

# NEWSLETTER

*of the*

## HOUSTON ARCHEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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"Man is a creature not to be contained in a solitary skull vault nor is he measureable as, say, a saber-toothed cat or a bison is measureable. Something, the rainbow dancing before his eyes, the word uttered by the cave fire at evening, eludes us and runs onward. It is gone when we come with our spades upon the cold ashes of the campfire four hundred thousand years removed."

--- Loren Eiseley from "The Star Dragon"  
Natural History, Vol. LXXIX No. 6.

The Newsletter is published four times per year by the Houston Archeological Society. Contributions of news items, short articles and information of archeological significance should be sent to the Editor - Alan R. Duke, 1706 Oaks Drive, Pasadena, Texas 77502.

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- Sec.-Treas. - Rhonda K. Chrisco, 225 Marshall St., #104, Houston, Texas, 77006
- Directors - Alan R. Duke  
Charles K. Chandler  
William Caskey

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### Front Cover

The author, a naturalist-poet, moves backward in time to the early beginnings of man and then speculates on the affect of solar flares on the earth's fauna during various periods of prehistory.

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### Past and Future Programs

- June - 1970 - Mr. and Mrs. J. H. Brineman presented a slide program on Guatemala.
- July - 1970 - Jay Sharp showed slides of the 1970 T.A.S. Field School and discussed the various phases of the School.
- August- 1970 - Dr. Frank Hole and Mike O'Brien reviewed the status of our Clear Lake City Salvage Project. Plans for future work were discussed.
- Sept. -- 1970 - To be announced.

### New Meeting Place

The September and future meetings will be held at the Houston Museum of Natural Science. Dr. Tom Pulley has invited us to use the Museum as our permanent abode and in addition to providing us a meeting room, has offered us laboratory, storage and library facilities. We are most grateful to the University of Houston for providing us with a meeting place for the past ten years but the additional facilities at the Museum appear to be better suited to our overall program so - onward and upward!

# # # # #

## Clear Lake City Salvage Project

Members of the HAS met at Harris County Bay Area Park on April 11, 1970 to start the survey of Middle Bayou. Three survey crews were assigned various portions of the bayou by Coordinator Wayne Neyland. Crew chief Alan Duke, accompanied by the Charles Chandlers and daughter Holly, located and reported three clam shell sites on the west bank of the bayou. Crew chief Bill McClure and his team composed of his son Mathew, Jay Sharp, Frank Hole and Wayne Neyland did not locate any sites but enjoyed the outing and exercise. Mike O'Brien headed another survey team consisting of Tom Cobb, Larry Weiner and Tommy Medlin. They worked the east bank of Middle Bayou north to Baywood Country Club.

During the past several months, L. R. Chrisco and wife Rhonda have participated in numerous survey trips and have located three sites. Bill and Louise Caskey also located a site where Louise pointed out a large stemmed point and triangular scraper with her umbrella and probe rod.

Most of the surveys have been carried out along the immediate bank lines. Particular attention has been paid to barren areas, gully cuts, burrow holes and, wherever vegetation restricted vision, shovel tests were made. A total of 14 sites have been recorded in addition to the previously known sites.

Prior to the survey, a number of sites in the Clear Lake City area were known and reported by HAS members. Alan Duke reported a site destroyed when creating the fifth tee on Baywood Country Club and also site 41HR75 on Taylor lake. Lou Fullen reported a site, located on a pond, north of Spencer Highway. This site was destroyed by residential construction. In addition, Lou and Jay Sharp surveyed a large section of the lower reaches of Middle Bayou in 1968 and located and reported seven shell sites to the Texas Archeological Research Lab. Most of these sites lie south of the Bay Area Park and are not in immediate danger of destruction thru dredging of the stream bed.

Bill McClure has made a botanical study of three Clear Lake sites and a more extensive study of the total floral picture is planned which will encompass the overall watershed.

Two sites have been mapped by Mike O'Brien and the Chriscos in line with plans to excavate these sites in the future. One of these sites is on a sandy-clay knoll - lacks shell but contains pottery. The other is a shell site located near the middle of the Bayou.

Site material and reports are being turned over to Dr. Frank Hole at Rice University and are undergoing further evaluation and study. Charles Chandler has procured numerous copies of area site reports from TARL and has turned them over for perusal. Artifacts from 18 sites have been submitted for study.

