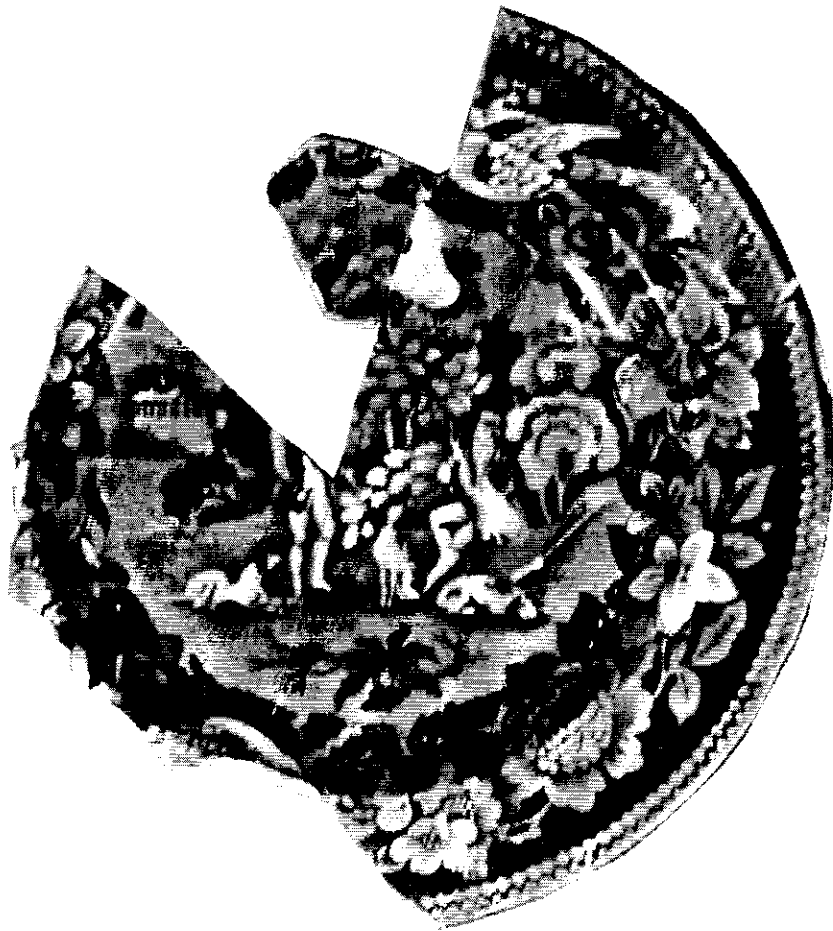




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Powell Site Ceramics: Rabbit Hunting

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# Additional Excavations at 41FB28, Fort Bend Co., Texas

L. W. Patterson, J. D. Hudgins, and R. L. Gregg

## Introduction

This article gives the results of additional excavations by the Houston Archeological Society at site 41FB28 in Fort Bend County in the spring of 2002. The site was discovered and recorded for state records by Joe Hudgins. Persons who participated in these additional excavations include Beth Aucoin, Pat Aucoin, Wanda Carter, Richard Carter, Dick Gregg, Joe Hudgins, Etta Palmer, Tom Palmer, Jim Palmer, Lee Patterson, Gary Ryman, Bob Shelby, and Allen Soukup. Field work was directed by Joe Hudgins, and field records were handled by Etta Palmer. The excavation layout diagram (Figure 1) was made by Tom Palmer and the burial diagram (Figure 3) by Tom Nuckols. Analysis of human and faunal remains was done by Dick Gregg.

The site has an occupation sequence from the Early Archaic through the Late Prehistoric periods, from about 5000 BC to AD 1500. This site was probably occupied on a seasonal basis by mobile hunter-gatherers. Artifact types found by the additional excavations are consistent with types found by the original excavations (Patterson et al. 2000). Use of this site was highest during the Archaic period from 5000 BC to AD 100. Lighter use of the site then occurred in the Early Ceramic (AD 100-600) and Late Prehistoric (AD 600-1500) periods. Artifact types found here indicate hunting, lithic manufacturing, and processing of plant materials in earth ovens.

