

A Pre-pithouse Occupation Component Under Housepit 5

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During the 1986 excavations several basalt microblades were recovered from a thin, black stratum in the rim of HP 5. This stratum was described as exhibiting evidence of vegetational burning. As one of the goals of the 1987 excavations at the site, the previous years' test-trench was extended towards the outer, southern, edge of the HP 5 rim (Vol. III, Preface, **Fig. 1**) and was widened to expose a larger area of the paleo-burn deposit in two, side-by-side, 1 m x 2 m test units.

The 1987 excavations revealed the paleo-burn deposit at approximately 122 cm depth below surface. It was found however, that the deposit was limited in areal distribution to the north 10 cm of the unit, and that it overlay an aeolian-like deposit, which contained still larger quantities of microblades and other tools.

This aeolian-like deposit (labeled Strata X and Xa)(Chapter 10.3, Fig. 2) averaged 28 cm deep, with a total estimated volume of 0.56 m³, and consisted of carbonate compacted silts containing fine gravels which increased in frequency with depth. In the southern end of the unit, several rootlets resembling those of sage brush (*Artemisia*) were found truncated at the surface of the deposit but retaining their vertical orientation within the matrix. Almost no fire cracked or altered rock, and very little bone or other organic material was recovered, with the exception of some scattered charcoal. One of the larger pockets of charcoal in the upper part of the deposit was of a size sufficient to be recovered for a radiocarbon sample.

Unlike pithouse-associated deposits, Strata X and Xa are horizontal and of an even depth throughout. The pithouse deposits tend to be tapered and

inclined parallel to the slope of the pithouse roof. Strata X/Xa are not found within the housepit, and like similar deposits in HP 7, would appear to be truncated near the interior wall of the pithouse. This suggests that; (1) Strata X and Xa represent surface deposits prior to the pithouse occupation of the site, and; (2) during the initial (or subsequent) construction phase of the pithouse, the surficial silts in the living area of the pithouse were removed and perhaps used as roof-cover.

This theory is supported by the fact that microblades are occasionally recovered from various strata through the rim deposits in both HP 5 and HP 7, indicating their association with roof and rim deposits after construction and cleaning phases of the pithouse, and the resultant mixing in the rim. Further, testing of HP 1 revealed no deposits resembling those of Strata X from HP 5, or of the similar HP 7 deposits, and produced no microblades in any of the rim deposits.

The pre-pithouse deposits from HP 5 produced a total of 1,957 pieces of lithic cultural material (see Table 1).

Exotic materials (i.e., other than basalt) included various cherts and chalcedonies native to the surrounding area.

Table 1
Keatley Creek (EeRI 7) Lithics
Provenience: Housepit 5, Square F, Strata X/Xa

Lithic	Count	% Basalt
Tools/Artifacts		96.4
– bifacial	10	
– unifacial	19	
– misc., chipped stone	27	
Microblades	362	98.6
Flakes	1,539	97.5
Total	1,957	97.5

Table 2 and 3 present a breakdown of all microblades and other artifacts recovered from the 1987 excavations of HP 5, Strata X/Xa deposits. Apart from microblades, which comprise 86.6% of the total assemblage, the most prominent tools found are utilized, and unformed retouched flakes (4.3% and 2.6% of the total artifact assemblage, respectively). Also of interest, are four microblade core/core fragments and four keeled scrapers; both comprise approximately 1% each of the total artifact assemblage (or 7.1% of the artifact assemblage minus the microblades) and all are of fine-grained basalt. Keeled scrapers are reported from the Lind Coolee Site (Daugherty 1956).

Table 2
Keatley Creek (EeRI 7) Lithics
Provenience: Housepit 5, Square F, Strata X/Xa

Code/Artifact	Level:	Test Unit 1			Test Unit 2			Row Totals
		1	2	3	1	2	3	
<i>Bifacial Artifacts</i>								
131 Biface (misc.)			1	2	2			5
133 Bifacial Drill		1						1
134 Preform			1					1
135 Distal tip		1	1					2
140 Unformed biface/fragment						1		1
<i>Unifacial Artifacts</i>								
150 Formed unifacial scraper			1		1			2
155 Large keeled scraper			1	1	1	1		4
157 Misc. formed unifac fragment		1						1
170 Unformed retouched flakes		3	1	1	2	2	2	11
171 Abrupt irregular retouch			1					1
<i>Misc. Chipped Stone</i>								
147 Microblade		12	75	106	19	104	46	362
149 Microblade Core/fragment			4					4
180 Utilized flake		5	4	2		4	3	18
186 Core (multidirectional)				1		1		2
187 Core fragment			2	1				3
Column Totals		23	92	114	25	113	51	418

