



RICHARD H. JORDAN¹
1946–1991

Arctic archaeology lost one of its leading scholars with the death on January 19, 1991, of Richard H. Jordan, professor of anthropology at the University of Alaska–Fairbanks, and board member of the Alaska Quaternary Center. Jordan, 44, died of a heart attack while shoveling snow at his home in the Fairbanks hills. A productive and energetic scholar, his legacy includes a series of excellent publications and well-trained scholars. He is especially known for his excavations at early Labrador Inuit and Dorset culture sites in Labrador, and at Karluk on Kodiak Island, Alaska. Jordan also conducted work in Greenland, making him the only archaeologist of his generation with field experience throughout the New World Arctic.

Jordan was born in Anchorage, Alaska, in 1946 and spent his childhood in Seldovia, Alaska, before moving briefly to New Hampshire in the early 1950s and then to Scranton, Pennsylvania. His anthropological interest began during his undergraduate years at Dartmouth College, from which he graduated in 1969. Like many others, he fell under the spell of Robert McKennan and Elmer Harp's inspirational teaching and cut his archaeological "teeth" analyzing Dorset material from Newfoundland and Archaic collections from the Neville site in New Hampshire. Jordan's first fieldwork was in 1969 at a large Susquehannok site excavation near Lancaster directed by Barry Kent. In 1970 he joined McKennan and John Cook's crew at Healy Lake, Alaska, and participated in the Aleyeska Pipeline Survey. Dick then entered the University of Minnesota graduate program where he studied with Elden Johnson and from Herbert Wright acquired an abiding interest in ecology and paleoenvironmental studies. In 1971–1972 he lived in Copenhagen, then still the world center of arctic anthropology, on a Marshall Fellowship, and studied archaeology and ethnology with Helge Larsen, Birket-Smith, and Jorgen Meldgaard; radiocarbon dating with Henrick Tauber; faunal analysis with Ulrik and Jeppe Mohl; and palynology with Bent Fredskild.

In 1972 Dick began a long association with the Smithsonian Institution, joining the Hamilton Inlet field team to gather paleoecological data for testing models of Labrador culture change. Dick successfully recovered and analyzed a series of lake cores for his dissertation, *Pollen Studies at*

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Hamilton Inlet, Labrador, and Their Implications for Environmental Prehistory (1975), demonstrating relationships between postglacial vegetation history and 8,000 years of Indian and Eskimo culture change. This was the first direct application of paleoecological techniques to an archaeological problem in the North American arctic. His study helped stimulate an avalanche of interest in Labrador–Quebec paleoecology in the 1970s–1980s.

After landing a faculty position at Bryn Mawr College in 1974, Dick returned to Labrador in 1973 and 1975 to excavate seventeenth- to nineteenth-century Inuit winter village sites in Hamilton Inlet. Here Jordan's work at Eskimo Island, Snooks Cove, and Double Mer Point documented Inuit culture change from A.D. 1500 to 1850, beginning with the first appearance of Thule culture on the central Labrador coast and ending with the modern historical era. During this period, Labrador Inuit came into increasing contact with Europeans and their culture, and the Labrador environment changed in important ways. European whaling decimated whale and walrus stocks; Inuit economy shifted from a traditional subsistence base to trading, trapping, and fishing in response to European contacts; and housing patterns, social organization, and religious beliefs changed. These discoveries prompted Jordan and Susan Kaplan to advocate social, economic, and historical forces over the prevailing ecological paradigm as prime movers of historic Inuit culture change. This application helped spur use of similar models elsewhere in North America.

Later Dick went on to work in northern Labrador and in 1977–1978 directed part of the Smithsonian–Bryn Mawr College Torngat Project survey from Okak to Cape Chidley. Dick's major contribution to this project was excavation of a frozen midden on Avayalik Island that produced Labrador–Ungava's first well-preserved Dorset wood and bone artifacts, including artistic bone and ivory charms, wood bowls, boxes, and maskettes. During these years Dick remained involved in Pennsylvania archaeology and collaborated with his second wife, Colleen Lazenby, on a variety of contract projects.

Thereafter Jordan turned his attention in other directions—to Kodiak Island for a hydroelectric survey in 1980 and to Greenland for Norse and Inuit surveys with Thomas McGovern in 1981. But frustrated by isolationist policies against North American projects in Greenland, and as the incredible potential of Kodiak fieldwork began to emerge, Dick found himself returning annually to Alaska, like a salmon to his native stream, to develop a research program that would occupy him for the rest of his life. His Alaskan reentry was greeted with glee by his senior tutor, Bryn Mawr colleague, and friend, Frederica de Laguna.