Several human skeletons in poor condition were found by the additional excavations. Judged by a Bulverde dart point in an arm bone (Feature 6), at least one burial is from the Middle Archaic period (3000-1500 BC). This seems to be the first evidence of violence in this time period in Southeast Texas. However, the database is small for human remains in the Middle Archaic period of this region, mainly from Group 1 burials at the Ernest Witte site, 41AU36 (Hall 1981). A small piece of red ochre found in pit K (55-60 cm) of 41FB28 may be related to human burials. No grave goods were found with burials.

## Site Setting

Site 41FB28 is located on a knoll on a high terrace of the north bank of the San Bernard River. The site is wooded with deciduous trees. The general area is a mixture of woodlands and coastal prairie. A wide range of plant and animal food resources would have been available to prehistoric Indians. Deer hunting is still done in this area.

## Excavation Details

An excavation layout drawing is shown in Figure 1. A total of 11 one-meter square pits have been excavated, with pits J and K done as additional work in the spring of 2002. It is estimated that the site is somewhat larger than 20 meters in diameter.

Excavations were done in arbitrary 5 cm depth intervals, because no natural stratigraphy was apparent in the dark soil. Excavation pits were done to depths where culturally sterile soil was found. Soil was processed through 1/4-inch (6 mm) mesh screens. Relatively few cultural materials were found below 50 cm, except for human burials that were intrusive to the lowest excavation depths.

## Site Chronology

The chronological sequence of occupations at this site has been previously determined by data from the original excavations in pits A to I (Patterson et al. 2000:1). A series of Oxidizable Carbon Ratio (OCR) dates and the relative sequence of artifact types were used for chronological placement of the various depth intervals. The sequence of time periods is: Early Archaic, 5000-3000 BC (40-50 cm); Middle Archaic, 3000-1500 BC (30-40 cm); Late Archaic, 1500 BC-AD 100 (20-30 cm); Early Ceramic, AD 100-600 (15-20 cm); and Late Prehistoric, AD 600-1500 (5-15 cm). There is also a possibility of some occupation in the latter part of the Late Paleoindian period (8000-5000 BC). Time periods for Southeast Texas have previously been published (Patterson 1995a:243, 1996:9).

## Projectile Points

Projectile points found by all excavations at 41FB28 are summarized in Table 1. Projectile points found in the additional excavations of pits J and K are illustrated in Figure 2. Late Archaic dart point types found in the 20-30 cm depth interval are Morhiss and Kent. An Angostura Late Paleoindian point found in this depth interval was probably found by later Indians of the Late Archaic period.

The Middle Archaic period (30-40 cm) is represented by Gary, Bulverde, and Pedernales point types. The Early Archaic period (40-50 cm) is represented by Early Stemmed points, which is a major type of this time period (Patterson 1998). The stratigraphic sequence of dart point types at 41FB28 is consistent with projectile point type sequences for Southeast Texas (Patterson 1995a: Table 3, 1996: Table 4).

A unifacial arrow point (Figure 2F) was found with burial fill in pit K. This specimen may be from the Middle Archaic period, judged by placement of at least one burial from pit K in this time period. Unifacial arrow points are found as early as the Middle Archaic period in Southeast Texas (Patterson 1992).

A Bulverde point (Figure 2C) was found embedded in an arm bone of a burial in pit K (Figures 3 and 4).

## Stone Tools

Not many formal stone tools have been found at this site. This is typical for sites in Southeast Texas, where the dominant tool type was the unmodified utilized flake. A perforator (Figure 2G) was found in pit J (30-35 cm). Previous excavations yielded a scraper, a perforator, and four graters (Patterson et al. 2000:2).

