Archaeology

Recent Excavations at the Austin Cave Site: A Late Pleistocene through Early Holocene Occupation in North Central Tennessee

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During the fall and spring of 1991–92 an archaeological survey was conducted along portions of the upper Red River in north-central Tennessee and south-central Kentucky to document early prehistoric sites along this tributary of the Cumberland River. Through controlled surface reconnaissance, 17 early-Archaic and 4 Paleoindian sites were recorded (Barker 1992).

One site, 40Rb82, was selected for preliminary testing due to the high frequency of Paleoindian material and the possibility that intact deposits might remain at this open habitation site. Three fluted points (Figure 1) and numerous flake tools had been recovered during initial surface collections. Several previously reported sites that provide evidence of Paleoindian activity in the vicinity of 40Rb82 include Savage Cave (Schenian 1988), Adams (Sanders 1990), Boyd, Ledford, and Roeder (Tankersley 1990).

Subsurface integrity of the site and its spatial dimensions were defined on the basis of ten 50-cm² test units placed above the cave and around several adjacent sinks. All fill was screened through ¼-inch mesh. Prehistoric lithic material was observed to subsoil in all units. Kirk Corner-Notch points constituted the majority of diagnostics, followed by a ground and basally thinned side-notch variant. Twelve uniface tools and three fluted preforms were also recovered.

Testing revealed that a majority of 40Rb82 has been severely deflated by erosion and modern farming activities. A small knoll occupying an area of approximately 90 m², situated just to the north of Austin cave, remains the only exception. Initial testing revealed evidence of a deep, naturally stratified midden that warranted further investigation.

Subsequently, four contiguous units, each 1 m², were excavated in this portion of the site. Units were placed on an east-west axis to obtain a maximum profile of deposits. All unit fill was bagged and later screened through ¼-inch and ⅛-inch mesh at the Tennessee Division of Archaeology laboratory.

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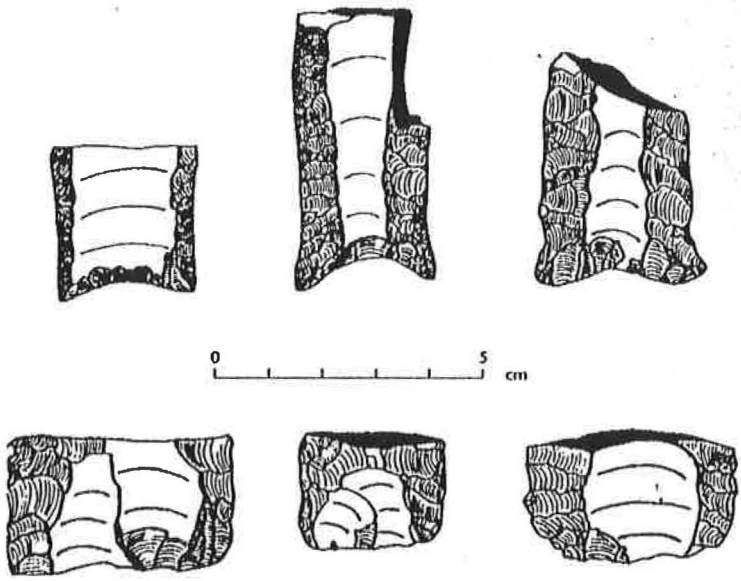

Figure 1. Fluted projectile points and preforms from 40Rb82.

Three distinct strata were evident in the excavation unit profile. Stratum I consisted of a light brown sandy loam that contained a dense amount of small chunky limestone and blocky fossiliferous chert. The base of this level averaged 40 cm in depth and contained early- and middle-Archaic artifacts, including Kirk, Big Sandy, and a concave stemmed variant of the Stanly point (Justice 1987). Mixed cultural materials in this upper zone are attributed to redeposition by slope wash. This redeposition has resulted in a colluvial cap that has preserved the underlying deposits.

Stratum II extended to 90 cm below surface and consisted of a medium reddish brown loam matrix. Numerous ground and basally thinned side-notch points were recorded in this deposit. Stratum III was composed of a dark brown loam, which attained a maximum depth of 160 cm below surface. Three Clovis preforms (Figure 1), numerous Kirk Corner-Notch points, uniface scrapers, and other flake tools were recovered from this level.

A significant assemblage of floral and faunal remains was present in the excavation unit fill. ^{14}C samples from hickory nut shell have been prepared and are expected to yield dates for the early-Archaic and possibly Clovis occupation of the site.

A total of two Clovis projectile points, one fluted Greenbriar and 16 Clovis preforms, have been found at 40Rb82. It is apparent that a rather extensive Clovis occupation is represented here, and that further excavations will be necessary to determine if intact Clovis features are present within the deposits. Previous surveys of the region have demonstrated a correlation between caves/sinkholes and dense concentrations of both Clovis and Cumberland materials.

These areas would have attracted an abundance of game animals and appear to have been a focal point of the early-Paleoindian settlement system. Future excavations at the Austin Cave site may provide clues regarding the type and configuration of Clovis settlement in the mid-south, and could be useful in understanding this very complex human adaptation.

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The Carson-Conn-Short Site (40BN190): An Extensive Clovis Habitation in Benton County, Tennessee

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The Carson-Conn-Short site (40BN190) is located on the edge of Kentucky Lake in Benton County, Tennessee. The site area is a series of partially flooded terrace ridges south of the old Tennessee River channel. The Tennessee Division of Archaeology recorded this site in February of 1992 as part of a Paleoindian site survey project within the Kentucky Lake region (Broster and Norton 1990; Broster et al. 1991).

During the initial survey, some 43 deflated hearths were noted in four distinct areas, and all were associated with fluted points and uniface tools. A limited surface collection included 27 Clovis, 1 Cumberland, 41 bifaces, 78 uniface tools, 35 blades/knives, and 11 blade cores (Figure 1). Three of the exposed areas showed potential for in situ deposits. We thought that testing would be of great importance in understanding Clovis occupation in the area.

An Archaeological Resource Protection Act permit was granted by the United States Department of Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service. Our objectives were to determine if intact Clovis deposits existed, and to obtain faunal and carbon samples from such an occupation. A test unit (1 m^2) was excavated in an undisturbed area adjacent to one of the exposed hearths, which had produced one Clovis preform and numerous uniface tools. All three natural levels of the

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