



# FACT SHEET No. 4

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## The Pottery of P.G. Downes



20th century) and Harry Moody (an avocational historian and ethnologist at Denare Beach). He prepared a manuscript about Cree beliefs, most of them told to him by Adam Ballantyne of Pelican Narrows.

In 1943, Downes published *Sleeping Island*, based on the journal of his 1939 trip from Brochet at the north end of Reindeer Lake to Windy River at the north end of Nueltin Lake, NWT (now Nunavut). The book reveals a man who was passionate about the outdoors, about history, and about the cultures of the Cree and Dene people who had lived there since time immemorial.

### The Pottery

On his first journey to northern Saskatchewan in 1936, Downes canoed from Pelican Narrows via the Sturgeon-Weir, Churchill and Reindeer rivers to Reindeer Lake. About half way up the lake they had to turn back because of bad weather. Downes made the following entry in his journal on September 12, 1936, while at Southend on Reindeer Lake:

"Bill Douglas, the old trapper, came over and brought some pottery shards he found on Sandy Island 30 mi. North of here on raised beach 7' high, 400' from water. Amazing shape and design-and location."

In 1937, he donated the sherds to the National Museum (now the Canadian Museum of Civilization) in Ottawa. In 1939, he published the first description of pottery from

### Who was P.G. Downes?

Downes was an American school teacher, but at heart he was an historian, cartographer, adventurer, and naturalist who loved the north. He made canoe trips through northern Saskatchewan and the Northwest Territories in 1936, 1937, 1939, 1947 and 1951. He kept detailed journals in which he recorded not only daily events but also the stories and traditions of the Cree and Dene people.

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, Downes maintained steady correspondence with Frank Speck (a well-known ethnologist of the early

northern Saskatchewan in the journal *American Antiquity*.

This type of pottery is now called Clearwater Lake Punctate. These pots have a globular body and vertical or outflaring neck with a single row of punctates (small round indentations) around the rim. Clearwater Lake Punctate pottery is found in the boreal forest from central Manitoba to central Saskatchewan. In Saskatchewan, it was made from approximately AD 1200 to 1500.

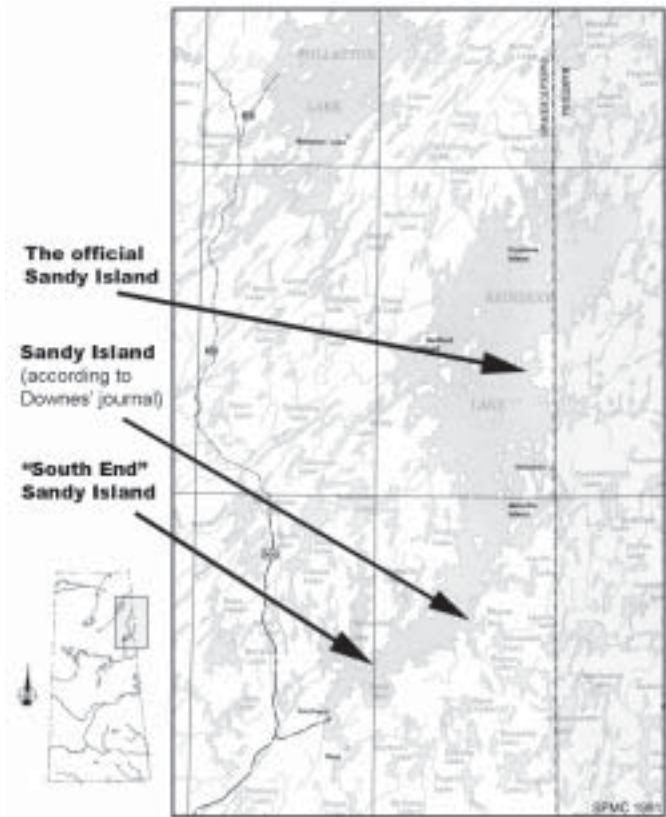


Clearwater Lake Punctate pottery is one regional expression of what archaeologists call the Selkirk Composite that extends throughout the boreal forest from northwestern Ontario to eastern Alberta. Most archaeologists think that the Selkirk Composite represents the ancestors of modern-day Cree.

## Where did Douglas find the Pottery?

The exact location of "Sandy Island" is a bit of a mystery. There is no "Sandy Island" recorded at the location near Wapus Island that Downes recorded in his journal. The official "Sandy Island" is too far north. "South End Sandy Island", where Downes was wind-bound for two days, is too far south.

The location near Wapus Island is probably correct. Downes describes Douglas's



camp at nearby Wapus River as "a really lovely spot - low sand banks and grass and a series of small bays backed by the steep cliff-like hills". It is quite possible that there are sand beaches on a nearby island that would justify giving it the local name "Sandy Island".

## Further Reading

R. H. Cockburn. 1984. "To Reindeer's Far Waters: P.G. Downes' Journal of Travels in Northern Saskatchewan, 1936". From: *The Journal of Polar Studies* Vol. 1:131-178

Downes, P.G. 1938. *Reindeer Lake Pottery*. *American Antiquity* 4: 48.

Downes, P.G. 1943. *Sleeping Island: The Story of One Man's Travels in the Great Barren Lands of the Canadian North*. Coward-McCann, Inc. New York (reprinted 1998, edited and with an introduction by R.H. Cockburn, Western Producer Prairie Books)

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