

Europeans explored Ontario in 800 BC

BY BOB HARVEY
OTTAWA CITIZEN

OTTAWA — Scandinavians may have crossed the Atlantic three millennia ago and made it as far as Peterborough, Ont.

A Calgary archeologist says rock carvings at Petroglyph Provincial Park that are regarded as the work of aboriginal shamans were probably carved by Europeans about 800 BC.

David Kelley said the petroglyphs, 40 kilometres northeast of Peterborough, include a depiction of a Viking-like ship almost identical to prehistoric ships carved in a rock near Boslund, Sweden, as well as abstract symbols used as a form of writing by northern Europeans.

Kelley, a retired University of Calgary professor renowned for his

work deciphering Mayan script, said the symbols are part of a script called Tiffinagh.

It developed in northern Africa, and was adopted by Scandinavians who regularly travelled down through Italy, across the Mediterranean, and perhaps down the Niger River in northern Africa.

"Every symbol that is known in Tiffinagh is found among the 800 carvings at Peterborough," he said. "It's sort of like a place where a lot of people carved their initials."

Kelley said any one of the symbols could have been randomly carved, but it is highly improbable that a whole complex set of them could have independently arisen in two different places. The simplest explanation is that the carvings were left behind by northern Europeans, not aboriginals.

Tiffinagh consists of a series of circles with dots inside and outside, which stand for particular sounds.

However, Kelley said it is uncertain which symbols stand for which sounds. To date, all he has been able to decipher in the carvings at Petroglyph Park is the equivalent of the letters "wdn," which are associated with figures of a man.

The first academic to make the link between the petroglyphs and Tiffinagh was a Harvard marine biologist and self-trained archeologist, the late Barry Fell, who first began studying them in the early 1970s. He eventually interpreted the petroglyphs as telling the story of a man named Woden-Lithi (servant of Odin) who came to North America to collect copper ingots.

Kelley regards Fell's interpretation as "rubbish," saying it would be

a long slow process to decipher the symbols.

He reviewed Fell's work in 1991 in the prestigious Review of Archeology published in the United States, but will outline his own work on the petroglyphs in an article he expects to be published at the University of Calgary in November.

Although his work on Mayan scripts is widely cited by other scholars, they prefer to ignore Kelley's opinions on the petroglyphs, because they can't believe Bronze Age Scandinavians could have travelled as far as Peterborough.

"I have no particular desire to be a martyr, and have my colleagues jump on me, but I don't think 'you must be wrong' is ever a good answer."

Kelley said he's convinced there was a lot more travelling in prehis-

toric times than most scholars believe.

The petroglyphs were discovered in 1954 under a covering of lichen, and are now enclosed in a climate-controlled visitors' centre. The Ojibway say the carvings match a legend of what their people called the Talking Rocks and regard them as sacred. Many native people visit the rocks regularly to fast and meditate.

Interpreters hired by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources tell 20,000 visitors a year that the carvings were probably carved between 600 and 1,100 years ago by aboriginal shamans who went there for vision quests. The 800 carvings of snakes, birds, and fertility symbols are the largest collection of petroglyphs in North America.



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