

A Recent Radiocarbon Date
for Intermountain Flatbottom Pottery
from the Middle Fork of the
Salmon River, Idaho



PHOTO: J. WOODS/HERRETT MUSEUM

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Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness
U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service
Regions 1 and 4
Heritage Program
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by
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Pottery shards have been identified at some prehistoric sites in the mountains of west-central Idaho in varied contexts by many different people. Some of these discoveries have been made in the course of archaeological surveys or subsurface investigations during which information was being recorded; some have been brought to the attention of archaeologists by river runners, hunters, or other members of the public. However originally discovered, there is an extant body of data indicating that pottery was utilized by some of the Native American groups indigenous to the valleys of the Salmon River drainage prior to Euroamerican settlement of the area. The overwhelming majority of the pottery fragments are remnants of the style known as Intermountain Tradition Brownware, a flat bottomed, truncated cone, "flowerpot" style of coarse low-fired pottery which dates from approximately 1450 A.D. into the historic period (Butler 1983 :14, Coale 1963).

There have been relatively few fragments found in the Salmon River drainage. Of the nearly 300 recorded sites along the Middle Fork of the Salmon River, only 13 sites are now known to contain pottery (see Table 1). Of the 11 previously known pottery locations, 5 have been excavated, three of which have produced radiocarbon dates. Of the 7 radiocarbon dates obtained, only 1 has been reported to have been in direct association with pottery fragments, at 10-CR-592 (Hackenberger 1988).

During an inventory and monitoring of Middle Fork archaeological sites conducted by the author and Lawrence A. Kingsbury for the Salmon-Challis National Forest in the summer of 1996, an exposed prehistoric hearth containing pottery fragments was located along the trail near a recorded isolated find, 10-LH-493 (see map). A large Ponderosa pine had grown up through the hearth, exposing a portion of it around the base of the tree. The pack trail along the eastern bank of the Middle Fork then wore down the edge of the exposed hearth. The seasonal high water on the river was an additional threatened impact. When discovered in June, the distance from the hearth to the edge of the water was less than 5 meters. Given the exposed and isolated condition of the feature, the probable incipient impacts, and the presence of pottery fragments in the context of a possibly datable hearth, it was decided to excavate the feature. An area 1 meter by 0.5 meter was excavated stratigraphically to a depth of slightly less than 10 centimeters at the deepest point. The lenticular hearth remains filled the majority of the excavated area and measured approximately 1 meter long, 20 centimeters wide, and nearly 10 centimeters deep. Included in the hearth matrix were fragments of fire cracked rock, small pieces of burnt bone, one basalt flake, black sandy soil, and 136 pottery fragments. One small unifacially worked piece of grey cryptocrystalline silicate, which may have been part of the hearth at one time, was located adjacent to the western edge of the excavated area. The soil that was removed was cleaned of rock and root fragments and collected. This resulted in a radiometric sample which contained 3.98 kilograms of carbonaceous soil.

The collected hearth feature soil sample was sent to the Radiocarbon Dating Laboratory, Department of Geology, Washington State University for radiometric determination. The dated results produced a calculation of 250 +/- 50 years before present (BP) with a zero age of A.D.1950, which indicates a date range of A.D.1650 to 1750 (sample #WSU4845).

The collected pottery fragments included 9 base fragments, 9 rim fragments, and 118 body fragments. Based on the probable original size of the pot as extrapolated from the curve of the base fragments, it is estimated that approximately 55% of the vessel was recovered. The shards ranged in size from 3.5 cm down to less than 0.5 cm, with the majority between 2-3 cm in diameter. Wall thickness ranged from 0.7-0.95 cm. The rim fragments tapered to a nearly pointed edge and were slightly excurvate. The base was flat, with walls flaring out at approximately 15 degrees. Color of the fragments ranged from red to grey, and carbon deposits were observed on both interior and exterior surfaces. Temper was of granular sand, with small inclusions of quartz. The exterior and interior surfaces exhibited a grainy, randomly scraped finish that has not been "floated". There was no evidence of any design elements, either incised or punctate. The construction method was not readily apparent, although an examination of the cross sections of the broken fragments did not exhibit the variability in thickness characteristic of coil construction. There was no evidence of burnishing on any of the fragments.

