

## Excavations at Housepit 105

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Located on the highest terrace above the core of the site (Terrace 2), HP 105 was chosen for testing because it was the largest and deepest (1.6 m) of the three structures on Terrace 2 (This Volume, Preface, **Figs. 1 and 2**). The isolated and peripheral location high above the site, and the relatively secluded nature of the small terrace (sheltered by natural embankments on the south and west and the mountain slopes on the east), indicated that this, and the other two nearby smaller structures, may have been special purpose structures. This notion was reinforced by one of the older residents of Fountain Valley who told us that a great many "bones" had been found in the structure. Previous illicit excavations had considerably disturbed the center of the structure, and in planning the location of the test pits, we attempted to take advantage of this disturbance in order to maximize the area excavated. Our excavations produced a cache of 72 bone buttons (the largest and earliest prehistoric collection of such items in British Columbia) and other unusual bone artifacts, which seem to support the notion that this was a specialized structure.

A minimum of two occupation periods are documented for this structure. The earliest is represented by the central storage pit (Feature 1) where the remarkable series of bone buttons was recovered. This was dated to 2,170 ±60 BP and may be associated with some remnants of floor deposits such as strata III or IV (**Fig. 2**). Most of the earlier floor deposits appear to have been removed by subsequent remodeling and cleaning operations as represented by the last occupation floor (Stratum III), dated to 270 BP.

Whether any intervening occupations occurred is open to speculation. Because of its potentially specialized use, this may be one of the most important structures at the site. However, because of the prehistoric disturbance of early deposits, and the illicit excavations that have occurred over the last 50 years, the value of this structure for understanding the social, political, and economic organization at Keatley Creek remains problematical.

The structure is about 9.4 x 10.2 m in diameter and the southern edge is built into the natural embankment on the south edge of the terrace. A 0.5 by 4 meter test trench was opened up (Sq.'s A, and B) with Square C added in the center of the structure extending out almost to a full 2 m square in order to encompass the area of illicit excavation (**Fig. 1**).

Illegal excavation occurred at least twice in the past. A 1.5 m diameter, 45 cm deep circular depression existed near the center of the housepit, with soil heaps to the northeast and south. This had no vegetation growing on it, and may thus have been dug fairly recently. An older excavation left a 1.25 m diameter, 30 cm deep circular depression to the west-southwest of the larger one, with spoil piled to the north-northwest. A local informant related having visited the site nearly forty years ago, and having seen the remains of someone's digging in this housepit. There are mosses growing in this smaller illegal excavation, which in some measure corroborates the story. The informant also stated that a great deal of bone was unearthed at the time, and left scattered on the surface. Much bone was recovered from the floor context in HP 105, as detailed below, and many bones were recovered in 1988 from the illegal spoil cleared prior to excavation.

**Stratigraphy:**

Few observations were made by the excavators concerning the nature or the interpretations of the strata in this structure. What is available is summarized below. Some idea of the nature of these strata can be obtained by relating them to their stratigraphic representations in **Figure 2**. All Munsell colors were taken on dry sediments.

**Stratum I**

This deposit was a typical surficial alluvial and perhaps aeolian deposit of silts and sand with some admixture of gravels probably washed down from the higher levels of the interior rim of the structure. Humic accumulation typically contributes to the dark color. This stratum is described as loose, very dark grayish brown (10 YR 3/2) sandy silt with some coarse sand, small angular pebbles and occasional charcoal ash and FCR.

**Stratum II**

From the stratigraphic profile, this deposit appears to be roof collapse; it is generally dark or ashy colored. The field description appears to support this interpretation. This stratum is described as compact, very dark grayish brown (10 YR 4/2) sandy silt with 25% pebbles, FCR, and considerable charcoal. One broken Kamloops point was recovered from the middle of this stratum.

**Stratum III**

This deposit was interpreted as "unmistakably a living floor." It was quite compact, very dark gray (10 YR 3/1) silt with small patches of very compact clay containing much articulated fish and mammal bone, few

lithics, some charcoal, and charred wood in moderate amounts, but few FCR. All cultural material was lying horizontally in compacted floor sediments. The dark color is typical of charcoal-rich floor deposits. This stratum lies roughly horizontal, but does not appear to be distinguishable in most of Square A. It is clearly distinct in Square B. A broken Kamloops point was recovered from the top of this stratum.