A single, well-made projectile point fragment of fine-grained trachydacite recovered from Level 2 (10–20 cm depth within the strata or approximately 132–142 cm depth below surface) of Stratum X, is evidence of a high level of lithic craftsmanship during the pre-pithouse occupation of the site. The parallel-sided stemmed point (Vol. I Chapter 3, **Fig. 1**) Artifact 1910, (approximately 1/3 complete, proximal fragment) exhibits pressure flaking as the final shaping stage of reduction, and heavy edge grinding along the lateral margins of the stem.

Table 3
Keatley Creek (EeRI 7) Lithics
Provenience: Housepit 5, Square F, Strata X/Xa

Sample	Level	Complete Pieces	Fragmentary Pieces			Core Maint. Flakes	Sample Totals
			Prox.	Med.	Dist.		
<i>Square1</i>							
LS 621	1	2	4	4	1	1	12
LS 622	2	2	40	15	7	11	75
LS 623	3	4	41	41	17	3	106
<i>SquareTotals</i>		8	85	60	25	15	193
<i>Square2</i>							
LS 624	1	2	6	9	1	1	19
LS 625	2	6	46	34	16	2	104
LS 626	3	6	16	16	7	1	46
<i>SquareTotals</i>		14	68	59	24	4	169
Column Totals		22	153	119	49	19	362

Though the stem is slightly shorter, this point is similar in flaking character and pattern of stem grinding to Cougar Mountain type projectile points from Cougar Mountain Cave, Fort Rock Valley, Oregon, dated to ca. 12,960 years ago by obsidian hydration and supported by a radiocarbon date of 11,950 ± 350 BP (Gak-1751) from Cougar Mountain Cave II, 140 feet to the

northwest (Layton 1972). The Keatley Creek point is also similar to points described by Daugherty (1956) from the Lind Coulee Site in eastern Washington State dated at $9,400 \pm 940$ years BP and $8,518 \pm 400$ years BP (Daugherty 1956:256), though again it is slightly smaller overall.

Leonhardy and Rice (1970:25) report that Daugherty now considers the Lind Coulee radiocarbon dates to be slightly inaccurate and that geologic research at the site places the stemmed point component at 9,000–10,000 BC.

In general, the artifacts associated with the pre-pithouse occupation seem to comprise a basic hunting, hide-processing toolkit. The small quantity of mammal bone recovered is burnt and extremely fragmentary; it is doubtful whether it will reveal any information regarding the types of game species utilized during the pre-pithouse occupation.

Paleo-environmental studies indicate a warm, dry climate between ca. 10,000 and 8,000 BP (the Altithermal climax). Due to the presence of large grassland areas during this time, Rousseau (1987) suggests that k-type grazing species such as sheep, deer, antelope, elk, moose, and perhaps bison would have been exploited. In addition, the ever increasing intimacy with seasonal availability and behavioral patterns, would have allowed these large game hunters to supplement their resource base with the growing abundance and variety of r-type species (Rousseau 1987).

Despite the large sample of lithic material from the pre-pithouse deposits, it is difficult to determine whether there is any cultural relationship between this component and the later pithouse occupation at Keatley Creek. There are several indications that there is probably no direct relationship between the two phases of occupation:

- (1) the protective location, proximity of fresh water, firewood, lithic materials, and favorable hunting, would be inviting to any group moving into or through the area;
- (2) there appears to be a large temporal gap between the date suspected for the pre-pithouse occupation and the beginning of the later Plateau Pithouse tradition as outlined by Rousseau and Richards (1985), and;
- (3) there is no obvious continuity in the use of microblade technology between the two occupations; a technology which was seemingly important during the earliest occupation.

In conclusion, several suggestions have been made regarding the nature of the pre-pithouse occupation of the Keatley Creek site. Unfortunately, this type of preliminary analysis only serves to create more questions than it answers; more data is required to substantiate the interpretations presented here. Further excavations at the Keatley Creek site (EeRI 7) should include a major effort to expose a larger area of the pre-pithouse occupation deposits and additional sub-surface tests of the surrounding area to locate these deposits where they may be investigated without disturbing the pithouse rim deposits.

References

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Tables

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