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THE BURIALS ON DRY LAKE AND TCHELERY

A report prepared for the Hay
Local Land Council

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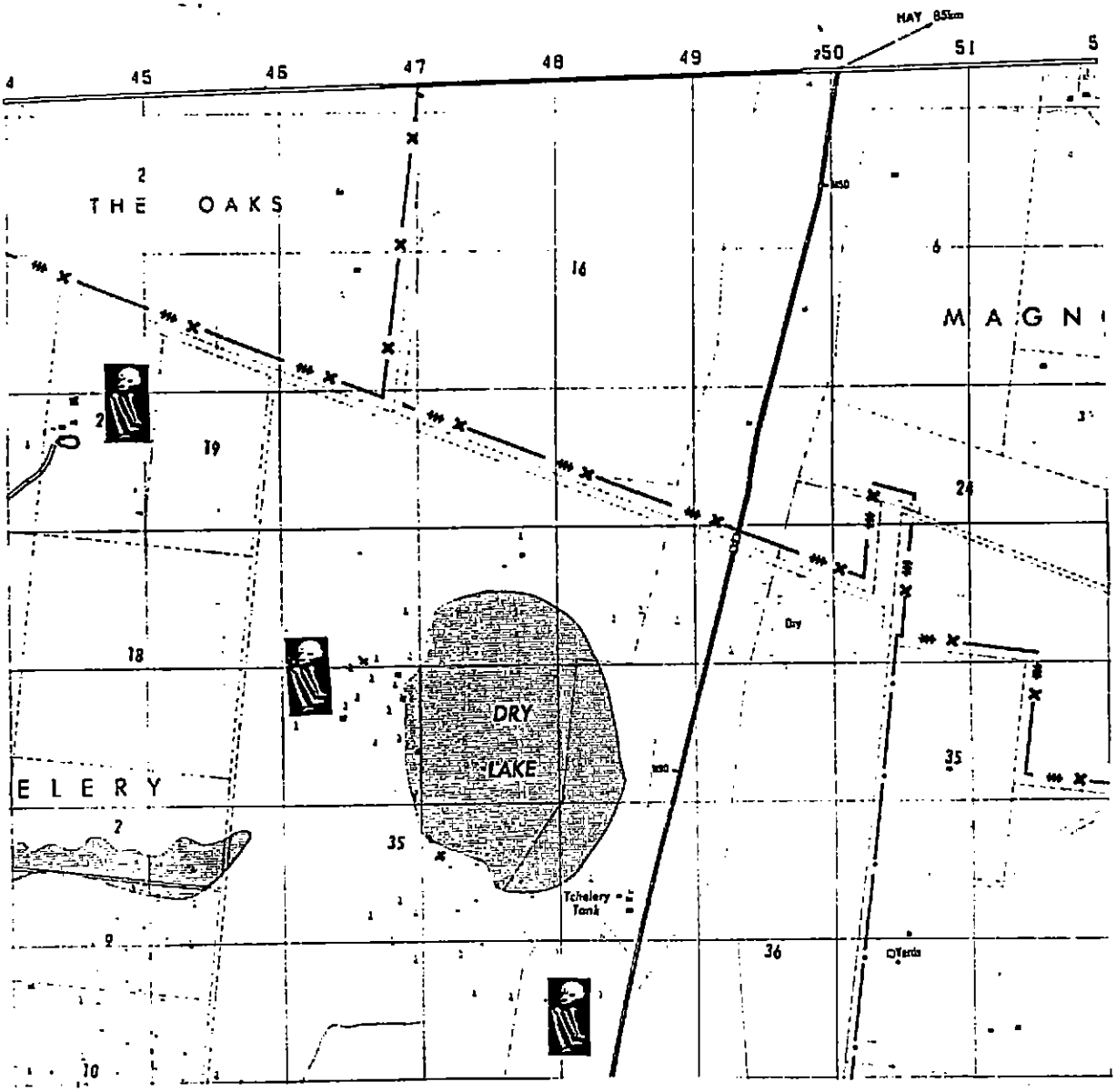
On 1-2 November, we visited Dry Lake and Tchelery to record the burials and the mound found by Ian and Terry. The last time I'd seen it (at the end of August) there hadn't been enough time to record the burials properly, so this time it was planned to completely record the burials so that plans could be made for protecting them.

