



THE PACKARD SITE

BY MARY HOLMES

THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA STOWELL MUSEUM AND OKLAHOMA ARCHEOLOGICAL SURVEY

PREHISTORIC PEOPLE OF OKLAHOMA

The Prehistoric People of Oklahoma series was initiated by the Oklahoma Archeological Survey and the University of Oklahoma Stovall Museum of Science and History. By making this series widely available, it is hoped that the publicized results of archeological field work will foster an appreciation for, interest in, and knowledge of the people who called Oklahoma "home" for some 11,000 years before Coronado visited the state.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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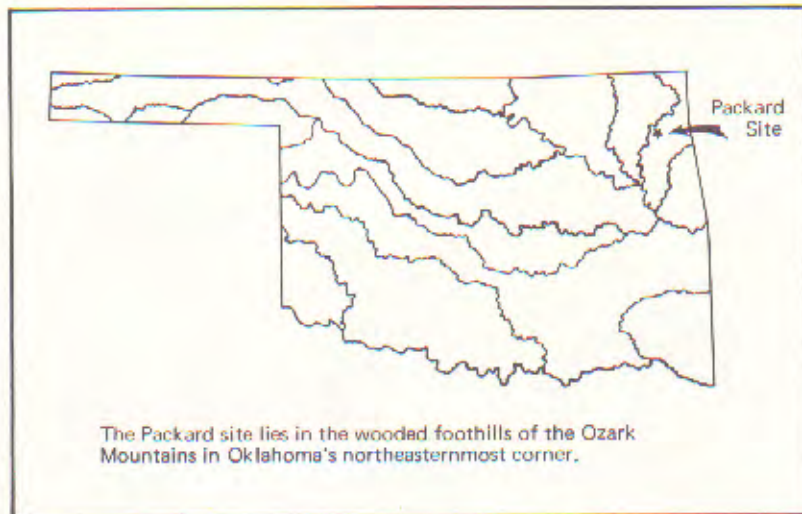
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Mary Ann Holmes

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HISTORY

Thousands of years before the flowering of Greek civilization, an ocean span away, the continent of North America was inhabited by groups of people. Some of these people lived in the area we now call Oklahoma. Though we use the term "Indian" Columbus mistakenly gave them, they were, in fact, the first Americans.

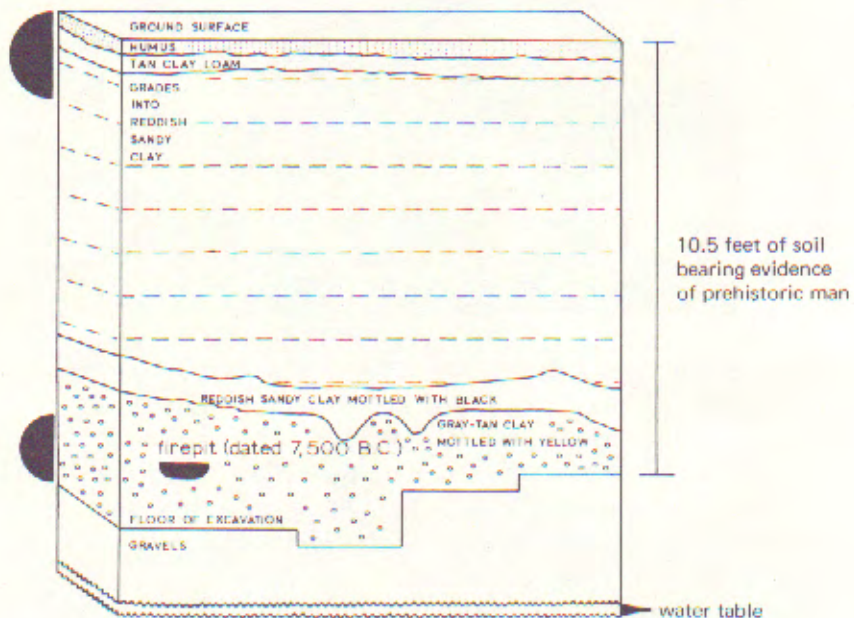
The existence of these native Americans is recorded today by the tools and trash left on the locations (or sites) where they lived. Often times these sites were buried by soil being blown over them by the wind or carried over them by flooding waters. A new ground surface on which later groups of people might also settle was created by this wind and water action. The passing of centuries and repeated settlements caused a sort of sandwich of soils bearing evidence of different groups of people in each of the layers.

