RECENT ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN OKLAHOMA
1946-1948

By Robert E. Bell*

During the past two years considerable archaeological activity has been conducted throughout the state of Oklahoma. This has not been an extensive nor especially planned program of development, but rather a sudden intensification in archaeological work brought about by the various Federal River Basin Reservoir projects. Most of the work accomplished has been survey or salvage work done in an effort to beat the bulldozer or impounded flood waters to an important site.

With the development of various reservoir areas and flood control projects throughout the state, it is obvious that impounded lake waters will flood and destroy many places of historical and archaeological importance. Since these materials contribute to our understanding of the prehistory of Oklahoma, and this in turn becomes essential if we are to properly understand the role that Oklahoma has played within the Mississippi basin, it is imperative that we make every effort to salvage whatever data and information we can before it is lost to posterity. Because of this emergency, the Department of Anthropology at the University of Oklahoma has been especially active in surveys and excavations to salvage some portion of this threatened cultural heritage. The Department of Anthropology has not been alone in realizing the seriousness of the situation, and various persons or institutions have contributed in many ways to facilitate fieldwork or research. The Department of Anthropology is indebted to each of the following groups for assistance and cooperation in the research already accomplished: University of Oklahoma Museum, United States National Park Service, Tulsa District of the U. S. Army Engineers, and the River Basin Survey section of the Smithsonian Institution.

The State of Oklahoma is not unique in being presented with this crisis. Many other states have similar developments taking place which require immediate action. Reservoir construction activities are to be found in most sections of the United States; the greatest amount of such work, however, is to be found in the Great Plains region in which Oklahoma is located. In all of these localities, archaeologists are busy trying to salvage perhaps five percent of the materials which will eventually be destroyed. With-

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in Oklahoma, unless our present archaeological program can be expanded, we will be fortunate to excavate even two or three percent of the total number of sites which will be lost.

Oklahoma is, archaeologically, very unfortunate in the choice of areas to be flooded for two reasons: first, many of the proposed reservoirs are to be found in eastern Oklahoma, the very portion of the state which contains the most abundant aboriginal remains; second, some reservoirs are to be built in regions which are relatively unknown archaeologically and hence necessitate a maximum amount of exploration.

With this situation existing within the state, almost all efforts in archaeological research have been directed toward work of a survey or salvage nature within the various reservoir basins. Some reconnaissance and test trenching has been done at newly discovered sites outside of reservoir areas, but this has been chiefly exploratory and for the training of students. It is felt that archaeological materials not immediately threatened by various reservoir or other projects can wait until the present emergency has been satiated.

During the past two years no less than nine archaeological surveys have been completed, eight of these being in reservoir areas. Emergency excavations have been accomplished in two of the reservoirs, a total of five sites having been examined. Two small test trenches have been dug into newly discovered sites relatively near Norman, and several additional sites have been added to our survey records.

CANTON RESERVOIR

The Canton Reservoir is located near Canton in the western part of the state, and will impound the waters of the North Canadian River thereby flooding sections of both Blaine and Dewey counties. Mr. Charles E. Smith of the U. S. Corps of Engineers and Mrs. James B. Watson of the University of Oklahoma conducted an archaeological reconnaissance of the area in January 1947. No evidences of prehistoric occupation were found by the survey although considerable time was spent examining the more favorable locations. The historic site of old Fort Cantonment is situated near the western edge of the reservoir but will not be flooded. Unless archaeological remains are reported or construction activities threaten Fort Cantonment, no investigations are contemplated for the Canton Reservoir.

HULAH RESERVOIR

The Hulah Reservoir is located near the town of Hulah in the northeastern part of Osage county, in North Central Oklahoma.
Hulah Dam will be situated on Caney River, and the resulting lake will flood portions of both Osage county, Oklahoma and Chautauqua county, Kansas. Mr. Charles E. Smith and David J. Wenner conducted a survey of the Hulah area in July, 1947.