## Lithic Manufacturing

Only a single small (40 mm diameter) chert core (pit K, 30-35 cm) has been found at this site. It appears that most lithic manufacturing was done here using imported flake blanks and preforms. Most of the lithic manufacturing at this site seems to have been done to produce bifacial dart points. A total of 1669 chert flakes were recovered, with quantities for each excavation depth interval given in Table 2. Only a small number of flakes were found below 50 cm depth. The small number of flakes for strata above 20 cm is an indication of light use of the site in the Early Ceramic and Late Prehistoric periods. The modest number of total flakes shows that lithic manufacturing

was not done on a large scale at this site. As previously noted (Patterson 2000:3), the manufacture of bifacial dart points at this site is shown by preform fragments and the characteristics of flake size distributions.

All remaining cortex on flakes is of the weathered type typical of chert cobbles from the Colorado and Brazos Rivers. Only a small percentage of chert flakes have remaining cortex, which indicates that flake blanks brought to this site had little remaining cortex. Many of the chert flakes have indications of heat treatment, in the form of reddish coloration, small potlid surface fractures, and waxy surface luster.

## **Ceramics**

Only two potsherds were found in the additional excavations of pits J and K. A Goose Creek Plain sherd from pit J (15-20 cm) is from the Early Ceramic period. A Goose Creek Plain sherd at 45-50 cm in pit K probably fell there from a pit wall during excavation. Only 17 Goose Creek and bone tempered sherds were recovered at this site. This is another indication of light use of this site during the Early Ceramic and Late Prehistoric periods.

## **Fired Clayballs**

A total of 5350 fired clayballs were found in excavations at 41FB28. Data for clayballs at each depth interval are given in Table 3. Additional excavations yielded 357 clayballs from pit J and 311 clayballs from pit K, with 4682 clayballs found by previous excavations of pits A to I. The relatively small number of clayballs in strata above 20 cm is also an indication of light use of this site during the Early Ceramic and Late Prehistoric periods.

Fired clayballs were used as heating elements for earth ovens, as demonstrated experimentally by Hudgins (1993). Earth ovens were used in Southeast Texas from the start of the Late Paleoindian period (8000-5000 BC) through the Proto-Historic period (AD 1500-1700). Earth ovens in Southeast Texas may have been used mainly for processing certain plant foods, such as roots, on a seasonal basis (Patterson 1995b).

## **Modern Materials**

Modern materials found in upper excavation levels indicate some site disturbance, especially from modern armadillos. In pit J, glass pieces were found at depth intervals of 5-10 cm, 10-15 cm, and 15-20 cm. In pit K, glass pieces were found at depth intervals of 0-5 cm and 10-15 cm. In previous excavations, metal and glass pieces were found at depths of 0-15 cm in a few pits, with one glass piece at 25-30 cm in pit I.

There is also evidence of modern disturbance in pits A and B from burned tree roots. Charcoal in pit A at 25-30 cm has a radiocarbon date of  $190 \pm 50$  BP (GX-26470) and charcoal in pit B at 30-35 cm has a radiocarbon date of  $110 \pm 60$  BP (GX-26725).

## **Faunal Remains**

Analysis of faunal remains from pits A to I by Bill McClure identified box turtle, mud turtle, opossum, nine-banded armadillo, white-tailed deer, and cow or bison. No additions to this list were found in pits J and K. Deer and turtle are the most common types of faunal remains at sites in Southeast Texas (Patterson 1995a: Table 2, 1996: Table 16).

## Human Remains

Human remains were found in pits J and K, with depths to top of bones ranging from 40 to 60 cm. The bones were very poorly preserved, apparently due to the soil conditions. Almost no small or thin bones were recovered. A number of long bones could be recognized, but only a few femora and humeri were identified as to specific type. Generally epiphyses were all but missing and diaphyses disintegrated on drying or by touch. A few other bones such as vertebrae and ribs could be identified because of their sizes, shapes, and anatomical positions. But most would disintegrate upon excavation, so they were pedestalled, drawn, photographed, and left in situ.

