

NOTES ON SOUTH TEXAS ARCHAEOLOGY 2005

An Overview of the Archaeology of Bandera County, Texas

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PREHISTORY AND EARLY HISTORY IN BANDERA COUNTY

Ancient peoples first occupied the Bandera County area at least 11,500 years ago. From that early time, during the end of the Pleistocene (Ice Age), until the early 18th century, prehistoric American Indian cultures lived as hunters-and-gatherers, exploiting the abundant resources of this portion of the Texas Hill Country.

These peoples left behind a rich archaeological record. Their sites include the hundreds of burned rock middens ("Indian mounds" of fire-cracked limestone) most of which result from the earth-oven cooking of sotol bulbs and other wild plant foods (Black et al. 1997). These food-processing locales were usually just a part of their campsites, where large amounts of debris resulted from daily tasks. Most recognizable are their projectile points ("arrowheads") and other stone tools, along with the vast quantities of flint flakes that resulted from the making of such artifacts.

The archaeological past is easiest to examine in terms of the major time periods that have been defined by archaeologists: **Paleoindian** (9200-6500 B.C.), **Archaic** (6500 B.C.-A.D. 700), **Late Prehistoric** (A.D. 700-1700), and **Historic**.

Paleoindian

The earliest known occupations is referred to as the Clovis culture (9200 B.C.), peoples who hunted Ice Age mammals, including mammoth. They left behind distinctive fluted spearpoints at sites such as Pavo Real in Bexar County, 30 miles southeast of Bandera and at Kincaid Rockshelter, above Sabinal, 35 miles to the southwest. At these two sites, there were also Folsom occupations (around 8800 B.C.) typified by smaller fluted points used in hunting, among other things, a now extinct-form of Ice Age bison. The author has recorded the heavily patinated base of a Folsom point found north of the town of Medina. It is distinguished by long "ears" of the sort seen in the sample from Lubbock Lake (Sellards 1952:e, e') and one of the specimens from Kincaid Shelter (the specimen illustrated at the top of the web page "Discovery and Investigations" in *Texas Beyond History*; www.texasbeyondhistory.net).

The later cultures are more commonly represented in Bandera County, where spearpoints of this era have been collected. These include: Plainview (8200 B.C.), Golondrina (7000 B.C.) and Angostura (6800 B.C.; see Figure 1). Though the populations were still small, and highly nomadic, the climate had greatly improved after 8000 B.C., approximating today's environment by 7000 B.C.

This paper is a slightly edited version of a manuscript submitted for publication in *A Pictorial History of Bandera County* (Schumacher 2006). The editor shortened the manuscript as appropriate for the book's goals. However, the publisher in Virginia applied erroneous captions for every illustration in the paper. For example, on page 24, a photograph of charred acorns is described as "Pedernales points from Bander County."

Most of the observations in the paper have not been published before, and the illustrations have not appeared before, with the exception of a couple that are in Sharon Dornheim's (2002) thesis on 41BN63.

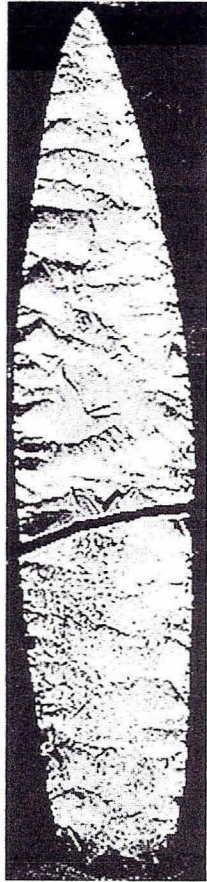


Figure 1. An Unfinished Angostura Point from Bandera County. From the Medina River drainage south of Bandera, Texas. Broken during late stages of manufacture. Length of specimen is 19 cm.

Archaic

By 6000 B.C., the Bandera County landscape could support larger populations and a long sequence (continuing until around A. D. 500) of hunting-and-gathering American Indian cultures can be chronicled. Because of the presence of streams and springs, deer and other animals, acorns and other plant foods, this was a rich area for ancient peoples.

Their campsites (cf. Hester and Evans 2000) represent a more settled way of life, in which groups of 100 or more people which, we think, would live at an occupation site for several months at a time. The Archaic cultures are easily recognized by their projectile points. The large flint points (mistakenly called "arrowheads") are of many shapes—shapes which change through time and which archaeologists can use to date different parts of the Archaic period.

