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August 1, 1968

Dr. Robert E. Greengo
University of Washington
Department of Anthropology
Seattle, Washington

Dear Bob:

Thanks so much for the copy of the letter to Dave Sanger relative to the implement which allegedly assisted in artifact manufacture. I think Mr. Lemley has been carried away with the not too uncommon myth of artifacts being formed by dropping cold water on hot stone. Unfortunately, this is an old wives tale put in the Boy Scout manual many years ago and I have spent a lifetime trying to dispel this foolishness.

There was never an artifact made in this way. Try dropping cold water on hot stone sometime, and you will find that it will just craze and crack and, if fracture did occur, it would in no way resemble the removal of flakes by the application of force, i.e. pressure, indirect percussion, or percussion. How could anyone possibly think that by dropping water on hot rocks, the aborigine could attain the beautiful control of flake removal that is exhibited in both the new and old world. This is just ridiculous.

The toolmaker did use certain types of stone to abrade his platforms before the application of pressure, but natural silicon carbide is non-existent and appeared only after the invention of the Carbon Arc Furnace. So I doubt if the rock is silica carbide and, if so, it is recent.

The knapper did use certain types of stone for grinding platforms and turning the edge and also for sharpening the point of his antler tool. This sounds very much like a rock which was used for sharpening, as it would be grooved from rubbing and a grooved rock could not be used for smoothing arrowshafts. Whatever it is, it certainly was used for purposes other than as an implement for making arrowpoints.

Boby, I think it is better to be quite frank about this fallacy of working flint by rapid temperature changes before it goes any further. No reputable Museum should display an object that would give the layman a false impression of artifact manufacture. The aborigine was a very skilled artist when it came to working stone and I think we should give him the credit he deserves and hope some day we can reach his perfection.

Do wish we could have had more time together at Santa Fe to talk more extensively about your experiences in Mexico. Perhaps you will attend the Great Basin Conference at Pocatello and we can get together then. Give my regards to Alex and, again, it was nice to hear from you.

Yours very truly,

Don E. Crabtree

cc-Dave Sanger
cc-Carl Borden

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