Jordan's enthusiasm for the new Alaskan work led to a burst of energy in which he mastered new literature and began a series of excavation programs at Karluk, perhaps the only location in North America where grizzly bears outnumber human inhabitants. Over the course of several seasons, Jordan and Richard Knecht dug back through a 6,000-year sequence of Koniag, Kachemak, and Ocean Bay cultures. His experience in Labrador permafrost proved useful in excavating water-logged Koniag middens that contained more than a dozen superimposed house floors and many spectacular finds including dance masks, carved dolls, figurines, charms, and other artistic and ceremonial items. The Karluk remains led Dick to see population continuity as a dominant feature of Kodiak prehistory, but evolving under influence from both Bering Sea Yupik and Northwest Coast culture areas.

In 1987, Jordan, who harbored a strong distaste for red tape, found himself at the helm of the Bryn Mawr Anthropology Department (1987–1988) struggling with the administration over the survival of a graduate program that had had a small but illustrious history. Dick, like de Laguna before him, had been instrumental in its success at undergraduate and graduate levels. Dick's gruff, no-nonsense style left few shelters for unprepared students, but his challenging teaching style produced lasting respect, and many students moved on to larger graduate programs while others remained to receive a Bryn Mawr degree. A sense of humor and tolerance of old-fashioned faculty prerogatives was not all that was necessary for students to survive close encounters with Jordan; apart from scholarly acuity one also had to adopt Jordan life-style, family, and work patterns. Dick's students did not become wallflower colleagues.

By 1988, Bryn Mawr carried out its threat to close the graduate program, and Dick, whose Kodiak research had by then assumed Baranov-like proportions, promptly answered a call to become the

chair of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Alaska–Fairbanks (UAF). Ironically, Fairbanks was just inaugurating a new anthropology graduate program. Although this position was not without frustrations, his two-year tenure brought new energy to UAF at a time when arctic research was expanding. Dick's leadership took UAF into closer relationships with the UAF Museum, federal archaeology programs, the Smithsonian, and Soviet colleagues, all of which activities were accompanied by characteristic Jordanian roller-coaster zest. Of particular importance during these years was Dick's collaboration with James Dixon and Roger Powers on problems of Alaskan and Siberian archaeology. Powers and Jordan were about to begin a book-length synthesis on this subject at the time of Dick's death. He also coedited a volume on Alaskan maritime cultures with de Laguna, soon to be released.

In addition to vigorous field, publication, and teaching programs, Jordan also developed a strong sense of responsibility for native concerns and of the role of archaeology in fostering cultural identity and empowerment. His Karluk program quickly sprouted native cultural and educational programs. He worked to provide positions for native students on digs and at UAF, and developed strong ties with the Kodiak Area Native Association, vigorously assisting its efforts to create a local museum. A sense of his awareness of social responsibilities of archaeologists is seen in a series of film reviews on social anthropology he wrote for the *American Anthropologist* just before his death.

Dick's associations also led beyond the confines of Alaska. During his tenure at Fairbanks he worked closely with arctic-research policy groups in Washington, D.C., and helped highlight the recognition of Alaska as the leading geographic center of circumpolar arctic research by hosting the Conference on Hunting and Gathering Societies and the Inuit Studies Conference in Fairbanks in 1990. He also became involved with the Smithsonian's "Crossroads of Continents" program and was helping to create a smaller show for local Alaskan and Siberian viewing. It was on this project



At the University of Alaska Museum: *from left to right*, Mim Dixon, E. James Dixon, Rachel Hopkins, David M. Hopkins, Colleen Lazenby, and Richard H. Jordan.

that "Jordan" became a household word in Magadan (Siberia) when he appeared there in April 1990 spontaneously, without warning, explanation, or visa.

Such was the productive, passionate, and tumultuous life of Richard H. Jordan. Long will he be remembered by his family, teachers, colleagues, and students. He was a gifted anthropologist who was beginning to find a voice as a proud leader of circumpolar anthropology and archaeology. Perhaps above all he is to be remembered for his dedication to international scholarship and to the cross-fertilization that results from open scholarly exchange across national and cultural borders. Dick's career in Denmark, Greenland, Canada, Alaska, and Siberia did more than advance our collective understanding of northern peoples and cultures; his life demonstrated how much more can be gained from open borders than is lost when collegiality and reciprocity fail.

WILLIAM W. FITZHUGH

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NOTE

¹ E. James Dixon kindly helped to locate the photographs that appear here. The lead photograph was taken at the Walker Road site, one of the type sites of the Nenana complex, interior Alaska, 1989: *from left to right*, Richard H. Jordan, Dennis Stanford, and E. James Dixon (courtesy Charles Mason, photographer).