This report is basically just to let you all know what we found out about the people buried on Dry Lake. The burials we looked at are marked on this map:

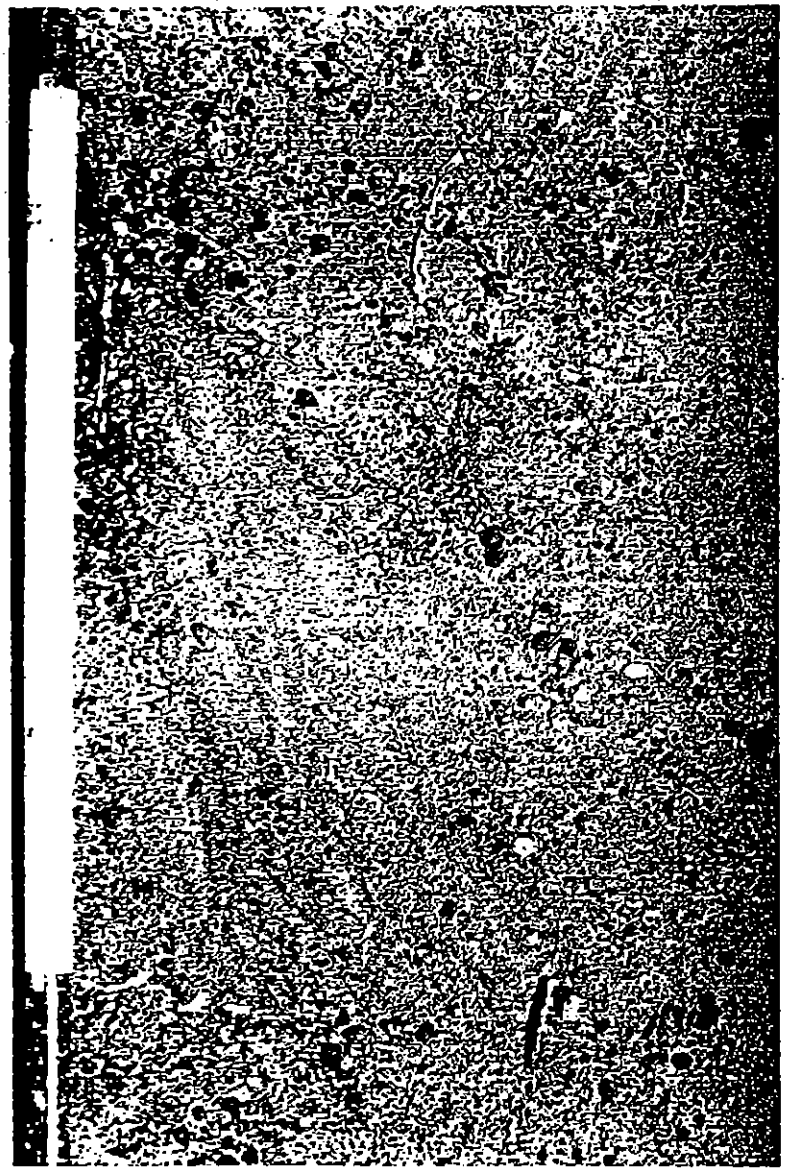


BURIALS NEAR THE BIG MOUND AT TCHELERY

About 800 metres north of the huge mound at Tchelery are two smaller mounds. Harvey, by the way, does agree that this is the largest mound he has seen so far. That doesn't help us decide, however, whether its a small group of people over a long period of time or a large group of people over a short period of time.

