



Richard E. Morlan (1941-2007)

In Memoriam: Richard E. Morlan

I first encountered Dick Morlan in the extremely wet summer of 1967, nearly 40 years ago, on Old Crow River in the northern Yukon. He was then a member of Bill Irving's University of Toronto field crew, which had just found two excellent steppe bison skulls farther upstream. The next year he was one of several graduate students to whom Irving directed generous contract funds. Dick devoted his portion to a major excavation at the Klo-kut site, just upstream from the mouth of Old Crow River. This work later evolved into a major contribution: *The Later Prehistory of the Porcupine Drainage, Northern Yukon Territory*. (Mercury Series: Archaeological Survey of Canada Paper No. 11, 1973).

Dick was born on 6 December 1941 in Woodstock, Virginia. His deep interest in nature was awakened in childhood as his parents and grandparents were avid birdwatchers who encouraged his participation. On his sixth birthday he was presented with a pair of binoculars and Peterson's *Field Guide to the Birds*, and these interests remained with him throughout his life. Another abiding passion was music, stimulated by his father. His forté was string bass, but he also played the recorder and several other instruments beautifully. In fact, he attended the Oberlin Conservatory of Music from 1959 to 1961.

As an undergraduate at George Washington University (Emma K. Carr scholar, 1962-1964), Dick studied under Dr. Jack Campbell, an avid ornithologist and archaeologist. His first field season was spent in northern Alaska in 1963. The

animal bones recovered during that summer's excavation inspired a lifelong interest in faunal analysis. Graduating with a B.A. in Anthropology in 1964, he then studied under the renowned archaeologist (and bird enthusiast) Dr. Chester Chard at the University of Wisconsin at Madison (N.S.F. Graduate Fellow, 1965-1967). He received an M.A. in Anthropology in 1967 and a Ph.D. in Anthropology in 1971 (University Fellow, 1967-1969). From 1967-1969, he became acquainted with Bill Irving, Bill Taylor and several other archaeologists at Canada's National Museum of Man (now the Canadian Museum of Civilization, or CMC). This led to his being hired as Yukon Archaeologist in 1969, a position in which he remained for 20 years. Dick married his wife Heather in 1973, and they were to carry out many projects together in the field and at home. Heather acted as camp manager and field assistant for several years during Dick's excavation at Loc. 15 on Old Crow River. For many years, they even cooperated in assisting injured raccoons to recover in their large, specially-constructed backyard enclosure.

The highlight of his time as Yukon Archaeologist was his organization and direction of the Yukon Refugium Project, a broadly-based, multidisciplinary study embracing geology, stratigraphy, palynology, paleontology, and archaeology. Between 1975 and 1981 this project generated a great amount of fieldwork throughout the Yukon, with most of the results published. In interpreting the archaeological finds, Dick adopted the taphonomic approach from paleontology,

and subsequently made it into an essential component of Canadian archaeology.

The year 1981 was a turning point in Dick's career. A DC-3 aircraft chartered for Yukon fieldwork crashed on take-off at Inuvik. Dick and Heather were lucky to survive, but the experience scarred them. In addition, Roscoe Wilmeth's death had opened the position of Curator of Plains Archaeology at CMC which Dick took on, allowing him to broaden his experience and change focus to a new region, the Prairie Provinces. As an Adjunct Professor at the University of Saskatchewan, Dick teamed up with Dr. Ernest Walker to conduct research in the Wanuskewin Heritage Park near Saskatoon. Dick subsequently became the first Curator of Paleo-environmental Studies at CMC, a position that suited him perfectly and that he kept. The new position allowed Dick to expand his research both nationally and internationally. Indeed, I was fortunate enough to work with him on a paleontological project in Washington State. At CMC, Dick developed the Canadian Archaeological Radiocarbon Database (CARD) – a pinnacle of achievement. Now containing over 30,000 records for Canadian, Alaskan and Siberian late Ice Age archaeological and paleontological sites, CARD will continue to be an indispensable resource for the research community.

In addition to being an accomplished field worker, Dick was a scholar of international prominence, producing some 50 conference papers and nearly 100 publications on diverse topics and holding editorial positions with *Arctic Anthropology* and the *Bulletin of the Canadian Archaeological Association*. One of his most important

contributions has been as Technical Editor from 1983 to 2004 of the CMC's Mercury Series, which has become a barometer of archaeological achievement in Canada. His own publications in this series were among his most substantial contributions, such as: the aforementioned No. 11, 1973 (based on his Ph.D. dissertation), *Taphonomy and Archaeology in the Upper Pleistocene of the Northern Yukon Territory: A Glimpse of the Peopling of the New World*. No. 94, 1980, and, with Ian Dyck, *The Sjøvold Site: A River Crossing Campsite in the Northern Plains*. No. 151, 1995 (which included an innovative computer analysis of the faunal assemblage from this important site). Furthermore, Dick was always conscious of the importance of popularizing his findings (e.g. through many popular lectures and interviews on CBC, CTV, PBS, TNN, TVO and NHK). At the University of Saskatchewan, he served on 15 thesis committees. In addition, he advised on many important public displays – most notably, the acclaimed First Peoples Hall at CMC.

Among Dick's awards are a Certificate of Merit from the Canadian Museum of Nature for his contributions in vertebrate paleontology; and one from Heritage Yukon for his archaeological research in the Yukon and Beringia. He died on 2 January 2007 after a courageous struggle with a debilitating neurophysiological disease that was never clearly diagnosed. His loss is deeply felt by his wife Heather, by other relatives and many colleagues who benefited from his sage advice, generous assistance and cheerful comradeship.

C. R. Harington
Canadian Museum of Nature
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