#### **Stratum IV**

Only a thin lens of this stratum exists where it dips down and follows the depression probably created by subsidence of pit fill in Feature 1, the large storage pit. The upper and lateral extensions of Stratum IV have been truncated by cleaning operations associated with Stratum III. Stratum IV may therefore be the remains of an earlier floor, possibly the one associated with Feature 1. It is about the right thickness and has an appropriate horizontality and texture. It is described simply as moderately compact, dark grayish brown (10 YR 4/2) sandy silt with few pebbles, and some pockets of clayey silt. No cultural items were associated with this stratum in Square C, although one deer metapodial was recovered from Square B.

Strata V through X are all pit fill units of varying compositions, and should more appropriately be labeled as "Fill Units" of features rather than "strata;" however, I will follow the original designations. They can be described summarily as follows:

#### **Stratum V**

This is a compact, very dark grayish brown (10 YR 3/2) sandy silt with moderate amounts of pebbles and large fragments of mammal bone and large lithic debitage in Square A, but few items in Square C. This stratum

may have been deposited to level the floor after compaction and subsidence of the main fill of Feature 1. However, it seems that little time elapsed between the deposition of Strata IV, V, and VI since Kusmer found a number of bone refits from these strata (see Vol. I, Chap. 10). Stratum V, Square A differs in that it is a reddish brown color. An unusual cluster of vertically oriented large mammal bones also occurred in Stratum V.

### **Stratum VI**

This is a compact, very dark grayish brown (10 YR 3/2) sandy silt with a high pebble content and some small cobbles. Bone and stone cultural remains are similar to Stratum V, although there were some locally very abundant pockets of lithics and bone material in Square C. Stratum VI, Square A differs in that it is a reddish brown color.

### **Stratum VII**

This too, is a compact, grayish brown (10 YR 5/2) sandy silt with a high pebble content and occasional small cobbles. Few bones or lithics are associated with these deposits, and the latter are mainly pressure flakes.

### **Stratum VIII**

This is a compact, dark grayish brown (10 YR 4/2) sandy silt with the same characteristics as Stratum VII.

### **Stratum IX**

This stratum is a quite loose sandy silt with a very dark gray color (10 YR 3/1). It contains some charcoal, but few lithics. Stratum IX, Square A differs only in that it is a reddish brown color.

### **Stratum X**

This is a compact, dark grayish brown (10 YR 4/2) silty sand containing at its base many bone buttons.

### **Stratum XI**

This is unsorted, sterile glacial till. It is compact, light yellowish brown in color (10 YR 6/4).

### **Features and Postholes**

There are only two features recorded in HP 105. One of these, Feature 2, is a hearth visible in the wall profile (**Fig. 2**) and almost certainly associated with the most recent floor (Stratum III). About 4-6 cm of fire-reddened soil underlies an ash lens about 60 cm in diameter. There are abundant salmon and bone remains just to the south of this hearth on the floor in Stratum III. Pieces of bone also occurred in the fire reddened sediments of this feature.

The second, and most substantial feature, Feature 1, is a large storage pit visible in the profiles (**Fig. 2**). After this feature was encountered in the original test trench, 9 subsquares of another square (Sq. C) were opened up adjacent to Square A in order to more fully explore this important feature, even though illicit excavators had previously disturbed most of the upper deposits in Square C. The mid-section of this pit is about 150 cm in diameter, while the top section slopes outward and joins the floor deposits in a gradual fashion spanning almost 3 meters. The original depth of this pit below floor surface must have been 80 cm or more. The sediment fill is described above as Strata V-X. Some of these strata had few cultural remains, while others had unusual concentrations of lithic items, and others

