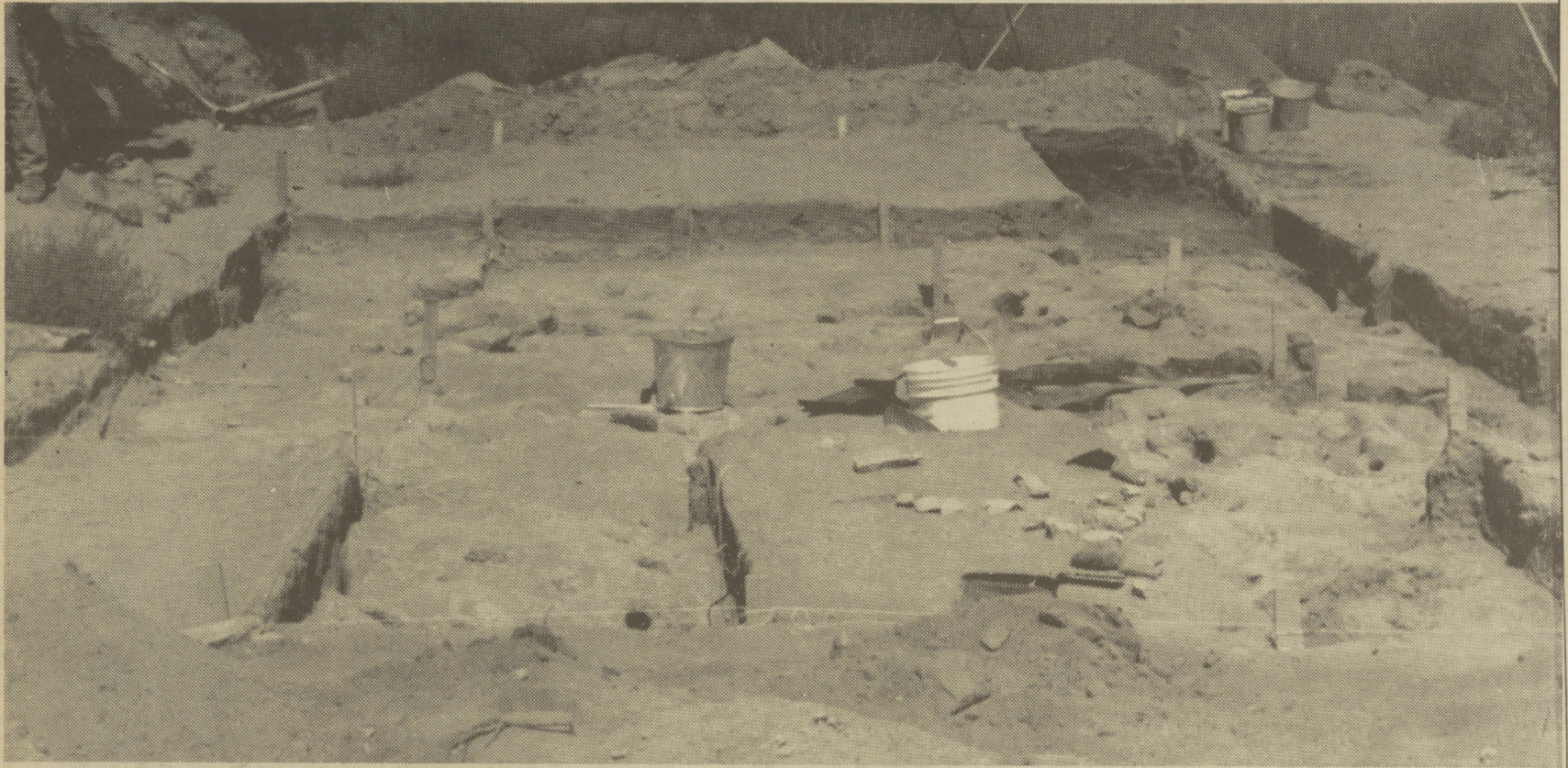


Part of past revealed in excavation



The site during the dig in 1981

by Donna Behrend

In April 1981, the remains of at least 12 people were discovered in Prineville-area by farmer Norm Forgey 7 miles north of the Central Oregon town. Those remains were re-buried in a special vault at the Agency Cemetery following tribal ceremonies at the Agency Longhouse earlier this month.

The story, from the initial discovery to the final burial, unfolds like this. Forgey was leveling a field, preparing it for planting, when he realized he had uncovered human remains. His first thought was to merely pull his find out of the way and continue to work.

