



OKLAHOMA ARCHEOLOGICAL SURVEY
THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA
NEWSLETTER

Volume 21 Number 4 August 2002 [for April 2002]

HARPER COUNTY, OKLAHOMA CANYONS PEDESTRIAN SURVEY

During the winter and spring of 2001/2002, archeologists from the Oklahoma Archeological Survey surveyed 3520 acres (5.5 square miles) along the incised canyons of the southern Cimarron River drainage in Harper County, Oklahoma (Figure 1). Survey blocks included sand hills with playas, promontories with extensive vistas, canyons with Permian redbed gyp springs, and canyons with Ogallala aquifer springs. This study, funded by the Oklahoma Historical Society and National Park Service, identified 70 new sites and 13 isolated finds which document human presence during the Archaic, Plains Woodland, Plains Village, and Historic eras. The discovery of numerous bison bone exposures identifies one of the major resources sought by prehistoric groups in this rugged area.

PREHISTORIC FINDS AND PATTERNS

The majority of sites identified during this project predate Euro-American entry into this region. Some sites may have occupations dating back to Paleoindian times, although most fall within the broad Archaic and Late Prehistoric [Plains Village] time periods, based on the presence of various types of projectile points or ceramics. As is typical of surveys, often the short time we could spend at any one site precluded the discovery of these time diagnostic artifacts. For this reason, most sites are listed as unknown prehistoric. However, we found projectile points or ceramics at some sites occupied during the Archaic, Plains Woodland, and Plains Village periods. The prehistoric cultural resources have been divided into general categories including camps, lithic scatters, quarries, isolated tools, and bison bone exposures. In addition, nine prehistoric isolated finds were recovered, including three biface fragments, two flakes, one side scraper, one core, one mammoth tooth fragment, and one bison

skull.

Camps typically contain tool manufacturing debris such as flakes

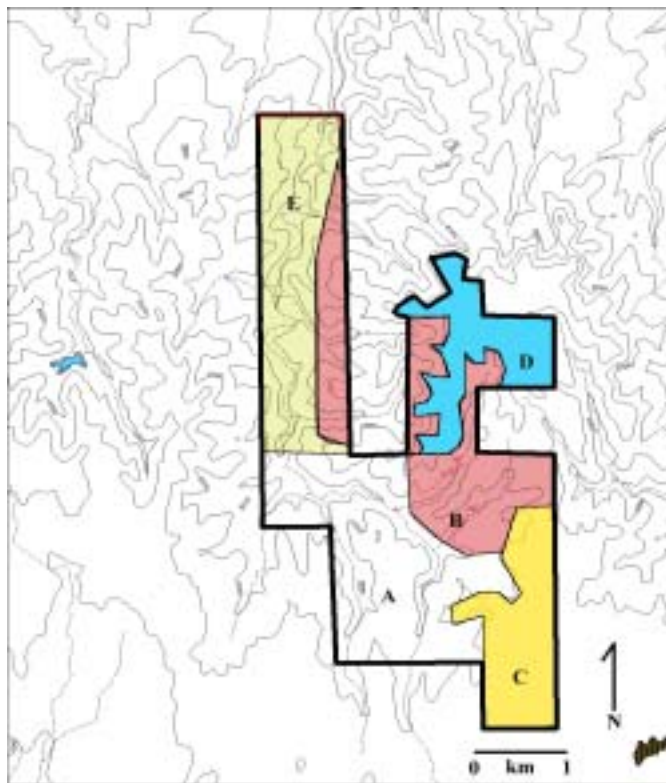


Figure 1. The project area in Harper County, Oklahoma.

and cores, finished tools, ground stone implements, and burned rock resulting from cooking or heating activities. The wide variety of materials mirrors the myriad tasks performed at these locations. Camps may result from an overnight stay to considerably longer episodes. We found a total of 23 camps during this survey. Based on time-diagnostic artifacts recovered, there are four Archaic, three Plains Woodland, and four Plains Village period components. Only one site has all of these time periods represented. We didn't find temporally diagnostic artifacts at the remaining 14 camps; thus, they are listed as unknown prehistoric.

These camps typically contained burned quartzite cobbles, stone tool manufacturing and maintenance debris, stone tools, and bison or deer bones. Other faunal remains recovered included turtle, freshwater mussel, and prairie dog. One site had a small sandstone metate. Four camps had ceramic sherds, including smooth sandy paste wares, smoothed-over cordmarked wares, and stick impressed gypsum tempered wares. Although the majority of the stone tools and debris consisted of the local Day Creek chert or Ogallala quartzite, one camp contained chert from the Edwards Plateau of central Texas, two had Niobrara jasper from northwestern Kansas, and several had Alibates agatized dolomite from the Texas panhandle.



Figure 2. Promontory in Harper County, Oklahoma.