We do not know why these point styles changed through time, but excavations and radiocarbon dating have established them as important diagnostic items (see Turner and Hester 2002). They were used as tips for spears thrown with the spearthrower or atlatl, the major "weapons system" from Paleoindian times until the bow and arrow was introduced in the early centuries A.D. Some of the distinctive spear point (or dart point) types in Bandera County include: Gower (6000 B.C.), Martindale and Early Triangular (4000 B.C.), Andice (3500B.C.), La Jita (3100 B.C.), Pedernales (2000-1000 B.C.), Montell (800 B.C.) and Frio (300 B.C.-A.D. 500). In addition to the points, there are large numbers of unfinished chipped stone points, known as "preforms" and "blanks." Flint (chert) was so abundant that any errors during the flintchipping reduction process were simply thrown away. Formal tools, dating from various times within the Archaic, included butted bifaces (often called "fist axes"), whose thin blades and heavy wear-polish indicate their use in plant-processing, Clear Fork tools used in woodworking, drills or perforators, and corner-tang bifaces, mostly used as knives but some of which had ritual importance. Ground stone artifacts included manos and metates. Figure 2 illustrates an unusual metate from a site near Vanderpool.

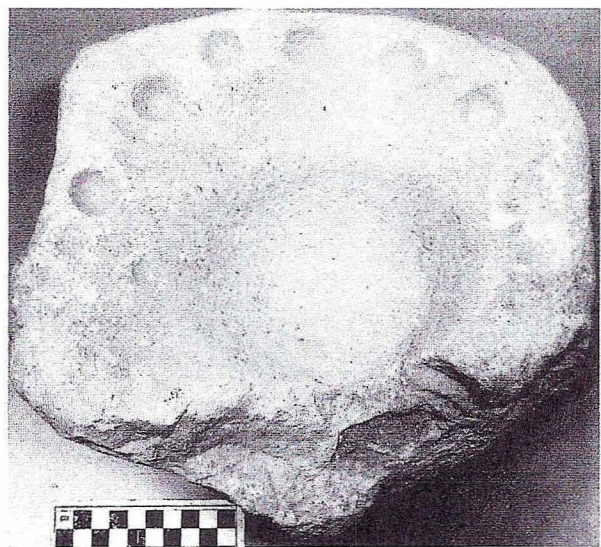


Figure 2. Grinding Stone from Bandera County. From a site east of Vanderpool, Texas. There is a central grinding area, and several small "cupules" surrounding it.

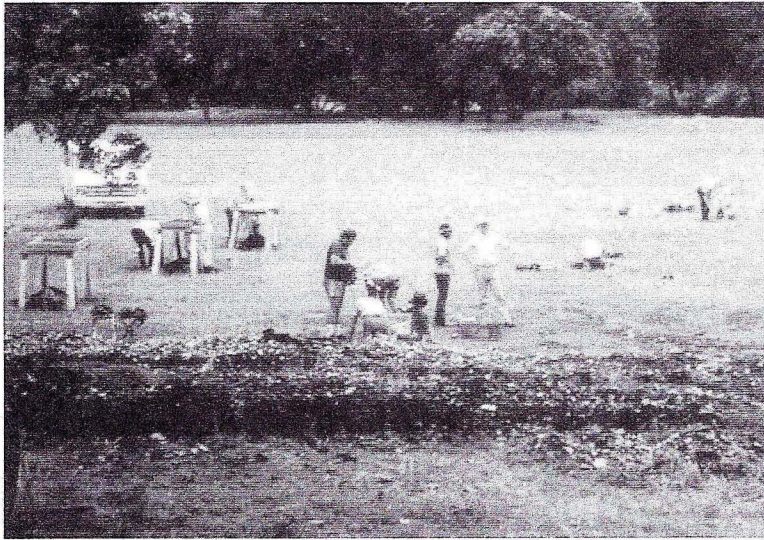


Figure 3. A View of 41BN63. Looking east from the burned rock midden toward the west floodplain of San Geronimo Creek.

