

# NYSAA NEWSLETTER



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## Recent Archaeological Discoveries in the Town of Wilton, Saratoga County: New Information on the Early Archaic and Late Woodland Periods

by Ed Curtin, Curtin Archaeological Consulting, Inc.,  
& Van Epps-Hartley Chapter

In 2011-2012, Curtin Archaeological Consulting, Inc. completed a Phase 3 cultural resource investigation at 708 Route 9, Town of Wilton, Saratoga County, New York. The investigation was performed for Thomas J. Farone and Sons, Inc. in advance of new construction. The results of the investigation provide some important insights into the Early Archaic and Late Woodland period archaeology of the upper Hudson region. The sites investigated are referred to as Sites 1-4. No new information was obtained from Sites 2 and 4 (except that they did not contain archaeological features). Site 3, however, contained an interesting pit feature, while Site 1 proved to have meaningful stratification permit-

ting the inference of changing site use during the Late Woodland.



Incised pottery sherds  
from the old topsoil stratum, Site 1.

The pit feature at Site 3 contained pine fuel-wood that was radiocarbon dated 8760 BP, which has been calibrated to a range of 7950-7610 BC (Cal BP

9900-9560) by Beta-Analytic, Inc. This date in the Early Archaic period is part of a growing body of evidence of Early Archaic land use in eastern New York State. No projectile points were found at this site, but it is only some 7 miles north of where James P. Walsh has found bifurcated base points at the Arrowhead Casino and Arrowhead III sites. To me, it is a good question as to whether projectile points associated with this radiocarbon age would be corner-notched or bifurcated base. However, the only artifacts found at Site 3 were 4 relatively large chert flakes, 2 of which had been utilized for cutting or scraping. It seems as though Site 3 not only demonstrates an Early Archaic presence, but also

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Examples of Fort  
Ann chert from Site  
1. (left)

Examples of Nor-  
manskil chert from  
Site 1. (right)



## RECENT ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES IN THE TOWN OF WILTON CONTINUED:

may exemplify a site type with a rather sparse imprint on the archaeological record: a small cooking pit and limited discarded material from an expedient, utilized flake technology. This type of site seems important in order to understand Early Archaic land use and settlement patterns. This site type also may be more common than previously suspected, but very difficult to find and recognize..

Site 1 contained 2 stratified Late Woodland components, with the deeper defined within the sandy subsoil, and the upper in an old topsoil (which itself was stratified below a layer of fill displaced in mid-20<sup>th</sup> century times from house construction on-site). The lower component contained a hearth several centimeters below the subsoil-old topsoil interface; it was radiocarbon-dated 740+/- 30 BP (calibrated to a range of Cal AD 1260-1290). This component contained a flake assemblage but no pottery or projectile points. The upper component, in the old topsoil stratum, did not contain dateable archaeological features, but it did contain thin, hard-bodied potsherds, 2 of which bear the parallel incised decoration of post-AD 1400 native ceramics. These indications of chronology show that the upper and lower (old topsoil and subsoil) components are separated in time by at least 100 years.

The lower and upper components are also associated with lithics from largely different sources. For example, the lower component has about 6 major types of lithic material, while the upper component has 12. The lower component has most-

ly Normanskill chert, with small amounts of other kinds of stone, while the upper component has several types of chert, chalcedony, and quartzite that are numerically important within the assemblage, in addition to Normanskill chert. While much of the stone in the lower assemblage came from Hudson valley Normanskill quarries, and little came from other sources, a variety of stone types found in the upper assemblage came from some distance away, and often may have been transported from the north and west. These include a greater use of Fort Ann chert, and the first appearance of slate (from eastern or northeastern Washington County) and chert resembling Kalkberg (from south of the Mohawk and west of the Hudson). Much of the upper assemblage is composed of untyped gray chert, translucent chert, and chalcedony of unknown sources, while there are also several pieces of exotic-looking black, white, and brown-mottled chert. In addition, the old topsoil contained much more quartzite, which may have a local source in glacial till.