From the similarity in color, construction, accretion deposits and the ratio of rim and base shards to body fragments, it is most likely that these fragments represent pieces of a single vessel, an example of Intermountain Tradition pottery as described by Butler (1979), Coale (1963), and Plew (1982).

The chronology and diffusion of material culture as evidenced by pottery has long been a subject of controversy in Idaho (Butler 1979; Plew 1980a; Harrison and Hanson 1980; Plew 1980b; Butler 1987). Although it has been generally accepted that Shoshonean speaking groups made the flat bottomed "flowerpot" style of coarse low-fired pottery known as Intermountain Tradition, it is by no means clear whether they were the only ones to do so (Butler 1979;Plew 1994). Fortunately, it is well established that the Northern Shoshone group known as the Tukudika or Sheepeaters were settled in the drainage of the Middle Fork of the Salmon River during the ethnographic period (Steward 1938:188; Reddy 1995:4-5; Pavesic 1978:9). Also, artifacts indicative of the Great Basin culture area in the late prehistoric period, including the distinctive Eastgate, Rose Springs, Desert Side Notched, and Cottonwood types of projectile points are found throughout the Middle Fork drainage, denoting a presence prior to the protohistoric period (Knudson et al. 1982; Trowbridge 1989; Kingsbury and Stoddard 1996).

The fact that these pottery fragments were collected in direct association with a radiocarbon sample from the Middle Fork of the Salmon River which yielded a date just prior to the protohistoric period indicates that in this case Shoshonean speaking peoples, probably Tukudika, were utilizing pottery in the river canyons of west central Idaho at least 250 years ago.

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Cover illustration after a photograph by James Woods of a Shoshone pot from the Crockett Site in Twin Falls County, in the collection at the Herrett Museum, Twin Falls, Idaho. In: Backtracking: Ancient Art of Southern Idaho, by Max G. Pavesic and William Studebaker. Idaho Museum of Natural History, Pocatello, 1993.

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TABLE 1

Pottery/Radiocarbon Sites on the Middle Fork of the Salmon River

10-CR-592	1230 +/- 60 BP	Direct Association	Hackenburger 1988
10-VY-67	580 +/- 70 BP	3-7cm/TU 4	Wiley & Scott 1981:6
	1050 +/- 80 BP	0-10cm/TU 3	(Shards: 2 surface
	1100 +/- 60 BP	10-20cm/TU 2	6 0-10cm
	1230 +/- 70 BP	10-12cm/TU 4	3 10-20cm)
10-VY-76	2010 +/- BP		Trowbridge 1989
	980 +/- BP		
10-LH-493	250 +/- 50 BP		Kingsbury/Stoddard 1996

Sites with Pottery on the Middle Fork (Excavated)

10-IH-65	198 shards "Intermountain Brownware"	Trowbridge 1989
"	6 shards	McDaniels Pers. Comm. 1996
10-LH-317	"potsherds in TU, Depression #7"	Trowbridge 1989

Sites with Pottery Reported on Middle Fork

10-VY-124	"shard in depression", site monitoring report, n.d.(1980's)
10-VY-128	"shards washing out of bank in camp" L. Whisnant(river guide) 1996
10-LH-28	shard found on surface during monitoring. Kingsbury/Stoddard 1996
10-LH-188	Knudson, <u>et. al.</u> 1982:131
10-LH-317	" " " " "
10-CR-596	" " " " "



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RADIOCARBON DATING LABORATORY

NAME OF SUBMITTER

Dr. Lawrence A. Kingsbury

DATE RECEIVED

June 26, 1996

DATE REPORTED

Aug. 19, 1996

SSN or PO#

WSU NO.

4845

YOUR SAMPLE ID.

