More fluted point finds from the Unadilla Valley

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Introduction

Over a dozen fluted projectile points have been recovered from the Unadilla Valley, making it one of the largest concentrations of fluted projectile points in New York State outside of the Hudson Valley. Fluted points and point fragments are still being found by collectors, and other Paleoindian artifacts likely remain undiscovered in other private collections. This report provides new information about three new fluted point discoveries made in the Unadilla Valley since Funk's (1993) study of Paleoindian fluted point finds in the Upper Susquehanna drainage.

Previous Examinations

In New York State the popular interest in fluted points can be traced to Ritchie's (1957) study *Traces of Early Man in the Northeast*, which described what was known about Paleoindians at that time and provided a list of known fluted point find spots. None of these points came from the Unadilla Valley, although later interest in Paleoindians ultimately led to a series of three inventories of fluted points encompassing the drainage.

In 1959 Paul Van Hosen conducted the first fluted point survey in the Unadilla Valley and published his findings in the Chenango Chapter NYSAA Bulletin (Van Hosen 1959). Van Hosen described 6 fluted points occurring in along the Unadilla, as well as other fluted point finds in the Chenango Valley and along Canaderago Lake. Eighteen years later, Ted Whitney expanded upon Van Hosen's list, providing descriptions of 44 Paleoindian artifacts from the Chenango area, including 17 from the Unadilla drainage. Finally, Funk (1993) included a table of all known fluted points in the Upper Susquehanna Valley (n=41), including twelve recovered from along the Unadilla.

One of the problems I first encountered in trying to understand the number of fluted points was that while each of the subsequent inventories were based on the previous studies, none of the studies used all of the previous examples. Additionally, some of the inventories include scrapers, knives and other objects also thought to be Paleoindian in origin, further complicating matters. Funk (1993:174) notes that he chose not to include all of the known points on Whitney's (1977) list, since several of them appeared to actually be Jacks Reef Pentagonal points. Funk also did not include a knife which he felt could date to any period. It would appear that Whitney was also selective in his sampling of Van Hosen's (1959) study, since only 3 of the 8 points illustrated were included in his inventory. Several of these excluded points also appeared to be later pentagonal forms. This propensity of mistaken Jacks Reef points is likely due to the morphological similarity between later pentagonal and smaller Paleoindian fluted points as well as the high number of late Hunters Home and early Iroquoian sites in the Unadilla drainage.

Table 1.
Fluted point finds reported between 1959 and the present in the Unadilla Valley

Current Study Number	Funk (1993) Number	Whitney (1977) Number	VanHosen (1959) Number	Find Name/Location
1	12	1		Spooner Farm W. Edmeston
2	13	3		Yaw Bridge Long Farm
3	14	2		Felton Farm W. Edmeston
		5	5	Barrell Farm
		6	3	Rogers Farm. W. Edmeston
4	15*	4	7	Rogers Farm. W. Edmeston
5	16	7	1	Yaw Bridge Howard Farm
6	17	8	2	Butternut Valley
7	18*	9		Unadilla Valley
8	19	10		Unadilla Valley
9	20*	11	8	Yaw Bridge Howard Farm
10	21	13		Gregory Farm Silver Lake
11	22	23		Junction at Hotaling Farm
12	25	12		Turner Farm New Berlin
		15		Brodie Farm S. New Berlin
		29		Stillman Farm Great Brook
		30		Brooks Farm Great Brook
13				McElligott Point-Mt Upton
14				Letson Point-Sidney
15				Parsons Point-Rockdale

*Deemed suspect by Funk (1993:174)

Based upon my current understanding, a total of 15 established fluted points have been reported from the Unadilla Valley and the confluence at Sidney as shown in Table 1. This figure includes three fluted point finds reported in this article as well as three points which Funk (1993:174) included in his inventory but which he felt were suspect (these points are shown with an asterisk). The approximate locations of these finds are plotted to show the distribution of known fluted points as shown in Figure 1.

New Reports

This article is intended to provide information about three previously unreported fluted projectile point finds recovered from the Unadilla drainage. All of these points were found by collectors and do not occur in the previous fluted point inventories, showing that new finds are still being made. Information about each of these finds is provided below.

McElligott Point Find

Clearly the most spectacular of the new fluted point finds discussed here was recovered by Pat McElligott in the vicinity of Mount Upton (Figure 2). The point has a small chip but is otherwise complete, measuring 67.5 mm long and 31.5 mm wide at the widest point. The base is deep and shows evidence of grinding. A single flute flake scar occurs on each face of the point. One flute is roughly twice as long as it is wide, measuring 2.2 x 1.2mm and terminating in a step fracture (Figure 2a), while the other appears rounder, measuring approximately 1.7 x 1.6mm (Figure 2b).