Some of the stone types from the fill deposit that are not found in the other soil strata include Cheshire quartzite from Vermont, Eastern Onondaga chert (from south or southwest of Saratoga County), and yellow jasper (probably

from the Canadian Shield or Pennsylvania). The stratigraphic pattern of disturbed soils, where observed, suggests that most of the fill is displaced from the original topsoil (and some 13 stone types were found in the fill). Some of the stone with unknown sources may have relatively local, but undiscovered sources, or may outcrop en route to 708 Route 9 from other locations. Regarding possible sources en route, one such possibility involves Gailor chert, a relatively unfamiliar gray chert reported to outcrop several miles west of 708 Route 9 (and thus, on-route from the Mohawk valley).

It is also possible that accessible Gailor dolomite deposits run much closer to the archaeological site, providing other potential source locations for gray chert.

The intriguing increase in raw material variety between the lower and upper components may be related to increased travel along paths that ran north-south and east-west near the 708 Route 9 archaeological sites. The great 18<sup>th</sup> century chronicler of Five Nations history, Cadwallader Colden, reported on a military engagement near here that became known as the 1693 Battle of Wilton.



Examples of untyped gray chert from Site 1.



## RECENT ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES IN THE TOWN OF WILTON CONTINUED:

Fleeing French and Indian forces moved east and then turned north along these trails about 1 mile north of 708 Route 9. The 19<sup>th</sup> century historian Nathaniel Bartlett Sylvester later drew attention to these trails, discussing the battle and referring to the trails as the great northern and western warpaths. The 708 Route 9 lithic data are interpreted in part as related to the use of these routes long before the battle, with the suggestion that the use of Site 1 shifted from mostly foraging by parties from settlements near the Hudson River (or its tributary, Fish Creek) to frequent short-term camping by groups (whether Mohawk, Mohican or others) who were traveling long distances along the trails. Perhaps some of these later parties did not have access to the Normanskill chert quarries farther east near the Hudson, but could bring curated assemblages to the site, or find usable stone sources either en route or in the vicinity nearby. Simply put, the inference is that the more the trails were used, the greater the diversity of stone left behind. Greater use of the trails during the very late prehistoric period may have been related to the intercultural dynamics of those times, such as changes in the intensity of trade and warfare, territorial abandonment, and population aggregation.

The decorated ceramics and some of the most recurrent stone types are shown in the several photographs accompanying this report. Acknowledgment is made to Jon Vidulich, who classified the stone (and noted some color and shade varieties that I later collapsed for brevity into macro-classes such as “slate”, “other quartzite” and “untyped gray chert”); Andrea Lain and Jon Lothrop who opened the comparative lithic collection at the New York State Museum and discussed it with me; Justine Woodard McKnight, who performed the archaeobotanical study; and Beta-Analytic, Inc., who performed the radiocarbon dating and calibration (INTCAL09). Short articles on the Battle of Wilton and the Site 3 Early Archaic component appear in *Fieldnotes* (February 17, 2012 and September 5, 2012) at [www.curtinarchaeology.com/blog](http://www.curtinarchaeology.com/blog).



Examples of chalcedony from Site 1. (above)

Examples of translucent chert from Site 1. (below)



## Obituary: Fred Assmus

Submitted by David Johnson, President, Incorporated Orange County Chapter



Frederick Assmus, of Middletown, NY, passed away Sunday, October 14, at Orange Regional Medical Center. Fred was born in Brooklyn, NY on January 16, 1946, son of the late William and Dorothea Koehler Assmus.

He was a retired controller at American Applications in Middletown, NY and Wykoff, N.J. He is survived by his loving wife of 39 years, Sharon Mueller Assmus, his sister-in-law, Yukki Assmus of Rolling Meadows, IL; nephew, George Assmus of Rolling Meadows, IL and numerous cousins.

He was a lifelong and enthusiastic member of the New York State Archaeological Association and the Society for Pennsylvania Archaeology. He was a past president and trustee for the Orange County Chapter of the New York State Archaeological Association and was treasurer of the New York State Archaeological Association. He also served as liaison for the Society for Pennsylvania Archaeology and was a member of Chapter 14, the Forks of the Delaware, where he served as trustee.

Fred often talked about growing up along the Delaware River where Native American artifacts were often observed along the shoreline. This interest was fostered by his former teacher and mentor, William Leiser, and grew into a lifelong quest to study the Native Americans who once lived there. Fred's specialty was Native American ceramics, and he presented numerous lectures to archaeological associations throughout the region.