Sample No. 1

14-C AGE. YEARS B.P

250 ± 50
(corrected for ¹³C)

(Del ¹³C = -25.636)

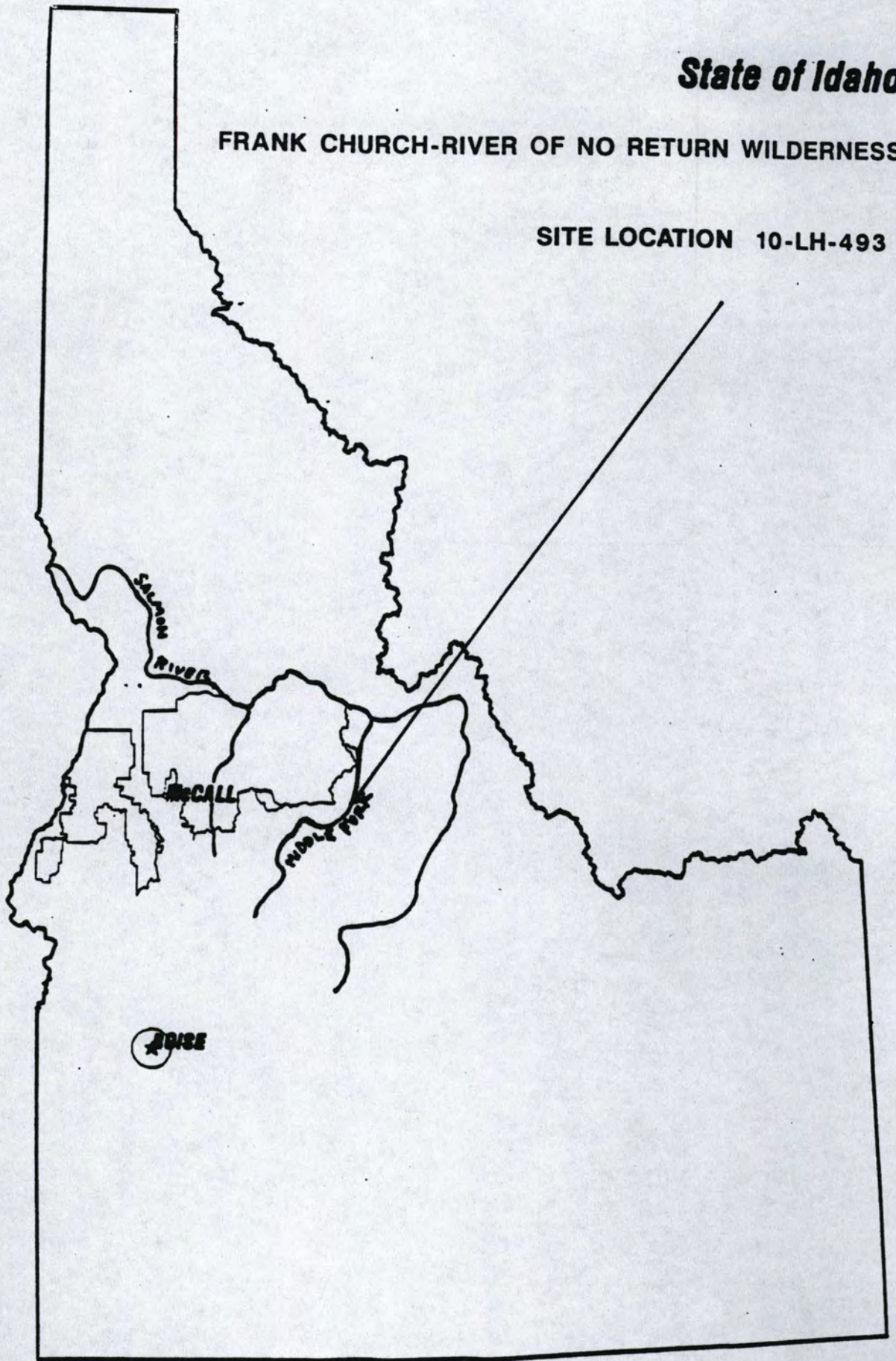
Sample Processed by: Welter
Sample Calculated by: Welter/Sheppard
Sample Reported by: Welter/Sheppard

NOTE: All analyses are based upon the Libby Half-Life (5570 ± 30 years) for radiocarbon. To convert ages to the Half-Life of 5730 years, multiply the given above by 1.03. Zero age date is A.D. 1950. (Reference: Editorial Comment, RADIOCARBON, VOL. 7, 1965).