The survey party located four archaeological sites; all were quite small and apparently were the remains of temporary camps or transient groups. Surface materials included flint chips, fragments of mussel shell and occasional chipped artifacts. Because of the scarcity of cultural remains and the fact that all sites are represented only by a thin veneer of surface deposit, no additional work is suggested for this reservoir.

The small amount of surface cultural material recovered does not permit the assignment of cultural relationships for the sites concerned. It is interesting to note, however, that no pottery was found, and that flint samples were derived from quarries in Kay county, some forty miles distant to the west.

**HEYBURN RESERVOIR**

The Heyburn Reservoir is located on Polecat Creek to the west of Kellyville in the northeastern part of Creek county, Oklahoma. This reservoir is a small one and the inundated areas are confined entirely to Creek county. A survey of the Heyburn area was conducted in March 1948 by George W. McClure and George W. McClure, Jr.

The Polecat Creek area was inhabited by various members of the Yuchi Indians who moved westward from the Creek Reservation in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Two sites are recorded which apparently represent this historic period; one of these is a burial plot, and the other is a small village community.

Two additional sites were found which appear to be prehistoric, or, at least, not to be associated with the Yuchi of historic times. These sites were marked by flint chippings, burned rocks and an occasional artifact of stone. In addition, they lacked the broken glass, bits of metal and chinaware which marked the later Yuchi habitation areas.

Although the examination of historic Yuchi materials would be desirable, the needs for excavations in other areas have forced our attentions elsewhere. No salvage program is proposed for the Heyburn Reservoir area.

**SOUTHWESTERN OKLAHOMA**

Mr. David J. Wenner conducted an archaeological survey of portions of Harmon and Greer counties in southwestern Oklahoma in June 1947. Although this survey was not within a reservoir area
it has contributed to our understanding of Oklahoma prehistory. Until the time that this survey was made, this section of Oklahoma was relatively unknown as far as archaeological information was concerned.

This survey was primarily concerned with the valleys along the Salt Fork of the Red River and Prairie Dog Town Fork of the Red River. Some localities on Red River and the North Fork of Red River were also examined. A total of fifteen archaeological sites were reported. Two of these were extensive village areas, and the remaining thirteen represented smaller village or camp sites.

The two large village sites noted on this survey have been visited by amateur archaeologists in this area throughout the past ten or fifteen years, and considerable surface material has been recovered from the sites. Among the items found are metates and manos, grooved sandstone arrow-shaft smoothers, flint scrapers, flint knives, small triangular projectile points, bone hoes, grit tempered cord-marked pottery and plain shell tempered pottery.

No test excavations were attempted by the survey party although surface materials were abundant. Specimens examined indicate materials resembling those found in the Texas Henrietta focus. Some pot sherds resemble those found in the Sanders focus of northeastern Texas. A few items suggest contacts with the Texas and Oklahoma panhandle cultures as well as the Pueblo peoples of New Mexico. No Folsom points or suspected paleo-Indian sites were noted.

The survey demonstrates that this region was inhabited throughout a considerable span of prehistoric times, and that excavations in the area should be valuable in establishing cultural contacts between the Pueblo area and Oklahoma.

WISTER RESERVOIR

One of the most important archaeological areas within the state falls within the Wister Reservoir in LeFlore county. This reservoir lies in the eastern part of the state and includes rich archaeological sections of the Poteau and Fourche Maline river valleys. We have been fortunate in one respect, however, for a large number of the sites known in this area were excavated by the University during the extensive W. P. A. operations a few years ago.

Out of a total of thirty-two sites within the Wister Reservoir, nineteen had been completely or partially excavated. It is from these sites that we have the archaeological complex known as Fourche Maline. Of the remaining thirteen sites, four were tested and one of these was selected for additional investigation. This
site is known as the Scott site (Lf 11), and it appears to be an important example of the Fourche Maline culture.