We might think of these deposited soils as a cover which sealed the indications of the first Americans safely in place. The archeologist is an individual who has been trained to remove this cover carefully so that tools and trash which were abandoned by prehistoric peoples can be found exactly as they were left.

In the summer of 1962, archeologists began work at one of these sites along Saline Creek near Grand River in northeast Oklahoma.

Last pottery-making peoples

Earliest hunting-gathering peoples



Deeper deposits of tools and trash left by prehistoric people are older than shallow deposits.

THE SITE

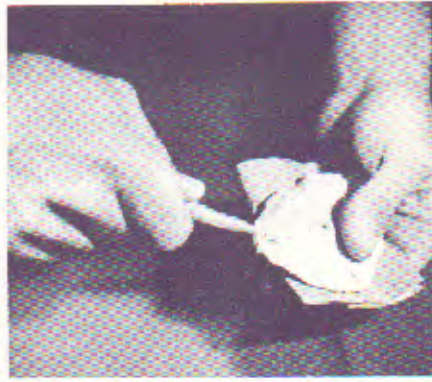
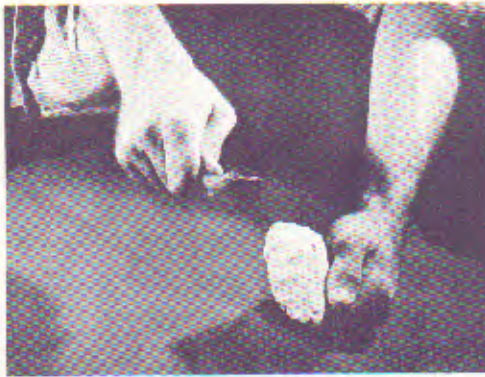


The Packard site took its name from the owner of the land where it was situated. Its location would soon lie under the waters of a lake to be formed by the damming of Grand River. Imminent destruction and potential loss of valuable information had decided the fate of the site. It was to be salvaged.

Archeologists conducted excavations at Packard for 45 days. Layer after layer of soil was removed with almost surgical

precision, and the situation of each item found was painstakingly recorded. With the exact location of the material remains noted and photographed, archeologists were able to return to the laboratory. Then began the reconstruction of the long sequence of human life at the Packard site. The archeologist uses such extreme care in uncovering and recording so that in the laboratory he can reconstruct the surface of the site exactly as it was left by its prehistoric inhabitants.





