The subject of cultural use of playas immediately evokes scenes of Paleoindians trapping and dispatching mammoths and large bison along the muddy margins of a shallow, ephemeral watering hole. Whether the game animals are mammoths, extinct bison, or modern bison, the playa is commonly viewed as an important part of the game procurement strategy. However, horticultural groups also took note of these resources.

Ephemeral water supplies held by upland playa lakes in the Oklahoma panhandle (No Man’s Land) and adjacent portions of Kansas, Colorado, and Texas attracted hunter-gatherers as well as horticultural groups throughout prehistory, yet archeological investigation of this widespread setting remains in its infancy. Not a single playa site has been excavated in the Oklahoma panhandle, although numerous such sites produce extensive surface artifact collections. Important early man sites such as the Nall site, 34CI134, and the multicomponent camp at the Muncy site are known solely from surface collections.

The Oklahoma panhandle, termed No Man’s Land during the 1850s, is a strip 267 kilometers long by 54 kilometers wide that today is divided into Cimarron, Texas, and Beaver counties. This strip is located in the Great Plains physiographic zone and is a prime setting for the investigation of the prehistoric use of playas and other water resources in the Southern Plains. The Cimarron River is on the north, the North Canadian (Beaver) River on the south, and there are playa-dotted uplands throughout. Water resources in No Man’s Land can be grouped into four classes: potable springs, non-potable springs, upland playas, and dendritic drainages. The Cimarron and Beaver rivers cross the area from west to east. Springs are found at various settings across the Panhandle, ranging from the canyon bottoms in northeastern Cimarron County to river terraces in Texas and Beaver counties. The springs vary in mineral content based on the substrata which the ground water traverses. The western springs are less mineralized and thus consistently more potable than the eastern springs. Playas located on the upland plains likewise provide variable grade water, which also ranges from ephemeral to permanent, as well as from potable to alkaline.

The playa resources are the least understood in terms of prehistoric land and water use. Once the use of short term water supplies and the resources they provide is assessed, playa exploitation can be integrated into broader studies of prehistoric subsistence strategies.
To this end, Survey archeologists Lee Bement and Bob Brooks received funding to survey playas in Texas and Beaver counties in the Oklahoma panhandle. The initial stage of this fieldwork began in September 1997 and will continue through this summer. Ph.D. student Scott Brosowske is looking at this area for the basis of his dissertation research. So far, we have surveyed 12 playas and have recorded 24 sites. Many of the sites yielded arrow points and/or Late Archaic age dart points. One site contained a Paleoindian point base. Many of the landowners and other folks around Guymon know of other sites, and we are currently documenting some of the private collections from the area. Bobby Nickey graciously took us up in a small plane so that we could view the playas from the air. Of course, we chose the windiest day for this little excursion. All went well. Now, however, the snow has slowed our progress, but we will return.

Lee Bement

Mammoth Tusk Display Donated to the Dewey County Museum

A reconstructed mammoth tusk, incorporated into a display, will be housed at the Dewey County Museum in Taloga. The tusk was recovered after gravel quarrying exposed mammoth bones buried deeply in a prominent terrace of the Canadian River in Dewey County, Oklahoma. Controlled archeological excavations, directed by Don G. Wyckoff, were undertaken to ascertain if animals had been killed by Paleoindian hunters. Although no traces of humans were found, the site did yield a small, but intriguing, array of Pleistocene animals in an interesting geological setting.

Manual stripping and extensive backhoe trenching revealed the presence of five ancient spring deposits. Bones of Pleistocene elephants around spring #2 were uncovered and studied in detail. Portions of two mammoths and scattered bones of turtles, frogs, a water rat, a wood duck, a pocket gopher, a horse, and a pronghorn were recovered. The mammoth molars share attributes with both *Mammuthus imperator* (Imperial mammoth) and *M. columbi* (Columbian mammoth). Uranium-thorium dating of the mammoth teeth enamel yielded results ranging from 140,000 to 165,000 years ago.

The display’s photos and illustrations, as well as information above, are from the publication, *Interdisciplinary Studies of the Hajny Mammoth Site, Dewey County, Oklahoma* (Wyckoff et al. 1992). The mammoth tusk was donated by Mr. Gary Hajny. Captions for the photos were written by Don Wyckoff and formatted by Lois Albert. The display was constructed by David F. Morgan.

Reference

Survey Archeologists and Students Attend Plains Conference

Richard Drass, Lee Bement, and Kent Buehler presented papers at the 55th Annual Plains Anthropological Conference in Boulder, Colorado in November. Lee presented a paper, “Ritual and the Hunt: A Painted Bison Skull from a Folsom Bison Kill in Northwestern Oklahoma”, in the general session on Upper Paleolithic and Paleoindian site-specific research, which he co-chaired. Rich presented “The Little Deer Site and Protohistoric Subsistence in Western Oklahoma” in an organized symposium on Plains Village Tradition on the Southern Plains. A recent update on the work at the Certain site was presented by Kent (co-authored by Lee and K.C. Kraft). Graduate students K.C. Kraft, Scott Brosowske, Jesse Ballenger, and Kari Schmidt presented summaries of their respective research. The Plains Conference provides professionals, avocationalists, and students the opportunity to present the findings of recent investigations in Plains archeology. The three-day conference also provides a setting where professionals and students can get together and discuss important themes, some not so important, and also to get to know one another. Conferences such as this one provide the opportunity to showcase Oklahoma’s prehistoric heritage and to acquire new ideas and information to broaden our understanding of Oklahoma’s past.
Survey Collections to be Used in New Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History