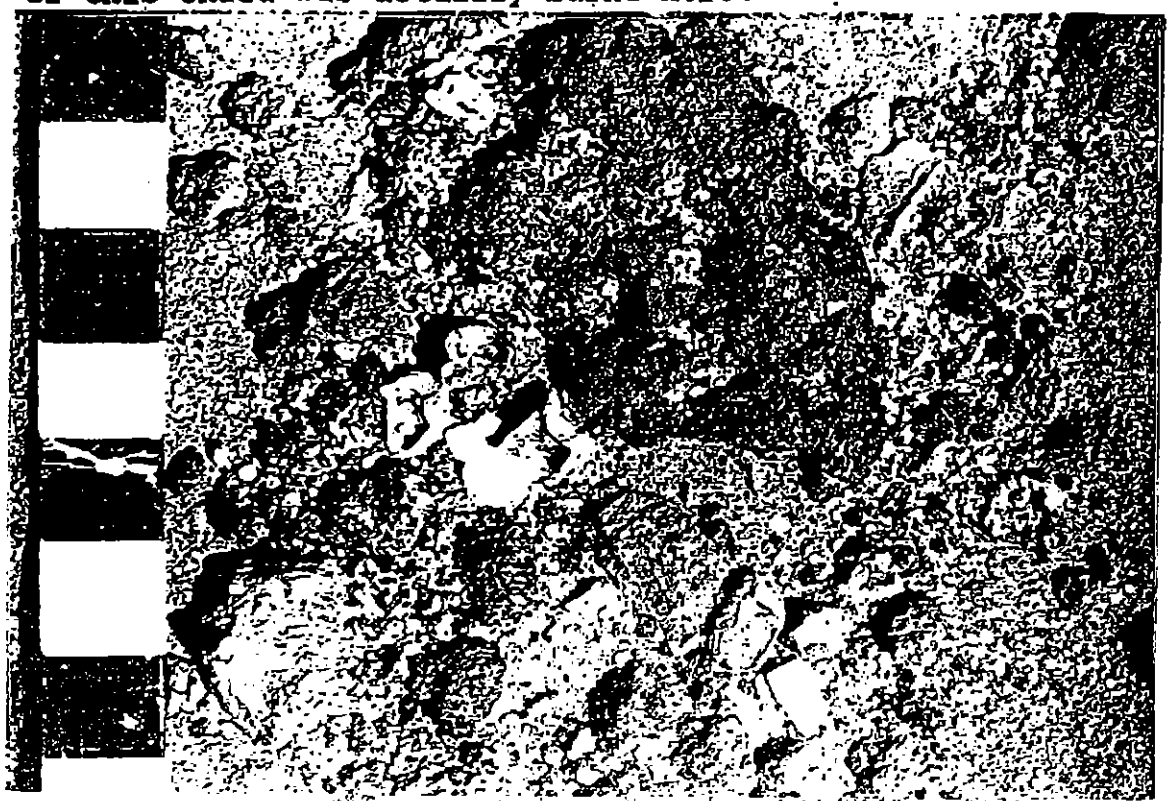
Anyway, on the western side of the most northerly mound are three burials. They're all about two metres apart from each other. The first burial is a small scatter of bone fragments mixed in with the remains of a fireplace. The bone isn't burned at all. There are a couple of teeth on the surface: a first and a third molar. The third molar (or wisdom tooth) had already come up when the person died so that shows that he or she was an adult. However, neither tooth is worn very much at all so probably this person was only about 15-25 years old when they died. I can't work out what sex he or she was because there isn't enough bone left.

Closest to this body is a burial which is just being exposed by erosion. Its the body of a child, about 10 years old, who has been buried lying on their right side, head pointing to the south-west and face to the south-east. The body is partly flexed. Flexed burials seem to be the most common position for bodies in this area; Colin Pardoe found that most bodies at Jeraly and Toogimbie were flexed.



Another two metres away is a very small group of teeth and some skull fragments that are still in the ground. This is the burial of a very young child, maybe only about 3 years old when he or she died. Its unusual to find the skeletons of babies or young children, for two reasons. Firstly, often the bones aren't preserved because they're so small and fragile. Second, it seems that in some areas children weren't buried in the same places as adults.

The bones of this child were burnt and they were found with remains of a fireplace so it may be that the body of this child was actually burnt here.