Archaic diet was based on the hunting of deer and other smaller game; buffalo were infrequent in the area, although appear to have been more common again around A.D. 600-800. The economy likely focused more heavily on plant foods, since these were in abundance. Acorns could be used when harvested—and they could be stored for processing later in the winter. Native pecans, walnuts and other nut and seed crops were also important. Prickly pear fruits (*tunas*) were gathered in summer months and the seeds in the tunas could be ground with a mano and metate. There were also bulbs of various sorts, the most important being that of the sotol plant. During much of the Archaic, and even into later times, sotol bulbs were dug up and baked in rock-lined earth ovens. The repeated building and emptying of the ovens over many centuries led to the formation of the “Indian mounds”—the burned rock middens. Recent experiments and careful excavations have clearly demonstrated the earth-oven function of the middens (Black et al. 1997).

The first Archaic site to be excavated in Bandera County is the J.W.

Edwards site near Pipe Creek, dug by the University of Texas in the early 1930s. The collection is curated at the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory (UT-Austin) and continues to this day to be an important research tool for many studies of the Archaic.

In 1985, I directed excavations at 41BN63 (41: Texas; BN: Bandera County; 63: 63rd site to be formally documented) with a field school from UT-San Antonio (Figure 3). Rudy Robbins of Bandera was one of the landowners at the time who provided great help to our project. The site was dominated by a large dome-shaped burned rock midden (Figure 4).

The central part of the midden had been trenched with a backhoe prior to our project. However, we cleaned up the walls and those profiles, and along with our controlled excavations, revealed an earth-oven pit that had been used dozens of times. Pedernales and Montell points were found, dating the midden from 2000-600 B.C. (Figure 5). Underneath the midden, in a clay soil,

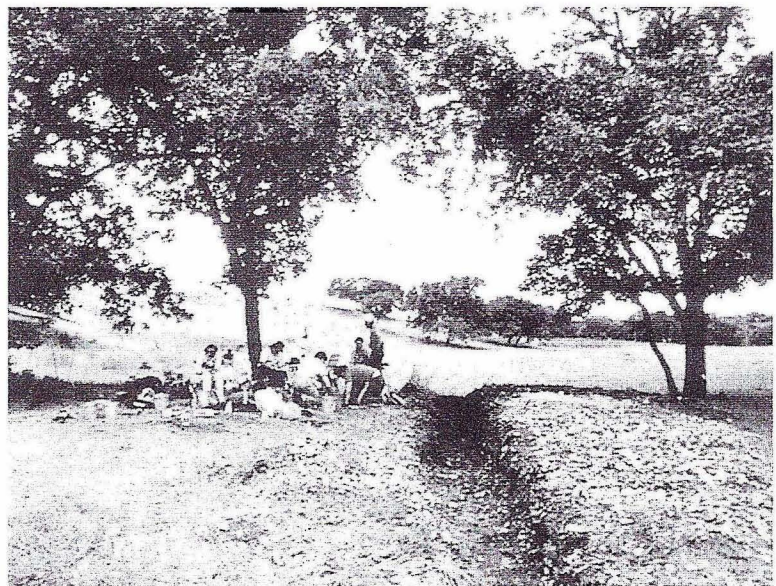


Figure 4. The Burned Rock Midden at 41BN63. View looking northwest. The trench had been dug by backhoe before archaeologists were notified. It was profiled and units excavated on the left side of the trench.

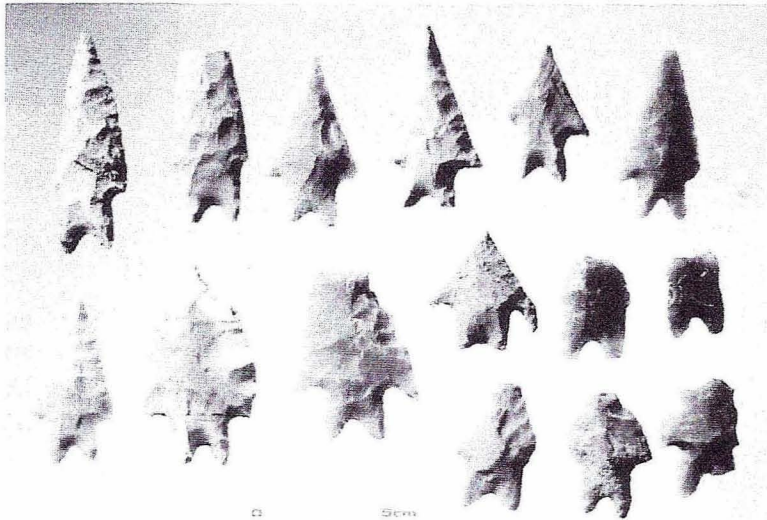


Figure 5. Pedernales Points from 41BN63. Scale is 5 cm.