State of Idaho

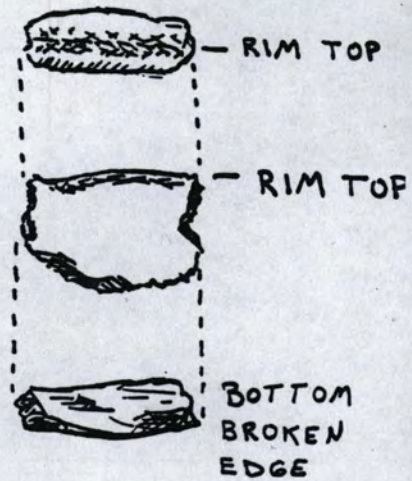
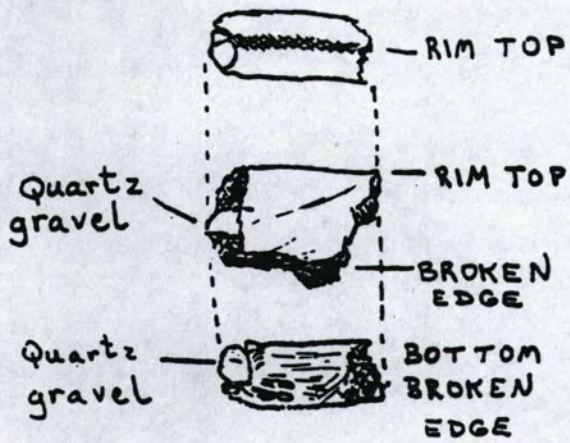
FRANK CHURCH-RIVER OF NO RETURN WILDERNESS

SITE LOCATION 10-LH-493

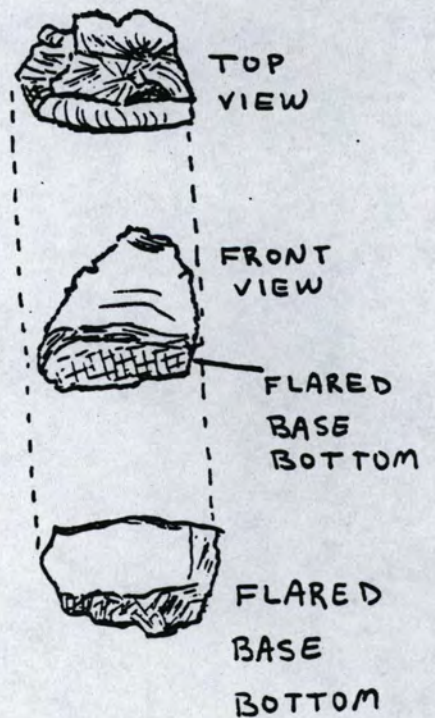
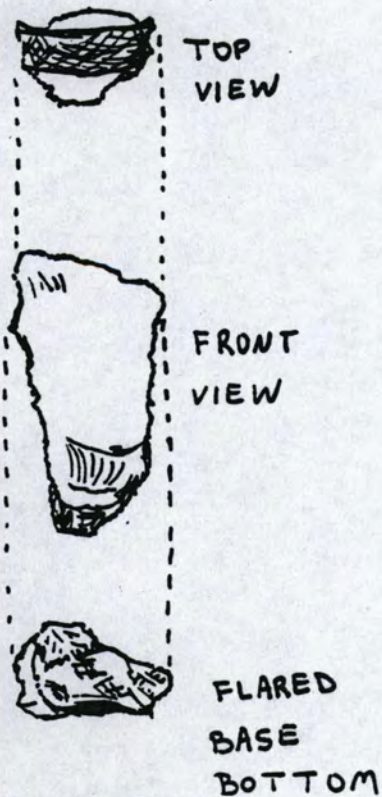


