

Small Housepit 47 Excavation Results

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Housepit Location and Description

Keatley Creek has a number of smaller house depressions which are encompassed by the main site area. Excavations have been undertaken in some of these small house features to determine their role in the overall site organization. The excavation of HP 47 is one such investigation. This house feature is located on the south edge of the main section of the site about 20m east of HP 5 (This Volume, Preface, **Fig. 1**). The house is positioned on the top edge of the south cut bank bounding the Keatley Creek floodplain. Housepit 47 measures approximately 8 m in diameter. Two test trench squares measuring 2 m north-south by 50 cm east-west were excavated through the house feature. The squares were dug by natural strata, using the trench datum for provenience purposes. Larger strata were broken up into arbitrary 10 cm levels.

Test Trench Excavation Results

Twelve separate strata were identified during the excavation. They are indicated on the profile drawing of the west wall (**Fig. 1**).

Stratum I

This stratum was about 3 cm in depth. It consisted of litter mat and grass roots. No colluvium deposits were encountered in this layer which makes it different from the large housepits. This appears to be a natural deposit, with no cultural material in association.

Stratum II

This stratum (5 cm in depth) lies mostly in Square B, with only about 28 cm intruding into Square A. This layer is a semi-compact, medium gray-brown, sandy silt with high (30%) pea gravel content, (25%) pebbles, and an abundance of fire cracked rock. There was very little in the way of cultural material in this stratum. A few flakes and one bipolar core were recovered from Square B. No cultural material came from Square A. Towards the bottom of this layer, sections of burned beams and charcoal fragments were uncovered. It seems possible that this may be a section of burned roof. If this is so, it may be from an extremely small house, or some other type of small structure.

Stratum III

This stratum is about 10 cm in depth and is only found in Square A of the trench. This layer is made up of a moderately compact light gray-brown, sandy silt with 3% pea gravel, 10% pebbles, and 10% cobbles. Several flakes were recovered from this stratum. Due to its association with a depression (note profile), it would appear as though this stratum was formed through aeolian activity. Wind blown sediments would have built up in the underlying depression, thus forming this deposit. The flakes probably entered the stratum through natural depositional processes.

Stratum IV

This stratum is about 7 cm in depth and is made up of a loosely compacted black, sandy silt with ash and 10% pea gravel. It only occurs in the northern two-thirds of Square A. Numerous pieces of fire cracked rock (23) were recovered, along with fish bone in large numbers. These bones

were especially prominent in the center of the unit. Fire reddening was also present in this stratum. Overall, it would appear as though this deposit built up inside a shallow depression, which is visible at the surface. Thus it seems to indicate some type of dug-out hearth feature.

Stratum V

This deposit was only found in Square B, directly below and in association with the stratum II deposit. It is a loam with 5% pebbles and 30% pea gravels. No fire-cracked rock was found, but some fish vertebrae were recovered along with one core. It is plausible that this is a localized floor deposit associated with the Stratum II roof deposits, but it does not run across the whole trench. Therefore it would either be a partial floor of a small house, or possibly some other type of structure.

Stratum VI

This stratum is found across Square B, and in the southern one-third of Square A. This deposit is an ashy-gravel sediment with 30% pebbles, 20% pea gravel, and 5% cobbles. Very little cultural material was uncovered from this layer. One flake was recovered from Square B, and one piece of fire cracked rock and one fish vertebrae were obtained from the Square A deposit. It would appear as though this was some sort of dump deposit. The stratum IV deposit in Square A seems to have truncated Layer VI, thus this deposit does not run the length of the unit.

Stratum VII

Stratum VII is a very dark brown silty layer with 50% gravel, 15% pebbles, and 2% cobbles. This layer was quite compact, yet not highly

compacted like some floor deposits. It was found across the entire trench, except for where it ran into the Stratum IX deposition in the southern portion of Square B. This stratum was quite thick, and went down to a maximum of 34 cm in some cases. A number of artifacts were recovered from this stratum, including basalt flakes, cores, preforms, a small bone bead, a large shell fragment, fish and mammal bone, one keyhole scraper, and a large quartzite core, or possibly a chopper, based on some use-wear traces. This chopper/core was found in a horizontal position at the bottom of Stratum VII in association with the top of the underlying Stratum IX. The keyhole scraper is diagnostic of the Plateau and Early Kamloops horizons. Thus, Stratum VII probably dates to this time period. The shell fragment does not appear to be local in origin, and it was probably traded in from outside the site catchment area. One of the important pieces of faunal remains uncovered was an almost complete deer scapula. This scapula was found *in situ*, in a vertical position. This bone was in association with a flat rock which was also inclined at a sharp angle. This situation probably indicates that this was a fill deposit, rather than a gradually accumulating horizontal stratum.