had concentrations of faunal remains, including fish (see stratigraphic descriptions above). There was a partial pavement of cobbles at the interface of Strata VII and VIII, near the bottom of the pit. Also of interest, is the fact that an intense fire burned on top of Strata IX at some point thereby fire-reddening these deposits to a depth of 2 cm and providing good carbon samples for dating. Charcoal from the pit has been dated at 2,170 BP, that is, from the Plateau Horizon period, which is consistent with the age estimate provided in the field by Michael Rousseau on the basis of the presence of bone buttons. About 72 bone buttons were found at the bottom of this pit, some overlying each other, but not in contact. At least two were in a vertical position. The distribution of all the buttons that were recorded *in situ* is shown in **Figure 3**. While pits of this size are usually assumed to have been for food storage, especially salmon, it seems clear that this pit was also (or perhaps exclusively) being used to store prestige or ritual objects. The distribution and concentration of bone buttons makes it seem unlikely that these objects were a cache of loose items. The fact that almost all of the buttons seem to have been oriented with their polished, convex sides facing up also indicates that this was not simply a cache of loose objects. It seems far more likely that these buttons were attached to some sort of garment or blanket, perhaps of buckskin. As far as I am aware, this is the earliest evidence that exists for the manufacture of button blankets which were ethnographically so well known on the Coast. Few faunal remains were recovered from this feature.

At a subsequent date, a small pit seems to have been excavated inside the pit fill of Feature 1. This smaller pit was 24 cm deep and about 20 cm in diameter. This pit does not appear to have been cut down through any of the floors, or at least not Stratum III, and therefore probably dates from the

earlier occupation period. A similar bowl-shaped pit about 30 cm deep seems to have been excavated into Stratum VI of the large storage pit. This contained some pine needles, salmon and mammal bones, and some lithics.

Only two postholes were identified with certainty, one located at the southeastern corner of Subsquare 7 of Square C. This was apparently associated with the most recent floor (Stratum III). This posthole was 14 cm in diameter and 14 cm deep. The other posthole was more substantial, being 34 cm deep and 10 cm in diameter. It was located in the northeast corner of Subsquare 10 of Square C, and appears to be from an earlier occupation.

### **Artifacts**

Clearly the most interesting artifacts are the bone buttons from Feature 1 that have already been described (See This Volume, Chap. 2, **Fig. 10**). However, there are a number of other interesting finds as well. These include a tabular bone bead sawed at both ends, and a sharply pointed needle from Stratum I or II (Sq. C.). Another bone needle was recovered from the most recent floor (Stratum III). The most recent floor also contained many salmon head parts, fins, ribs, and several articulated backbone segments. Several mammal long bones also constitute unusual occurrences, including an articulated segment of distal deer limb, and a cluster of large broken ulna, tibia, and ribs stuck vertically into the floor. A very unusual pointed and perforated bone object (See This Volume, Chap. 2, **Fig. 10**; also Vol. II, Chap. 13, Fig. 3E) seems to have come from the upper levels of the large storage pit (Feature 1).

Lithic objects of importance include both Plateau and Kamloops point fragments from pothunters' backdirt piles, and an exhausted stemmed



biface from just above the large storage pit. Point types found *in situ* are shown in the profiles and floor plans (**Figs. 2 and 4**), and include one Kamloops point in the roof deposits, and one on the most recent floor (Stratum III). Few other lithics were associated with Stratum III.

### **Summary**

There were at least two periods of occupation in HP 105, an earlier Plateau horizon occupation from which only the large storage pit feature (Feature 1) and small lenses of associated floor have been preserved; and a much later occupation from about 270 years ago. Both occupations are interesting, the earlier occupation because of its unusual bone buttons, pointed bone artifacts, and accompanying faunal and lithic assemblage. Especially when taken in conjunction with several Plateau period meat roasting pits that are adjacent to the structure (EHPE 5 and Feature 4 in HP 106 which included a ritual knife), a fairly strong argument can be made for specialized ritual and/or feasting use of HP 105 and the areas immediately adjacent to it during Plateau times.

