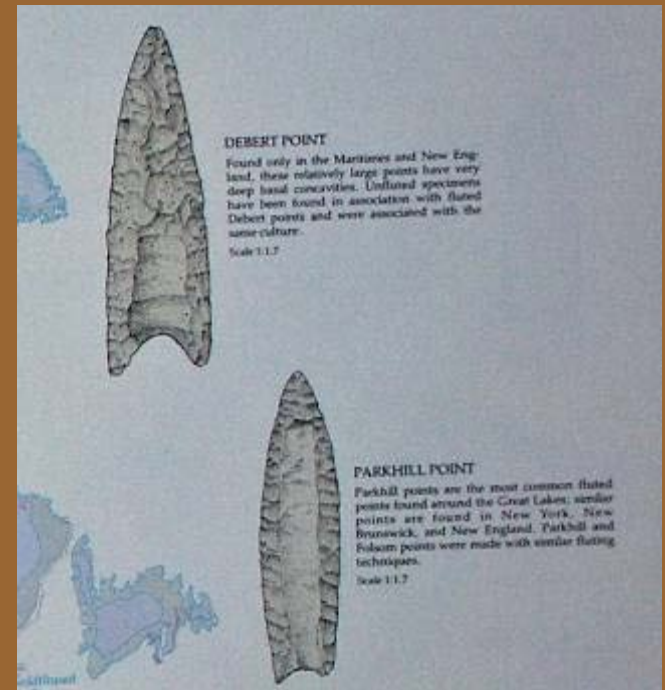
One humorous Vuntut Gwitchin legend describes an exchange of tails as parting gifts between a beaver and a muskrat. A conniving muskrat wanted the lakes to himself and suggested that the two friends go their separate ways. The suspicious beaver convinced the muskrat that his long tail would help the muskrat walk through grassy areas, and that the flat tail of the muskrat would help him [the beaver] to build dams and lodges. So with that they traded tails. The beaver climbed onto a log and drifted down the river while the muskrat joyfully headed directly north to the lakes which are now known as the Crow Flats.