But when he saw there were too many, including skulls, he decided to stop and contact a friend who was familiar with such things. This friend, in turn, happened to mention the discovery to Bureau of Land Management (BLM) archaeologist Susan Crowley Thomas.

She immediately contacted Forgey and cordoned off the area so that excavation could begin. She also contacted the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs because of the proximity of the site and because of the Oregon State Law which says that all Indian burial sites found within the state must be reported so they can be protected. Forgey continued his farming and worked around the 4 yard by 5 yard area.

Thomas and her husband Scott, who is also an archaeologist, were the two people responsible for the excavation. Working every weekend for about 6 months, the Thomases painstakingly dug the area where they found, not only the human remains, but over 500 hundred artifacts as well.

Thomas said the remains were in excellent condition and much older than they had first thought. Radio carbon-dating, done in Florida, shows that the remains are 600 to 700 years old. The artifacts found at the site indicate that the people were from the Columbia River Basin area.

At first it was thought the site was a burial site. But because of the haphazard way the bodies were situated and the discovery of evidence of warfare, the Thomases feel the group was attacked and died where they fell. There was also evidence that the group had a permanent shelter of some kind and that it was burned down on top of them.

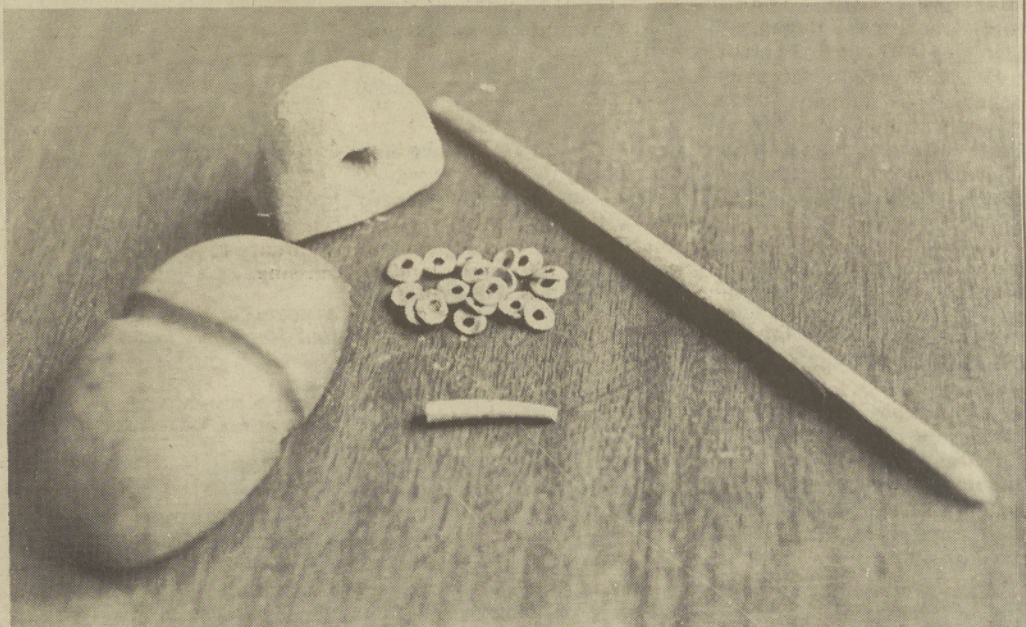
Study of the remains showed that two males and two females of the group were in their mid-twenties. Three other males were children under 10 years of age and one other child who was buried near one of the women was under five years of age. There was also one other thirteen to eighteen year-old whose sex was undeterminable.

One of the adult men had a bone disease and cavities, which was very uncommon at the date in time, said Thomas. One female was found to have an arrowhead in her spine and the youngest child had a spearpoint in the pelvic area.

The artifacts were, to say the least, amazing. Tiny arrowheads were perfectly sculptured with the points as sharp now as they were then. Some are made of obsidian while others are made of other native stones. They also found antler splitting wedges, bone tools that could have been used for making arrowheads or basketmaking, a bone hairpin, a piece of native lead metal which has a hole drilled through it and many other items.

All are very well preserved for their age. There is even a club head that was used at a much earlier time that the archaeologists think is a family heirloom. Artifact are currently at the Thomas' home in Prineville awaiting cataloging. They will be available for further study and eventually they will be in the Warm Springs museum.

It is difficult to imagine the type of life these people led, what the terrain was like, animal habitat—the list goes on and on. But this type of discovery definitely links the Warm Springs tribe to a past known by few cultures today.



Just a few of the artifacts found



A sketch of the site and the way the remains and artifacts were found.