INTERMOUNTAIN TRADITION POTTERY RIM FRAGMENTS

10-LH-493 6/10/96 J. FRYE

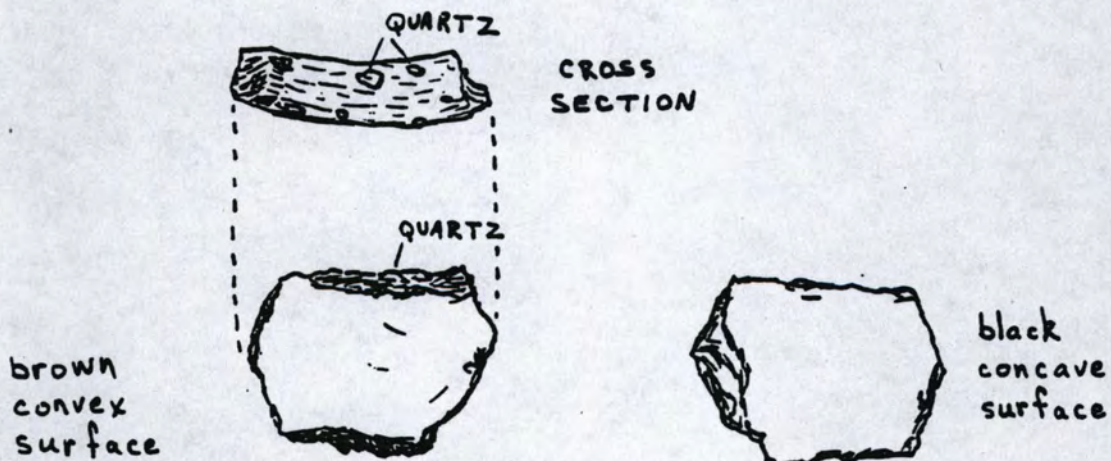
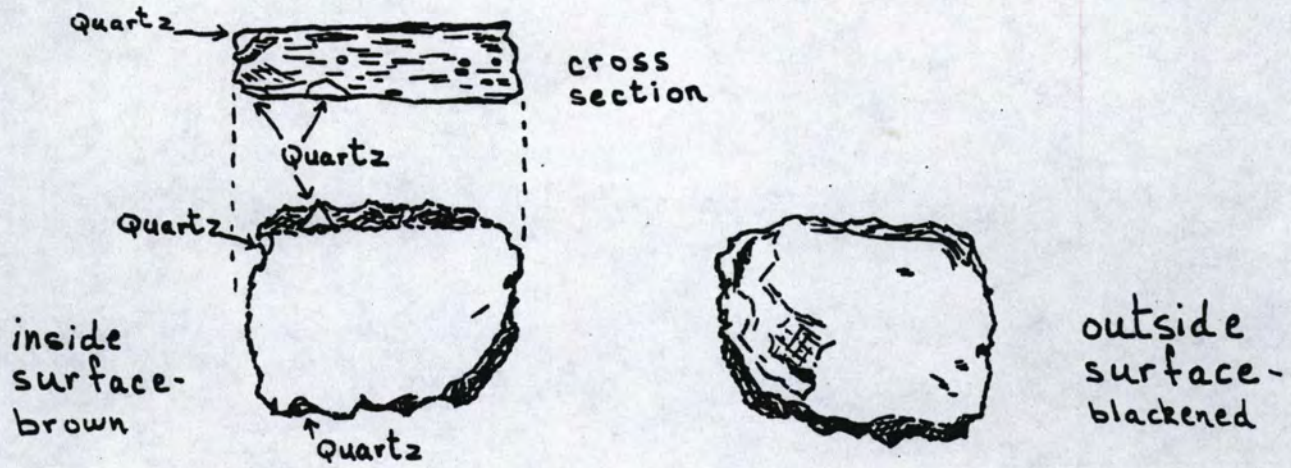


INTERMOUNTAIN TRADITION POTTERY BASE FRAGMENTS



INTERMOUNTAIN TRADITION POTTERY BODY FRAGMENTS

10-LH-493 6/10/96 J. FRYE



TOTAL POTTERY SHARDS FOUND: 136

- 9 pieces are rims
- 9 pieces are bases
- 118 pieces are midsections

- ALSO FOUND:
- 1 burned carpal
 - 1 basalt flake
 - 1 c.c.s. orau shatter



gray c.c.s. shatter