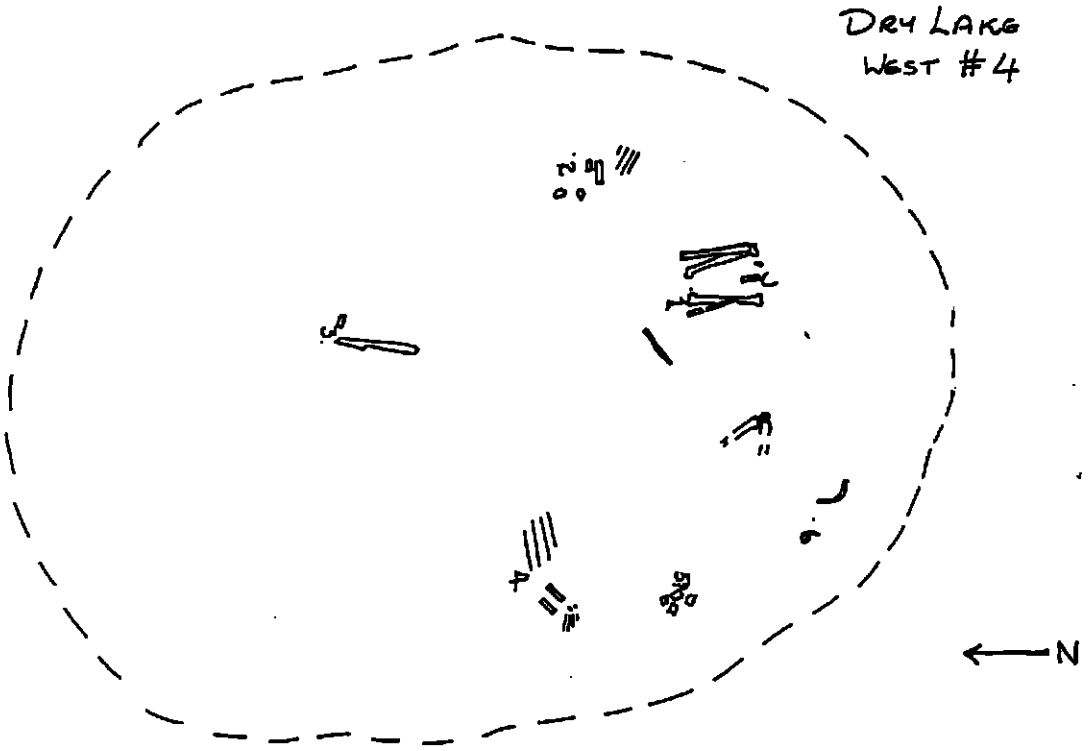
TCHELEEH BURIAL #3. BABY TEETH

THE BURIALS AT DRY LAKE

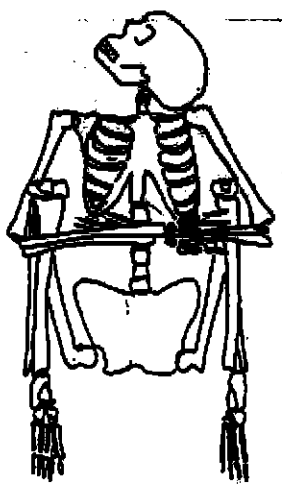
Around Dry Lake are a series of mounds about 10 in all. These all seem to be about 400 metres apart (map on the next page). Four have burials in them: the microblade workshop has two burials which have been recorded by Colin Pardoe and Dry Lake south, which I saw with Ian and Terry at the end of August has two cremations and the burial of one child. The shell mound to the south (DLW8) has fragments of one burial - an adult but it is fairly eroded and scattered.

Two mounds, however, have more than one burial. Dry Lake W4 is a small collection of hearths about 12 metres long and 7 metres wide. There are the bones of six burials eroding out of the surface. Most of the bones are scattered and mainly fragments, but we can

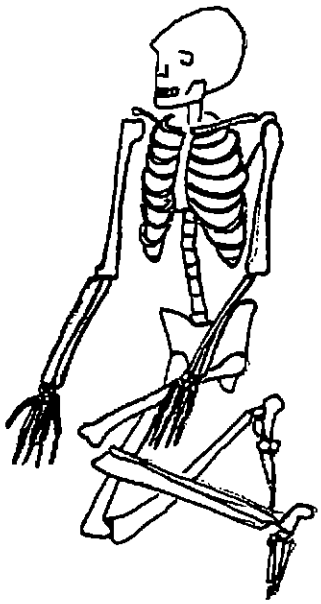
get a fair bit of information about who was buried here.



The first burial had me really confused and I'm still not quite clear about it. Its the burial of a male and, based on how worn the teeth are, he was probably around 40 years old when he died. When I first looked at this burial with Ian, Terry and Linda I thought that it might have been a bundle burial. Since then though I've read about a burial where the person was laid on their back, with their knees up to their chest, arms wrapped around their legs. I think that may be how this person was buried. His head was twisted up out of place but this probably happened while he was being placed in the ground. His head is pointing to the south-west.



