NEWSLETTER

OKLAHOMA ARCHEOLOGICAL SURVEY

Volume 11 Number 3 January 1991

SALVAGE EXCAVATION IN ROGER MILLS COUNTY

by Francie Gettys

Last July, the Survey received a call from John Flick telling us that some human bones had been exposed in a wheat field in Roger Mills County. Mark Sullivan and Charles Carpenter recognized human bones that turned up while they were deep-plowing a field near a permanent tributary to the Washita River. They notified the County Sheriff, and Survey staff members planned a field visit.

On July 19, we first visited the site, now recorded as Rm-668, the Sullivan-Carpenter site. In addition to the localized scatter of human bones, this large site has yielded triangular arrow points (Fresno and Harrell types), a few plain potsherds, several manos, flakes, burned rock fragments, and bones large enough to be bison or cow.

Our purposes were to recover the disturbed and damaged human remains and to find, record, and remove any bones left in place. We began by moving about two meters away from the bone concentration. We carefully shoveled down through the 8-10" plow zone; the bottom was recognized by harder packed soil containing calcium concretions. Whenever we came across a bone, we dug carefully around it to determine whether it was in or near its original context. All dirt was screened through 1/4" mesh; many bone fragments and very few flint flakes were recovered.

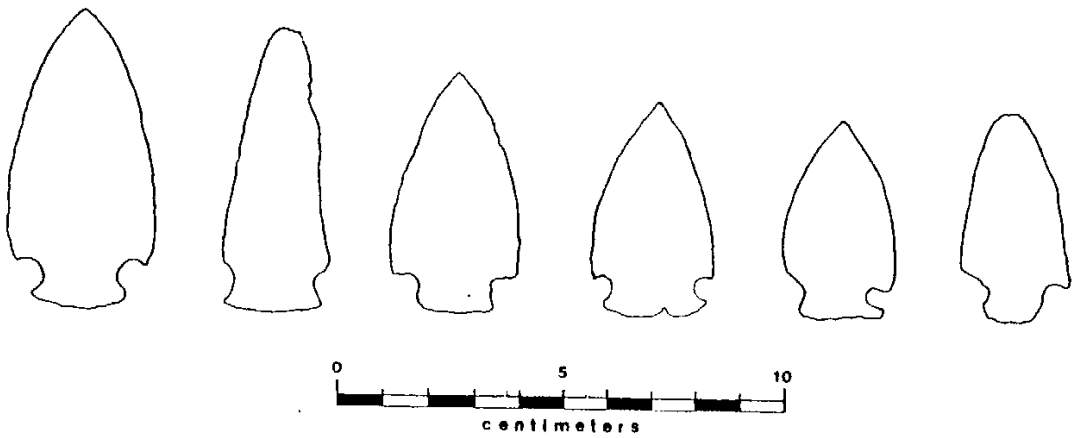
We soon found enough skull fragments to indicate that at least two individuals were present. By the end of the second day's work, John Flick found a row of plow-damaged vertebrae just below the plow zone. Within the next day, we exposed the partial remains of two individuals in situ. They had been interred close together or overlapping, in a flexed position with the heads toward the south, facing west. No artifacts were found either in situ or in the screened plow zone. Because the surface artifacts showed Late Prehistoric use of the site, we assumed that the burial probably dated from that occupation.

During the five days in July that we spent exposing and recording this burial, other human bones were discovered on the plowed surface about 100 meters away. The double burial was then named Burial 1, and we visited the site again during August to investigate Burial 2.

Surface finds at Burial 2 included some skull fragments and two right clavicles (collarbones), so again we knew there were at least two individuals. We began carefully digging off to one side of the surface concentration, and almost immediately found bones in situ. We soon uncovered parts of two apparently complete skulls, so we knew the surface fragments represented a third individual.

We found that Burial 2 contained three skeletons, nearly complete, in a very small oval shaped area (less than one meter in diameter). The presence of a pit was inferred from the tightly limited area of the bones, not from any changes in soil color or consistency. As we carefully exposed the remains, we found that most bones were articulated, making the identification of the three individuals relatively easy. We were also able to infer the order of placement in the grave and the positions of the bodies. Two bodies were flexed on their right sides in a nested position with the upper vertebrae pointing west-southwest. Neither skull was attached at the time of excavation. One had apparently been pulled out of position and broken up by the plow, leaving only parts of jaws and teeth near their original position. The other skull, including the two top vertebrae, lay on the opposite side of the pit from its body, indicating that the individual had been beheaded before burial. The third individual in Burial 2 lay underneath the others, obviously the first to be interred. The person lay on his or her back, head to the east and facing south; the legs were flexed along the south edge of the pit.

As we carefully removed dirt to expose the bones, we began finding artifacts. A total of seven large, corner-notched dart points or knives (see illustration) were included in the burial. The presence of one point lodged in a vertebra leads me to believe that all the points were used to kill the victims. The other six points are in locations that may indicate their use as weapons: they lie within the chest, upper arm, or pelvic areas of two individuals. Interestingly,



the decapitated person had no points associated with the body or the skull.

Some bones have been analyzed for characteristics that would indicate age and sex of the individuals. At this time, we believe that the first person interred was a young woman around 17 years old. The other two are men, age 20-30 and 30-40 respectively. The younger man had been decapitated.

Ten days of hard work were spent on salvaging Burial 2. The bones were fragile, especially as they dried out. We could move only a little dirt at a time with very small tools. Most days were hot and sunny, and when rain threatened, we stretched a tarp over the work area with a trench to lead water away from the burial.

