

Preliminary Report

2008 Archaeology Field School, South Texas

Director

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Introduction

The Archaeology Field School, South Texas completed another season of operations and student/volunteer training in archaeological research. The Lower Nueces River Valley (Fig. 1) was the focus of attention during the 8-week program sponsored by Texas A&M University-Kingsville (TAMU-K), and the Corpus Christi Museum of Science and History (CCMSH). This season, work involved the intensive study of two Late Prehistoric settlements. Students

contemporaneous Late Prehistoric base camps located 5 km apart along the Nueces River. The diversified type of work conducted at both sites provided excellent student training and generated new and exciting data. Corpus Christi Caller-Times (Harr 2008) and Channel 6 News (2008) provided newspaper and TV coverage about the participants, the program, and archaeological discoveries this season.

2008 Participants

The 2008 Field School students were from Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, University of North Texas, Floresville High School, and California State University at Fullerton. John Hahn, a previous Field School student (2007) and graduate of the University of Northern Iowa served as Field Supervisor. Eighty-five new and returning volunteers joined the Field School team. These included middle and high school students and adult volunteers, as well as faculty, students, and staff from TAMU-K, TAMU-CC, and CCMSH.

University groups included the Student Undergraduate Research Program (SURP), led by Dr. Suzette Chopin at TAMU-CC. Anthropology students led by Dr. Cecilia Rhodes of TAMU-K also participated. Jesenia Guerra (Museum Librarian) and Yvette Shaffer (Museum

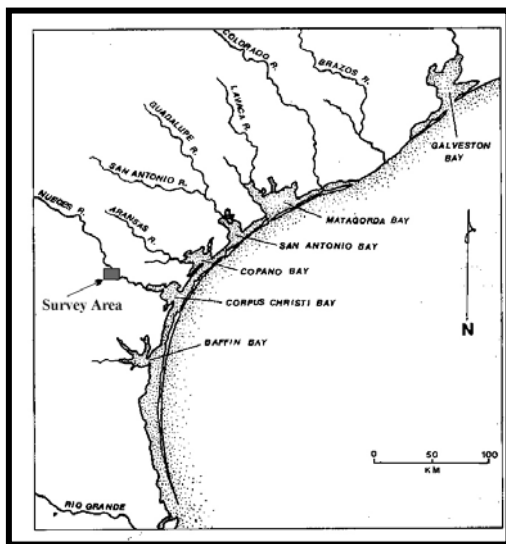


Fig. 1. 2008 Archaeological Field School Study Area, Lower Nueces River Valley.

completed the excavation of habitation features at 41-NU-220 and initiated study of 41-NU-54 through intensive survey, mapping, and testing. Both of these sites appear to have been

Registrar) joined the field team during critical times and assisted in laboratory work and completing survey and excavations at 41-SP-220.

For the third year in a row, the Alice ISD Science Camp participated in field and lab operations over a two day period. Forty-five 7th graders along with high school mentors and teachers were energized in their participation. Some will undoubtedly return in the coming years.

Sponsorship and Assistance

Institutional assistance and community support, as in previous years, continues to provide key elements of the Anthropology Field School Program. The Friends of the Corpus Christi Museum provided equipment, supplies, and consultant fees. The Corpus Christi Museum Director, Rick Stryker, and Development Director, Dr. Patricia Drolet assisted in fundraising and facilitating Field School logistics. Drs. Jieming Chen (Chair, Psychology and Sociology), Sonny Davis (Assistant Dean) Cecilia Rhoades (Assistant Professor) and George Weir (Office of Registrar) from Texas A&M University-Kingsville provided administrative support. Three of the Field School university students received scholarship awards from the Friends of the Corpus Christi Museum through a grant graciously provided from the Behmann Brothers Foundation.

