Oklahoma Anthropological Society Fall Excavations at the Pratt Site, 34GV156

by Richard R. Drass

During the Oklahoma Anthropological Society Fall Activity, volunteers helped excavate a large Plains Village site near Pauls Valley, Oklahoma. The Pratt site, 34GV156, sits on a high terrace that is being eroded by the river (Figure 1). Over 14 pits were mapped in the river bank at this site last spring, and excavations were designed to test the context of the remaining site and identify a house pattern. Many Society members participated in preparations for the excavations as well as digging for four days from October 30 through November 2. The very good weather brought out from 30 to over 40 people each of the four dig days. As usual, Society members accomplished a lot in a short period of time. I thank everyone for their help and enthusiasm. Although Dave Morgan prepared the equipment and made arrangements for the dig, he became ill and could not attend. Special mention also goes to those who came early to help set up the excavation grid and equipment, map the site, and begin the testing. This excavation would not have been possible without the assistance of Billy Hartley, Don and Camilla Heasty, Jim Mayberry, Austin Dennis, Chip Pearson, Dale McHard, Tom Borella, Willard Payne, Rood Blanchard, Mike Hester, and Larry Neal. Roger Patton volunteered to backfill the excavations with his tractor, permitting us to dig all of the last day,
Sunday, and saving us considerable work and back pain. For this, we are all thankful. The cooperation of the landowners, Mr. and Mrs. Pratt, is greatly appreciated, and I hope that they will find the results interesting.

In addition to the excavations, Lois Albert arranged two OAS Certification Program seminars in the evenings. Bob Brooks (Survey) presented the “Public Education” seminar and Neil Garrison (Martin Nature Center, Oklahoma City) led the “Specialized Techniques: Flintknaping” seminar. Both seminars were well attended. Those attending the dig enjoyed a hamburger/hot dog dinner before the first seminar.

Four test areas were laid out at the site and excavations occurred in all four areas (Figure 2). These areas were selected based on observations made by Austin Dennis, Chip Pearson, and Jim Mayberry, who had seen the site after it had been plowed and materials were exposed. We also attempted to examine areas with a soil probe, but very dry conditions negated this type of testing. Instead, we noted areas where rodents had exposed artifacts, assuming that these might correlate with features that had softer soil from organic fill. We selected for testing four of the most promising areas based on the reported locations of artifact concentrations and the evidence from rodent activity. Excavations were hindered somewhat by the very dry soil. We resorted to wetting the soil enough to loosen it for excavation and screening. The soil is mostly a sandy loam or sandy clay loam, which will usually dig and screen easily with any soil moisture.

Our excavations indicate that we were either very good or lucky in selecting areas for digging or, more likely, there are lots of features present at this site. Although we did not uncover a complete house pattern during this phase of testing, we identified evidence of four houses, one in each of the excavation areas. Twenty-three squares were excavated, with many reaching the bottom of the cultural deposit. The subsoil varied across the site. In our northeastern and southwestern test areas (E65 - E70 and E3 - E6 squares), a reddish sand subsoil occurs around 30 to 35 cm deep. In the E36 and E37 units, we encountered dark brown to brown soil as deep as we dug (55 cm). It is interesting that the pit in E36 was distinguished by tan soil as was the post mold in N3-E37. The soil in the E10 units was also brown to dark brown and extended to 70 cm in N20-E10 before we encountered a tan sand subsoil.

Features were found in all four tested areas. These include pits, post molds, and hearths. Four pits were identified with two overlapping each other (Figure 3). We completely excavated the two overlapping pits (Feature 15), but only uncovered parts of pits 16 and 18. We did not reach the bottom of either of these two pits, ending at 110 cm in both. All pits contained charcoal, ash, bone, and some artifacts such as pottery, arrow points, etc. Soil samples were taken from flotation; I expect corn and other plant remains to be identified after the samples are processed.

An ash-filled hearth, Feature 17, was discovered in N18-E10 at 30 cm beneath the surface (Figure 4). This unit also contained burned clay and artifacts at this level, suggesting that a burned house floor is present. A pit or other feature...
may be present in the squares to the north of the hearth, but we could not define its edges. Only a portion of the hearth was excavated, but it is 23 cm deep and appears to be about 70 cm in diameter.