Aside from extensive work at the Scott site, three other sites were tested in order to determine the nature of the deposits and their cultural relationships. These sites are the Ward site (Lf 10), the Conser site (Lf 3) and the Cantrell site (Lf 4). All of these sites appear to represent the Fourche Maline complex. Although considerable surface materials were present at each of these, excavation indicated that the village or midden materials were rather shallow, being limited to about two feet in depth. At both the Conser and Cantrell sites there was considerable evidence of erosion and flooding which has undoubtedly removed a great deal of the original village accumulation. The Ward site does not appear washed or eroded and presumably represents most of the original village accumulation. The shallow but homogeneous deposit would suggest that the site had not been occupied for a long period of time.

The Scott site is located on Fourche Maline Creek about two miles north of Summerfield in LeFlore county. It represents a village midden deposit which has an average thickness of about five feet in the deepest part. A block of earth about twenty feet by thirty feet was carefully excavated by arbitrary six inch levels in the thickest portion of the midden. Although the midden deposit is quite uniform in character and lacking natural stratigraphic layers, it does offer a clear transition from pre-pottery to pottery bearing levels, the pottery being confined to the upper portions of the deposit. Excavations at the Scott site indicate that the Fourche Maline complex should properly be subdivided into two periods—a pre-pottery and a pottery bearing period. These two periods do not appear to be particularly different except for the appearance of pottery in the upper levels. In general, the cultural inventory is very much the same for both non-pottery and pottery bearing levels, and the broad picture is one of a single group of people who acquired a knowledge of pottery during their last occupation of the site; otherwise their cultural content remained very much the same as in earlier times.

A total of eleven burials were found during the excavations. These were all in a tightly flexed or semi-flexed position and usually unaccompanied by artifacts. No evidences for graves could be found to indicate an interment, but rather the body apparently was merely placed upon the ground surface and covered over with the surrounding refuse accumulation.

No evidence of house structures could be found, although concentrations of ash or charcoal suggested occupational surfaces. The midden deposit is composed chiefly of black colored earth con-
taining a considerable amount of organic material. Throughout excavation of the midden, quantities of firecracked stones, animal bones, mussel shells, flint chips and various types of artifacts were recovered.

The most abundant artifact is represented by projectile points. The most typical projectile point is fairly large in size, averaging between two and three inches in length, and having a tapered stem with poorly defined shoulders. Other artifacts include oval shaped flint knives, crude scrapers or choppers, hammerstones, grinding stones, double-bitted flaked axes, polished stone gorgets, boatstones, bone flakers, bone awls and other miscellaneous items. The pottery is a plain surfaced, thick, granular tempered ware characterized by a flat disc-like base. No restorable vessels were found and sherds were not especially plentiful.

The Scott site apparently represents the habitation area of one of the earliest peoples to occupy this section of eastern Oklahoma. They were a hunting, fishing and gathering people presumably without a knowledge of agriculture. They were undoubtedly related to some of the pre-pottery or Archaic people of Eastern United States, and may or may not have been contemporary with them. A clearer picture of the Scott site and the Fourche Maline culture which it represents must await laboratory analysis and detailed comparisons with other known materials. This research has already been initiated.

**Tenkiller Reservoir**

During the month of July, 1948, Mr. David J. Wenner, Jr., sponsored by the River Basin Survey of the Smithsonian Institution, conducted a survey of the Tenkiller Reservoir in eastern Oklahoma. This reservoir will impound waters of the Illinois river to flood sections of Cherokee and Sequoyah counties. A total of thirty-eight archaeological sites were examined and recorded, and small test excavations were dug into the most promising of those discovered. The majority of the sites appeared to lack pottery and may represent an early Archaic or pre-pottery horizon within that locality. The surface materials from these sites are represented chiefly by large projectile points, crude knives or scrapers and abundant flint chippings. One pottery bearing site appears to represent the Spiro focus of the Gibson aspect, and another the Fort Coffee focus of the Fulton aspect. Some excavation work is recommended and anticipated for the Tenkiller area in the near future.