Charlie Lake Cave, BC



http://www.sfu.ca/archaeology/museum/bc/clc_src/CL000100.HTM

Fluted Point Cultural Tradition



Debort Site, Nova Scotia



Plano Cultural Tradition

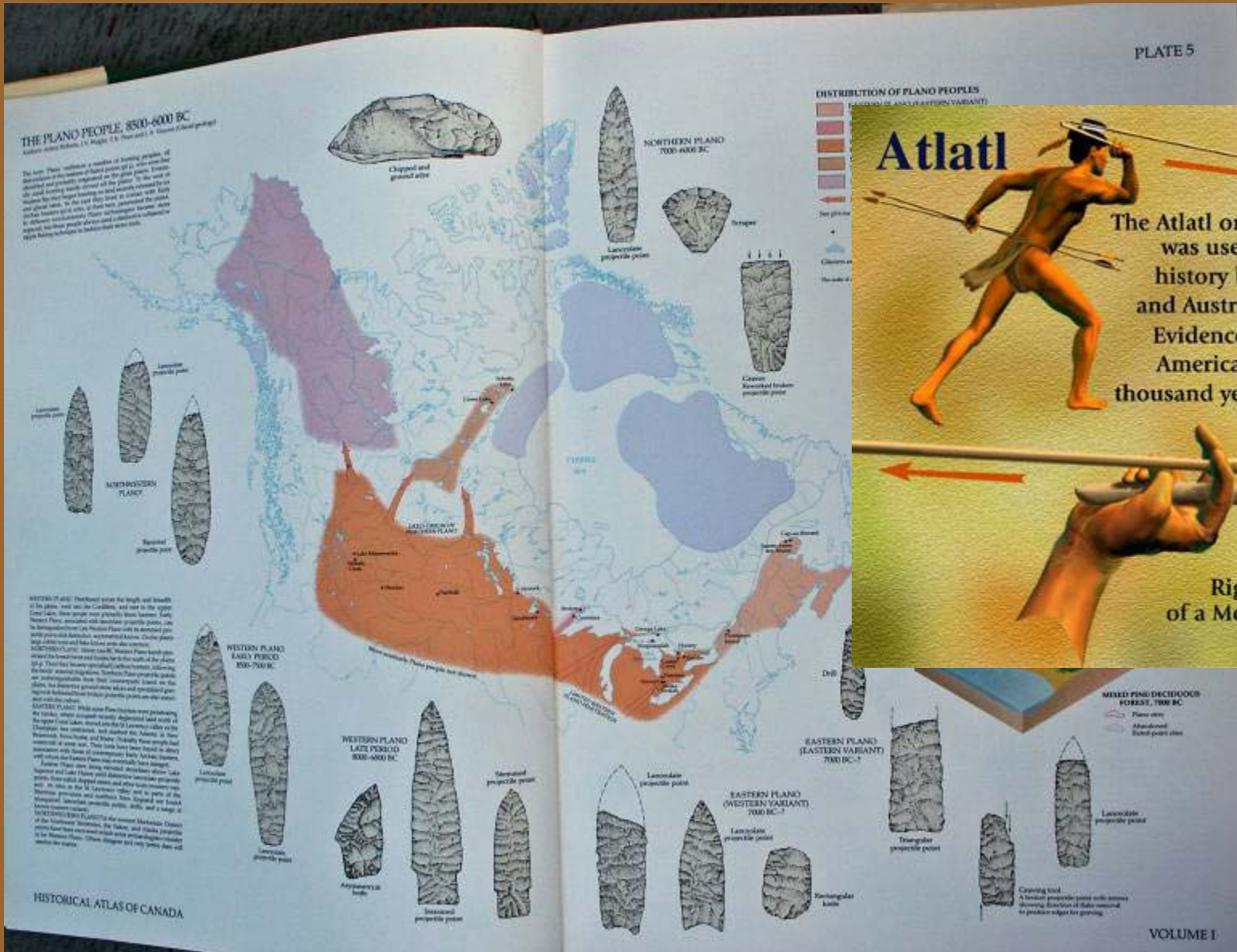


PLATE 5



Keatley Creek, BC



BC Archives #G-00754

Port Au Choix, NF (4,400 – 3,200BP)



<http://www.civilization.ca/hist/lifelines/licrf03e.html>

<http://www.heritage.nf.ca/aboriginal/prehist.html>

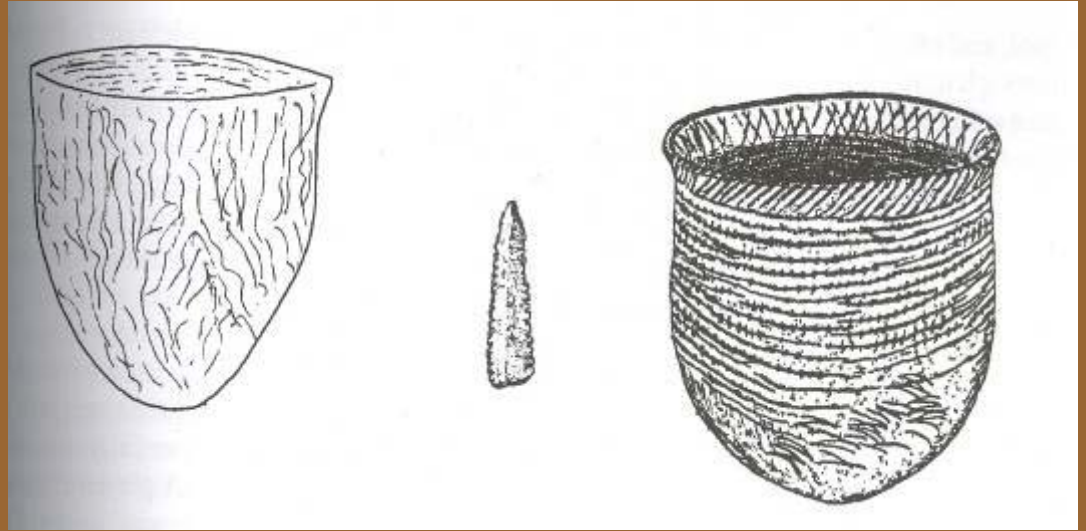
<http://www.geo.vu.nl/~palmorph/images/Phillip's%20Garden%20site,%20Port%20au%20Choix,%20Newfoundland.jpg>

Middle Maritime Cultural Tradition (2,000BP)



(From Wright, Vol I.)