Bone was found in several concentrations, denoted as features 1 through 7 (Figure 3). Three partial skulls were found, constituting features 2, 4, and 5. To obtain better information, these three features as well as parts of features 1 and 6 were removed as separate blocks for later excavation under laboratory conditions. The laboratory excavation helped by revealing several small portions of the skulls which were moderately preserved. However, much of the skulls was gone and what was left was mostly very fragmented and mixed. The femora of feature 1 were quite fragmentary, but because of their width and wall thickness they could be identified as adult.

Feature 5 includes a portion of skull, mandible, and left zygomatic, with left side down and facing south-south-east. (The diagram of feature 5 in Figure 3 shows only the outline of the block removed for laboratory examination, not placement of bones.) The deepest bones, on the left side, are the best preserved of all the bones in the two pits. But even these had to be kept in the matrix as the exposed bone surfaces underwent careful cleaning with water so that laboratory photography could be done. Figure 5 shows this best-preserved area, running left to right from the upper left canine to the upper left second molar. All are adult teeth except the deciduous upper left second molar, which is being pushed out by the adult second premolar, and the crown portion of the opposing deciduous lower left second molar. This is interesting in that Ubelaker (1978) places the deciduous second molars as still present only as late as age 10 years ( $\pm 30$  months) but the adult upper canine as not fully erupted until age 12 years ( $\pm 30$  months). The large error bounds prevent these data from being in conflict; we will say that the individual died at age 10-12 years. A total of 26 teeth, including the deciduous ones, plus 8 isolated tooth roots were found in this feature. The upper incisors show considerable shoveling (Figure 6).

Adjacent to feature 5 on the west is feature 6 (Figure 3). It contains three long bones identified in the field as humeri. For the two outer bones, the field-measured minimum lengths of 23 and 25 cm are somewhat less than adult lengths of, say, 30 to 35 cm. They are grassile. Traces of curving bones (not shown in Figure 3) which appeared to be upper ribs were noticed lying between these two humeri, at their eastern ends. Also, what appeared to be vertebrae lay in correct anatomical position from the skull of feature 5 into this region, lying approximately halfway between the two humeri. Thus feature 6 could in part be the remains of the upper torso of the 10-12 year old of feature 5. If the burial was prone, the lower portion would be in the unexcavated area to the west of pit K. At the northeast end of the middle bone is the Bulverde point mentioned earlier. This bone was too fragmentary to determine whether it belonged to the 10-12 year old. However, the impression from the field notes (including tentative identification as humerus) and photos is that the bone is from another burial.

Several teeth were recovered from (skull) features 2 and 4. No evidence of caries was seen on any of the teeth from pits J and K.

The closeness of the bones, especially of the skulls of features 4 and 5, and the five parallel long bones of feature 7 would indicate that several persons may have been buried at the same time. If newer burials were placed next to older ones, more disturbance of the older ones would be expected than appears to be the case here.

No evidence of a burial pit was found. The predominant direction of the long bones is 0° to 45° (W-E to SW-NE).

The choice of location seems unusual for a cemetery. Although the general area is part of a high ridge, the site is in a shallow local depression that causes the soil to become quite soggy after even modest rains and very hard to walk through, as was noted during field work. When dry, the soil becomes very hard with large cracks. It must have been difficult to dig a burial pit in this soil.

## Summary

The additional excavation of pits J and K supports previous findings that the occupation sequence at 41FB28 is from the Early Archaic through the Late Prehistoric periods, a time interval of about 6500 years. Judged by the large number of clayballs and the relatively small amounts of lithic materials, this site may have been used primarily as a seasonal processing station for plant foods, with some hunting and lithic manufacturing activities also indicated. The long occupation sequence may indicate reuse of this site for seasonal scheduling of resource procurement. Data indicate heaviest use of this site during the Archaic period (5000 BC-AD 100), with less use of the site during the following Early Ceramic and Late Prehistoric periods.