The program for the future will include the following endeavors:  
 (1) Continue the survey of areas not covered to date - Horsepen Bayou, etc. (2) Excavation of several small sites to verify findings on CLCSP #7. (3) Excavation of CLCSP #14 - a large shell midden.  
 Objectives of the program include determining the chronology of sites in the area; determining existence of house structures and defining depositional history of the sites. All this information to be drawn together, along with information gleaned from previously reported sites, to paint a picture of the aboriginal occupants of this portion of the Gulf Coast.

THE FOOLS' HILL SITE - MIKE O'BRIEN

Site 41HR81, commonly referred to as the Fools' Hill Site is situated on the east bank of Middle Bayou, approximately one-half mile south of the Harris County Park on Bay Area Blvd. It was first recorded by Lou Fullen and Jay Sharp during their 1968 survey of the area. The site is the most northern of a series of shell middens extending down the bayou to Clear Lake.

Limited testing was carried out by the original party and the information turned over to the state. Some work was done in restoration of vessels, but the majority of the artifacts were labeled, bagged and delivered to Rice University in 1970, where all artifacts from the Clear Lake City Salvage Project were being stored. Further restoration of pottery was undertaken and sherds from at least three distinguishable vessels were found.

In late May, another survey party, composed of Rhonda and Chris Chrisco, W. B. Neyland and Mike O'Brien, visited the site for purposes of mapping and gridding. Small test holes were sunk to determine the limits of the site and on the third hole, the spade cut through a quantity of bone. Bone is common in shell sites, but the quantity of it and the size of the pieces indicated that it might be human. A portion of a long bone was recovered; a piece which looked large enough to be diagnostic of the situation. The bone was shown to two M.D.'s and both agreed that the bone was from the lower part of a human radius.

Finding a skeleton in a site is not really out of the ordinary, but it does indicate that all skeletons in the area will not be found in a central "cemetery." No human skeletal material was found in 10 squares of site 41HR81, but quite a few were found 3/4 of a mile south in 41HR80, the Harris Co. Boys' School Site. The depth of the Fools' Hill skeleton was 6 inches and the skull may be closer to the surface than that. No outline of a burial pit was found, but, as stated before, as soon as the bone was hit, the hole was filled in.

The site sits on a prominent bank 10 feet above the water in a grove of cedar trees. The extent of the shell is hard to determine, because as it moves out laterally, its depth increases. The soil is extremely hard and compact on top of the midden, but as one moves out off the midden, the soil becomes extremely sandy with an underlying layer of clay. It seems odd to have buried the body in the hard, black dirt, when the soft sand was so close at hand.

When the site was visited by O'Brien et al., the ground was so hard that a sharp spade and a Marshalltown trowel could hardly dent the surface. Chiggers also presented quite a problem, but the biggest problem came from the almost total inaccessibility of the site. A boat would be the desired mode of travel to and from the site.

Two-hundred-seventy-one pieces of pottery were recovered from the surface of the site and from one very small test pit. They break down into the following:

Sand-tempered - Plain

Rim  
8

Body  
263

Of the 271 pieces, twenty-three pieces are from one vessel and thirty-eight from another. Five of the rim sherds are from the latter vessel. No incised sherds and no sherd-tempered pieces were found.

No specific shape was determined by the pot sherds from the two vessels, although it seems likely that the pieces represent end products of considerable size.

One dart point and one small drill were found in the test pit. The dart point was slightly stemmed (small shoulders) and had a twist to it; the workmanship was very crude.

About 150 pieces of bone were recovered, and while every piece is not identifiable, it is readily observable that most are deer bones.

This small presentation is intended only as a quick report on what I consider to be a potentially important and informative site. Whoever undertakes the job of excavation should view the situation as a decidedly important one and invest his time in a worthwhile excavation program. Random sampling of this site will be almost a waste of time and energy, because it will actually tell us no more than what we already know from other shell middens in the area. In fact, the only reason that this site should be fooled with at all, is the fact that tentatively-identified skeletal material exists from it, and the fact that it is the last of a chain of large shell middens extending northward from Clear Lake. The fact that a particular site is in danger of natural or man-made destruction warrants a sampling of it, but for a large-scale excavation to be undertaken, a site should be looked upon as a source of answers to pre-existing questions. The Fools' Hill Site does seem to qualify under this criterion.

