

Excavation Summary: Extra Housepit Excavation 4

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The area examined by EHPE 4 was a small circular cultural depression measuring ca. 3.2 m north-south by 3.5 m east-west (Vol. III, Preface, **Fig. 1**). It resembles (surficially) what are usually referred to as “cache pits” or “earth ovens.” Excavation revealed at least three use-episodes for this feature, twice as a storage pit, and once as an earth oven or hearth.

Stratigraphy

Stratum I

Stratum I (see **Fig. 1**) represents recent pothunters disturbance and recent natural sediment deposition. From this zone came the proximal portion of a Plateau horizon point and a microblade core which may have initially come from Stratum II. Stratum I cuts into Stratum II.

Stratum II

Stratum II contains evidence which suggests that the final aboriginal use of this feature was as an earth oven or hearth. This is indicated by the thin lenses of charcoal, (IIa, IIb), and high density of charcoal and FCR in this stratum. Some bone was also recovered. A flotation sample was taken from the bottom of this hearth/oven. The point base and microblade core found in Stratum I may have originally been associated with Stratum II, therefore relating it to the Plateau horizon.

Stratum III

Stratum III represents use of the pit as a relatively shallow storage pit, which was lined with several slabs of Ponderosa pine bark along its bottom.

A float sample was taken from immediately above, and around the back slabs. A microblade core was recovered from this stratum, in the northern half of Square A. Its association with the use of the storage pit is unclear, as it may have been deposited here from elsewhere by slopewashing or as a result of aboriginal digging activities.

Strata IV and V

Strata IV and V are typified by having relatively low cultural content and appear to have been deposited after the initial construction and use of a large cache pit, which is manifest by Stratum VI.

Stratum VI

Stratum VI represents infilling deposits into a basin-shaped storage pit feature, whose bottom is represented by Strata VI A. A Plateau horizon point was found just above the bottom of the pit. It is estimated that the original dimensions of this storage pit were ca. 100 cm in diameter by approximately 80 cm deep.

The relationship between Stratum IV and V is not clear, however, it may be that Stratum V was deposited from digging activities to the immediate south after the storage pit was abandoned. A float sample was taken from Stratum VI A. A large rock was found at the bottom of this storage pit, which is typical of other storage pits in this area. It may have found its way there by intentional discard into the pit, or as is mentioned in the ethnographic literature (Teit 1900) it may have been a "weight" rock, which once weighted a lid over the cache pit. Several pieces of bone (mammal and fish) were recovered from the bottom of the pit, as were a large quantity of charcoal and flakes. The charcoal's presence is probably owing to having

fallen in the pit accidentally, or perhaps by intentional discard there. No FCR was noted in this pit feature, nor were there any burned soil lenses.

Stratum VII

Stratum VII appears to represent a culture bearing deposit which predates the construction and use of the initial storage pit indicated by Stratum VI. This deposit contained a plateau horizon point in Unit B, dating it to between ca. 2,400–1,200 BP. Its small size however, suggest probably late Plateau horizon (ca. 1,600–1,200 BP).

Stratum VIII

Stratum VIII represents sterile basal till. Excavation was terminated at depth of ca. 110 cm below surface.

Summary and Conclusions

In sum, at least three separate use-episodes can be identified in this depression feature:

- (1) initial construction and use of a storage pit indicated by Strata VI and VIa;
- (2) a second storage pit of smaller dimensions represented by Stratum III, and:
- (3) a final use as a hearth or earth oven as represented by Stratum II, IIa, and IIb.

All use episodes appear to date to the latter part of the Plateau horizon (ca. 1,600–1,200 BP).

The presence of two microblades in these units seems to suggest that microblade technology was in use during the late Plateau horizon.

Microblades are consistently absent in most excavated Plateau horizon components, and the microblade may have been incidentally introduced through displacement by cultural or natural processes. This is much more recent than the commonly held belief that they went out of use by 4,000–3,500 BP.

References

Teit, James A

1900 The Thompson Indians. *American Museum of Natural History Memoirs* 2:4, New York.

Figures

Figure 1: Extra-Housepit Excavation 4 stratigraphic profile.