Community contributions added to the Field School success. St. Patrick's Catholic Church in San Patricio once again provided the Community Center for dinner and evening discussions. As in previous years, the field research team had exclusive use of Dr. Robert

Bluntzer's ranch in San Patricio, where the field headquarters, camp, and laboratory were located. Lonnie Glasscock and Bill Bluntzer offered access to their ranches for archaeological work at Sites 41-SP-220 and 41-NU-54 respectively. Local residents also offered a wide range of aid and assistance during the field investigations. Charles Bluntzer, Joan Bluntzer, John Lloyd Bluntzer, John Floyd, Bill Havelka, Geraldine McGloin, and Reverend Francis Sebastian were helpful in providing meals, local history, conversation, and field assistance when needed. Alan Miller, of Taft, Texas once again provided his small boat for river survey. Finally, Mr. Sanford Amey, a businessman from Corpus Christi, kindly donated a full-size pick-up truck for the duration of the program.

Now a tradition, the community of San Patricio hosted a public meeting at St. Patrick's Church Community Center where Field School students and staff presented their research results at the end of July (Bunge 2008; Chapman 2008a; Giuliatti 2008a; Hahn 2008a; Morehead 2008; Wright 2008a). The presentation was attended by nearly 50 people from the surrounding area.

2008 Field Research and Results

After identifying new habitation and quarry sites in the 2007 Field Season and recovering more information at the Late Prehistoric settlement Site 41-SP-220 (Drolet 2007a, 2007b) it was becoming clear there were at least three Late Prehistoric settlement clusters located along a 14 km stretch of the Nueces River in the Valley (Drolet 2007a, 2007b, 2008a; Fig. 2).

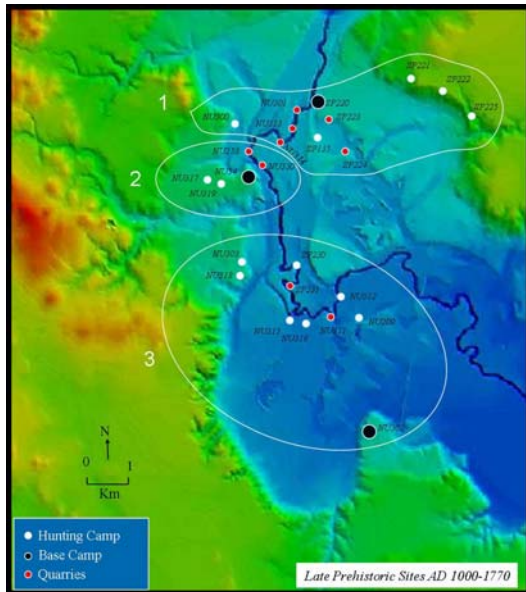


Fig. 2. Late Prehistoric Base Camps and Settlement Territories (1-3), Lower Nueces River Valley, South Texas.

Field operations in 2008 were organized to finish excavation work in one major habitation area at 41-SP-220, initiate work downriver at the Late Prehistoric base camp (41-NU-54), and continue the survey of river-bank stone quarries where chert cobbles used for tool making were obtained. Information would provide more detailed evidence about how two neighboring Late Prehistoric base camps were organized.

Site 41-SP-220

From 2003 to 2008 the entire Midden 6 (M6) deposit was exposed in a large block excavation. Artifacts were plot pointed, stratigraphic details were recorded, and spatially distinct features were identified (Drolet 2007; Fig. 3). This season located the western border of this 9m by 8m habitation area (Fig. 4). The analysis demonstrates this living area was associated with domestic tool making, butchering and cooking of diverse animal species, and pottery use associated with predominantly undecorated bone-tempered Toyah