Remains of at least four individuals were found. Because of poor bone preservation, the information obtained from these is quite limited. An adult and child aged 10 to 12 years were apparently buried together. A Bulverde point was embedded in an arm bone of another burial. This seems to be the first evidence in Southeast Texas for violence in the Middle Archaic period (3000-1500 BC).

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Table 1. Projectile Points

type	level, cm	pit	L	W	T
dart point fragment	15-20	B			
Morhiss	20-30	A	39.0	23.2	7.7
Morhiss stem	20-25	H			7.5
Kent	28	A	83.9	24.7	9.0
dart point fragment	25-30	C			9.6
Angostura	25-30	D		25.5	8.7
Bulverde (?)	30-40	A		36.8	8.4
dart point fragment	30-35	E			5.6
Bulverde	30-35	J		26.4	7.5
Gary	34	K	56.1	20.1	7.5
dart point tip	35-40	I			
Gary stem	35-40	F			7.3
Pedernales	35-40	C	46.0	26.1	7.5
dart point tip	40-45	B			
dart point stem	46	A			
Early Stemmed stem	48	H			6.2
Early Stemmed	48	K	60.0	21.2	6.5
dart point fragment	40-45	K			
dart point blade frag.	50-55	K			
dart point tip	Feature 4	K			
Bulverde	Feature 6	K	34.5	24.7	8.1
unifacial arrow point	burial fill	K	20.3	14.8	2.6

Table 2. Chert Flakes

depth, cm	pit			total
	J	K	A to I	
0-5	1	12	29	42
5-10	2		84	86
10-15	7		34	41
15-20	2	3	43	48
20-25	6	4	65	75
25-30	9	13	126	148
30-35	27	5	106	138
35-40	11	4	277	292
40-45	8	9	254	271
45-50	23	39	309	371
50-55	24 A	32 A	78	134
55-60		16 A	7	23
	120	137	1412	1669

A some from burial fill



Table 3. Fired Clayballs, all pits

depth, cm	no.	wt., gm	size range, mm square
0-5	58	262	15-35
5-10	61	203	15-30
10-15	90	435	15-35
15-20	193	921	15-40
20-25	478	3154	15-60
25-30	844	6737	15-70
30-35	983	6594	15-60
35-40	1029	6904	15-60
40-45	846	6055	15-70
45-50	587	4151	15-60
50-55	165	1182	15-50
55-60	16 A	177	15-40
	5350		