Thus, it would appear that Stratum VII was built up through a succession of dumping events. It may be the case that this small depression was used as a refuse area for nearby houses, possibly HP 5.

Stratum VIII

This stratum is quite problematical. It is described as light in color, medium in compaction, and high in gravel content. Even so, the color varies across the trench and gravel content seems to covary with color; the lighter the color, the more gravel. This stratum appears to lay mostly in Square B,

with only the southern third of Square A containing this deposit. Artifacts were scarce in this layer, with only a few flakes and some fish bone being recovered. Two exceptions to this rule are the recovery of one late Plateau or early Kamloops point, and the proximal end of a micro-blade. There was also one proximal section of a deer metatarsal near the floor of this stratum. Overall, this stratum is approximately 20 cm in depth, and seems to resemble a fill or dump deposit.

This stratum is problematical due to the fact that while profiling the west wall, it was extremely difficult to isolate this stratum from Stratum VI where these make contact. It did appear to be slightly clearer in the east wall profile, thus the boundaries shown for this stratum on the profile are only tentative in nature. It may be that Stratum VI and VIII, which both have the appearance of dump deposits, are too difficult to separate in the profile. It may also be that these two stratums are in fact one, and that by splitting them we have caused the problematical situation to arise.

Stratum IX

Stratum IX is a mottled, silty-gravel deposit with 50% pea gravel, 10% pebbles, and 1% cobbles. Black charcoal stains are found throughout this layer, which runs almost the length of the trench. At its thickest, in the southern section of Square B near the rim, this stratum reaches a depth of 30 cm. At this point, the stratum rises up and follows the contour defined by the rim deposit. As one moves down in this deposit, the matrix changes slightly from a brown silty- gravel, to a light brown silty-gravel. Lithic, faunal, and organic material seem to occur throughout this deposit, with no apparent concentration areas existing.

Both basalt and quartz flakes were recovered from this stratum. Faunal material included fish, mammal, and shell. A group of bone fragments marked with striations were also uncovered from this stratum. They were found slightly underlying the large quartzite core/chopper uncovered at the bottom of Stratum VII. Due to the fact that one of these bone fragments shows a working edge, they probably belong to some form of bone tool. A small (10 cm) piece of burnt wood was also found in this general area.

A number of large rocks formed two separate features which lay horizontally on top of the Stratum IX deposit. One of these features, which was located approximately 50 cm back from the north end of Square B, was associated with fire reddening and ash. This feature intruded into the Layer IX deposition. The other feature, which was located about 80 cm north in Square B, seemed to be a retaining wall, although this is speculative due to the small area uncovered by the trench. It was made up of a number of larger rocks lying on top of one another directly inside the rim deposit.

Due to its compactness and thickness, coupled with its mottled nature, Stratum IX would seem to be a good candidate for a floor deposit. This idea is supported by numerous horizontal rocks and artifacts, which lay horizontally on or near its surface. No diagnostic artifacts were found in this stratum, making it difficult to date this stratum accurately. It would appear, based on findings in overlying strata, that this is minimally late Plateau or early Kamloops in date and may be earlier.

Stratum X

This stratum is made up of a very dark grayish brown silt with 40% pea gravel, 20% pebbles, and 1% cobbles. This Stratum was found mainly in

Square A, and only intruded about 30 cm into Square B. The layer reached its deepest (4 cm) near the border of Squares A and B. Overall it was a semi-compact, sterile deposit. Based on the fact that it was not highly consolidated, it appears to be some form of sterile fill or dump. Sterile till was found directly below this deposit.