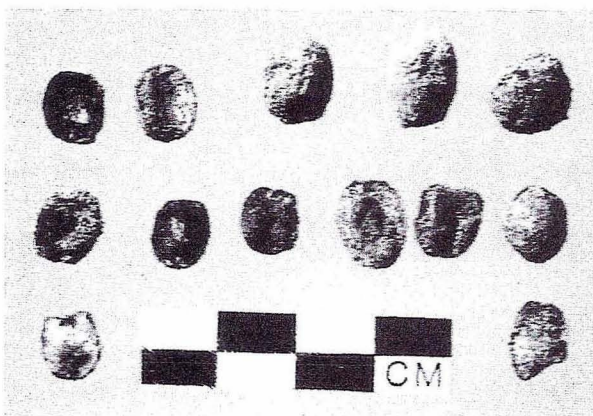


Figure 6. Charred Acorns from 41BN63. Charred acorn pits occurred in cooking pits in matrix below the burned rock midden, associated with La Jita points.

were many small pits in which charred acorns were found (Figure 6). We do not know what type of cooking process was being used to process acorns at this time, around 3100 B.C., but these were perhaps predecessors to the earth ovens of later times. La Jita points (Figure 7) were being made at this time, and we also excavated a burial that is one of the earliest found at an Archaic site in central Texas. The primary camping area was on the north side of the burned rock midden on a low terrace overlooking a nearby creek. A Master's thesis by Sharon Dornheim (2002) details the discoveries at 41BN63.

Late Prehistoric

Around A.D. 700, the bow and arrow is introduced. The large spear or dart points are replaced by true arrow, often called "bird points" because of their tiny size. However, the bow and arrow is a weapon that relies on the deep penetration of the arrow shaft, in contrast to a heavy blow and bloody wound inflicted by a spear and spearthrower. Thus, these "birdpoints" were used to kill animals such as bison and deer, or in warfare with other groups. [There are many accounts in early Bandera history of arrow wounds involving early settlers. A study done by the late Adrian Benke, a skilled bowhunter who lived near

Hondo, has demonstrated that the recorded arrow wounds in 19th century southwest Texas were usually not fatal, unless they hit a vital organ or led to subsequent infections. . . and such recorded episodes are actually quite rare! Mr. Benke theorized that hunting dogs were used by the Late Prehistoric Indians to follow animals that had been struck by arrows.]

At first, there was little change in the way of life from Archaic times. We can detect new styles of points from around A.D. 700, such as Edwards (Figures 8, 9), Scallorn, and Sabinal points. Burned rock middens were still being formed,

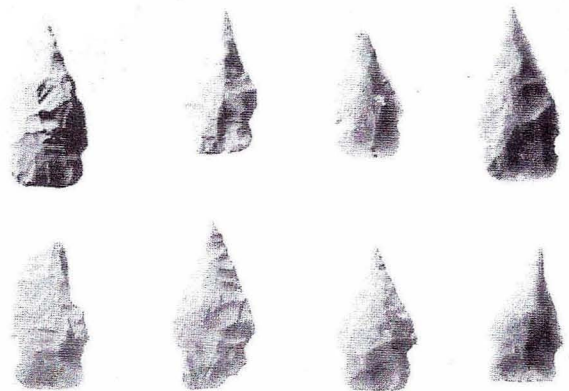


Figure 7. La Jita Points from 41BN63. Scale is 5 cm. La Jita points occurred below the burned rock midden.