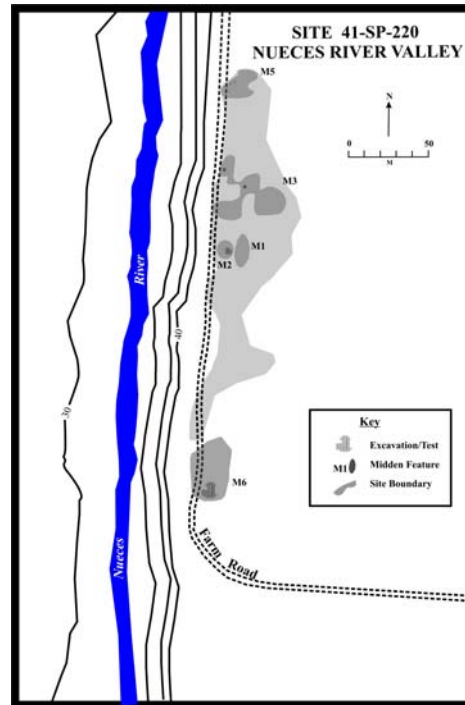


Fig 3. Habitation Middens, Site 41-SP-220.

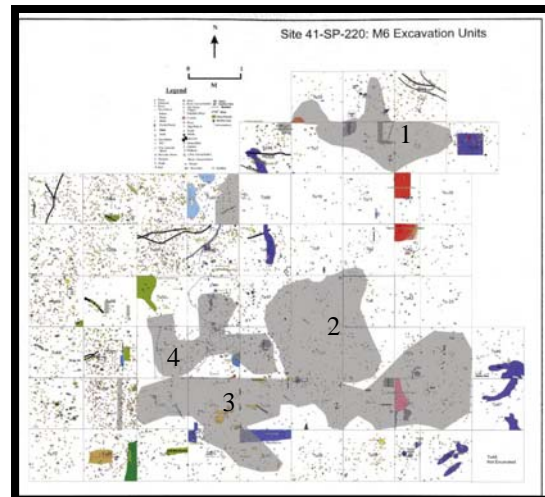


Fig 4. Midden 6, Site 41-SP-220. Large shaded areas are Features, containing concentrated faunal bone (Feas. 1 & 3), lithic artifacts (Fea. 2), and Toyah pottery (Fea. 4). Units along the western edge of the excavation block were completed in 2008.

bowls and jars (Bunge 2008; Giulietti 2008a; Jackson 2007). The completion of this work provides one of the most complete pictures of a principal activity area and domestic unit within a Late Prehistoric Toyah-phase base camp.

Results of investigations at the site and the Midden 6 area has been presented in conference papers (see bibliographies in Drolet 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2007) and in one MA thesis study (Gilmore 2007).

Site 41-NU-54

The site is located on a 25m high terrace overlooking the south bank of the Nueces River. Field operations shifted to Site 41-NU-54 (Fort Lipantitlán) in late June 2008. Previous studies in the 1980s and 2002-2004 (Jackson et al. 2006) primarily focused on documenting the military occupation of this 19th century Mexican/Texan outpost. Spatially limited investigations of the approximate 2.5 ha terrace confirmed 19th century military artifacts and habitation materials associated with the historic occupation. These studies also revealed the presence of Late Prehistoric and Archaic artifacts. In 2007, a survey team from the Archaeology Field School inspected the northwest section of this site as part of the systematic quad survey of the Valley and confirmed Late Prehistoric materials from surface finds, including pottery and lithic artifacts (Drolet 2007; Elmore 2007). The prehistoric materials indicated the possibility that this site corresponded to a base camp similar to 41-SP-220.

In 2008, one hectare (ha) of the northwest terrace was surveyed and mapped. This was followed by excavation of posthole tests and two 1m x 1m excavations (Chapman 2008a). A detailed map was made and over 3300 historic and prehistoric artifacts were recovered. Late Prehistoric materials dominated the collection: Toyah ware ceramic sherds (Fig. 5), lithic debitage, cores, knives, scrapers, prismatic blades,

marine and freshwater shell, burnt clay nodules, and concentrated land snails (*Rabdotus sp.*). This material was recovered not only on the surface mixed with historic material, but in excavation units where the Late Prehistoric assemblage was recovered up to 60-70 cm below the surface. One Archaic period projectile point recovered below this level suggests a long prehistoric occupation of the site.