Lithic scatters, although often similar to camps, lack burned rock and artifacts indicating a wide range of activities. Generally, lithic scatters are short term activity areas where people exploited a resource such as cobbles or a food source. Of the 23 lithic scatters we recorded, only one produced temporally diagnostic artifacts – two Archaic dart points. Nine sites yielded remains indicating a targeted resource, including six lithic scatters with bison bone. In addition, one site each contained turkey bone, freshwater mussel shell, and grinding basins pecked into boulders. The remaining 13 sites contained only lithic debris and a limited number of lithic tools. One lithic scatter contained flakes from the Edwards Plateau of central Texas.

Three lithic quarries were identified by the presence of lithic flakes and cores on a natural outcrop of the lithic material. Although all three quarries were on outcrops containing Day Creek chert nodules, only one site had its red variety. Two sites also contained cobbles of Ogallala quartzite.



Figure 3. Redbed canyon showing moderate gully action.

Bison bone exposures were recorded as cultural resources because of the probability that they could be bison kills or processing areas, although no cultural remains were noted. Most of the bones were in sediments marking filled arroyos cut either by modern gully action or by widening of the main canyon. Such settings could mark the location of an arroyo trap kill site. Two exposures recorded as bison kill sites contained more than one individual and extended more than 15 m horizontally. The cultural association of such sites can only be ascertained through excavation. An additional five sites contained several bones, likely the result of human activity, but without excavation the number of individuals remains unknown.

Previous work in adjoining areas of northwestern Oklahoma and the Oklahoma panhandle has identified trends in the distribution of prehistoric sites. Because these patterns were identified in areas adjacent to Harper and Woods counties, it comes as no surprise that prehistoric resources in the current project area generally follow these expectations. Specifically, sites were found on sand hills adjacent to inter-dunal ponds on the upland divide separating the North Canadian and Cimarron river drainages. Promontories contained lithic scatters and quarries. Ogallala-like drainages fed by aquifer springs contained the highest site densities, whereas redbed canyon seep spring-fed drainages had the lowest site densities. Perhaps the most obvious deviation from the expected patterns is a large Late Archaic/Plains Woodland/Plains Village site on a high bank overlooking the narrow main stream. Plains Village components are expected to be adjacent to an area with deep fertile soils. However, the project area lacks such soils, so perhaps this site was simply a preferred camp site beginning in the Archaic and repeatedly used by groups of people performing special tasks.

THE HISTORIC RECORD

Although the historic period began with the Spanish exploration of this area in the 1500s, significant traces of Euro-Anglo activity began with the establishment of Indian Territory. During Anglo-American expansion during the 1800s, many Native groups were shunted westward onto reservations. In addition to the specific tribal land holdings was a strip of land called the Cherokee Outlet, including what today is northwestern Oklahoma and extending as far west as the 100th meridian, assigned to the Cherokee as a corridor to hunting grounds. Although some of the bison remains may be the result of early historic hunting parties, none of the cultural resources identified during this project can be attributed to early Cherokee Outlet times.



Figure 4. Ogallala canyon in Harper County, Oklahoma.

During its tenure as a hunting corridor, the Cherokee Outlet was used by groups from many tribes. As long as conflicts between groups were kept to a minimum, the Outlet was open to most anyone. However, as whites encroached on the north and south and Northern Plains tribes were moved into Indian Territory, the Outlet became an active source of contention between all parties. The result of these hostilities between displaced northern Plains tribes and surrounding white settlers led to an era of military presence in the region and to the establishment of Camp Supply at the confluence of Wolf Creek and the Beaver River. Originally set up as a supply depot for Sheridan's Winter Campaign of 1868, Camp Supply became a permanent fixture in the Outlet as hostilities continued between Native Americans, bison hunters, cattlemen, and homesteaders. The outpost's final act was to oversee the opening of the Cherokee Outlet to homesteaders in 1893.

Within the project area, little can be directly associated with the military. Although the project area is less than eight miles from Camp Supply, the earliest evidence of possible military activity consists of a single .50 caliber rifle cartridge case, fired from a 1868 or 1870 Springfield trapdoor rifle or carbine and found on a narrow ridge overlooking the confluence of the two spring-fed branches of the main drainage. Its caliber and Martin primer suggest this casing dates to an early military activity, such as hunting by Fort personnel.

In 1873, the military issued .45 caliber Springfields, although

they might not have appeared at Fort Supply until around 1875. A post-1873/75 military presence in the project area is suggested by the recovery of a .45 caliber cartridge case and a military-type horseshoe at a historic dugout. Assignment of this material to a military presence is tentative, because cartridges of this type were common in civilian hands in later years. Likewise, the horseshoe could be either military or the civilian use of military equipment because horses, like cattle, were widely traded, bought, and stolen.

