

## Prairie Creek: A Stratified Site in Southwestern Indiana

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### *Abstract*

This is a report of some of the results of a test excavation conducted during the fall of 1973 at the Prairie Creek Site located in Daviess County, Indiana. The area tested consists mostly if not entirely of water-laid deposits which are exposed along the creek bank. The work was undertaken to obtain a stratified sample of the organic materials known to be present in the deposits and to determine if the location was an Indian site. Indian artifacts were found in 2 and probably 3 strata. These are the units discussed. The uppermost of these produced bone and antler artifacts and a quantity of organic remains which includes the bones of extinct peccary (*Mylohyus*) and giant beaver (*Castoroides*). There are radiocarbon dates of  $2535 \pm 75$  B.P. and  $3535 \pm 90$  B.P. from this stratum. The evidence indicates that this deposit is mixed. A bone artifact and part of the shell of an armadillo were present in a lower unit, and a possible worked bone and *Mylohyus* were recovered from one below it. Unfortunately there is the likelihood that they too are mixed. However, unmixed areas may be present, and the site could prove significant.

The purpose of this report is just to present some of the results of an archaeological excavation conducted at the Prairie Creek Site, 12Da9.

The site is located in southwestern Indiana in Daviess County approximately 3 miles north of the city of Washington. It is exposed along the southernmost bank of Prairie Creek which flows in a south-westerly direction out of a former glacial lake-marshland area known as Thousand Acre Woods. The site is about 1 mile below the lower end of Thousand Acre Woods and some 6 miles from where the creek enters the West Fork of White River.

The location was reported to the Glenn A. Black Laboratory of Archaeology in the spring of 1972 by an individual who had found mastodon bones exposed along the creek bank. At that time we visited the area and spent part of a day recovering the exposed mastodon. It was observed that the deposits were stratified and contained well preserved botanical and faunal remains. In addition, a few pieces of chert were found on the eroded bank. Their original context could not be determined.

In order to recover a stratified sample of the organic remains and to determine if an Indian site was present, the author undertook a test excavation at the location. This was done on weekends during September and October of 1973. The work consisted basically of a pit whose dimensions were about 5 by 5 by 5 feet. The pit extended south-east into and perpendicular to the stream bank. Many of the strata tested produced organic material, sometimes in quantity. In addition, Indian artifacts were found in 2 and probably 3 strata.

The area excavated consists mostly if not entirely of water-laid deposits (Fig. 1). Fifteen strata were segregated. Each is composed

of a mixture of sand, silt, and clay. In terms of texture they are sands with the exception of Strata 1 and 2a which are silts.

The vertical extent of the lowest stratum tested, Stratum 12, was not ascertained. Although there is the possibility that it was water deposited, it may well represent a buried sand dune (Henry H. Gray, personal communication). In any event it appears that a stream channel had been cut into Stratum 12 and filled with alluvial deposits. Stratum 1 does not represent the original surface. Part of the deposits had been removed by a channelization project.

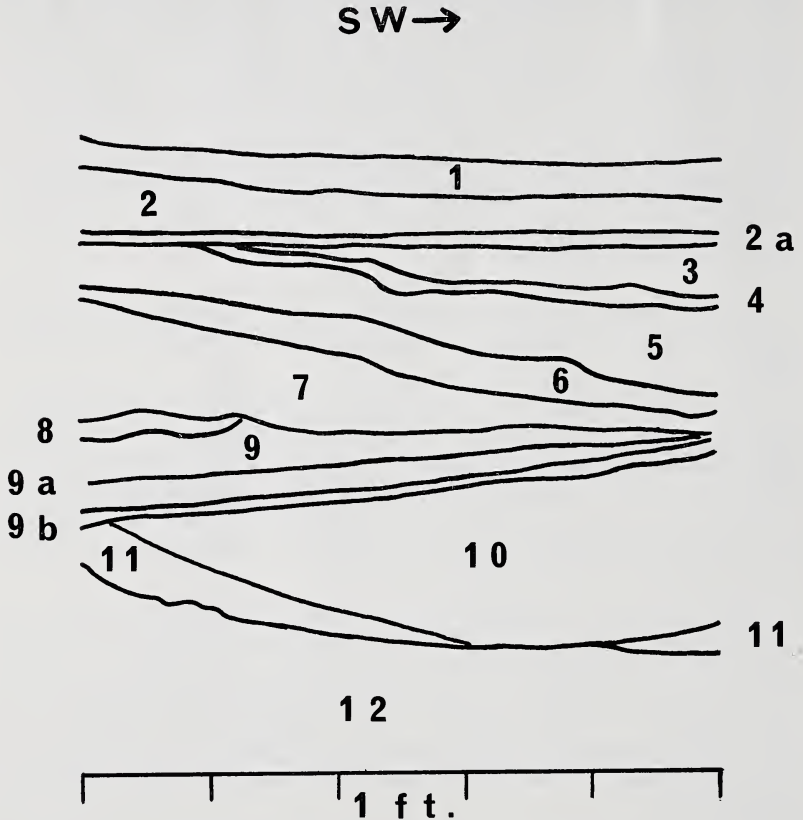


FIGURE 1. SE Wall of Test Pit; Strata Numbered.