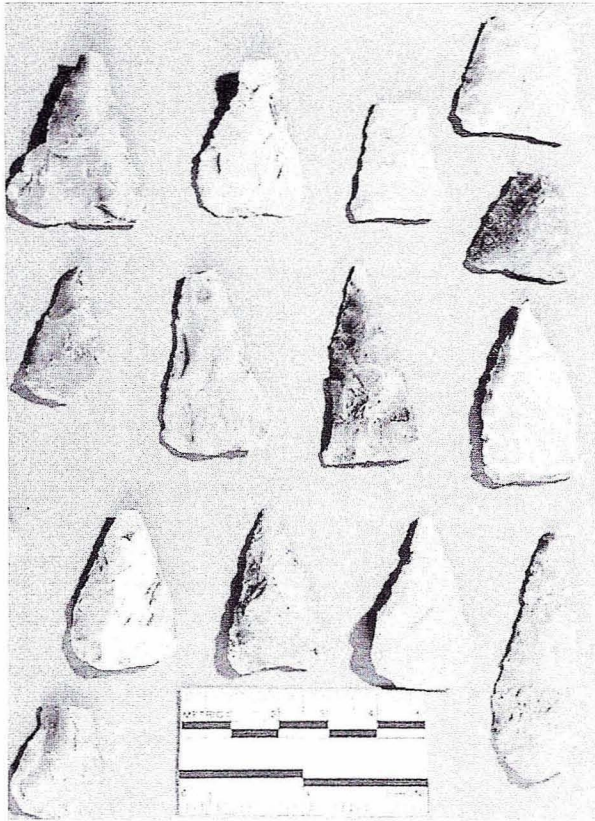


Figure 8. Arrow Point Preforms. Found at a site near Bandera. See also Figure 9. Photograph by Curt Harrell.

and campsites were located atop the older Archaic locales. An excellent study of a site from this time period was published by Houk and Lohse (1993). They excavated the Mingo site (41BN101), near Vanderpool, with a burned rock midden, Edwards, Sabinal and Scallorn arrow points, and a work-area with a large metate.

Nearby, a small sinkhole cave was excavated by archaeologists from the Texas Highway Department in the 1970s prior to the construction of FM337. Published by Henderson (2002), the Rainey Site (41BN33) was found to contain finely stratified layers of Late Prehistoric occupation which spanned almost the entire Late Prehistoric era. At the top of the deposits were artifacts of the final part of the Late Prehistoric, known as the Toyah Horizon. It dates between A.D. 1250/1300-1700 and is characterized by Perdiz arrow points, beveled knives, end-scrapers, and pottery. The Toyah Horizon represents an adaptation to buffalo hunting, as bison herds moved back into this region in some numbers after A.D. 1250. Across central and

south Texas, and down to the Texas coast, the artifacts typical of the Toyah Horizon spread to the various Indian groups.

The knives and end scrapers were used for butchering and hide processing, and the pottery possibly for rendering and storing bison fat (there are also *ollas* or water jars represented in this plain orange-tan pottery).

Historic

There are many problems associated with studying the campsites of the early Historic Native Americans. For example, it is clear that many Toyah Horizon occupations continued well into early 1700s, but unless glass trade beads or other European goods are found, it is hard to be sure. For example, a Toyah Horizon occupation at the La Jita site south of Utopia bore traces of a totally prehistoric campsite—except for a crudely made possible metal arrow point found among the remains (Figure 10).

The native peoples were quickly displaced or eliminated by two factors: the Spanish Colonial period with its missions and the incursion of Indian groups from the Southwest and the Plains. Though the Comanches, Lipan Apaches, Tonkawas are often thought of as “Texas Indians,” they are not originally. The Tonkawas arrived in central Texas around 1680 from a homeland in Oklahoma. The Lipans came in the 1720s from the southern Plains and Southwest, and the Comanches (who had been hunters and gatherers in southern Idaho before they obtained horses) did not appear on the scene until the 1750s.

Thus, the native peoples—who were not organized as tribes and whose band names are known to us only through Spanish records—were caught in a vise between the advancing Spanish frontier and the aggressive intrusive Indian groups. Those who were not killed by the Lipans or Comanches went into missions in San Antonio and elsewhere, and many perished there from epidemics of measles and smallpox. While the Historic

Indians of this part of Texas are often referred to as “Coahuiltecan,” this is an incorrect label. “Coahuilteco” was one of at least seven distinct native languages spoken in south central and southern Texas, and there was never a “Coahuiltecan culture.” Indeed,