The most recent occupation is also interesting since all three structures on Terrace 2 were occupied at this time and they vary enormously in their contents. Housepit 106 has almost no cultural remains associated with it. Housepit 104 is notable for its unusual concentration of sandstone abrading tools, including a very large and unusual sandstone saw, as well as the charred remains of a coiled basket, and substantial numbers of mammal bones. The most recent HP 105 floor is notable for its high density of salmon heads, fins, ribs, and backbones, as well as deer long bones pushed vertically into the floor. The only other bones pushed vertically into the floor deposits at the site come from HP 106. Elsewhere in the world, bones pushed

vertically into living surfaces are associated with ritual sanctuaries (Bégouën et al. 1993; Freeman and Echegaray 1981). Some other small structures are also notable for high densities of salmon fins, heads, and small bones (e.g., HP's 9 and 109). As yet, the significance of high concentrations of these types of salmon parts on occupation floors is not clear, but constitutes a distinct phenomenon associated with some small structures. Whether the structures on Terrace 2 around 270 BP constituted a small group of related families seeking the shelter and protection of a secluded location, or whether these structures constitute some sort of specialized ritual or feasting complex such as occur in New Guinea (Hampton 1999), cannot be resolved without more extensive excavation of these structures. However, the unusual density of bones, many of them articulated, seems to indicate a use other than normal residence where trampling would disarticulate bone segments and cleanup would ordinarily remove them from floor contexts or at least clear them off of the most used parts of the floor.

### Figures

- Figure 1: Approximate locations of excavation test units in HP 105.
- Figure 2: Stratigraphic profiles for the east and west walls of Square A and B.
- Figure 3: Locations of bone buttons at the bottom of Feature 1 recovered *in situ* from the initial test trench in Square A. Note the clustering and semicircular pattern of most of these buttons. Only a few additional buttons were recovered from the bottom of the rest of the feature excavated in Square C.
- Figure 4: The floor plan of the most recent occupation (Stratum III) in Square B. Note the high density of salmon bones.

## References

Bégouën, R., J. Clottes, J. P. Giraud, and F. Rouzard.

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Figure 1. Approximate locations of excavation test units in HP 105.