Another possible hearth is present in 0-E3. This feature is less well defined than Hearth 17 due to rodent activity. We noted an ash concentration at 30 cm deep which extended almost to 35 cm. To the south, in square S1-E3, we found a large post mold in level 3 (30 cm depth). This is one of the largest post molds I have seen in the area. It is about 40 cm in diameter, and extended 63 cm below level 3. There is some speculation that this might be an historic post. The excavation units in this area typically had some historic materials mixed in the upper levels. However, the lack of any wood material remaining in the post hole seems to indicate that the post mold is much older than the last 100 years. I think that this is a center post and that the ash concentration to the north is the central hearth from a house. If this is another house, then Pit 16 would be inside the structure or intrusive into the house pattern.

The northeastern excavation unit contained the greatest number of squares, ten. We encountered the pits of Feature 15 in our first test units, so we expanded excavations west of the feature in hopes of finding a house. We discovered post molds to the west, and there is a line of post molds extending west for three meters. We also identified a line of post molds extending north in two squares. It appears that we have uncovered the southeastern corner of a square to rectangular building. There is a single post to the east of this corner that would be outside the proposed structure. This may represent some other feature. There is no evidence for burning in this structure. The pits in Feature 15 would be outside this structure.

Materials recovered from the excavations are being cleaned and cataloged. We found a good sample of remains, including Fresno and Washita arrow points, plain pottery, bone, and charcoal. There has been no analysis of the material yet, but the points and pottery suggest a Washita River phase occupation. Both dates from the river bank pits were A.D. 1290, also during the Washita River phase. Additional radiocarbon samples will be submitted to establish dates for some of the excavated features. One impression from the excavations is that there was not a lot of bison bone found. Most other Washita River phase sites in this area have significant amounts of bison bone. Analysis of the materials will determine if this initial impression is correct.

Although we did not get a complete house pattern, primarily due to the dry soil conditions slowing excavations and screening, we did accomplish a lot. We now have four potential houses that could be investigated further with future excavations. We also completed a topographic map of the site which included the location of the pits in the river bank. The sample of artifacts is sufficient for comparison with other villages in the area. Thus, we have some good data.
from another very large, Late Prehistoric village along the Washita River, and we know that the site is in very good condition.

**Upcoming Events**

**March 12 - 13, 2004.** *46th Annual Caddo Conference*, Northwestern State University, Natchitoches LA. An opening reception will be held Thursday evening, March 11, at the Williamson Museum; paper sessions will be in the Student Union ballroom; and there will be a Caddo dance on Saturday evening. Contact: Dayna Bowker Lee, Louisiana Regional Folklife Program, Box 3363 NSU, Natchitoches LA 71497; phone: 318-357-4328; email: daynal@nsula.edu; website: www.nsula.edu/regionalfolklife/news.htm

**March 27 - 28.** *Flint Hills Conference*, St. Joseph Museum, St. Joseph MO. The conference will include a symposium “Chert Sources: Looking East from the Flint Hills”. Contact: Jim Feagins, 800 Sunset Lane, Belton MO 64012-4922; phone 816-318-4488; email: jimfeagins@sbcglobal.net; website: www.stjosephmuseum.org

April 17. *Oklahoma Anthropological Society Spring Meeting*, Dale Hall (room 103), University of Oklahoma. Contact: Oklahoma Archeological Survey (address below); phone: 405-325-7211; email: lealbert@ou.edu; website: www.ou.edu/cas/archsur/oas

June 5 - 13. *Oklahoma Anthropological Society Spring Dig*, Bryson-Paddock site, Kay County OK. This dig at a Wichita contact period site will run concurrently with an *OU/OSU field school* (June 1 - July 2). Contact: Richard Drass, Oklahoma Archeological Survey (address below); phone: 405-325-7211; email: rdrass@ou.edu; website: www.ou.edu/archsur - click on link to Bryson-Paddock field school.

June 1 - July 9. *OU Field School*, Jake Bluff Paleoindian Bison Kill, northwestern Oklahoma. Contact: Leland Bement, Oklahoma Archeological Survey (address below); phone: 405-325-7211; email: lbement@ou.edu; website: www.ou.edu/archsur - click on link to Jake Bluff field school. More details in next newsletter.

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