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Lithic Studies

A Preliminary Survey of Paleoindian Sites in Tennessee

John B. Broster

The Tennessee Division of Archaeology has recently undertaken an intensive inventory of existing records of the Paleoindian occupation of the state. An attempt has been made to document known archaeological sites and collections, and to use these data in developing predictive models of site location within Tennessee. In compiling these data, it was learned that Paleoindian sites and isolated materials have been recorded in all the geographic divisions of the state. Starting in the west, the Coastal Plain and the Western valley of the Tennessee River have produced many isolated finds and eroded small camp sites dating from the Clovis to late or Transitional periods (Figure 1). The eastern and western subdivisions of the Highland Rim, which surround the Central Basin, have probably produced more isolated Clovis materials than any other location in Tennessee. Sites are also known in the Central Basin, Cumberland Plateau, and the Ridge and Valley divisions of the eastern part of the state. Additionally, scattered remains have been reported in the mountains on the Tennessee/North Carolina border.

In Tennessee, the Paleoindian occupation has been generally divided into an early and late phase, based upon projectile point morphology. The early phase corresponds to the general fluted point horizon made up of Clovis and Cumberland types. The Clovis material is generally assumed to be older than Cumberland. Dates of 11,500 to 10,000 yr B.P., based on radiocarbon dates from other regions, have been projected for the fluted point period.

The late phase, often termed Terminal or Transitional Paleoindian, has been assigned dates of 10,000 to 9,000 yr B.P. This phase has become rather broad with the inclusion of numerous projectile point types. Types such as Quad, Beaver Lake, Wheller, Plano and possibly Dalton have been placed in this category. At this stage of research, these so-called types may represent differences in regional adaptations, time factors, or in some cases may be related to different components of the same basic tool kit.

Only two Paleoindian sites, the Wells Creek Crater (40Sw74) and the Pierce site (40Cs24), have been extensively excavated (Dragoo 1965, 1967, 1968, and 1973; Broster 1982). Neither of these sites produced undisturbed materials or occupation

levels. To date, there are no known single-component Paleoindian sites recorded in the region which have potential for undisturbed deposits.

In researching the state site files, a total of 58 archaeological sites produced two or more Paleoindian artifacts. Some 24 sites were located in the west, 23 in the central region, and 11 were recorded in the east portion of the state. Additionally, 47 sites produced isolated Paleoindian artifacts on multi-component locations. However, one should be very cautious in giving a Paleoindian interpretation to many of these sites. In excavated context, throughout the region, we have found that Paleoindian materials were often curated and modified by later prehistoric populations. At this point only those sites which have produced numerous Paleoindian tools can be truly assigned to the period. This includes only six known sites.

The most numerous recorded Paleoindian artifacts are the hundreds of isolated fluted and non-fluted projectile points. An attempt in the 1960s, by the University of Tennessee, was made to document fluted point surface finds by local collectors. Of particular value from these studies are the photographic records and point measurements. Unfortunately, provenience information was usually limited to the county of origin although occasionally the drainage or more specific information was obtained. This lack of specific information was probably due to the collectors' reluctance to divulge good collecting sites and suspicion of the motives of professional archaeologists. This suspicion still exists and has done much to harm further studies.

The lack of "in situ" sites has done much to discourage Paleoindian studies in Tennessee. The professional community has not shown much research interest in this important period. The majority of our information is still obtained from collectors willing to share their knowledge and allow the recording of their finds. Due to this lack of systematic research, the Tennessee Division of Archaeology has undertaken a long-term study of existing records and is proposing multi-stage surveys of potential areas of heavy occupation. Local amateurs have been very generous with their time and collections, and are helping to fill in important gaps in our knowledge of this very critical time period.

Specific goals of this study are the development of a systematic survey and testing of probable site locations. Unfortunately, several surface sites are known to have been destroyed by stream action, development and unsystematic collecting. Additionally, a thorough mapping and investigation of known occurrences of late Pleistocene fauna will be attempted to see if there are any correlations in distribution of these remains and Paleoindian artifacts. A major short-term goal will be the continuation of the recording of amateur collections, and the analysis and

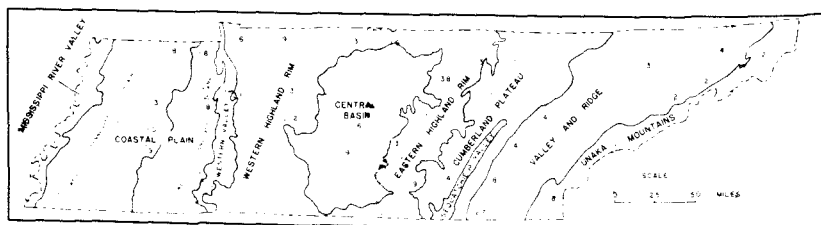


Figure 1. Distribution of fluted projectile points in Tennessee. Drawn by Mark Norton.

publication of the unrecorded but well-known surface sites. Although lacking in importance as undisturbed sites, these localities provide much useful information on lithic technologies. Research for this period in Tennessee has lagged behind the rest of the country. This is very unfortunate when one becomes aware of the amount of Paleoindian artifacts which have been collected in Tennessee over the past three decades. This information must be better recorded, and toward this end the Tennessee Division of Archaeology will continue its efforts.

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An Update on the Texas Clovis Fluted Point Survey

David J. Meltzer

Since my initial reports of a statewide survey of 205 Texas Clovis fluted points (Meltzer 1986, 1987), an additional 72 Clovis points have been recorded. This new information warrants brief comment.

It is still the case that less than half of the state's 254 counties have produced Clovis points. And most of those have produced very few points. Of the 112 counties (up from the previous high of 95 counties) producing isolated fluted points, 89 counties (79%) have 3 or less. Only three counties—Crosby, Gaines (in west Texas) and Jefferson (on the Texas Gulf Coast)—have 10 or more isolates.

It was earlier observed that the distribution by county of isolated Clovis points appeared unrelated to the distribution of later Paleoindian sites. A comparison of the distribution by county of isolates with the distribution of Paleoindian sites (site data from Biesart et al. 1985) reveals that there is no concordance or correlation between the two (Kendall's $W = .0156$, $p = .187$). However, there was nearly complete agreement between the number of Paleoindian sites and the total number of sites by county (Kendall's $W = .946$, $p < .0000$).

Granting biases in the collection and reporting of isolates versus Paleoindian sites, I speculated one might attribute the lack of concordance between the two to differential land use on the part of Clovis groups or perhaps to the fact that Clovis groups only rarely participated in the highly structured spatial behavior that produces sites (Meltzer 1986).