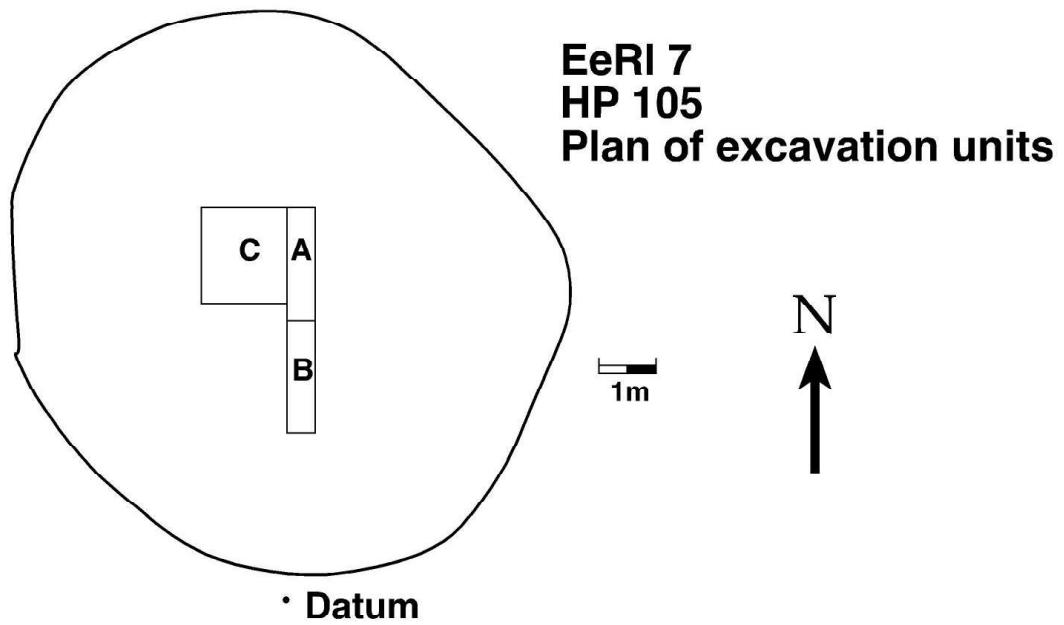
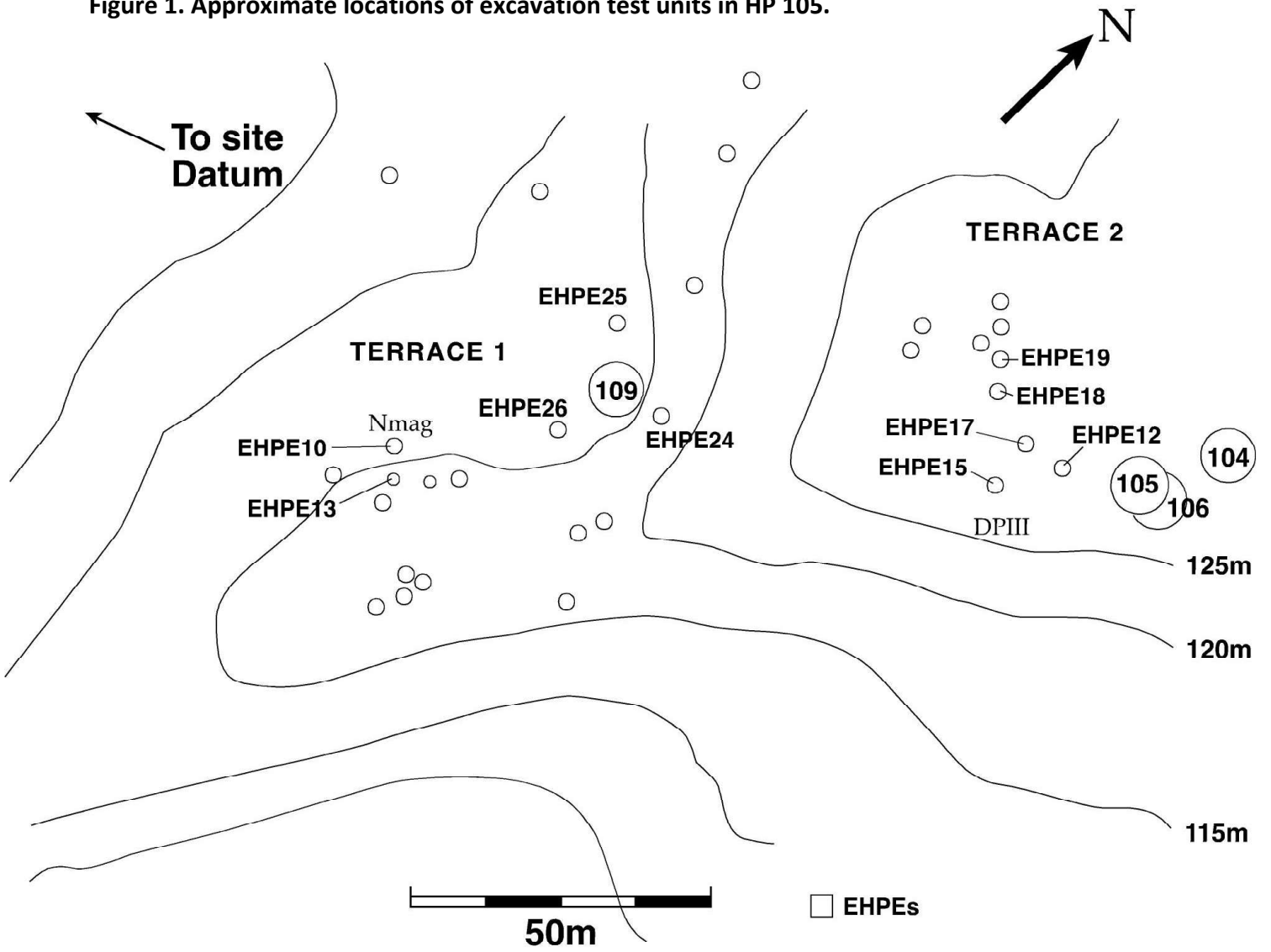