Stratum XI

This stratum is made up of a black, extremely silty deposit with 5% cobbles, 50% pea gravel, and 10% pebbles. Large amounts of ash are present throughout this layer, giving it a gray to light gray tint, depending on the locale. The stratum itself is highly compact, and reaches a maximum depth of 6 cm. It is found mainly in Square B, where it runs from approximately 90 cm north to the northern border of the square. It only intrudes about 40 cm into Square A.

Two basalt flakes and a number of fish bones were recovered from this deposit. The fire reddening, which was found in the overlying Stratum IX, also occurs in this stratum in association with a very white ash. Three small, irregular depressions (about 20–30 cm in diameter and 5-7 cm deep) were also found in association with this stratum. These depressions appear to have been dug into sterile till from the Layer XI occupation zone.

Initially, it was thought that this was a floor deposit. Excavations proved that its extent was too small to be a house floor, and for this reason, coupled with the large amount of ash in the deposit, this surface would appear to be a hearth feature. Based on the compactness of the layer, it would seem that most of these deposits do not constitute the hearth itself, but an area directly associated with a hearth. The fire reddening and white ash may be a

portion of the actual hearth, which was the central feature during the occupation period.

Stratum XII

This stratum was located in the area between 0 cm north and 80 cm north in Square B. The matrix is a dark yellowish brown sandy silt with 30% pea gravel, 20% pebbles, and 10% cobbles. This deposit was not highly consolidated. The layer reached a depth of 34 cm before turning to compact sterile till. Stratum XII was sterile throughout. It would appear as though this deposit was formed when sterile material was re-deposited to form the house rim.

Excavation

Housepit 47 excavations unveiled a very complicated sequence of events. It would appear that this house feature was utilized for a number of distinct cultural activities. Initially, the housepit area was the scene of a hearth feature and associated deposits (Stratum XI). Although no diagnostic artifacts were found in this stratum, based on its depth below later diagnostics, it would seem possibly to be in the late Shuswap-early Plateau time period.

The next event which occurs in this depression, is the dumping of the sterile Stratum X deposits. The origin of these deposits is unknown at this time. At this point, the ground appears to have been quite level in nature. After this, the construction of the housepit feature took place, with sterile till used to form the house rim (Stratum XII). In association with this, Stratum IX was deposited as a house floor. One problem with this construct is that no outstanding roof deposits were discovered during excavation. It may be that

in these earlier times, little or no soil was placed on the mat or bark covered roofs; or it is possible that the Strata VII and VI deposits are actually roof material. Even so, strong evidence for roof deposits does not seem to be present. Thus we are basing our housepit interpretation primarily on the occurrence of a well defined rim deposit.

After the occupation of this depression as a house, it would appear that the area became a refuse or unwanted soil dump through Strata VII, VI, and VIII (that is, if these deposits do not appear to be roof related which is difficult to ascertain given the confusing depositional events). This may have occurred as larger houses, such as nearby HP 5, began to use the smaller house feature as a refuse area. In this interpretation, at least two thick layers of cultural debris were built up. Diagnostic artifacts indicate that this dumping was taking place during late Plateau and early Kamloops times.

After this, the housepit depression was the site for two separate cultural activities. In the Square A deposits, it would appear as though a hearth depression was dug down into the surface (Strata IV and VIII). The Stratum III deposits seem to have been deposited in the resulting depression through aeolian activity.

In Square B we find something different occurring. Stratum V is a possible floor deposit laying directly below Stratum II, which appears to be a roof deposit. There are two interpretations which come to mind at this time. Either this is an extremely small house, which seems somewhat unlikely, or it is some other type of small structure. Whatever the function of the structure, we are confident that it burned, or was burned, based on the extensive layer of burnt bark which is present on the bottom of Stratum II.

Overall, this excavation has shown us that this small pithouse has a very complicated history. It may be that many small housepits lose their role as habitations, and seem to take on the role of secondary activity sites as one moves closer to the late Plateau-early Kamloops time period. Whether this is a general pattern must be determined by further excavation in these smaller cultural units. When this is done, we can hope to gain a better understanding of the role these features played in the overall community schema.

Figures

Figure 1: Housepit 47 profile of west wall, Squares A and B.

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