

Excavation Summary of Housepit 58

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Housepit Location and Description

One of the goals of the 1988 field season at EeRI 7 was to test several smaller housepits in order to locate small structures suitable for excavation and for comparison to large housepits. Housepit 58 was one of the small housepits chosen for testing (This Volume, Preface, **Fig. 1**). While it appears that a clear, well defined burned horizon may represent a roof burning event, the underlying deposits are confused and may include post-occupational dumping episodes and long term accumulations thus minimizing the utility of the housepit for comparative purposes. This is not entirely surprising given the central location of this housepit in the site. A detailed discussion of the excavation results follows.

A housepit datum stake was established on the crest of the south rim and a 50 cm wide test trench laid out extending 4 m due north. Trench A consisted of the northernmost 2 m, trench B of the southernmost. A profile shows the constituent strata (**Fig. 1**).

Test Trench Excavation

Stratum I

This stratum consists of surface litter mat and sediments associated with post-depositional vegetation accumulations, such as humic loams.

Stratum II

Stratum II appears to be roof fill that is a gravel-enriched humic loam, similar in color to Stratum I. It overlies Stratum IV which represents a clear burn event.

Stratum III

This stratum consists of rim deposits which vary from unconsolidated ashy, gravelly silts, to almost pure gravels thrown up from the first housepit construction events. A Plateau horizon projectile point was recovered from the top of the rim deposits.

Stratum IV

Stratum IV consisted largely of a thick layer of burned beams and charred slabs of pine bark extending from the edge of the rim almost to the center of the housepit. Charcoal rich loam and fire-reddened earth also form part of this stratum. The most parsimonious explanation of this stratum is that it represents a bark covered roof of some sort that burned and collapsed.

Stratum V

Stratum V is one of the more enigmatic strata encountered at the site. It appears ash-gray but given the occurrence of gravels, is probably composed of ash mixed with other sediments. There is an exceptionally high concentration of broken mammal bone in this deposit, most of it unburned. This bone deposit represents one of the highest concentrations of mammalian remains anywhere in the site. There are very few lithics. In this respect, it is not dissimilar to the ash deposit in HP 104 although bones in

those deposits were calcined and smaller fragments. Stratum V in HP 58 forms a pronounced mound in Square A and gradually lenses out to the north and south (**Fig. 1**). Both the form of this deposit and its contents indicate that it should probably be viewed as a dumping event constituting hearth cleaning and eating refuse. It seems unlikely that such dumping would have been created by HP 58 residents since the dump is centrally located and of large dimensions. Rather, this dump makes more sense as material that was dumped through the smoke hole of HP 58 after it had been abandoned, but while the roof was still standing. Presumably, the ash and waste bone that form Stratum V originated from a nearby housepit and the dump continued to be used for at least one season given its volume. Shortly after the deposition of Stratum V, the abandoned HP 58 roof was burned.

Stratum VI

This stratum consists of darker, silty loam deposits which occur as a local lens in Square B underlying the burned roof layer. This stratum was originally thought to represent a floor deposit, given a high concentration of bone, lithics, and even fir needles near the rim. However, the restricted occurrence of Stratum VI makes this seem somewhat questionable. It may simply represent a local infilled depression.

Stratum VII

Stratum VII is also enigmatic in that it represents an extraordinarily deep deposit of hard, compact silts with about 10–20% gravels containing scattered flakes (although very little bone or charcoal or fire cracked rock) throughout its thickness. It is very homogeneous in character. Excavation

had to be terminated at a depth of 60 cm in this stratum, due to termination of the field season. Small flecks of carbonate may indicate a fairly early late Prehistoric or even middle Prehistoric origin of this stratum. However, no floors could be discerned, not even at the contact with stratum V, which was clearly dumped *onto* the top of stratum VII. Nevertheless, the top of stratum VII may have served as a floor prior to abandonment since few artifacts are found in the central areas of other housepits (e.g., HP 7) and they may not have accumulated in the centers of smaller housepit floors either. It may simply have been an aggrading surface used over a long period of time, or a deep housepit that continually was filled by accreting sediments.

Features

A possible post or roof-beam emplacement was noted on the upper part of the rim.

A pit feature of undetermined proportions was partly exposed in the west wall of Square B, and seems to have only been partly filled at the time the roof was burned and collapsed, for Stratum IV follows the general contour of this pit. No use can be proposed for this pit at this point.

Another possible large pit feature was just beginning to be exposed in the north end of Square A when the field season ended and the excavation had to be abandoned. This probable pit feature was cut into Stratum VII and was much darker, softer, more humic, and more hydrophyllic than Stratum VII, although the contact between the two was very diffuse. This may have been a storage pit.

Excavation Summary and Conclusions

Although it is difficult to define a clear “floor” deposit in HP 58, its excavation has provided the clearest evidence to date for the dumping of ash and broken mammal bone (sometimes burned) from one housepit in places other than the deposits immediately associated with the same housepit. In this case, an abandoned housepit appears to have been used. This housepit also provides abundant evidence for pine bark being used as roofing material. Lack of clearly defined floor deposits does not make this housepit very useful for the overall goals of the project. However, the unusually deep, homogenous cultural deposits below the inferred living surface may contain some relatively early cultural remains.

Figures

Figure 1: Housepit 58 west wall profile.

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HP #58 - West Wall Profile