Analysis has been concentrated on Stratum 7, the uppermost artifact bearing unit. It was selected because it also produced a quantity of material which included the bones of extinct animals. Stratum 7 is a water-laid sand containing beds and areas of dark clayey sand. Its maximum thickness was about 1 foot.

The items recovered from Stratum 7 include 3 pieces of oxidized sandstone, 2 pieces of coal, a diabase pebble, 27 chert flakes, a utilized flake, an antler point with a hollowed-out base, a worked deer

metatarsal, a carbonized acorn, 3 pokeberry (*Phytolacca americana*) seeds which probably represent a recent intrusion, *Quercus* of the red oak group, ash (*Fraxinus sp.*), and *Acer* of the soft maple group.

The fauna identified from Stratum 7 are given in Table 1.

TABLE 1. *Fauna from Stratum 7.*

SCIENTIFIC NAME	COMMON NAME
<i>Mylohyus sp.</i>	long-nosed peccary (extinct)
<i>Castoroides sp.</i>	giant beaver (extinct)
<i>Odocoileus virginianus</i>	white-tailed deer
<i>Procyon lotor</i>	raccoon
<i>Ondatra zibethicus</i>	muskrat
<i>Mustela vison</i>	mink
<i>Amia calva</i>	bowfin
<i>Lepisosteus sp.</i>	gar
<i>Ictalurus sp.</i>	catfish
<i>Micropterus salmoides</i>	largemouth bass
<i>Chrysemys picta</i>	painted turtle
<i>Sternotherus sp.</i>	musk turtle
Chelydra/Macrochelys group	snapping turtle/alligator snapping turtle
Pseudemys/Graptemys group	pseudemid turtles/map and sawback turtles
<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	mallard
<i>Anas sp.</i>	duck
<i>Podilymbus podiceps</i>	pieb-billed grebe

Two radiocarbon determinations have been made on wood from Stratum 7. A carbonized piece of maple produced an age of  $2535 \pm 75$  B.P. (ISGS-269). An uncarbonized sample of ash dated  $3535 \pm 90$  B.P. (ISGS-270).

It was hoped that an early deposit had been located in which artifacts were associated with extinct animals and that the materials from the stratum were contemporary. However, the magnitude of the dates and the difference between them, the presence of animals that became extinct earlier during the early part of the Postglacial, and the fact that the materials were recovered from a stream deposit, indicate that Stratum 7 is mixed.

Artifacts were also recovered from a lower unit which is composed of Strata 9 and 9a. These are sandy stream deposits containing laminations and areas of dark clayey sand.

The contents of this unit include 4 pieces of oxidized sandstone, 5 chert flakes, a bone fish-hook, some wood, and bones of fish, turtles, birds, and mammals. The material has not been completely analyzed but it does include the remains of 2 animal species not identified from Stratum 7. There is an upper molar that is like that of a marten (*Martes americana*) except that the archaeological specimen is noticeably larger. It may represent a fisher (*Martes pennanti*). In addition, part of the shell of an armadillo was found.

To the author's knowledge this is the first armadillo reported for Indiana. The location is on the northern extremity of their range. The latitude of the Prairie Creek Site is 38 degrees 43 minutes N. Armadillo (*Dasypus*) remains are reported for Organ-Hedricks Cave, West Virginia, 37 degrees 42 minutes N. (1) and for Cherokee Cave, Missouri, 38 degrees 40 minutes N. (1, 2).

One chert flake and a piece of mammal bone which appears to have been worked were present in Stratum 11. This is a water-laid sand having inclined beds and areas of dark clayey silty sand.

Stratum 11 also produced 14 pieces of coal, some wood, many mollusc shells, and the bones of fish, turtles, birds, and mammals. The analysis of this material has not been completed but it does include the remains of an extinct long-nosed peccary (*Mylohyus*) and 2 animals not identified from Stratum 7. They are a frog and the American coot (*Fulica americana*).

Unfortunately since the lower artifact bearing units are stream deposits, there is the likelihood that they too are mixed.

Although mixture was encountered, unmixed areas may exist at the location. In view of the stratigraphy, the depth of the deposits, and the possibility for paleoenvironmental reconstruction, Prairie Creek could prove to be an important site. Work at the location is being pursued by the Glenn A. Black Laboratory of Archaeology.

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