Both burials were carefully mapped in the field on graph paper. Burial 2 was mapped in two layers, with more layers in a few locations to record overlapping small bones. Each bone was numbered, removed, and bagged or wrapped in aluminum foil to protect against more breakage. In the lab, bones have been cleaned, numbered, and repacked. They will be analyzed by Doug Owsley, Smithsonian Institution, as part of his ongoing study of prehistoric populations on the Plains.

Corner-notched large points don't seem to belong on a Late Prehistoric site with Fresno points, although Don Wyckoff has suggested that a ritual murder might have required certain styles of dart or knife points (possibly antiques) that were not normally used for hunting or other subsistence tasks. However, a simpler explanation is that the site has several components, and other evidence for Late Archaic or Woodland occupations may be buried beyond the plow's reach. For sites containing corner- notched large points in western Oklahoma and the Texas Panhandle, radiocarbon dates range from 1510 B.C. through A.D. 1113 (J. Peter Thurmond, in press). Although the upper range seems too late to be true, we should probably accept that these artifacts were in use through A.D. 500. We plan to get radiocarbon dates from both burials to help answer some of these questions.

We also plan to do residue analysis on the points. It is now possible to detect and identify residues on prehistoric tools left by contact with animal (including human) blood as well as some plant materials. If the analysis works on these points, the suggestion of violent death may be supported, or we may find that the points were used as general purpose tools in addition to or instead of murder weapons.

The salvage excavation at Rm-668 was demanding and fascinating work, and I was very lucky to have shared it with several dedicated volunteers and supporters. Survey staff members Bob Brooks, Ines Pennella, and Leslie Anderson helped me in the field; Kent Buehler, Amy Kennedy, and Steve Vanlandingham have worked on this project in the lab. Volunteers include the Sullivan family (Mark, Belinda, Frank, Jessie, and John Mark), the Carpenter family (Charles, John, and Cynthia), John Flick, Karen and Heidi Nowlin, Marceta and Jackie Dirickson, Roy Patterson, Tim Shantz, John Northcutt, and Tom Parry. Karen, Marceta, Marjorie Duncan, and Samm Hurst have volunteered their help in the lab. Our many hours of painstaking work were brightened by everyone's cheerfulness, sincere interest, and lively speculation on the story of these prehistoric people. I especially thank the Sullivan and Carpenter families for their willingness to put their work aside for a while and their hospitality to all of us.

SURVEY HOSTS OAS LAB DAYS

Oklahoma Anthropological Society members gathered at the Oklahoma Archeological Survey's Archeology Lab the weekend of November 10th and 11th to process materials from the Densmore Site, 34 Gv-167. Guided by Richard Drass, Francie Gettys, and Kent Buehler from the Survey staff and assisted by former Survey Lab Assistant Leslie Anderson, a two-day total of 28 volunteers washed, sorted and cataloged items recovered during the 1990 OAS Spring Dig.

Most of the participants had previous lab experience, so although we did not complete the cataloging, we were able to process a large amount of material. Debris from two of the larger excavated features was completely washed, sorted, counted, cataloged and boxed, thus making it possible to begin analysis of these features.

The Survey recently received the results of two radiocarbon assays from the site. The charcoal samples came from two large pits and gave uncorrected dates of A.D. 1420 +/- 80 (Beta-39981) and A.D. 1270 +/- 90 (Beta-39982). Funding for these dates was provided by the Society's Dig Committee.

In all, we had a very successful two days and accomplished quite a bit. The work done by the Oklahoma Anthropological Society will be a big help to Survey staff member Richard Drass as he analyzes the materials from the site. OAS members also benefitted by gaining lab experience with a variety of material types and earning certification credit.

Participating in the Lab Days were Leona Coleman, Gene Hellstern, Charlette Gifford, Paul Ferguson, Ruth Ferguson, Gina Short, Gayle Farley, Mary McHard, Milly Fightmaster, Preston George, Margaret George, Bob Sweet, Paul Medcalf, Marceta Dirickson, Jackie Dirickson, Paul Benefield, Rennie Benefield, Walt Rosborough, Kay Tarapolis, Don Shockey, Leslie Anderson, Sandy Dubase, Don Menzie, Jane Menzie, Bill Menzie, Dave Morgan, Tim Cannon, Linda Cannon, Richard Drass and Francie Gettys.

NEW LIGHT ON THE LIPSCOMB BISON QUARRY

by Jack L. Hofman

It was Saturday June 10, 1989, exactly 50 years after the first excavation was opened at the Lipscomb Bison Quarry by the University of Nebraska State Museum. Jerry Peery cooked buffalo steaks on the bar-b-que grill and a group of students and archeologists enjoyed the cool late afternoon air which came as a prelude to a severe thunderstorm. After nearly 50 years of neglect, we had returned to try and learn more about this Folsom- age bison bone bed. The original research at Lipscomb in 1939, under the direction of C. Bertrand Schultz and the field supervision of William J. Hendy, was a paleontological venture focused on the recovery of a late Pleistocene age bison sample for comparison with other bison remains being collected and studied by paleontologists at the University of Nebraska. Lacking radiocarbon dating, the Lipscomb bison sample was of particular significance because of the diagnostic Folsom projectile points which were found in direct association with the bison bones. Previous archeological, paleontological, and geological work at the Folsom site in New Mexico, at the Blackwater Draw site near Clovis, New Mexico, and at the Lindenmeier site in Colorado had documented the Pleistocene age of the distinctive Folsom projectile points. To paleontologists, Lipscomb was an important bison bone bed for the study of bison evolution. To archeologists,