

## THE PROBLEM OF THE STONE LASTS

An unsolved problem awaits solution. For many years stones with the approximate shape of the human foot have been found, and these so closely resemble lasts for making shoes that the stones are popularly called lasts. Yet since these stones are found in western Oregon and western Washington where the known Indians either went barefooted or wore moccasins which did not require a stone last there seems to have been no attention paid to the occasional foot-shaped stones, and nothing seems to have been published in regard to such things.

That these artifacts were laboriously fashioned with a high degree of skill can now be definitely proved, since the writer has found an ancient "factory site." The numerous partly made "lasts" show the details of workmanship, from the chipping of an unsuitable stone which was rejected, through the various stages to the completed artifact, one being an almost perfect model of a human foot, as natural as a plaster cast. This is probably the supreme masterpiece of aboriginal art of this region.

As the result of extensive correspondence many specimens have been located, including a cache which was found while digging up the stump of a tree about four feet in diameter. It had grown above a log which had almost entirely rotted, and beneath were found fifteen specimens, ranging from the size of the foot of a small child to that of a large man. At another place two hundred miles away about the same number were found, which also ranged in similar sizes. These indicate some early people who made these artifacts for some definite purpose, and the obvious similarity to lasts for making shoes seems to indicate that they were made for constructing foot-coverings.

The site of the ancient "factory" was evidently selected because many river stones of suitable size abounded there, and scattered among the boulders are many showing attempts to shape some stone which was found unsuitable. These are andesite, a hard lava rock, and great skill is shown in splitting off portions. One specimen was entirely shaped by cleavage, but usually some small boulder of approximate shape was selected and then portions broken off to make the needed shape. Then there was a laborious system of abrasion, often parallel cuts were made along a ridge which was then ground

off by rubbing with some hard stone. A polisher worn by much use was found and probably was used for that purpose. A set of about twenty specimens in various stages has been collected.

It seems highly improbable that these artifacts were made by the Indians who occupied the region where they are found at the time when white men reached the northwest coast. Some earlier people must have used some form of foot-covering which required such lasts. That they were made of hard stone instead of easily cut wood seems to suggest that thick skin of some animal was wrapped about the stone which was boiled in some process of tanning, yet nothing whatever is actually known beyond the fact that these remarkable relics exist.

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