**Onapa and Canadian Reservoirs**

In the months of July and August 1948, Mr. David J. Wenner directed a survey of two reservoir areas near Eufaula, Oklahoma:
Recent Archaeological Research in Oklahoma

the Onapa Reservoir on Deep Fork, and the Canadian Reservoir on the North Fork of the Canadian River. The Onapa Reservoir will flood sections of the Deep Fork river valley in McIntosh county, and the Canadian Reservoir will inundate large areas in McIntosh and Pittsburg counties. Both reservoirs were quite productive in so far as archaeological materials are concerned.

A total of forty-one sites were recorded within the Canadian Reservoir area, many of them representing historic Indian villages. The Onapa Reservoir produced a total of twenty-five archaeological sites, again many of them containing historic or contact materials such as glass trade beads, gun flints, broken glass, china and crockery. In addition to these historic materials, most sites produced considerable amounts of aboriginal pottery and an occasional flint or stone artifact. Since this area is that occupied by the Creek Indians in historic times it is not surprising that these contact sites appear to be abundant. Although it has not been demonstrated that these sites are Creek, nevertheless, an interesting problem is presented. The aboriginal pottery wares found on these historic sites are very similar to three wares associated with the Creeks in Georgia-Walnut Roughened, Okmulgee Fields Incised, and Kasita Red Filmed. It has been thought that these historic wares found in Georgia became extinct around 1750, and that they were not made after that date. If the Oklahoma sites are to be attributed to the Creeks, and since the Creeks did not enter Oklahoma until 1830, then the terminal date of 1750 for Georgia must be in error. It would hardly seem reasonable that the Creeks suddenly revived three pottery wares that they had not produced for some eighty years. If the materials are not to be associated with the Creek, then we must account for some tribe within the region for which we have no historical records.

Not all of the sites in this area are marked by contact materials, and sherd collections suggest relationships to both the prehistoric Gibson and Fulton aspects of the Mississippi pattern.

Fort Gibson Reservoir

The Fort Gibson Reservoir is located in the northeastern section of the state along the lower portion of Grand River. A survey conducted by Mr. David J. Wenner reported a total of twenty-six archaeological sites within this area, two of them being important mound groups and the remainder representing village or camp areas. Some non-pottery sites were found which may represent an early Archaic horizon somewhat similar to that noted for the Illinois River valley.

During the past summer extensive excavations were conducted at the Norman site about five miles east of Wagoner, Oklahoma. Previous work here indicated that it represented the Spiro focus
of the Gibson aspect. Since one large conical mound remained unexplored at the site, it was considered necessary that it be examined in order to place our understanding of the Spiro focus materials on a more secure foundation. Excavations at this site were conducted as a cooperative project between the University of Oklahoma, the U. S. Army Engineers and the River Basin Survey of the Smithsonian Institution.

Some limited excavations were conducted in the village area where portions of several houses and refuse pits were uncovered. The houses were rectangular in shape with an average size of twenty feet by twelve feet. The walls were indicated by rows of post holes spaced from one to two feet apart. The houses were apparently made of upright wooden posts and clay wattle, the roof having been covered with a layer of grass thatching. Some circular refuse pits were found associated with the houses, and these contained ordinary village debris such as broken animal bones, pottery, flint chips, and various artifacts.

The houses were obviously not all built at the same time since they were to be found at various levels within the village deposit. In addition, some houses had been built on top of the remains of earlier structures. Although some exploratory work was accomplished in the village area, our major efforts were directed toward the large conical shaped earthen mound.