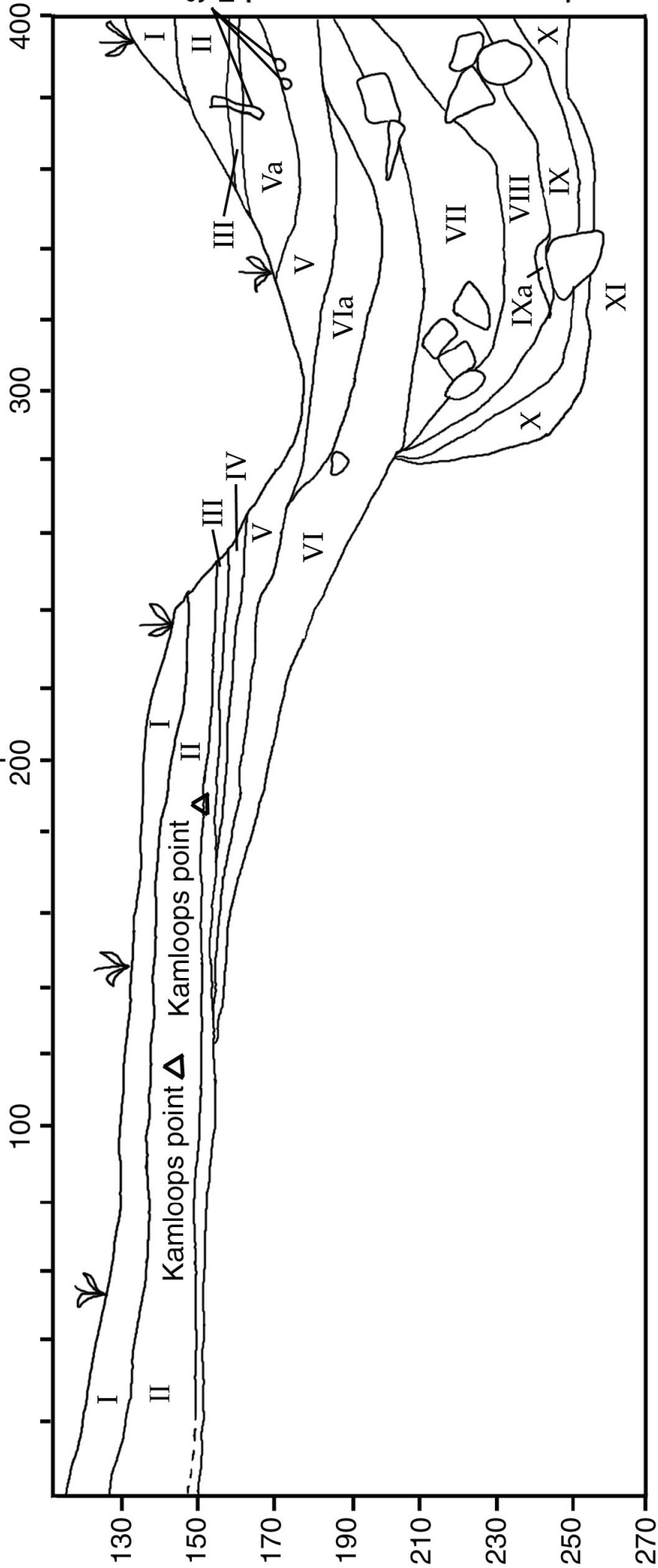
Figure 2. Stratigraphic profiles for the east and west walls of Square A and B.

EeRI 7 HP 105  
West Wall

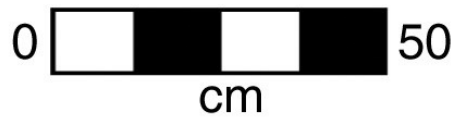


SQUARE B

SQUARE A



# HP 105



× Bone button

Figure 3. Locations of bone buttons at the bottom of Feature 1 recovered in situ from the initial test trench in Square A. Note the clustering and semicircular pattern of most of these buttons. Only a few additional buttons were recovered from the bottom of the rest of the feature excavated in Square C.