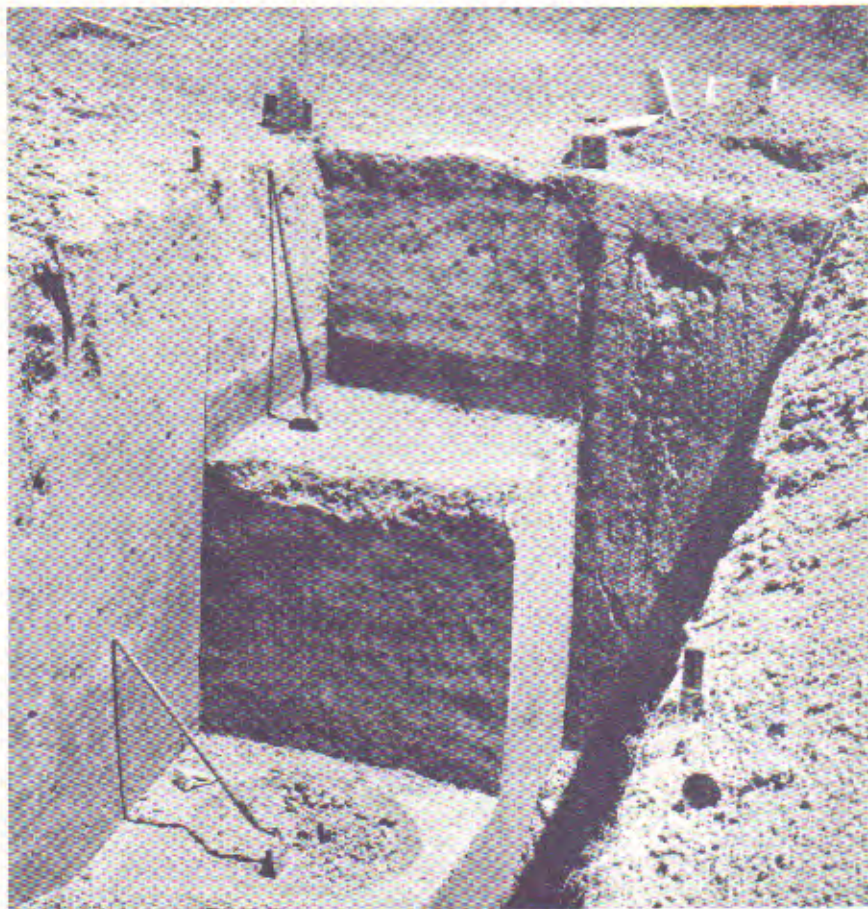
FLAKED TOOLS

This series of pictures illustrates some of the steps in the manufacture of a flake tool. From a large, rough block of flint (left) the flintworker knocks off a flake of flint with a hammerstone. The base of a tool made from a deer antler (middle) is used to rough out the desired shape of the finished tool. The tip of the antler (right) is used to do the finer work of flint-knapping.

Prehistoric man at the Packard site probably had easy access to a local, good quality flint. It is grey in color with blotches of white, black or darker grey. Large, rough blocks of this flint were smashed with other stones to produce smaller pieces. The flint worker could then use a deer antler to pressure smaller flakes off