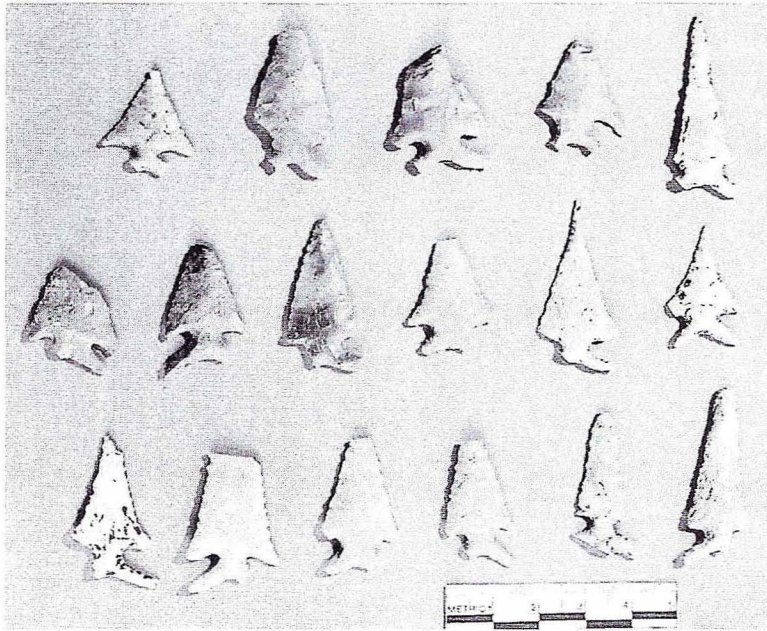


Figure 9. Edwards Points from a site near Bandera. Photograph by Curt Harrell.

studied through archival records (Headrick and Ellis 2002). Jose Policarpio Rodriguez, a major Tejano figure, built a massive cut-stone structure that was both a two-story home and fortification (“Polly’s Fort”) located on private property along Privilege Creek (Figures 12, 13; see Rodriguez 2006).

Indian raids continued as late as 1881 in Bandera County, as documented in studies by J. Marvin Hunter, A. J. Sowell and others. Most of the raids after the Civil War were by Kickapoos and other displaced Native American tribes living across the Rio Grande in Mexico. Again, archaeological traces of these raids are rarely found, and we have to depend

we do not know what language was spoken by most of the groups who lived in Bandera County.

Campsites of the Comanche, Tonkawa, and Lipan are almost impossible to find because these groups were always on the move. If found, such sites would be recognizable from the presence of colored glass trade beads, metal arrow points, bits of copper or other metals, knives (Figure 11) and gun or horse-gear parts. Such a site, containing a number of these traits, has been recorded by the author in northwest Medina County in recent years, and will be published at a later date. It dates to approximately 1780, and is probably Comanche or Lipan Apache.

We know from recent discoveries in the Tarpley area that Spanish explorers came into Bandera County as early as 1577 (the date engraved within a small rockshelter in a very remote area), but again they left few traces. There are a number of accounts of Spanish intrusions into the area, in a search for silver (a shaft related to such exploration is near the shelter). There are, of course, many houses and other structures from the early settlements of the 1800s. These need to be fully recorded before they are lost to development or the ravages of time. For example, in 1990, several historic structures in the Utopia area, some within Bandera County, were excavated and

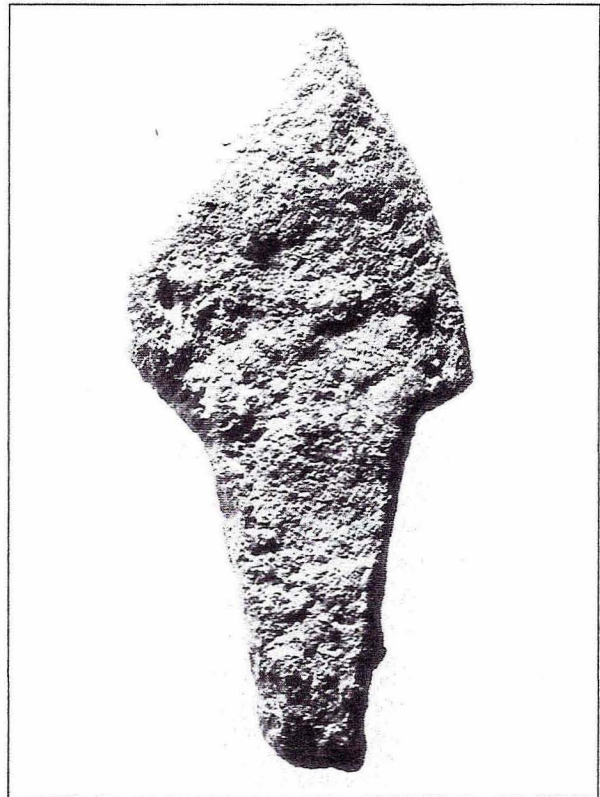


Figure 10. An Iron Arrow Point from 41UV21. This native-made metal point was found in excavations directed by Jeff Huebner at the La Jita site, 1989. Photograph by Kenneth M. Brown. Length, about 4 cm.