Period IV Artifacts



Eg. Batsican Site, Quebec; pottery from 2000BP, St. Lawrence Valley

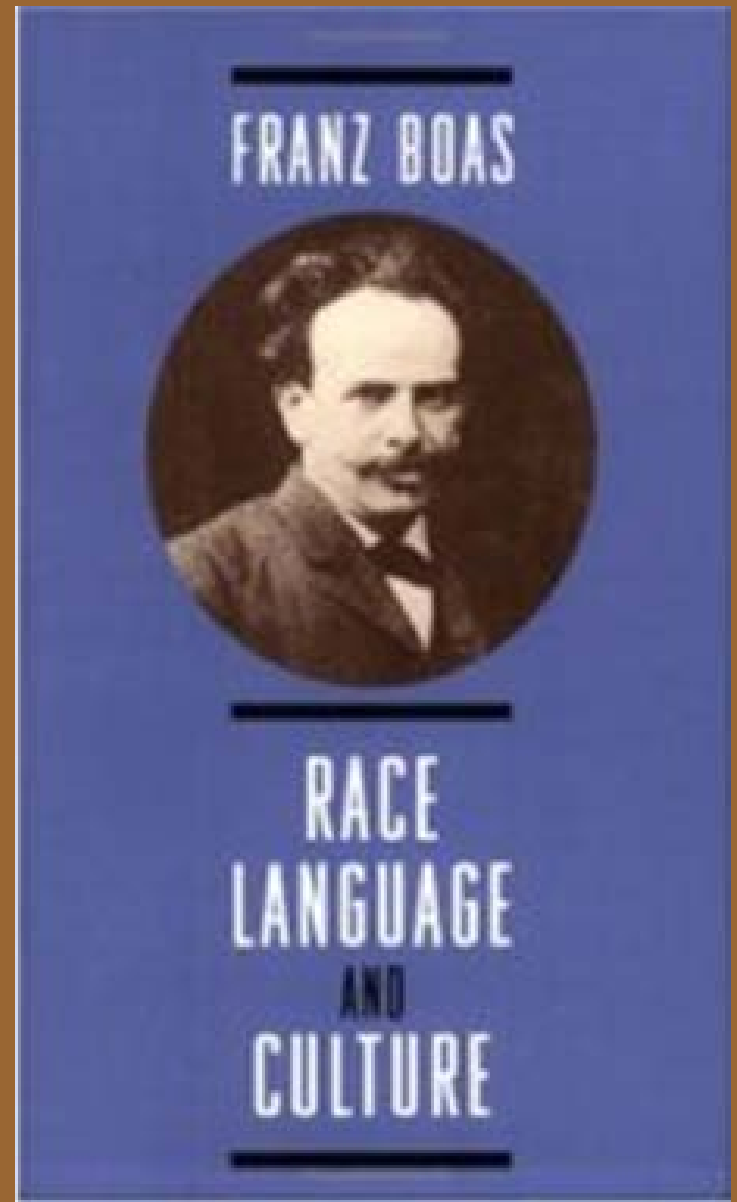
Period V: 1500-500BP



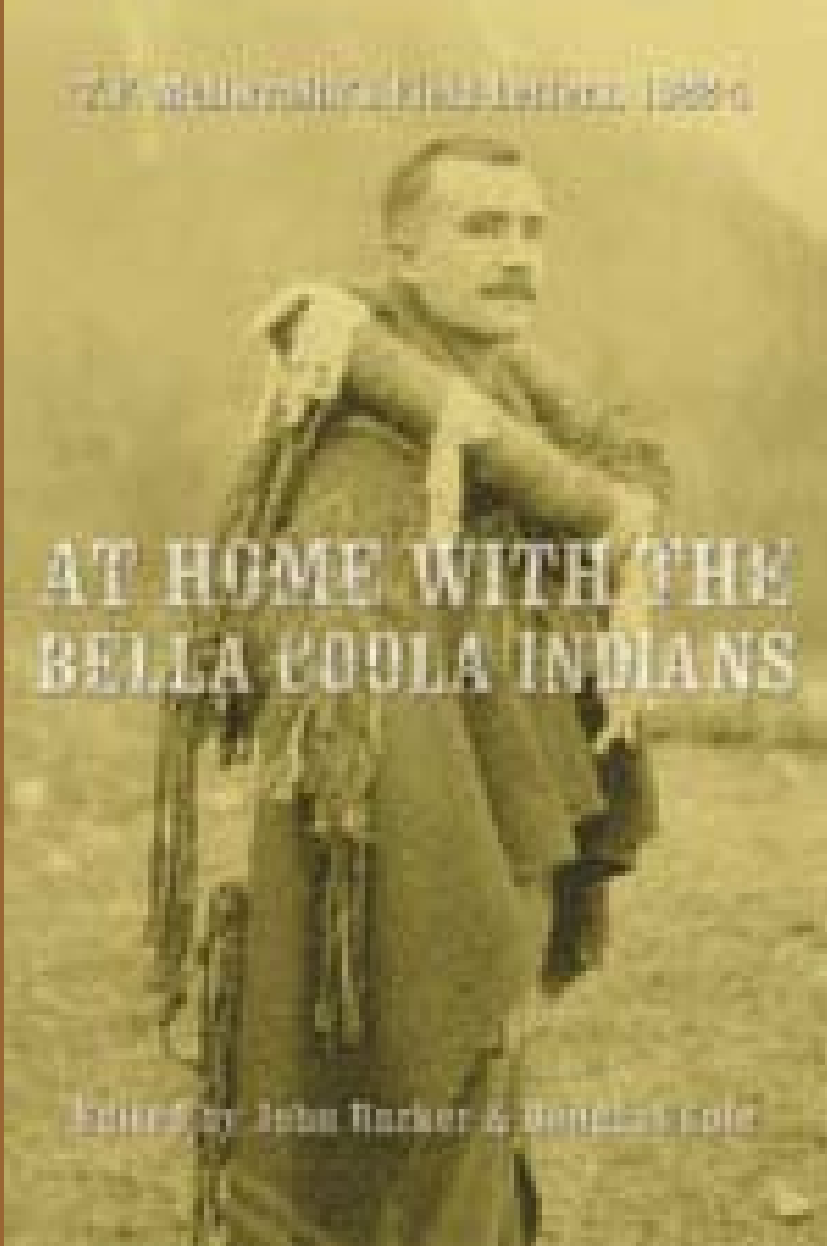
Ontario Iroquois Pottery, ca. 500-600BP



Franz Boas



Book illustration of John Tucker, 1908-9.



AT HOME WITH THE
BELLA COOLA INDIANS

Illustrated by John Tucker & Douglas Hyde

On the whole I think I had a fairly successful time at Bella Coola. The whole life of the people has been broken down by our "civilization," and we have treated them in a manner that has many points of resemblance with the Germans in Belgium. They are disease-ridden, down-trodden, and treated as dogs, while for some insane reason the government has forbidden the potlatch¹⁰⁸ in which centres their whole life; it is the essential feature at all marriages, deaths, and winter ceremonial dances. There were about six old men who were unspoilt by the missionaries and I got on the best of terms with them. It was easy to become friends with them as they were so accustomed to white men who had no interest in anything Indian, that they were pleased with the change. I liked the people very much: they were cheerful, lazy, fairly reliable in most things except where time entered into the bargain, dirty, intelligent, kindly, and very proud of their own customs.

I found it depressing working with the survivors of a once numerous people and having my friends, the old Indians, lamenting the days that have gone, realising all the time too, that it was the white man who was

