

## Three Toolkits from Big Creek in the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness

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Figure 1. – Metal arrow point – Housepit 30, surface.

The historical homeland of the Sheepster Indians in central Idaho is so remote that one wonders when they first encountered European Americans. This band of Shoshone people, also known as Tukudeka, lived in what is today the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness. They remained in this vast landscape until the 1879 Sheepster Campaign. After months of conflict with the United States Army, they finally surrendered – fifty-one Indians, fifteen of whom were considered “warriors.” (Brown 1926:26) In 1879 the weapons used by the Indians, five rifles, two muzzle loaders, and one shotgun, indicate that they had previous contact with the outside world. In order to obtain ammunition for these armaments, they also must have had repeated contact. Archaeological evidence from Big Creek, in the form of a small diamond-shaped arrow point made of iron, indicates even earlier contact with Euro-Americans. See Figure 1. Metal arrow points had replaced stone points as early as the 1850s in the western United States. (Cruse 2008:172)

This metal arrow point was located in 1984 by Frank Leonhardy and his students from the University of Idaho when studying house pit features in the vicinity of the Taylor Ranch on Big Creek (PY-114/10VY31). They found that small groups of people had lived in house pits as far back as 2500 years ago; the major occupation at the site was from 1000 to 400 years ago. (Leonhardy 1985:54) The most recent occupation was indicated by the metal point that was found in the sod on the surface of Housepit 30, as were stone wasteflakes and some broken stone implements. (Leonhardy 1985:25)

In May of 2010, evidence was found that indicates that the inhabitants of Big Creek also had the tools and skills to manufacture metal arrow points. (Koeppen 2010) Three toolkits were found on three separate river bars where clusters of house pits are located. The largest toolkit included iron preforms (something partially shaped, indicating it was to be formed into an arrow point), fragments of a flat file, a barrel hoop fragment, a square nail fragment, a piece of folded metal, and a metal rod sharpened at both ends. See Figure 2. The metal for these artifacts may have been acquired through trade or was salvaged from areas where Euro-American activities took place, again indicating movement by the Sheepsters into areas outside the wilderness. The artifacts at each location were found in close association suggesting that they may have been in leather bags that decayed.

Metal arrow points are generally thin, between one and two millimeters. If metal that thin could not be found, thicker pieces may have been heated and hammered into thinner sheets. The barrel hoop fragment at PY-114 is thinner on one end. See Figure 2F.

Don Crabtree, a famous Idahoan who made stone tools, analyzed metal artifacts found at an Oregon Trail site in south-central Idaho. (Crabtree 1968:38-42) There he noted complete metal projectiles (objects that are hafted and used as arrows, darts, or spears), preforms, metal bangles, and metal fragments in different stages of manufacture. He believed that the Indians were using stone anvils, hammerstones, and heat to thin metal before using stone or metal chisels to cut the metal into projectiles. He also noted a finished projectile made from laminated metal. In Figure 2B there is a fragment of metal laminated or attached to the tip of the preform.



Figure 2. – Toolkit found at PY-114/10VY31

In addition to the manufacturing methods noted by Crabtree, the presence of a file in one of the Big Creek toolkits suggests that they were also used to shape the metal projectiles. The nails in the toolkits that were fashioned into awls/chisels may have also been used when working leather. Two of the toolkits contain pieces of folded metal, the use of which is unknown.

Only one other iron projectile has been recorded in the vicinity of the Payette National Forest. It is on display at the Council Valley Museum in Council, Idaho. Iron projectiles have been found in all of the western states and the diamond shape is widely distributed. (Kennedy 2009) In addition to metal

projectiles made by native people, EuroAmerican-manufactured metal points were used as trade items as early as the 1600s in the eastern United States. (Cruse 2008:172)



Figure 3. – Toolkit found at PY-116/10VY33



Figure 4. – Toolkit found at PY-117/10VY34

Artifact #	Weight (grams)	Length (cm)	Width (cm)	Thickness (cm)	Notes
PY-114.2010.1A	3.0	5.215	1.95	0.155	metal arrow point preform
.1B	2.4	4.61	1.93	0.11	metal arrow point preform
.1C	2.1	3.56	1.80	0.13	metal arrow point preform
.1D	3.0	5.11	2.12	0.12	metal arrow point preform
.1E	1.6	3.22	1.43	0.153	folded metal
.1F	6.8	4.31	2.66	0.20	barrel hoop fragment with hole
.1Ga	34.7	1.5"	1.125"	3/16"	flat file fragment
.1Gb	4.3				" " "
.1H	4.1	6.37	0.54	--	square nail – broken, not modified
.1I	6.7	10.31	0.44	--	awl – metal rod sharpened on 2 ends
PY-116.2010.2A	8.2	5.51	2.00	0.22	folded metal
.2B	2.4	4.74	1.85	0.09	metal arrow point preform
.2C	22.2	11.265	0.73	--	awl/chisel – modified square nail
.2D	2.0	2.11	1.17	0.28	folded metal
PY-117.2010.3A	4.9	7.05	0.42	--	awl/chisel – modified square nail
.3B	1.4	3.94	0.43	--	awl/chisel – modified unknown

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