## Reconnecting With the Past: Locating Historical Graves Using Ground Penetrating Radar in Western New York

By **Lisa Marie Anselmi, Ph.D., R.P.A.**, Anthropology, SUNY Buffalo State & Frederick M. Houghton Chapter, New York State Archaeological Association, and **Kevin Williams, Ph.D.**, Earth Sciences and Science Education, SUNY Buffalo State

Ground penetrating radar (GPR) is a very useful geophysical tool for the detection of subsurface layers and structures. Because of the non-invasive nature of GPR, it was used in two public outreach projects undertaken by the SUNY Buffalo State Archaeological Field School and members of the Earth Sciences and Science Education department in summer 2012. The first project aided the Ellicottville Town Historical Society in an exploration of the Jefferson St. Cemetery in Ellicottville, NY. Although detection of old graves is difficult, GPR data revealed several dozen graves, both marked and unmarked. The second project aided People, Inc., the leading non-profit human services agency in Western New York, in their effort to restore the Niagara County Almshouse Cemetery in Lockport, NY. The results of the projects will be used to erect central markers to memorialize unmarked burials at each cemetery and to restore the boundary of the Almshouse Cemetery.

### Jefferson St Cemetery, Ellicottville, New York (in use 1830-2005):

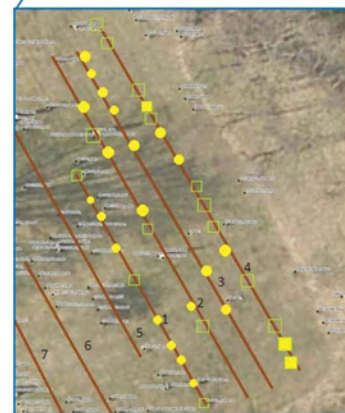
Buffalo State was first contacted by Project Manager Gail Carucci about the restoration of the Jefferson St. Cemetery in Ellicottville, NY in September 2011. Ms. Carucci and Town Historian Mary Elizabeth Dunbar, in addition to many volunteers, had been working for over a year at that point to complete an inventory of the existing headstones,

to restore the cemetery through the cleaning and righting of the existing headstones, compiling genealogical histories of the represented individuals and to apply for status to the National Historic Register. Several challenges to the project included a loss of town records pertaining to the cemetery in a fire and damage to the existing headstones through the effects of time and weather. Ms. Carucci and Ms. Dunbar have been able to piece together a list of at least an additional 16 individuals for which family stories, newspaper articles and/or obituaries state that they are buried in the cemetery though they



do not appear in the existing headstone inventory. Buffalo State was asked to assist in locating any unmarked graves within the boundaries of the existing cemetery through use of ground penetrating radar.

Small groups of Buffalo State Archaeological Field School stu-



dents set up fifteen transect lines to help have a unified search area and guide for the GPR project. Each transect line consisted of non-reactive measuring tapes and flags placed at predetermined distances, along which the GPR antenna could be moved. Each transect line crossed a portion of the cemetery that seemed to be partially open space, in an effort to recover as many unmarked graves as possible. Existing headstone loca-

## Reconnecting With the Past Continued:

tions were recorded from their midpoints so that the GPR data could be reconciled with the transect line locations.

### Methodology:

The transects along which to collect GPR data were identified based on existing grave markers (Jefferson St. Cemetery) and the location of a stone wall (Niagara County Almshouse Cemetery). Archaeological Field School students laid out and measured the transects and recorded other information. Most GPR data were collected at 400 MHz using a GSSI SIR-3000 system, and some data were collected at 200 MHz. Data were collected in both directions along each transect and at two different depths. Although initial data interpretation could be done on-site, more in depth data analysis was completed in the weeks following data collection.

### GPR Results:

Although concrete burial vaults are easily identified in GPR data, older burials are more difficult to locate. They can be detected in GPR data as areas of disturbed ground and/or as a reflection that may be caused by the flat bottom of the original grave.

The data from the Jefferson St. Cemetery were used to identify 39 unmarked burials. We also identified 15 burials that are associated with markers. Because the GPR data did not detect burials for all of

the marked graves, it is likely that some unmarked burials were also not detected.

