Abstract

This thesis focuses on the Matcharak Peninsula site (AMR-00196 or the MPS), located
on the east side of Lake Matcharak in the upper Noatak River valley of Alaska’s central
Brooks Range. The MPS contains a substantial and well-preserved collection of faunal
remains that date to between 6,190±35 and 3,780±35 14C years BP along with side-notched projectile points and microblade technology. Radiometric dating and stone tools
attribute the collection to the Northern Archaic tradition, thus the MPS is unique in that it
yielded the largest and most well preserved collection of faunal remains reported from a
Northern Archaic context to date. This project analyzed both faunal and lithic materials
to identify a more robust suite of human behaviors, better assess post-depositional
processes, and delineate between cultural components. This thesis first focuses on
intrasite activities and site function within a larger system of land use, indicating that the
MPS functioned as a short-term hunting camp and late-stage hunting tool repair location
occupied during warm months. A small number of individual caribou dominate the
faunal assemblage, but a narrow range of other Brooks Range prey species are also
present including Dall’s sheep and locally available fish and Arctic ground squirrel. This
thesis then develops broader interpretations about the Northern Archaic tradition to
investigate technological, mobility, and subsistence strategies by mid-Holocene Brooks
Range hunter-gatherers. The inhabitants were logistically mobile and organized special
task groups when resources were leaner, and came together in aggregated
communities to engage in communal hunts when caribou were reliably abundant. Lithic
raw material use at the MPS reflects a broader Northern Archaic trend of favoring more
exotic obsidian for maintainable tool components and locally available cherts for more
heavily engineered implements such as inset-microblade weapons. Finally, this thesis
explores side-notched and inset-microblade projectile weapon armatures in the context
of hunting strategies at the MPS and other sites, inferring bifacially tipped projectiles
were more effective at medium-range while inset-microblades were designed for long-range strategies.