the rougher object. His finished tool might be a point for his darts, a knife with a sharp cutting edge, or a scraper to clean the hides of deer or rabbit.

The evidence for those first people at Packard came from around 10 to 12 feet below the ground surface. It was the deepest layer of soil containing signs of man, and, thus, archeologists think it was probably the earliest period in time that men lived at the site. Below it lay gravel.

Reaching this deepest layer of soil signalled the end of the excavation after 45 days of digging. In that 45 days the archeological crew had uncovered the indications of nearly 10,000 years of human life.

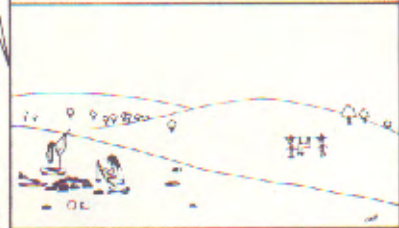
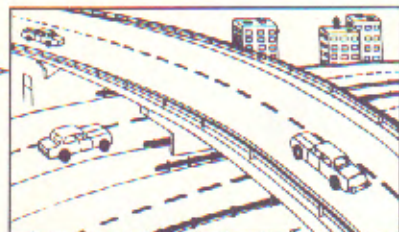
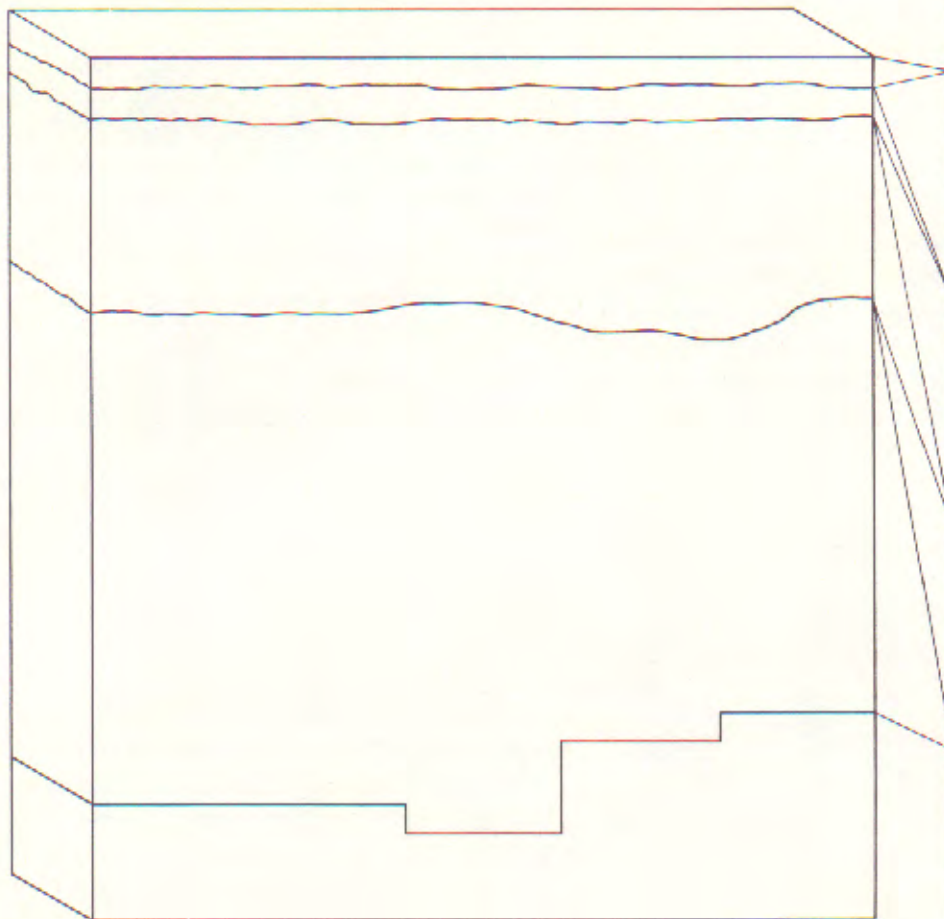