It is unclear what raw material the McElligott point is made from. The point has a deep patination on all sides. A tan colored speckling occurs on the obverse face of the point, although it is unclear if this is part of the surface patination or if it occurs within the raw material itself. The McElligott find is also significant in that it was found very close to a large chunk of chert that also shows very similar patination.

The McElligott Point appears to follow the Gainey tradition, a form of fluted point with a deep base and expanding sides. While there is some debate as to the origin and diffusion of Gainey points, they are generally considered to date to the middle part of the Paleoindian Period, occurring after the better known Clovis varieties but before the latter, unfluted point styles (Simons et a; 1984).

Parsons Point Find

Sometimes very small finds can be of great importance to archaeologists. A small base from a fluted projectile point was found by Mike Parsons near the roadside on the east side of NYS Route 8 just north of the hamlet of Rockdale (Figure 3). The fragment was very small and had further broken into two fragments, but still retained sufficient evidence of fluting and grinding to be identified as a Paleoindian point.

It is difficult to cull dimensions from such a tiny fragment, since it unclear exactly how large it might have been when originally made. The fragment is 24.1 mm wide at the base and 27.8 mm at the broken medial point, and measures 5.2 mm at its thickest point. One flake scar appears on each face of the point fragment, measuring 17.1 mm and 16.6 mm, respectively. While extremely fragmentary, the Parsons base appears to follow the same shape and dimensions as the McElligott point, with a deep base and slightly expanding sides. The fact that this point was found not far downstream from the McElligott fluted point suggests the possibility of a middle Paleoindian-era encampment occurring somewhere between Rockdale and Mount Upton.

The fragment appears to be made from a bluish chert with red and white mottles. The material appears similar to varieties of Normanskill chert found in the Hudson Valley and Saratoga Lake areas of eastern New York. Mr. Parson states that he had shown the fragment to William Starna, professor emeritus at SUNY Onenota. Dr. Starna confirmed the early age of the fragment, and also thought that it was likely made from a variety of Normanskill Chert. It would be interesting to learn if the point were made from a northern (Saratoga Lake/Flatley Brook) or southern (Flint Mine Hill/West Athens Hill) Normanskill source, as the results may have implications regarding the movement and

dispersal of Paleoindians along the landscape of central New York State (Lothrop and Younge 2011).

Letson Point Find

A second fluted point base was found by Terry Letson near the confluence of the Unadilla and the Susquehanna Rivers (Figure 4). This base is slightly excurvate and roughly square in shape, measuring approximately 30.2 mm long to the break. It is 29.6 mm wide at the base, and 35.2 mm wide at the break. The point appears to have broken somewhere below the midsection, making its original length unclear, although the wideness of the base suggest that it might have been quite long.

This base appears to be made from a light greenish material, although it does not resemble the greenish "Coxsackie" (Normanskill) shale chert commonly found in the Hudson Valley in Greene and Columbia Counties. It appears mildly patinated, and an unusual dark blue inclusion is visible in the obverse side. The base was shown to a number of archaeologists, including George Paulson, who recently completed his masters project on the different chert types found in our region (Paulson 2010). Mr. Paulson thought that this chert was most similar to material he'd previously found in the Ohio Valley, and suggested that the material might have come from that region.

As mentioned previously, the base appears relatively wide and slightly excurvate, and seems to follow an early Paleoindian form. The base was roughly square and showed evidence of grinding consistent with other finds. One large flake scar occurs one side, while two channel flute flakes have been removed in succession along the other side of the base prior to final grinding (Figure 5a).

Discussion

Clearly, more work is needed in identifying fluted points within private collections and in identifying possible locations for finding intact Paleoindian deposits. While little has been done in terms of placing these points within a chronological sequence, fluted points recovered from the Unadilla Valley appear to show marked variation in size, morphology and manufacturing techniques that would suggest that the valley had been used by Paleoindian people, at least intermittently, for hundreds or thousands of years.

The Unadilla Valley is an outstanding location for individuals interested in studying Late Pleistocene adaptations in central New York. Much of the previous research in the state has focused on quarry sites in the Hudson Valley as well as at isolated sites in central and western New York. The Unadilla provides an excellent source of information for examining those early adaptations not directly associated with raw material extraction. Quarrying and lithic procurement have been traditionally emphasized in Paleoindian studies because of their implications regarding raw material sources and migration patterns. Quarry sites have also been traditionally emphasized because they represent the richest known Paleoindian sites, both in terms of artifact density and intact deposits. Isolates and clusters of fluted point finds from the Unadilla and adjoining and Susquehanna valleys are often interpreted as reflecting transportation routes (Wellman

1982), which clearly they were. However, it seems likely that these finds might also hold the potential to tell us much more about what these people were like.