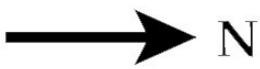
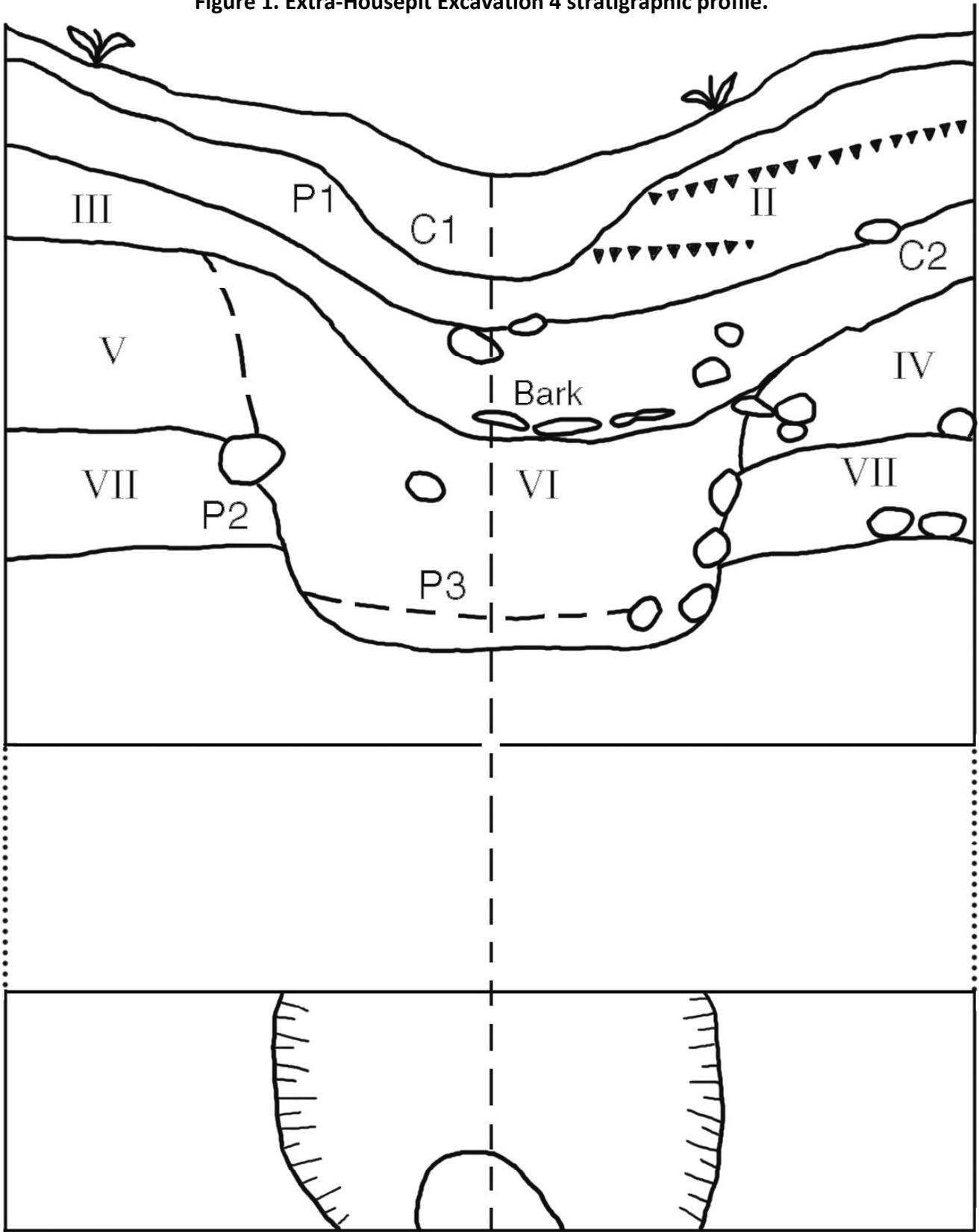
Figure 1: Stratum Legend

- I: Medium gray brown compact silt with some gravels. Pothunter's hole and recent surface deposition.
- II: Medium gray brown loose silt with some gravel, charcoal chunks and lenses, medium sized pebbles and fire-cracked rock.

- Ila & Ilb: Lenses of charcoal and II, representing use of feature as a hearth; fire-cracked rock associated.
- IV: Medium gray brown sandy silt and gravel with large pebbles. Bottom of strata with slabs of bark and represents bottom of a storage pit.
- V: Medium gray sand gravelly silt with high small pebble content; may be slopewash sediments from housepit rim to the north.
- VI: Medium brown loose silt with very few pebbles and low gravel content. Low cultural content.
- VI: Dark gray black compact sandy silt with small pebbles and high cultural material content. Represents initial pit shape and fill.
- VIa: Same matrix as VI but with a high percent of charcoal, lots of flakes, and some bone. Represents the bottom of a storage pit.
- VII: Dark gray black compact sandy gravelly silt with a high percent of pea gravels and pebbles. Represents pre-pit deposits. There is a low percent of cultural material (i.e. flakes, bone), but many charcoal pieces.
- VIII: Sterile basal till: compact medium yellow brown clayey, sandy, gravelly silt.
- P1: Plateau point
- P2: Plateau point
- P3: Plateau point
- C1: Microblade core
- C2: Microblade core

EXTRA HOUSEPIT EXCAVATION 4 STRATIGRAPHIC PROFILE

Figure 1. Extra-Housepit Excavation 4 stratigraphic profile.



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