A - with burial fill

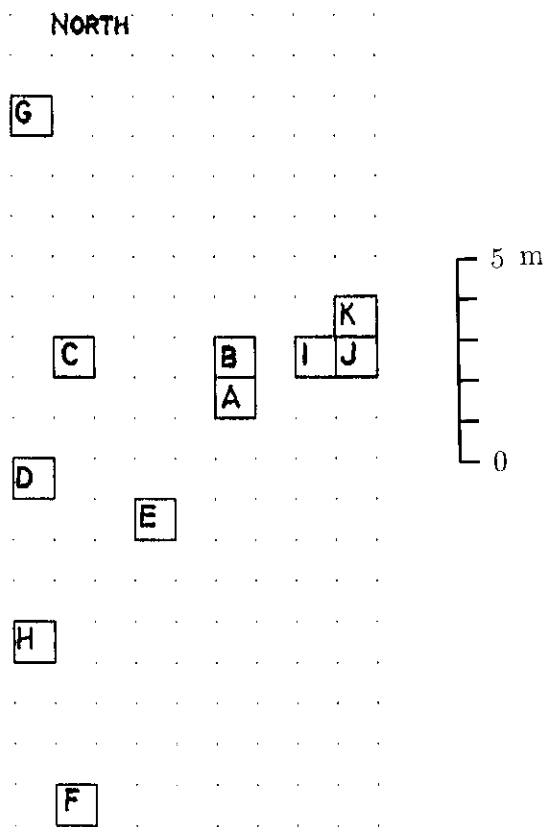
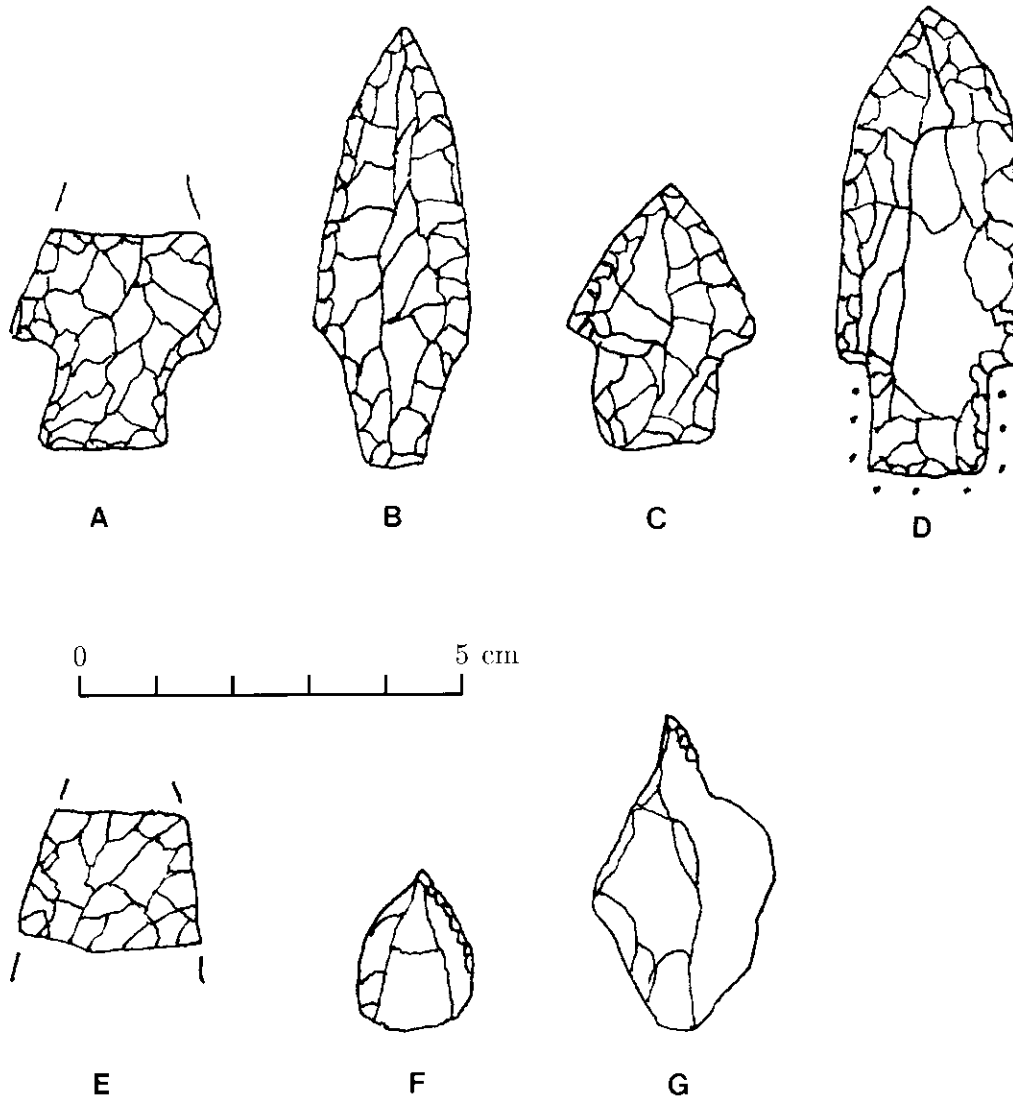


Figure 1. Excavation Layout



A - Kent point (pit J), B Gary point (pit K),  
 C - Bulverde point (Feature 6),  
 D Early Stemmed point (pit K),  
 E dart point blade fragment (pit K),  
 F unifacial arrow point, G - perforator,  
 dots show ground edges