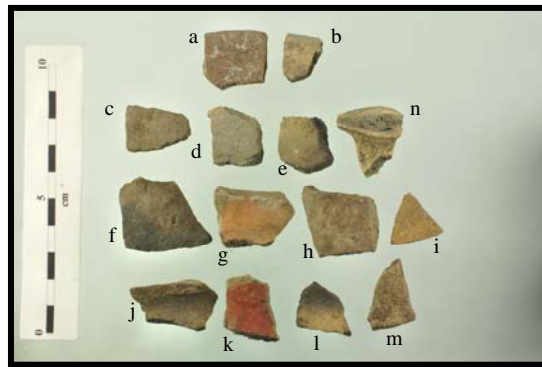


Fig. 5. Late Prehistoric Toyah Pottery, Site 41-NU-54, 2008. Rims (a-b, m), body (c-l), loop handle (n).

Initial work indicates the principal component identified in 2008 corresponds to the Late Prehistoric period. The diversity of artifact material is similar to that of Site 41-SP-220, confirming that it was a base-camp settlement, probably contemporaneous with 41-SP-220.

Survey and excavation evidence indicate that Late Prehistoric occupation probably ended around the mid-to-late 1700s, identical to the terminal occupation at 41-SP-220. This was immediately followed by a Mexican settlement. The evidence is based on 125 historic pottery sherds, bottle glass fragments, and metal items recovered from surface and sub-surface work. The historic artifacts were found with Late

Prehistoric artifacts in the upper 20 centimeter layer at the site, suggesting reoccupation of the terrace in the late 18th or early 19th century. Among the diversified, decorated and undecorated table earthenwares are early 19th century English and Mexican ceramic plate, platter, bowl, and cup fragments (Fig. 6). The evidence indicates a long-time Native settlement replaced by a Mexican settlement, possibly as early as 1790s. In 1831, the site became a military post until 1849 (Jackson et al. 2006). The details of this settlement transition in the late 18th century deserve more attention, since 41-NU-54 is the only known site in the Nueces Valley that contains this prehistoric-to-historic, multi-component evidence.

During Late Prehistoric times, survey evidence demonstrates that the 41-NU-54 base camp was organized similar to Toyah base camps further up and down river (Drolet 2008a). Several seasonal hunting camps (41-NU-317, 41-NU-319) surround the settlement. These, like the ones in neighboring settlement areas, were used by small foraging groups that radiated out from the base camp (Fig. 2). Over 625 gm of large and small mammal bone were recovered in the two test excavation units at 41-NU-54. Faunal remains of bison and deer were among the principal prey, similar to the species represented in the large faunal collection recovered from 41-SP-220 (Bunge 2008). The bone elements were fragmented and burned from butchering and cooking. Other food remains recovered included freshwater Yellow Sandshell (*Lampsilis teres*) and Hackberry seeds (*Celtis sp.*). The presence of marine shell, including Sunray Venus (*Macrocallista nimbosa*) and Chione (*Chione concollata*),

demonstrates diversified food resources, some traded into the settlement from the coast.

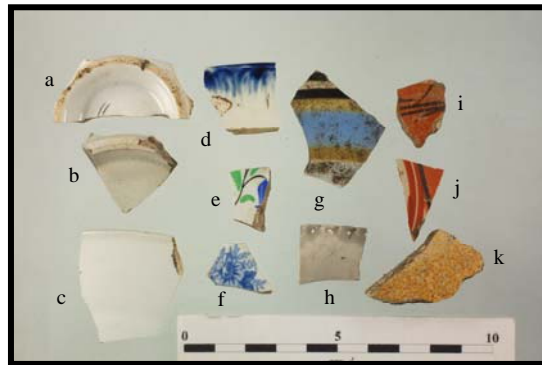


Fig. 6. Historic Pottery, Site 41-NU-54, 2008. Plain Pearlware ring bases (a-b), rim (c); Pearlware Edged (d); Pearlware Hand Painted Polychrome (e); Pearlware Transfer Painted (f); Annular Ware Banded (g); Creamware Edged (h); Mexican Red Brown Ware (i); Mexican Unidentified Red, Orange, & Black on White Polychrome (j); Lead Glazed Course Earthenware (k).