Both of the newly described finds discussed above were found in secondary contexts- in plowed fields or adjacent to the stream edges. Our understanding of Paleoindian life in the valley would be greatly enhanced by identifying potential locations for finding stratigraphically intact components. Also, while most collectors are aware of fluted points and how to identify them, far fewer are familiar with Paleoindian scrapers, cache blades and other temporally diagnostic tools also thought to be associated with these people. Educating collectors about what to look for may also help lead to further new discoveries.

In order to improve our understanding of Paleoindians in New York State, John Lothrop of the New York State Museum has developed the New York Paleoindian Database Project (NYPID). The goal is to better document the occurrence and distribution of fluted points in the state. Individuals with fluted points in their collections can download and fill out forms describing their points and the locations where they were found. This information then will be integrated into the Paleoindian Database of the Americas (PIDBA), a large scale study of Paleoindian sites and artifacts from across both North and South America, in hopes of increasing our broader understanding of life at the end of the ice age.

Acknowledgements
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More information about how to contribute to the New York Paleoindian Database (NYPID) can be found on their website:

http://www.nysm.nysed.gov/nypid/index.html

More information about the Paleoindian Database of the Americas Project (PIDBA) can be found at:

http://pidba.utk.edu/

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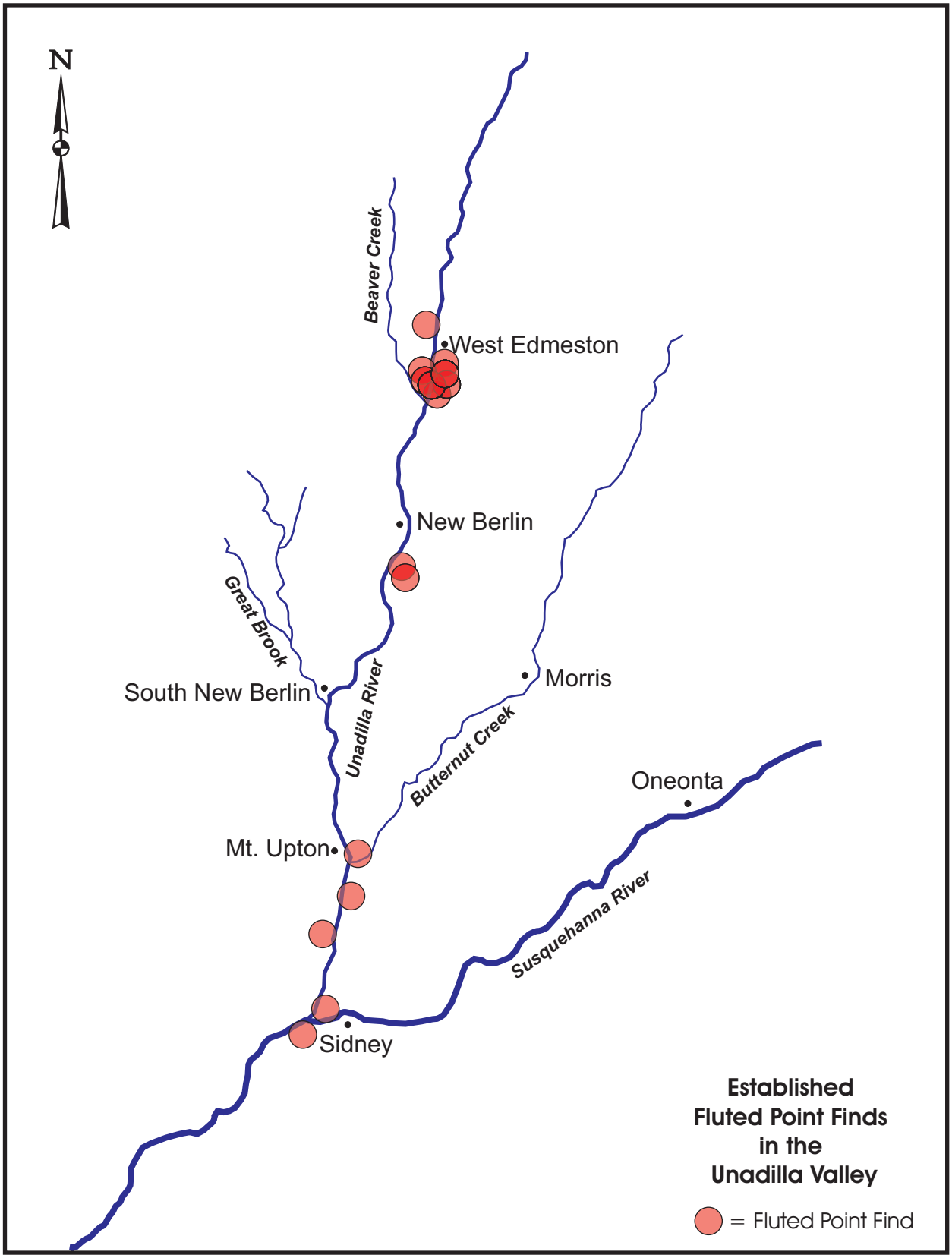

Figure 1. Map showing the location of established fluted points in the Unadilla Valley. All locations are approximate.