However, there may be another side to the question of whether the site should be excavated or not; that is, will the site still be around next year or twenty years from now? Will it be around when new ideas and excavation procedures arise or will it, along with all shell middens, be destroyed or excavated? This is something to keep in mind - although the Fools' Hill Site has been eroded, it does sit above the present high water line of the bayou. A watchful eye can be kept on the site to safeguard it and to make sure no more destruction takes place. At present, no bayou rectification is planned south of Bay Area Blvd.

In my estimation, the site should be "sat on" for a while and we should turn our immediate attention to the problem of an overall view of the Harris-Ft. Bend-Chambers-Galveston Counties area and see how the coastal shell middens etc. fit into the "big picture" of a settlement pattern.

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#### SHARPSTOWN EXHIBIT

Work on the HAS archeological exhibit at the Sharpstown shopping center in October, is proceeding under the direction of Tom Cobb. Volunteers for various phases of the work are needed urgently. Contact Tom if you have some spare time and want to help.

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POND SITES INVESTIGATED - W. B. NEYLAND

During the Clear Lake City Salvage Project survey, several pond sites were noticed on the 1955 League City Topo. It was decided to investigate their perimeters with regard to aboriginal occupation.

Four areas in particular, indicated by marsh symbols, situated approximately 12,000 feet south of Humble Oil and Refining Co.'s gas plant on Genoa-Red Bluff Road were investigated.

All four are deflated areas just east of 30' contours where the flat plains reach their highest elevations. Surrounding these wooded areas are broad grassy plains between the timberlines of Horsepen and Middle Bayous. Today they are being utilized as pasturage, oil fields and rice fields seemingly in a remarkable state of harmony.

Where water stands several feet deep during the summer months, cattails, water lilies, rushes and grasses of various sorts typical of moist areas are well represented. Around the banks and upon the ridges that encompass the pond a variety of trees including oaks, hackberries and yupon to mention a few were seen as well as an assortment of vines and underbrush. Collectively, they bring to mind much resemblance to the East Texas Thicket. The flora at these locations bear closer similarities to the Southern Evergreen Biotic Province than to the Coastal Prairie Province which surrounds it with the noticeable exception of the absence of pines.

Certain superficial observations in respect to vegetation contrast markedly with the western bank of the central section of Middle Bayou. An impressive stand of sweetgum trees was seen on the ridges of the southernmost pond. Growing in the stagnant and scumcoated water, lilies (*Nyphar advenum*) were in full bloom.

Blackberries have been available for some weeks. Still ripe, the survey team stopped to pause and refresh themselves. Evidence of wildlife is well represented around these watering places.

Each of the four ponds has several ridges 150' or longer ranging from 3 to 5' above current water level on three sides.

When the water levels reach overflow stage, each drains towards the east and spills onto the grassy plains. Due to this circumstance, ditches have been dug draining eastward to facilitate more rapid run-off. Early occupants evidently found the need to correct flooding conditions on these broad areas of monotonous relief since several ditches show on the 1920 Seabrook Topo.

The surface soil on the ridges around the ponds is composed of a light brown sand which is in sharp contrast to the dark gray clay (black gumbo) of the west bank of Middle Bayou a mile and a quarter to the east.

The survey teams dug six to eight shovel tests in each of the sandy ridges around the water holes, reaching depths of 24" without noting changes in soils and without verifying any aboriginal occupation.

Due to the apparent changes in soils and vegetation between the Bayou and plains, it would seem that a more extensive botanical and geological study is called for by competent personnel in order to attempt to reconstruct the economic factors in force during aboriginal times.

When these unique micro-environments are studied in greater detail, then comparative analysis may be made with a view towards exploitation of the economy under question thus adding to our understanding of the overall subsistence pattern relative to the Coastal Plains.

Speaking of the broad grassy plains, in 1835 Gideon Lindecum, a Mississippi farmer in search of lands to settle and an experienced soil and plant observer, entered in his journal which crossing the northwest sector of Harris County the following:

"18 Feb. 1835 - Passed through a vast Prairie today. Sometimes we were entirely out of site of timber, land nearly all good, what in my judgment should all be called excellent. We came out between Cypress and Spring Creek. These creeks diverge from each other, being 8 miles apart at the commencing of the good prairie, and 12 or 15 miles apart at the head. Leaving the head of these creeks you enter the prairie which is to the eye of the creeping Traveler bounded by nothing but the heaven and the soil is good as the heart could desire. Oh! What a pity that there is no timber. But, there are none not a stick, not even on many of the creeks. We passed 2 considerable creeks today, which had not a bush on their banks to mark their course through vast, the Boundless sea of grass. The water is good in the prairie and by digging may be had easy and plenty."