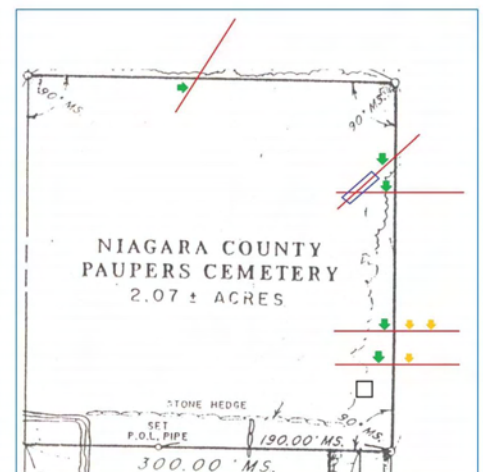
### Niagara County Almshouse Cemetery, Lockport, New York (in use 1830-1916):

Buffalo State was first contacted by Project Manager David Mack Hardiman of People Inc. in May of 2012. People Inc. has been engaged in an effort to restore the resting places of persons such as those served by their agency today: the elderly, the poor, the disabled and/or the mentally ill. To date, People Inc. has been successful in restoring/honoring the deceased at four Western New York cemeteries, including at the cemetery associated with the Niagara County Almshouse.

Buffalo State was asked to identify and clarify the boundaries of the cemetery and to identify individual graves within these boundaries if possible, using GPR. Unfortunately, several challenges to the project existed from the poorly recorded original location of the cemetery to the nearly hundred-years' worth of overgrown vegetation. A major factor in the identification of individual graves was the tiered burial system in practice at the cemetery while it was in use. There were at least four tiers of burials in many of the burial shafts at the site. Buffalo State Archaeological Field School

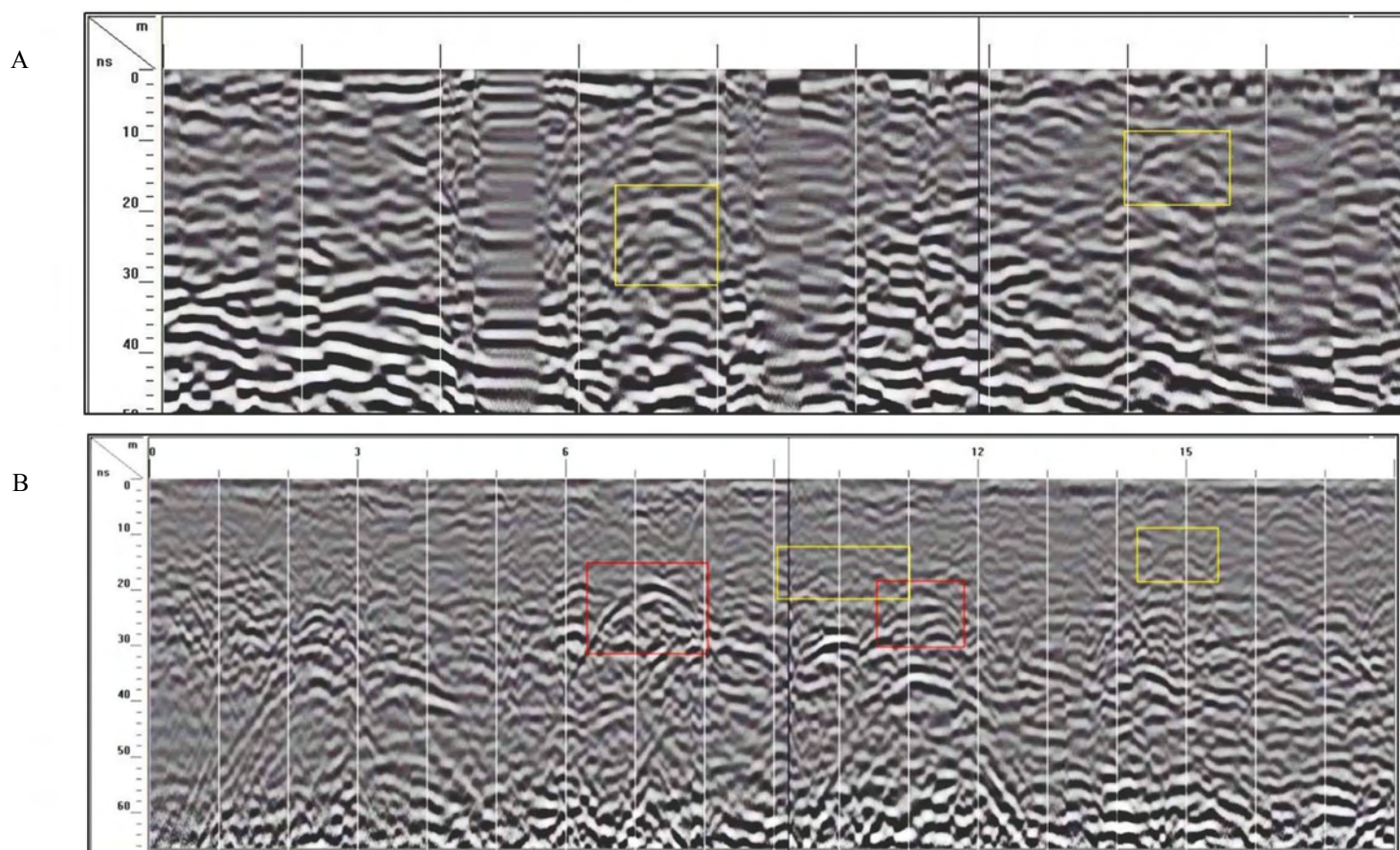
students, assisted by two students from the Earth Sciences and Science Education department, set up four initial transects at the site, in a somewhat 'open' area in the Northeast quadrant. After further clearing by the county and Calamar Construction, an additional seven transects were tested: five in the Southeastern quadrant, one each in the North-central and West by Northwest areas. The majority of transects were run perpendicularly to the 'known' stone walls marking this area in an effort to delineate the boundary of the cemetery itself.