THE PEOPLE

Archeologists believe that at least five different groups of people came to camp on the Packard site after that first group. Just as our automobile and light bulb will appear different to archeologists of the future than the buggy and whale-oil lamp of 18th century Americans, so the remains of the first groups of people at Packard differ from those of later times.

In the deepest (oldest) areas, flint points as much as two and a half inches long were found at a depth of 10 feet. Some points found 18 inches down were as little as a half inch long. Archeologists have found this to be the case at most sites where prehistoric man lived over long periods of time. Thus, they say that man in North America used the spear or dart with a large point for thousands of years and then slowly took up the arrow which holds a much smaller point.

The very form of the points changed over time, too. The second groups of people to visit the Packard site left three dart points in the same layer of soil which were uncovered some 9,500 years later by the archeological crew. These points were of special interest to archeologists because of their differing forms.



POINTS

Two are shaped rather like a willow leaf, a form which archeologists believe was commonly used by early prehistoric man. The remaining one has a notch on either side near the base where it was

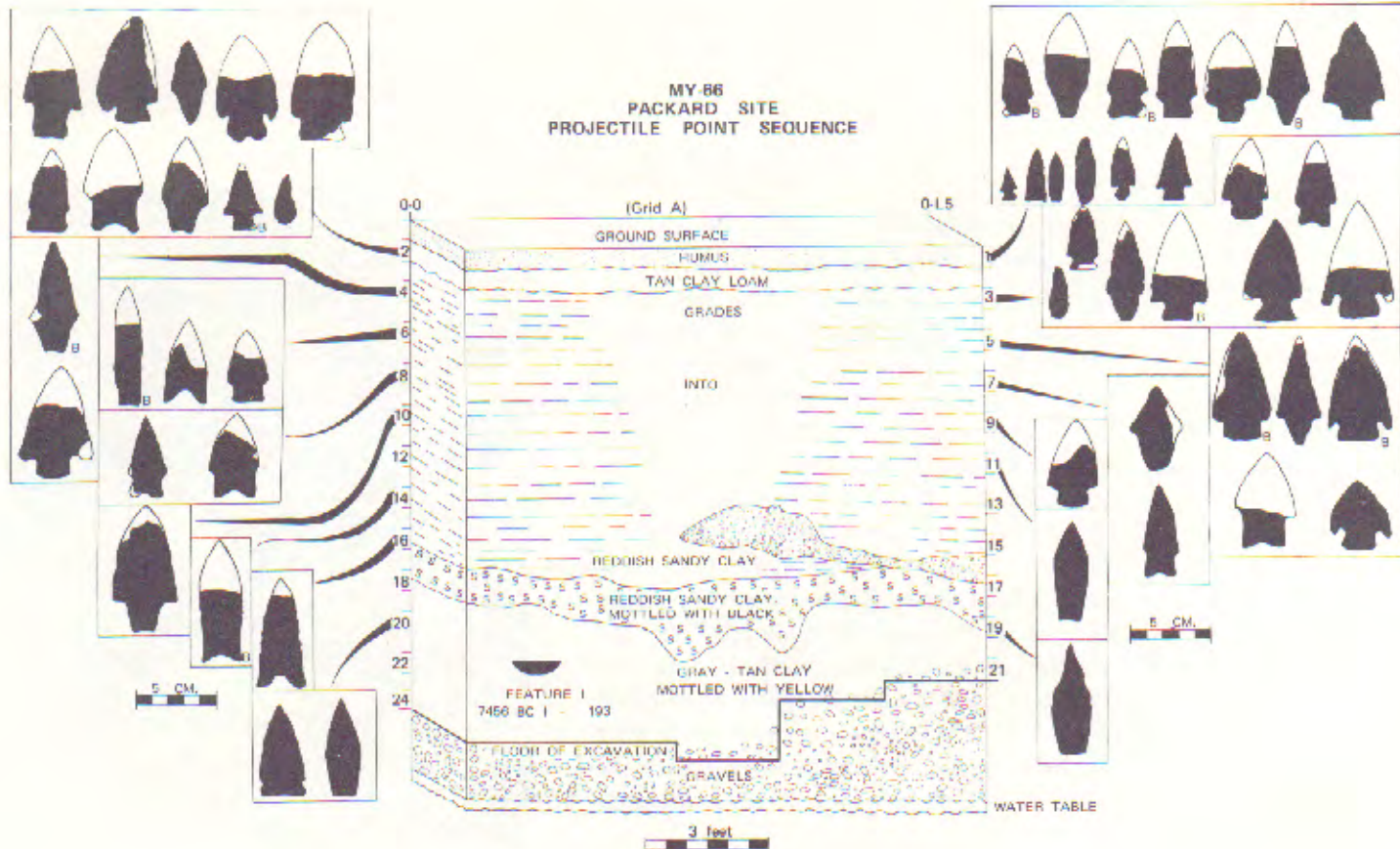


attached to the wooden dart or spear. It used to be thought, at least in this area of North America, that the point with notches was used by prehistoric people at a later period of time. Because they were found at the same depth, archeologists can now say that in northeast Oklahoma these two forms of points were being used by the same people.

Also found in the same layer of soil was a firepit which had been dug into the ground by the same prehistoric campers who used the three dart points. This firepit was circular in shape and about 6 inches deep.

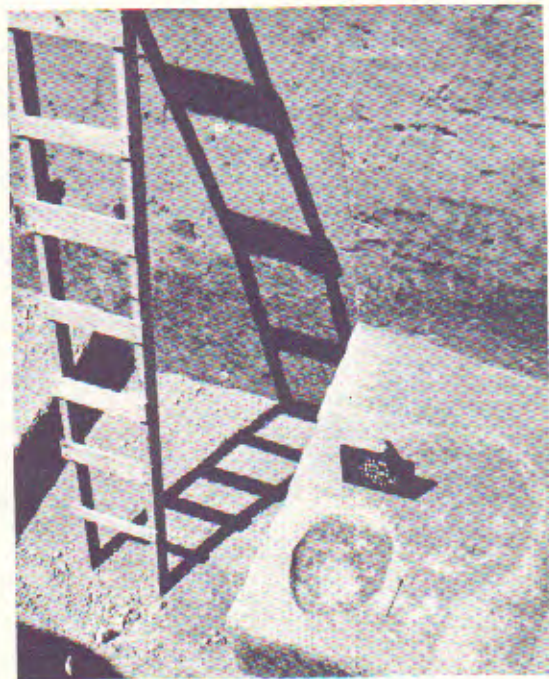
A firepit is always a special find for an archeologist because so much information can be gained from it. In this case, charcoal (from burned logs?) and burned earth were found in the pit. The charcoal was collected very carefully. Scientists, by examining the carbon in charcoal, are able to give us the approximate date it was burned. This scientific process is called radiocarbon dating.