Figure 2. Additional Artifacts

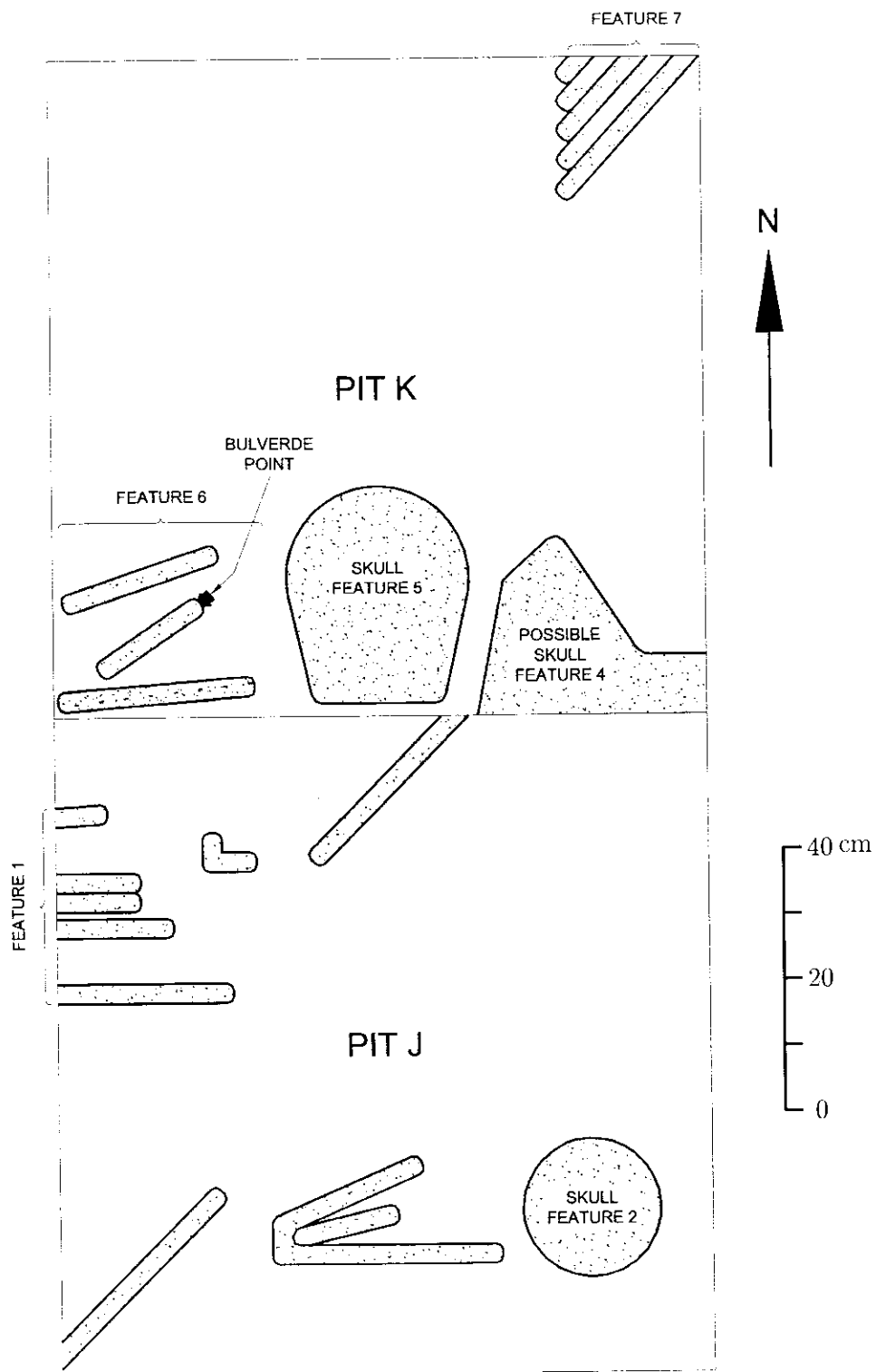


Figure 3. Burial Features of Pits J and K