GPR data collected at the Niagara County Almshouse Cemetery were collected along the red lines in the diagram below. The green arrows show where the interpreted extent of the burials. The yellow arrows identify locations of reflections in the GPR data that could be burials outside of the stone wall boundary, but the reflections could also be due to boulders in the subsurface.





### Reconnecting With the Past Continued:



The data transect above (A) shows two old burials that show up as hyperbolic shapes (yellow boxes). The other data transect (B) shows other old burials in addition to other reflections that are interpreted to be boulders (red boxes).



The stone bench above was placed at the site of the Niagara County Almshouse Cemetery by People Inc. on October 18, 2012 during a Ceremony of Remembrance held there. Previously, one engraved marker at the site noted three individuals (above middle) and other grave shafts were marked by flat, plain stones. Far left, using the GPR at the Niagara County Almshouse Cemetery.



## SUMMER OF THE MASTODON BY DAVE MOYER, CHENANGO CHAPTER

This past summer the Chenango chapter has been hot on the trail of the Hyde Park Mastodon, thanks to the collaborative efforts of Cornell University and the Paleontological Research Institution's Museum of the Earth in Ithaca, NY. As part of their Mastodon Matrix Program, we had the opportunity to pick through soil samples collected at the site of the Hyde Park Mastodon, which was found in a pond in a back yard Dutchess County in 2000. Since 2000, over 3,000 groups from 49 states and two countries have participated in the project. The Mastodon Matrix Project is a unique way to get everyday people involved in active scientific research. The project is not a laboratory exercise but an open-ended research project aimed at discovering New York's Ice Age past (late Pleistocene, 10,000-14,000 year ago). Participants provide real data that will be used by scientists to reconstruct the Pleistocene environment where the mastodon roamed, and the results will also help to create a Pleistocene reference collection at the museum for other researchers to further study.

As part of the project, we were provided with a bag of dirt, along with a packet of instructions on how to process the samples. We used tooth picks and plastic spoons to sort through the soil, then separated out our findings into basic groups like rocks, shell and twigs. We took some more of the matrix, mixed it with water and collected floating twigs and organic remains using coffee filters. Finally, all of the materials we separated out were studied and weighed before sending

everything back to the museum.