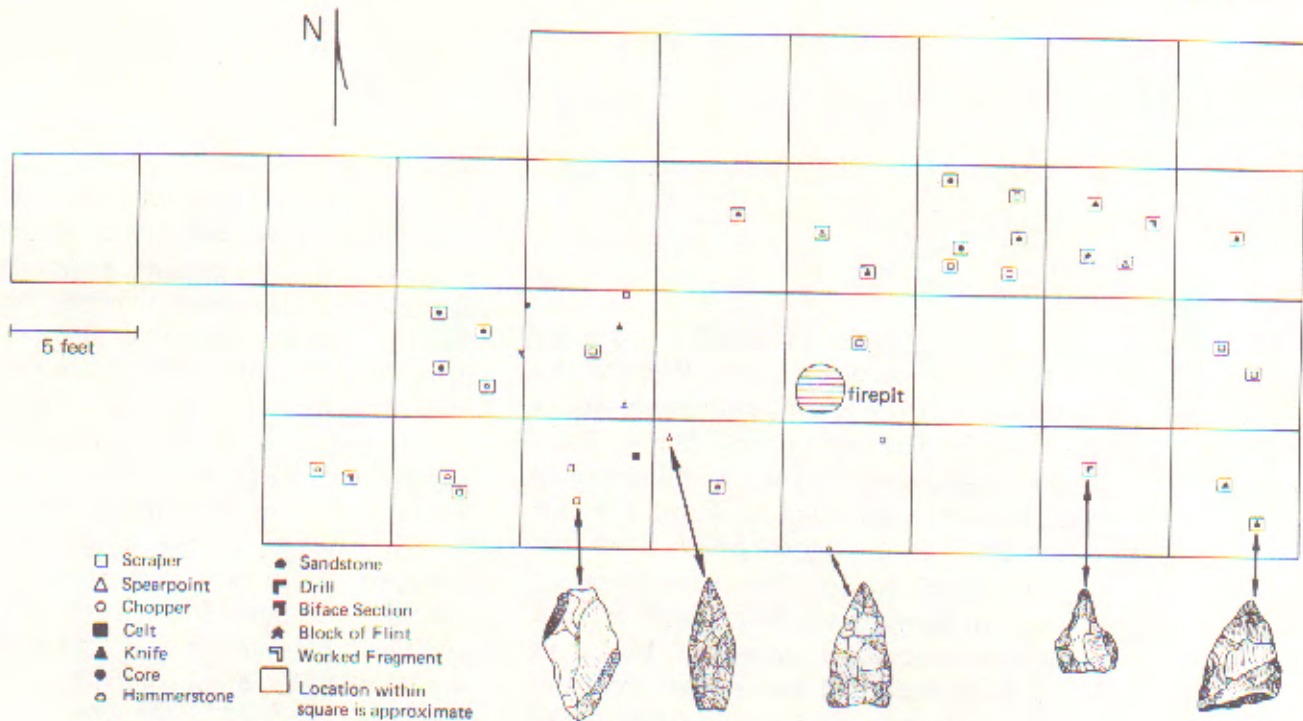
MY-86
PACKARD SITE
PROJECTILE POINT SEQUENCE



FIRE PIT

The charcoal from the firepit was radiocarbon dated at about 7,500 B.C. Archeologists at the Packard site were fortunate to find the firepit and the three different points exactly as they were left 9,500 years ago. All too often, a bulldozer building a road would have broken and scattered the three points hundreds of feet from each other and the carbon from the firepit would have been pushed to the side of a super-highway. Many times, people have even dug into sites for the purpose of finding "arrowheads" to add to their personal collections. If this had been the case at the Packard site, those three dart points would be gathering dust in someone's closet and the firepit just a jumble of dirt, a victim of an uneducated shovel.