With the pacification of Plains Tribes during the Red River Wars of 1874/75 and the destruction of all bison in the Cherokee Outlet by 1880, a group of livestock entrepreneurs moved to make the vast grasslands of the Outlet their own. Cattlemen from Kansas and Texas formed the Cherokee Strip Live Stock Association to lease the grasslands controlled by the Cherokee Tribe. Members of the Association divided the land into pastures, each member fencing their own holdings. Outcries from other cattlemen and, perhaps more importantly, homesteaders who wished to farm the land, eventually forced the US Government to buy the Outlet from the Cherokee Nation and open it for settlement. However, before this occurred, the members of the Cherokee Strip Live Stock Association had already left their indelible mark on the land.

The Cherokee Outlet opened to the public by land run on September 16, 1893. Although homesteaders coveted the eastern two-thirds of the Outlet, the western portion was all but ignored. Crowds of over 30,000 people were common at each of the eastern entry points, whereas only 330 people registered and entered at the noon signal in the westernmost portion. The dearth of homesteaders here allowed cattle ranching to flourish for another decade. Although this land remained open for homesteading, ranchers continued to fence off large tracts to run livestock. In the region around Fort Supply, the vast tracts of grasslands and canyon lands returned to or remained cattle range, and large ranching interests controlled much of the western portion of the Cherokee Outlet until the turn of the century. Then an influx of new homesteaders drove out the cattlemen, and by 1902, almost a decade after the land run, the western portion of the Outlet was homesteaded. In the Outlet, homesteaders had five years to make improvements and live off the land before they received ownership to the quarter section. The homesteaders learned what Native Americans had known for thousands of years, that the area was suitable for hunting game and the seasonal gathering of wild plants and berries, yet was unfit for long-term habitation. Many tracts required sequential claims of four to six people before the time frame for filing was met, and even then, the claim often was sold for cash to the next occupant. Only by gaining control of several sections as individual homesteaders abandoned or sold their stakes and moved on was it possible to eke out a living through a combination of ranching and farming. The census records since statehood illustrate dwindling population numbers for this area as a consequence of homestead abandonment. Rancher acquisition continues to the present time in all of Harper County. The county's highest population level was seen in 1910 at 8189 and, except for a slight increase between 1920 and 1930, the population has seen a steady decline to its 2000 census level of 3562 people.

CONCLUSIONS

During this survey project, we found 70 sites and 13 isolated finds representing time periods throughout the Holocene. Although the research design resulting from previous surveys within the North Canadian River drainage predicted a high likelihood of finding prehistoric sites, the total number of such sites was somewhat unexpected, because there were only 67 previously recorded sites for the county. The organization of the prehistoric groups inhabiting this area follow the general patterns of foraging groups, although during the Plains Village period the area was used for collecting pursuits such as hunting. The preponderance of sites with bison remains and the presence of numerous bison bone exposures in the gullies and stream terraces suggest that this resource was frequently sought by hunters during all prehistoric time periods.

Historic sites within the project area were related to Native American translocation to Oklahoma in the 1800s, military activity following the Civil War, cattlemen incursions subse-

quent to the destruction of bison and pacification of relocated Plains groups, homesteader activity associated with the land run of 1893, and post-statehood population movements. Of particular interest is that homestead claims were delayed following seven to ten years following the land run of 1893, with the majority of claims occurring between 1900 and 1902. This delay allowed cattlemen to use large tracts of public lands and highlighted the marginality of this land for horticulture. The large number of sites for all time periods in this perceived "marginal" area high on the divide between the Cimarron and Beaver rivers highlights the inadequacies of our understanding of the cultural history of this region of the state and the cultural resources it contains.

The project report, Pedestrian Survey of Canyons in the Cimarron River Drainage, Harper County, Oklahoma [ARSR #45], is available at the Oklahoma Archeological Survey, 111 E Chesapeake, Norman OK 73019-5111, for \$4.00 plus \$2.00 for shipping/handling. *Lee Bement*

The Oklahoma Archeological Survey NEWSLETTER is issued quarterly by the Oklahoma Archeological Survey, University of Oklahoma, 111 E. Chesapeake, Norman OK 73019-0575, telephone (405) 325-7211. Twenty-one hundred copies of the NEWSLETTER were printed by the Oklahoma Geological Survey, Norman OK, at a cost of \$192 to the taxpayers of Oklahoma. COPIES HAVE BEEN DEPOSITED WITH THE PUBLICATIONS CLEARINGHOUSE OF THE OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF LIBRARIES.

Newsletter editors: Lois Albert and Marjy Duncan
ISSN 1522-0346

PRESERVING OKLAHOMA'S PREHISTORY FOR THE FUTURE



The University of Oklahoma is an Equal Opportunity Institution.