Chert and sandstone quarries (41-NU-254, 41-NU-330) along the banks of the Nueces River are in close proximity to the site (Fig. 2). They were probably principal locations for collecting raw materials used for tool making and domestic constructions, such as hearths (Jackson et al. 2006:31-32, 34). One of the test excavations yielded 979 chert flakes concentrated in the 30 cm deep cultural deposit (Chapman 2008a); the remains clearly demonstrate tool making was a principal activity. Like the two other Late Prehistoric base camps identified in the Lower Nueces River Valley (41-SP-220 and 41-NU-302), these quarries and surrounding hunting camps were components of the base camp settlements (Hahn 2008a) and define settlement networks for each (Drolet 2008a).

The 2008 survey and excavations at 41-NU-54 also recovered over 100 Late Prehistoric pottery sherds (Fig. 5). These are primarily bone-tempered



Fig 7. Site Survey, 41-NU-54, 2008.

Toyah ware associated with bowls and jars, probably manufactured at the site. Rich clay deposits for making these ceramic vessels were available along the river. Two clay deposits were identified in 2008 (41-NU-330 and 41-NU-314) and samples from these deposits were used to replicate Toyah-style vessels from both 41-NU-54 and 41-SP-220 (Wright 2008a). Replication experiments using these clays closely match the paste characteristics from the prehistoric Toyah pottery sherds.

Initial work at 41-NU-54 has been productive; however, more work is needed to properly evaluate this Late Prehistoric base camp. Work was slow-going in 2008 due to the heavy brush cover, requiring machetes and chainsaws to establish a baseline grid and clear survey transects (Chapman 2008a; Fig. 7). The Late Prehistoric component extends 130m by 60m in size. However, only the eastern half of the terrace area was surveyed and the site probably extends over a larger area. More testing

and excavations are needed to recover artifact assemblages and locate habitation features. Field school students had the opportunity to learn diverse field techniques in the site investigation and gain insight into the procedures used to analyze and interpret artifact assemblages associated with a multi-component site.

Laboratory, Reports, and Curation

Recovering the archaeological materials in the field and carefully recording information on field forms was only one component of the work. Evenings were spent in the field laboratory cleaning, sorting, and cataloguing. Field maps were transferred to computer graphic programs, survey and excavation records were archived, collection photographs were completed, and the materials were transferred to the Corpus Christi Museum for curation and further study at the end.

Details relating to the 2008 work at Sites 41-NU-54 and 41-SP-220 have been prepared in Field School student reports that have been cited in the text and included in the bibliography. These papers (Chapman 2008b; Giulleti 2008b; Hahn 2008b; Wright 2008b) are currently being revised for a Symposium “Late Prehistoric Base Camps in the Lower Nueces River Valley” at the 2008 Texas Archaeological Society Meetings in Lubbock, Texas (Drolet 2008b).

Final Comments

The Archaeology Field School, South Texas Program takes place in June and July. Students receive 6 academic units for the course through TAMU-K. Volunteers join the student group through a public program sponsored by CCMSh. This is a unique educational

program in the region and offers both students and public excellent training and appreciation for archaeological field research. In June 2009, the 8-week field program will resume, representing the tenth consecutive year of field research and training in the Lower Nueces River Valley, South Texas. University students and public interested in joining may contact Dr. Robert P. Drolet, Corpus Christi Museum of Science and History, 1900 North Chaparral, Corpus Christi, Texas (bobd@cctexas.com, Tel. [361] 826-4662).

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