responsible. The Bella Coola language is an absolute brute, but all the Indians speak a Chinook lingua franca which can be learnt in three weeks. Thanks to this I was able to get along without an interpreter. The Indian Agent never went near the Indian village unless there was trouble, while the missionary was too lazy to learn Chinook (in spite of the fact that only about three Indians spoke intelligible English), so my friends used to come to me for everything. I refused to answer medical questions, but made a shot at all others, especially theological ones. I have named babies (not to mention nursing the dirty and howling brats on all occasions), helped hide wine from the police, prevented a murder (out of respect for the intending murderer, NOT for the victim), helped in a potlatch (forbidden by law), taken part in horse-play in the village, helped old men with their salmon nets, put drunk Indians to bed, taken their part against the missionary, agreed emphatically that much in the white man's bible was wrong and inferior to their own religion, given my valuable (?) assistance to settling disputes, and done many other things that would be considered undignified by the majority of American anthropologists.¹⁷

With the advantage of being on friendly terms with the people my chief difficulties were the infernal language, the decay of all the customs, and the trouble of getting the people to tell me what I want to know, rather than what they thought I ought to want to know. This last trouble was a brute as far as pedigrees were concerned, I fell down badly on that point. I won't try to give you any account of the material I collected. I had a mass of folk-lore thrown at me, and got a good deal about marriage with its great complexities and elaborate system of repayment by the wife's family to ensure a good position for the children, death with its complexities, winter ceremonial dances which are not dances at all but dramatic representations of experiences of ancestors, shamanism, the