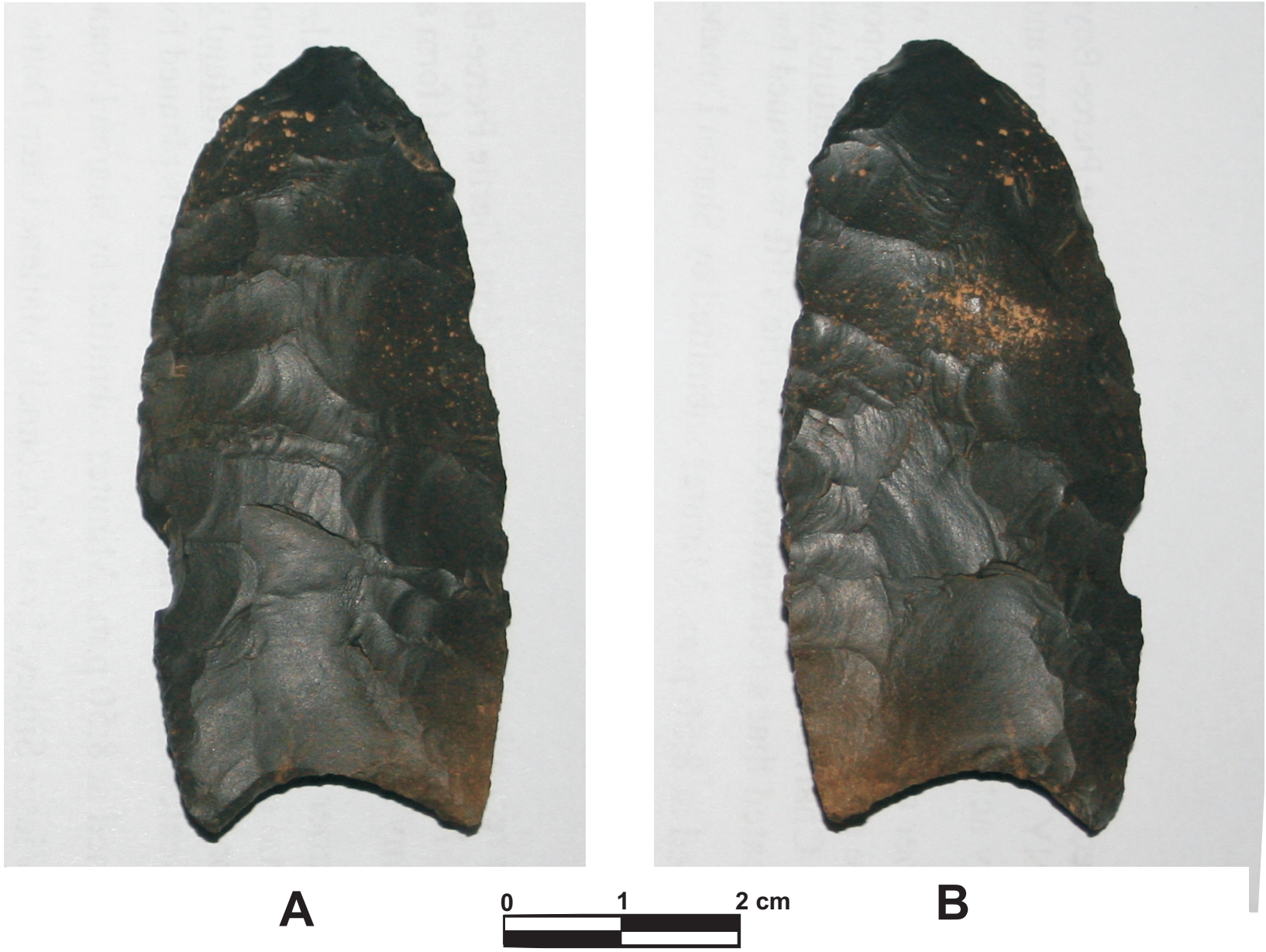

Figure 2. Complete fluted point discovered by Pat McElligott.

A

B

Figure 3. Fluted point base found by Mike Parsons.

A

B

Figure 4. Fluted Point Base found by Terry Letson.

A

B

Figure 5. Detail of fluted point base showing grinding. A=Terry Letson B=Mike Parsons.