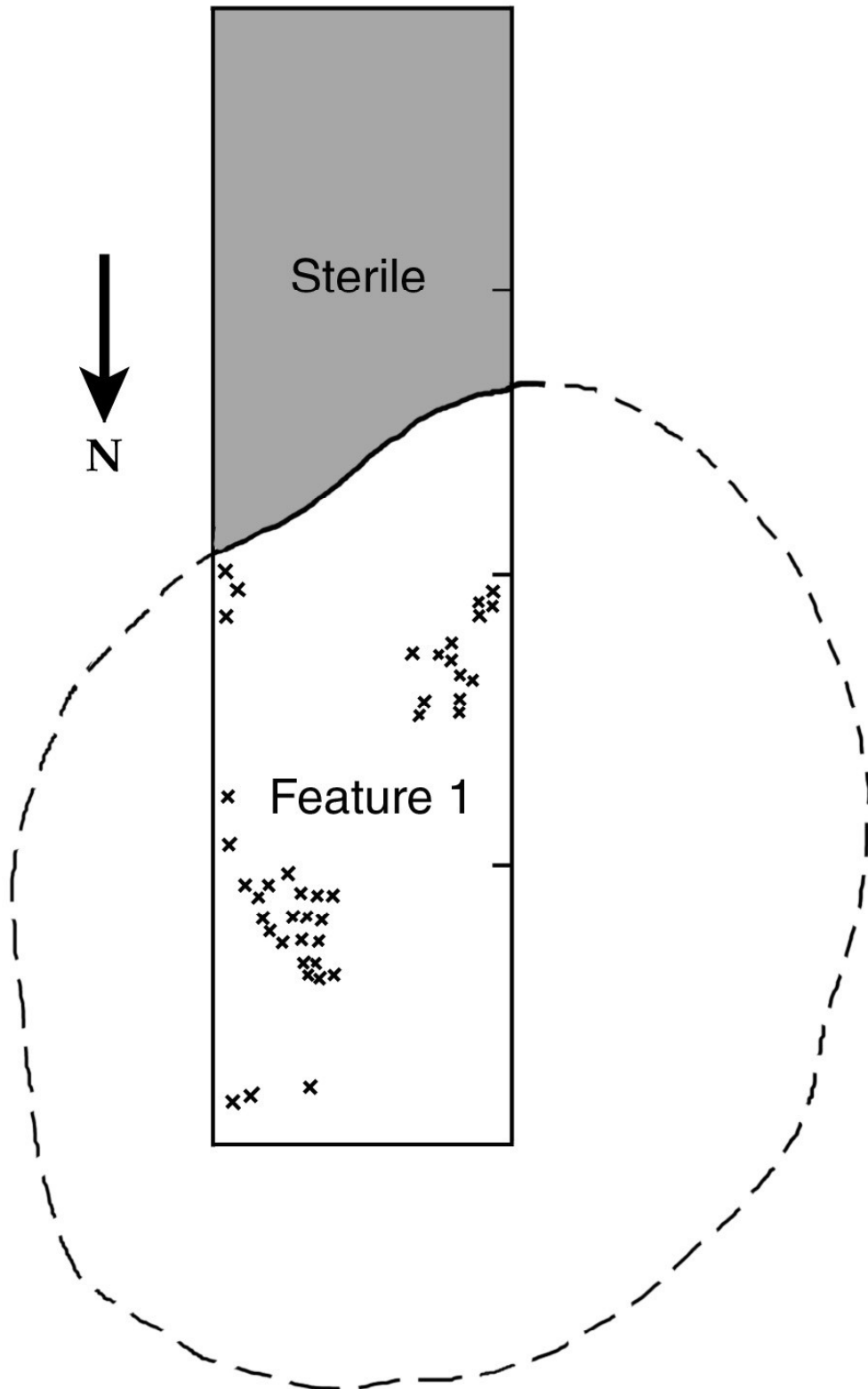


Figure 4. The floor plan of the most recent occupation (Stratum III) in Square B. Note the high density of salmon bones.

### EeRI 7 HP 105 Square B Floor Plan