Hopefully, other investigators will foresee the value of acquiring data from other pond sites located on the grassy areas between the streams that dissect Harris County, particularly in the northwestern section and specifically near the headwaters of small tributaries where the nature of the streams is intermittent and a less dependable supply of water is found, than where rain water may be trapped and stand year around in these deflated areas.

C. L. C. #II stands alone as the sole representative of this type of waterhole site in this vicinity known at this time to the writer.

#### Bibliography

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Vines, Robert A.  
Personal communication.

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#### TAS FIELD SCHOOL

The following HAS members attended the 1970 TAS Field School: Larry Weiner, Jay Sharp, Nancy Jircik, Lou and Margie Fullen, Tommy Medlin, Frank Hole, the Charles Chandlers, Janet Collins, Shirley Thompson, Elaine Burleigh and Bill McClure.

Approximately 150 sites were located and 15-18% of the new National Park area surveyed. Jay Sharp coordinated the Field School photography, Lou Fullen worked with the Pictograph crew, Elaine Burleigh and Shirley Thompson guided the Beaver Patrol (youngsters attending the School with their parents) and Charles Chandler was a Survey Crew Chief.

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# Archaeologists Probing Ancient Indian Culture

Here is an article of interest to HAS members who knew and worked with Dick Ambler when he headed the TASP and was involved in survey and excavation of the Wallisville sites and other sites in the Houston area. Our thanks to Bruce Duke, Casa Grande, Arizona for forwarding the news clipping.

Northern Arizona University archaeologist Dr. J. Richard Ambler studies fragile fiber sandals, found in test excavations of a small cave near Navajo Mountain. Radiocarbon methods have dated life in the cave at between 5,000 and 6,000 B.C.—oldest dated human occupation of the northern Arizona area. Ambler and a crew of NAU students are attempting to obtain more data about the long-vanished people.

**FLAGSTAFF** — A six-member Northern Arizona University archaeological expedition is now in the rugged, remote Navajo Mountain country near the Arizona-Utah border seeking new knowledge of an ancient Indian people who lived in the area almost 2,000 years ago.

The surprising antiquity of this otherwise little-known culture, NAU archaeologist Dr. J. Richard Ambler revealed, is known from hitherto unpublicized radio-active carbon-14 dates obtained from fragile fragments of fiber sandals fashioned 5,000 to 6,000 years before the birth of Christ.

**THE DATES**, he added, are the oldest yet found for a human occupation in the northern Arizona area, and almost double the 4,000 year time depth for its prehistoric population established in the early 1950s from the curious split-twig animal figurines that have been found deep in the Grand Canyon and in Walnut Canyon just to the east of Flagstaff.

The sandals, Ambler explained, were recovered from small, shallow Dust Devil Cave north and east of Navajo Mountain in test excavations which he conducted in 1961 as a staff member of the five-year Glen Canyon salvage archaeology project of Flagstaff's Museum of Northern Arizona.

"It was clear that they were old," he recalled, "but we had no idea they were that old!"

Radiocarbon tests on fragments from three of the sandals were not run until six years later, at the University of Texas, and yielded dates of 5200 B.C., 5590 B.C. and 5750 B.C., with plus-or-minus factors of from 120 to 130 years. Because the dates were obtained directly from the sandals, Ambler feels they are "quite sound."

**THE TESTS** at Dust Devil Cave, and more extensive excavations at nearby Sand Dune Cave, turned up an as-

semblage of crude artifacts, including some unclassified, side-notched projectile points, which Ambler has named "the Desha Complex," from the name of the drainage basin in the area.

Although the complex shows "some general similarities" to early archaeological remains from the Great Basin area of Utah and Nevada, there is not enough material to determine whether it is unique, or is linked to other known early cultures elsewhere in the western region.

To obtain additional artifactual material that will allow a more adequate definition of the Desha Complex, Ambler added, is the major purpose of the current NAU expedition.

The project, which involves extensive excavations at Dust Devil Cave over the next six weeks and subsequent laboratory work on the NAU campus, is being undertaken with the cooperation of the Museum of Northern Arizona, and financed through a \$13,700 research grant from the National Science Foundation.

With Ambler in charge, it is staffed by Bruce Hudgens, Larry Armstrong, Terry Pike and Nancy Veronda, all NAU Anthropology majors; and Gerald Bair, a graduate student at Arizona State University in Tempe.

Houston Archeological Society  
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August, 1971

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