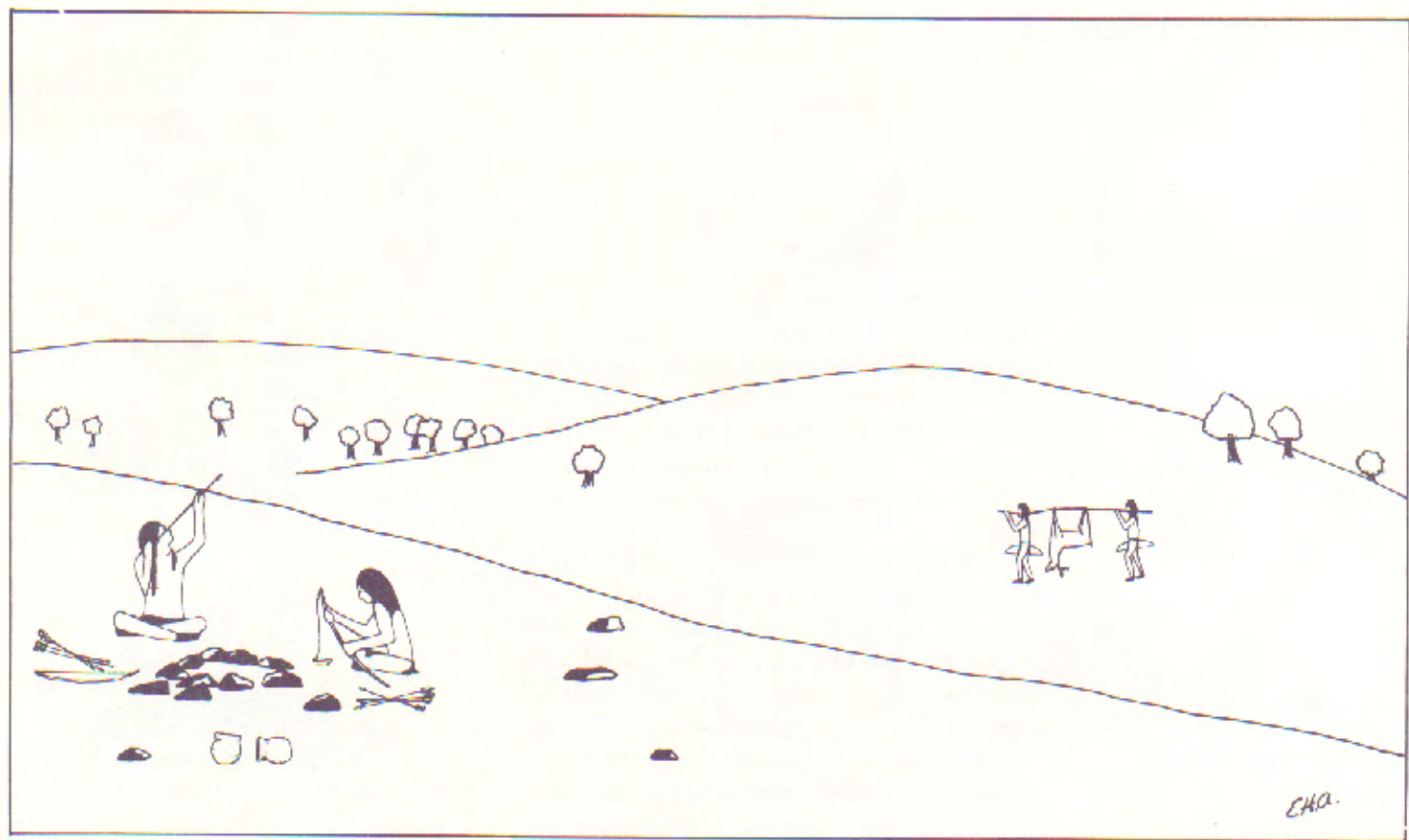


From a chart locating tools and trash around the firepit, the archeologist learns about the life of prehistoric people 9,500 years ago.

For a period of 4,500 years after the second occupation, the Packard site was visited off and on by different groups of people. The dart or spear points, scrapers, knives, and drills found indicate that hunting and gathering remained the only sources of food for these people. Over that time period, though dart points were still used to bring down large game animals, their form changed somewhat. That these forms changed and that certain groups of prehistoric men used certain forms during different time periods allows archeologists to give very general dates for the people using the points.