In recent years, archeologists at the Oklahoma Archeological Survey have been responsible for obtaining some of the most important information about Oklahoma’s prehistory. This information is now being sought by the Oklahoma Museum of Natural History for incorporation into their upcoming displays. Material from the Burnham site, excavated by Don Wyckoff when he was at the Survey, will contribute to the initial display in the Ancient Oklahomans area. Likewise, the Folsom-age Cooper site, excavated by Lee Bement, will be featured in a lifelike diorama of a Paleoindian bison kill. The painted bison skull from Cooper will also be on display once restoration is completed. Don Wyckoff’s research with Dalton sites will be included in the Paleoindian displays. The work of Larry Neal and Marjy Duncan will be incorporated into the Calf Creek display featuring Early/Middle Archaic cultures in Oklahoma. Lee Bement and Kent Buehler’s investigations at the Certain site, a Late Archaic bison kill, will contribute to the displays about the Western Bison Hunters. Information about the Plains Woodland and Plains Village horticulturalists extracted from research by Richard Drass and Robert Brooks will flesh out these displays. Displays about Spiro and other eastern Oklahoma groups will be bolstered by information gleaned from the works of Don Wyckoff, Lois Albert, and form Survey archeologist Dan Rogers. These are but a few examples of the ways in which Survey personnel are contributing to the new museum. In addition to these examples of material remains, Survey personnel are also contributing expertise in the prehistory of the state by participating in the planning of the exhibits as members of the advisory committee. Robert Brooks, Lee Bement, Marjy Duncan, and Kent Buehler have participated in the planning sessions.

Lee Bement

40th Caddo Conference to be Held in Arkadelphia, Arkansas on March 13 - 14

This year’s Caddo Conference, the 40th, will be held at Henderson State University in Arkadelphia, Arkansas on March 13-14. The usual party for early arrivals will be at Dr. Ann Early’s home on the evening of the 12th (Thursday). The preliminary announcement with a call for papers was sent in December. If you are interested in attending, and haven’t received the announcement, please contact Ann at (870) 246-7311 or email amarie@iocc.com.

86th Annual Technical Meeting of the Oklahoma Academy of Sciences Attended by Survey Staff and Students

On November 7, 1997, several archeologists from the Survey presented papers at the 86th Annual Technical Meeting of the Oklahoma Academy of Sciences at the University of Sciences and Arts of Oklahoma in Chickasha. The session for the Social Sciences Section was organized by the section chair, Lois Albert. Survey staff members and their topics were: Marjy Duncan, The Two Sisters Site: Late Prehistoric Occupation in the Oklahoma Panhandle; Richard Drass, Current Research at the Little Deer Site: The Protohistoric Period in Western Oklahoma; Lynita Langley-Ware and Robert Bartlett, Archaeological Excavations at 34NB68, a Historical Structure on Otoe-Missouria Trust Lands, Noble County, Oklahoma; and Lois Albert, Archeology in the Lee Creek Valley, Eastern Oklahoma. Other people associated with the University of Oklahoma or the Survey who gave papers were Joe Whitecotton, Patricia Gilman, and Paul Minnis (Department of Anthropology, OU), K.C. Kraft (Oklahoma Museum of Natural History), and Charles S. Wallis, Jr. (Oklahoma Conservation Commission).

Lois E. Albert

1997-98 Student Lab Assistants

Each year the Survey employs a number of student assistants to process the many artifacts and other items that come through the Archeology Lab. This practice is mutually beneficial to both the Survey and the students by providing a motivated labor force for the Lab and valuable experience for the students. The students learn a variety of lab procedures including the identification, organization, cleaning and cataloging of artifacts, and the processing of soil samples by water flotation for maximum recovery of charcoal, seeds and other materials. Many small items are recovered with the flotation techniques which would be lost using the coarser-meshed standard screens.

This year the Lab is fortunate to have William Scates, Mia Parham, Monica Bell, Lauren O’Shea and Talia Karim as lab assistants. All are undergraduates with a focus on various aspects of archeology. William and Talia have been instrumental in processing a large volume of flotation samples from several sites. Mia, Monica, Lauren, and Talia have cleaned and cataloged an extensive amount of artifacts from Little Deer (34Cu10) and numerous other sites.
We are also fortunate to have a Special Lab Assistant, Karen O’Brien. Karen recently completed her Masters degree at Texas Tech University in Lubbock where she worked with Eileen Johnson at the Lubbock Lake Landmark and other sites. Karen brings her extensive lab experience to bear on the bison material from the Certain site and is working to consolidate and reconstruct the numerous bone specimens from several excavation seasons.

The Survey appreciates the dedication and service shown by these highly motivated lab assistants.

Kent Buehler

Oklahoma State Fair Exhibit
Prepared by Survey Archeologists

Survey archeologists Lee Bement and Lois Albert, assisted by Larry Neal and other staff members, planned and created an educational exhibit for the 1997 Oklahoma State Fair in Oklahoma City. Three panels of illustrations, artifacts, and text depicting the archeological time line of our state from the Paleoindian period (at least 12,000 years ago) until historic times were assembled. A short, two page summary handout of the state’s prehistory was also prepared by Lee and Lois.

On September 22-23 and 25-27, the exhibit was set up in the Lattice Stage room of the Hobbies, Arts, and Crafts the hours that the fair was open during these four days to give out educational information and answer questions. In addition to the Survey materials, brochures from the Oklahoma Anthropological Society (OAS) and the State Historic Preservation Office were available. Members of the OAS and SHPO staff also helped staff the exhibit.

The Fair exhibit gives us a chance to meet people from across the state and talk with them about archeology. It presents many of these people with new information about our state’s past which they have never had the opportunity to learn about before. Several people told us of archeological sites or collections, and we have had the opportunity to travel to some areas for a visit and to document the materials. We hope to go additional areas when time, money, and the weather permit.