This mound was the largest of a group of four, and it measured approximately twenty-seven feet in height and ninety feet in diameter. Excavation was not complete although sufficient knowledge of its contents has been gained to consider our work at this mound as completed. The mound proved to be a domiciliary sub-structure mound with no less than six construction phases represented. A series of five flat topped mounds had been built, one on top of the other, the last of these having been capped with a cone shaped mantle of earth. Although very little in the way of artifact material was recovered, the mound is interesting for several reasons. The feature of placing a conical capping over the last occupation surface appears to be unusual. Some glass trade beads were found within the upper mantle. The mound is circular in outline rather than square or rectangular as in most sub-structure mounds. In addition, the construction periods were marked chiefly by a heightening of the mound, not a general enlargement of the structure. Each addition was merely placed upon the old occupational surface and did not include the sides of the mound. This construction method appears to be unusual for this type of mound. Analysis of this material is now in progress and a report should be available in the near future.
A second mound group, the Harlin site, contains seven mounds, and at the present time remains unexplored. Present plans include excavations at this site during the 1949 season. It, too, apparently represents the Gibson aspect and is probably related to the Norman site.

CEDAR CREEK

One site representing early man has been noted just north of Carnegie along Cedar Creek in Caddo county, Oklahoma. Throughout the gravels of the stream bed various types of projectile points and also the bones and teeth of extinct animals can be found. Classic Folsom points, Yuma-like points and Plainview points have all been found. Projectile points which are from later horizons, such as the small notched triangular point which is so common on the Southern Plains, can also be found. These materials appear to be concentrated along a stretch of about two miles of Cedar Creek and are apparently eroding out of the banks as the rains wash away the soils. At this time we have been unable to locate the original sources for the materials. Several reconnaissance trips and some testing of the river banks have produced no results to date; however, we are constantly hopeful that we can locate some specimens in situ and establish the archaeological position of the various projectile point types.

LEE-BOWEN AND BROWN SITES

Two archaeological sites have been located within short driving distance of the University. These are located on the Washita river to the southwest of Norman. At various week-end intervals, students in anthropology participate in test excavations at these sites. Although no extensive work has been done, we have learned a great deal about these two village sites.

At the Lee-Bowen site in Garvin county, an L-shaped trench, twenty five feet on each side, has been excavated. This trench cut across three refuse or storage pits so that considerable cultural material was recovered. A preliminary analysis of this material has been made by Dr. Karl Schmitt, and he considers it to be an example of the hunting agricultural economy existing in the Low Plains in the late prehistoric times.

The Brown site is located about fifteen miles westward from the Lee-Bowen site along the Washita river in Grady county. A smaller area has been tested but a greater amount of cultural material has been collected. The types of artifacts from the Brown site generally resemble those from Lee-Bowen; however, there are some specific differences.
Cultural materials which would represent these two sites are small notched triangular arrowheads, flint end-scrappers, grinding stones, arrow-shaft polishing stones, bone scapula hoes, bone arrow-shaft wrenches, bone awls, antler flakers, plain surfaced pottery and miscellaneous other items. Evidence for agriculture is presented by charred beans and a corncob fragment. No house patterns were discovered although small bits of wattlework made of clay and grass are plentiful.

Both of these sites have certain features which resemble the Texas Henrietta focus; there are also many features which resemble other sites in Garvin county along the lower Washita. In all probability both of these sites will eventually be grouped into a Washita River focus which is related to the Texas Henrietta focus to the south, and to the Paint Creek focus in Kansas to the north. No correlation with historic Indian tribes is possible at the present time.

**Summary**

If something in the way of a summary statement were made, it would include the fact that one-hundred and seventy-two new archaeological sites have been recorded. These sites appear to range in age from Paleo-Indian cultures represented by the Folsom materials up to historic villages of living tribes now found in Oklahoma. Excavations have shed additional light upon the early Fourche Maline complex, the Spiro focus and the more recent Washita River remains. We have a better idea as to the distributions of various cultures which will help in understanding the role of Oklahoma in American prehistory. Last, but not least, we know the types of sites that are to be inundated by reservoir areas, and we know where immediate excavations should be done. Getting this work done remains for the future.