The points left at the Packard site by those prehistoric men who used it as a hunting station present a dramatic illustration of the change in the form of points. Another dramatic change took place in northeastern Oklahoma which is also illustrated at the Packard site.

In the upper 30 inches of soil, archeologists found 23 pieces (sherds) of pottery. The development of pottery by prehistoric man is believed by archeologists to have occurred at the same general time as the use of the bow and arrow and the addition of farming to hunting and gathering as methods of obtaining food. These prehistoric Oklahoma farmers were quite probably raising maize, squash, and beans to add to the grain, nuts, and berries they had previously gathered from the wild.



POTTERY MAKERS

The first group to move into Packard were the earliest pottery-making people in northeastern Oklahoma. The Woodland peoples, as they are known to archeologists, were still hunters and were using large dart points to fell game, but they may have also been farming to some extent.

Archeologists believe that these Woodland people might have lived in Missouri and Kansas in earlier times and then slowly migrated to northeastern Oklahoma. Because their pottery is like that made by man in Ohio and Illinois from 300 B.C. to A.D. 500, it is possible that Oklahoma's Woodland people came into contact with the prehistoric Indians of Ohio and Illinois.



Tools of early pottery-makers



Tools of later pottery-makers

The second groups of pottery-makers living at Packard used ground up mussel shell to add to the clay of their pottery. In contrast, the earlier Woodland peoples used crushed rock. This second group might possibly have been farmers, too. However, because there were so few pottery sherds found, it is believed that the Packard site was a hunting station rather than a village site where farming and pottery-making were being done.

A village site several miles north of Packard seems to have been in use while this second group of pottery-making people lived at Packard. Possibly bands of hunters sent out from this village to bring back game drawn to the salt water springs was the last use of the Packard site by prehistoric man. Along with the darts of earlier times, these hunters were probably also using the bow and arrow.

Two different kinds of pottery were found at the Packard site. Along with some differing flint tools, these two kinds of pottery allow archeologists studying Packard to say that two pottery-making groups of people lived there.



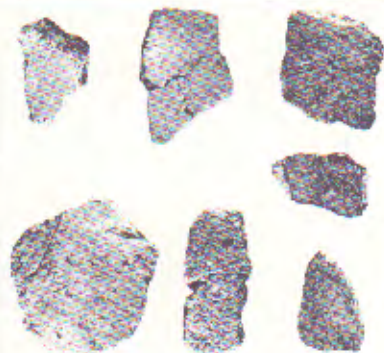
WOODLAND POTTERY VESSEL



TYPICAL VESSEL OF THE KIND USED BY THE LAST PEOPLE TO LIVE AT PACKARD



DECORATED POT OF THE TYPE USED BY THE LAST PREHISTORIC INHABITANTS OF PACKARD



0 1 2 in.

LAKE HUDSON

The long history of Packard came to an end in the summer of 1963 when archeologists completed the excavation of the site. The records and photographs made during the site's excavation gave archeologists information needed to determine who used the site and how it was used. Today the terrace of the Saline Creek that provided a home for man for thousands of years lies under the water of Lake Hudson.



For additional information about the fascinating prehistory of north-eastern Oklahoma, consult the following books:

- 1964 The Cultural Sequence at the Packard Site, Mayes County, Oklahoma. By Don G. Wyckoff. **Oklahoma River Basin Survey Project, Archaeological Report No. 2**, Norman.

This report is an analytical study of the 1962-63 excavations at the Packard Site.

- 1969 Oklahoma Archaeology: an Annotated Bibliography. By Robert Bell. **Stovall Museum Publication No. 1**, The University of Oklahoma Press, Norman.

This bibliography provides a guide to literature covering the past ten thousand years of human occupation in Oklahoma as recorded by archeological work.

- Holmes, Mary. **The Packard Site** (Prehistoric People of Oklahoma No. 1). Norman, the University of Oklahoma Stovall Museum and Oklahoma Archeological Survey, October, 1973. 20 pp.



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