Everyone enjoyed picking through the soil and separating out the twigs, shells and rocks we found. Many of us were surprised to find how perfectly preserved the wood and plant remains were, many of which looked "brand new." It was also a great opportunity for some of our older members who can't get out in the field much to recapture that sense and feeling of discovery. Most significantly, members felt that by collaborating with Cornell University and the museum that we were part of a larger research effort and contributing to our understanding of the ice age environment.

Following our session, we also watched an excellent short documentary about the Hyde Park mastodon that came with the sample which helped to answer some of the questions we had about it. The following month the chapter sponsored a field trip to the Museum of the Earth to visit the Hyde Park mastodon in person. Between the sorting session, the documentary film and the field trip to the museum, our summer is quickly turning into the "season of the mastodon."

I would recommend that other chapters with an interest in New York during the Ice Age consider participating in the matrix project. The instructions were simple to follow and required little material other than household objects like tooth picks and paper plates. Members brought magnifying glasses and cleaned pill containers to store the sorted samples. Dr. Carlyn Buckler, director of the project, was extremely helpful and supportive throughout the process. While the soil samples usually come in 1 kilogram bags which would keep approximately 20 people busy for approximately 90 minutes, you can also get half kilogram samples, which might be a better choice for smaller groups.

Conducting the matrix project in a chapter setting was a nice alternative to our usual monthly programs, which tend to be focused around having speakers. The project would also make for a good "winter project" when it isn't possible to get into the field. I liked that it was a non-destructive way of "playing in the dirt" that had real research value and was fun and educational in the process.



Members of the Chenango chapter sorting through soil samples from the Hyde Park Mastodon Site.



## SUMMER OF THE MASTODON continued:

To learn more about the mastodon matrix project there are two useful websites:

<http://scistarter.com/project/250-Mastodon%20Matrix%20Project>

[http://www.museumoftheearth.org/research.php?page=Mastodon\\_Research/Mast\\_Matrix](http://www.museumoftheearth.org/research.php?page=Mastodon_Research/Mast_Matrix)

This third web address is a link to a nice article about 4<sup>th</sup> graders who found a mastodon hair in their sample.

<http://www.livescience.com/14205-mastodon-matrix-excavation-citizen-science-volunteer.html>



Examples of beaver chewed twigs, shells and seeds found in the soil matrix. (above)

Chenango chapter members posing in front of the Hyde Park Mastodon on a field trip to the Museum of the Earth in Trumansburg.. (below)



**CALL FOR PAPERS**  
**New York State Archaeological Association**

97th Annual Meeting  
April 26-28, 2013  
Ramada Inn, Watertown, NY

The Finger Lakes and Thousand Islands Chapters are proud to host the 97th Annual Meeting of the New York State Archaeological Association and the annual spring meeting of the New York Archaeological Council. NYAC will meet Friday. The NYSAA annual business meeting will be Friday evening, with paper presentations all day Saturday and on Sunday morning. The annual banquet and awards ceremony will be held Saturday evening. Our guest speaker will be Dr. Claude Chapdelaine, discussing the search for Paleo-Indians in the far Northeast. All events will be at the Ramada Inn, conveniently located on Exit 45 off I-81.

This is an open call for papers on the archaeology of New York and adjoining regions. Presentations should not exceed 20 minutes in length. Time will be allowed for questions following the presentation.

Each speaker may present only one paper, although individuals may co-author multiple papers.

All speakers must register for the conference.

**Deadline for Abstracts: March 1, 2013**

Abstracts (one paragraph, 150 words or less) and A/V preference must be received by March 1, 2013 for consideration. You will be notified by March 10 if your paper is accepted. Meeting registration for paper presenters must be pre-paid by March 20, 2013, or your paper will be dropped from the program.

Registration information will be available online at <http://nysaa-web.org/conference>.

Please send your title, abstract, A/V preference and contact address to:  
Wendy Bacon, 2013 NYSAA Program Co-Chair at: [wbacon4@gmail.com](mailto:wbacon4@gmail.com)

**Conference Co-Organizers:**

Tim Abel (President Thousand Islands Chapter), Wendy Bacon (Secretary Finger Lakes Chapter), Sherene Baugher (President NYSAA), and Laura Johnson-Kelly (President Finger Lakes Chapter).



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