

Archaeology and Primitive Technology at the Kolb Site

For the past ten years archaeologists have been coming to the Johannes Kolb site and excavating thousands of stone tools and flakes, pottery sherds, and animal bones. Although we have always had some aspect of technology interpretation - Sean Taylor has made stone tools, Bobby Southerlin has made pottery, and Jason Smith has demonstrated 18th century lifeways - this year we are emphasizing it a little more.

The people of the past had relatively simple societies. They didn't have to deal with traffic, school, or bureaucracy, for instance, but in some ways their lives were much more complicated than ours are today. Imagine not having electricity, so that you couldn't store food for more than a few days. Imagine not having metal or plastic. Imagine no grocery stores and no department stores. Imagine walking everywhere you went. Imagine not having telephones or even paper to send a letter.

The term 'Primitive Technology' encompasses various skills people all over the world have used to survive in the natural world. Basic to these skills are the ability to create fire, twist fiber into cordage, and shape stone into knives. In our modern lives there is little need for these skills and most people would have no idea how to make a living in the natural world. However, practitioners of these skills keep this

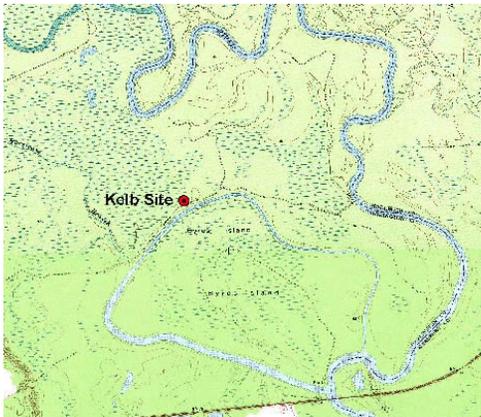


Figure 1: Site Location

knowledge alive in part because as people become increasingly disconnected from the natural world we also lose respect for that world. When people lose respect for something they cease to take care of it. Learning primitive skills develops respect and a sense of stewardship for the natural world through awareness of the skills people need to survive in that world.

Our demonstrators will show some of the ways people learned to cope with their everyday needs. Scott Jones shows how to make a stone axe and haft it to a hand made wooden handle. Tom Mancke shows that even something we might think of as a waste product - a deer foot - can be used to make cordage, fish hooks, and rattles. Because the Kolb site is right on the riverbank it is particularly appropriate that Thomas Ray is joining us this year to demonstrate ancient fishing technologies. After watching them work we can better appreciate just how sophisticated these "primitive" technologies are.

Fishing and catching other animals associated with the rivers was vitally important for the people of the past (and yes, the people of today as well). If you had to find your lunch in the world around



Figure 2: Scott Jones hafting a stone axe



Figure 3: Tom Mancke talks about the natural environment



Figure 4: Sean Taylor, demonstrating stone tool making

you every single day, knowing where to find a pretty steady supply for a couple of weeks at about the same time every year would be some pretty important information. And every year fish come upriver to spawn at about the same time, give or take a week or two. While the fish themselves are important they also attracted other predators such as bears which would provide meat, fat for cooking and furs.

And this would inevitably draw other people too. While we might not want to announce to the world where our favorite fishing spots are today, in the past there were far fewer people, and without making it known that they were going to be in a particular place at a specific time, it might be possible to go years without seeing another human being. So it is thought that far flung family level groups would come together to fish and hunt and trade useful things from their home territories such as high quality stone for other useful things, such as salt or shell for beads.

And of course, there is the social interaction. People need other people to survive. They might join together to build fish weirs or to drive deer. Or there might be a person in one group that is knowledgeable about medicine or religion. And most young people are interested in meeting members of the opposite sex. Without schools, churches, or workplaces people would rely on gatherings at places like this to meet people outside of their own family. So a place like the Kolb site might have meant much more to the people of the past than simply a good place to fish, but if you can fish, hunt, gather wild plants, and have fun with your friends all at once that would make it all that much better. For them, as with us, coming to the Kolb site could be the highpoint of the year.

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