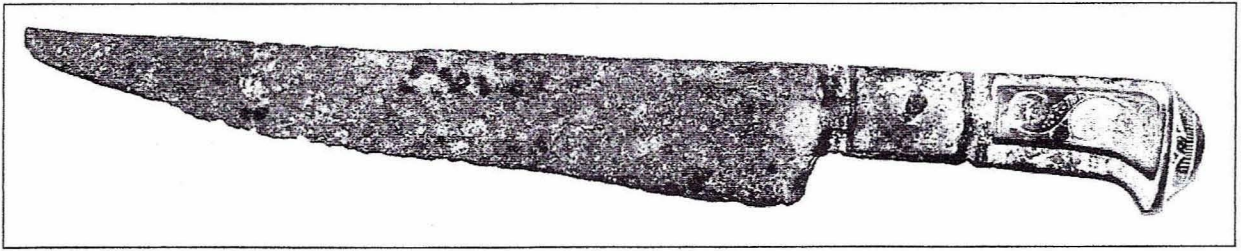


Figure 11. A Spanish Knife from Western Bandera County. Found on the Gazaway Ranch on Seco Creek, the knife has been identified as Spanish, dating to the mid or late 18th century. Length, 13 inches.



Figure 12. Polly's Fort, Bandera County. Front view, 2002.

on the historic accounts to examine the range and activities of these groups.

CLOSING COMMENTS

Although this broad outline of Bandera County prehistory can be sketched, the area remains one of the most poorly studied counties in the entire region. Very little scientific archaeology has been done (Simons and Moore 1997), and less than 200 of the county's thousands of prehistoric and historic archaeological sites have been documented for future generations. The location and description of each site is important, since once the site is destroyed by land development, roads, erosion—or dug into, whether by artifact collectors or

by archaeologists—it is destroyed forever. The archaeologist uses scientific methods, makes extensive notes, records, and photographs. The site is usually published and the collections kept in secure research facilities for future studies. Of course, if the archaeologist works at a site on private property, the landowner can decide what the disposition of the artifacts will be. At 41BN63, we returned the projectile points to the landowners at their request after we had studied and photographed them, obtaining the scientific information that was important. A widespread

misconception is that the recording of a site on private property can lead to intervention by the state or federal government, or that it will increase trespassing. From 40 years of working with ranchers and farmers in

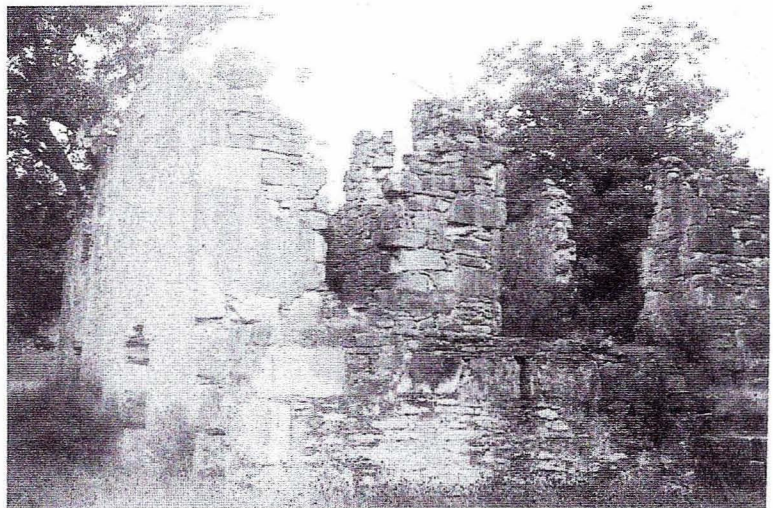


Figure 13. Polly's Fort, Bandera County. Oblique view, 2002.

central and south Texas, I can vouch that this is simply not the case, unless the study is done as part of a highway project or some other governmental construction project about which the landowner already knows. The Rainey sinkhole site was destroyed, after excavation, by the construction of FM337. An invaluable record of human prehistory would have been lost except that State and Federal law required the Texas Highway Department to have the site excavated and studied before they removed it.

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