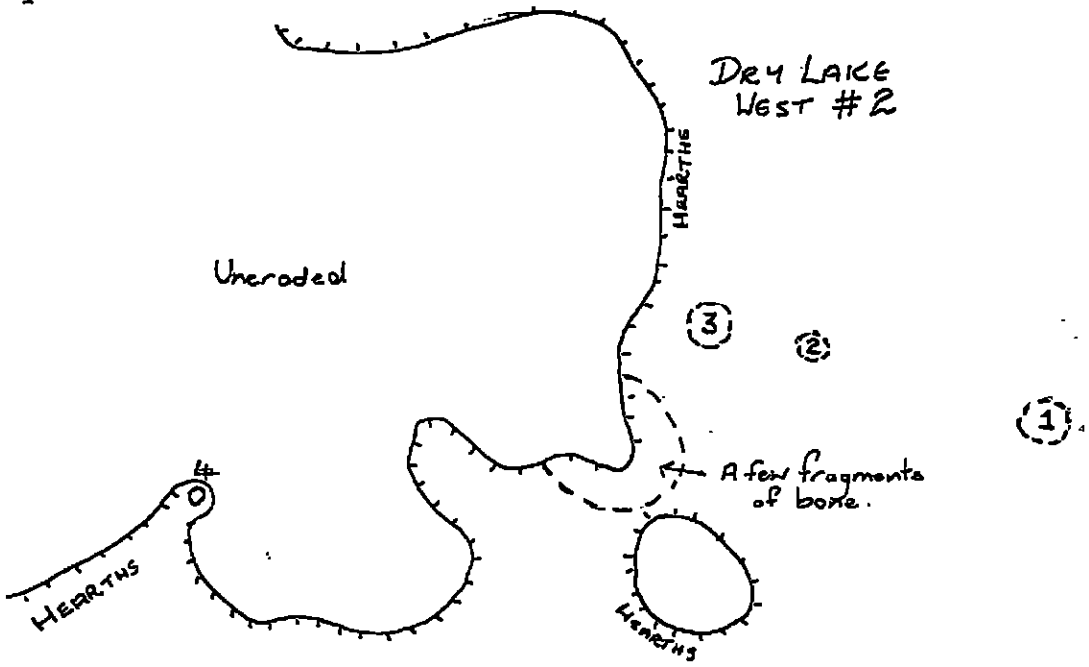
Burial no. 2 isn't so well preserved. Its the burial of an adult who was buried lying on their right side in a semi-flexed position. Only the leg and part of the jaw remains of the third burial which was also of an old adult (more than 40 years old). Burial no. 4 is the same, there is only the lower legs and feet left so its hard to be certain how this person was buried but I think they were burial lying on their right side and maybe partly bent. There are only small fragments of the fifth burial left - too little to say anything except that he or she was an adult when they died. Finally the sixth burial is that of an adult. I think it might be a woman because the skull is fairly thin but really there is too little bone left to be certain. This lady (?) was buried on her right side, knees bought up to her chest (so another flexed burial) with her head pointing to the south-west, her face towards the south. Like this:



Harvey thinks that these burials look like those at TSR 1,2 and 3. Its interesting that I counted only about 5 stone flakes over the entire area of this little mound. Maybe these hearths are associated with the burials. Some of the early historians describe mourning camps which were specially just for the period while a person was being buried. We need to think more about how camps like this would differ from normal types of camps and how to recognise them from the archaeology. At the moment, everyone is just in the process of discovering the archaeology of the Hay Plain and its hard to work out what's unusual and what's normal for this area.

The closest mound to the burials I have just talked about, is about four hundred metres away. The burials here are like those in the mound at Tchelery - they're on the end of a large mound, grouped quite close

together and there's a lot of evidence of people camping there: burnt animal bone, the odd shell fragment and lots of small stone tools. Also there's only a small number - only 3-4 people.



Most of the bone is really eroded and scattered. There are four burials - one of an adult, one of a child around six years old when they died (there's just one tooth from this child), a third one of a young adult or teenager, maybe around15 years old when they died (that's based on how worn the teeth are) and finally one that is still in place. Only the skull is visible. The skull is lying on its side, face to the north-east, top of the skull to the south-east. The bones are small and very thin. Judging from the size, this person was only a child, anywhere between three and six years old, when they died.

So all up if we look at the burials at Dry Lake and Tchelery

There are three burials at Tchelery:
the cremation of a very young child,
a child between 6-10 years old buried partly flexed,
and an adult,
along with 1 or 2 adults buried in another mound to the south of the extra large mound.

There are five places on Dry Lakes where there are burials:
two cremations and one subadult at Dry Lake south
two adults at the microblade workshop
one adult at the shell mound
one adult? in another mound to the west
one adult, one young adult/teenager, and two children (3-6 years old) in one mound

and six adults including at least two partly flexed burials and one fully flexed burial of a man on his back.

That makes a total of 22 burials in the area: six of children and probably 16 of adults so more than a quarter of the burials are children. Of the five burials where we can tell what position people were buried in all were either partly or completely flexed, most lying on their right side. Apart from this there are three probable cremations though I want to check Dry Lake 10 again since sometimes bone may have been burnt accidentally through bushfires and I need to make sure that these two really are cremations and not accidental burnings.

The pattern of burial (the numbers of children, the mixture of positions, the varying directions the bodies are facing) is really similar to what Colin Pardoe recorded for the TSRs, Jeraly and Toogimbie but it is certainly different from what Col Walker finds in his area and what is found to the west, around Euston, Dareton, Lake Victoria. At the moment, we're just getting to the stage of seeing a pattern as more sites turn up and are recorded this should all become clearer.

At the moment, the Hay Plain looks like it has its own unique pattern of Aboriginal occupation and customs. What we need to do is see if that really is the case and why.

Meanwhile, you'll no doubt be seeing more of us.