

## Test Excavations of Housepit 107

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Housepit 107 is a relatively small (8 m in diameter) structure located on the main terrace south of Keatley Creek, that is, on the opposite bank from the main part of the site (Vol. III, Preface, Fig. 1). The structure was tested in 1989. In 1999, the test excavation was expanded to determine whether the structure might have served any special function in relation to its relatively remote location and its very close proximity to HP 9 (15 m to the west) which is thought to have been the residence of a shaman or similarly specialized person. Specifically, I considered the possibility that HP 107 might have been used for ritual or secret society meetings and or feasting. While several excavated features in HP 107 seem consistent with such an interpretation, the paucity of artifacts and faunal remains make it difficult to advance such interpretations with confidence. The lithic assemblage is notable for its lack of retouched flake tools and its high proportion of billet or pressure flakes as well as 3 Plateau point preforms or points.

Excavators in 1989 thought that they had reached a floor level and sterile till in their 50 cm wide test trench in Squares A and B. However, after locating the plastic-lined walls of the original test trench, the subsequent investigations in 1999 failed to relocate anything resembling floor deposits either in the profiles of Squares A or B, or in the extended test trench in Square E (**Fig. 1**). In excavating under the bottom plastic lining, through what was called "sterile" soil in 1989, I continued to note some discoloration and soon exposed an extremely well-defined rock lined hearth with very well defined floor deposits on either side about 10-15 cm below the level

where the 1989 excavations stopped. While the floor deposits were easy to define to the south of this hearth, they became indistinct and difficult to define to the north. Because of time constraints and the very minimal amount of artifactual material in this structure, I decided not to continue searching for the rather elusive floor to the north of the main hearth (i.e., in Sq. A and the north part of Sq. B). In all of the housepits investigated at Keatley Creek, there are only two that had rock-lined hearths. These were HP 9 and HP 107. Thus, the presence of this feature and other distinctive similarities indicate that the two structures, only 15 m from each other, were closely linked in more than simply spatial terms.

Excavators in 1989 thought that there might be a poorly defined hearth on their "floor" in the southern half of Square B as represented by a circular depression with small cobbles, dark staining and scattered charcoal. Given the scant evidence of artifact deposition, and probably structure use, from the main floor, it is always possible that the 1989 excavators encountered an even less used and briefer occupation that occurred either during the collapse of the roof or from a briefly re-roofed structure. If there was an upper floor, it appears to be very difficult to identify and most likely represents a very ephemeral use of the structure.

### **Stratigraphy (Fig. 2)**

Stratum I: This is a moderately loose, light gray brown (10 YR 5/3) sandy silt with about 10% granules, 2% pebbles, and 1 % cobbles. This stratum is fairly homogenous and represents post-abandonment colluvial and aeolian infilling of the depression.

Stratum II: In 1989, the original excavators thought that they had reached floor deposits which they labeled Stratum III. However, the more

recent excavations indicated that their Stratum III was simply a continuation of roof deposits and could not be distinguished from Stratum II. I have therefore subsumed the 1989 Stratum III under Stratum II and refer to the originally defined Stratum II as Stratum II A, while I refer to the originally defined Stratum III as Stratum II B.

Stratum II A is a moderately compact, medium gray brown (10 YR 4/2) sandy silt with about 15% granules, 5-30% pebbles, and 1-5% cobbles. There is some slight darker color gradation from north to south. This stratum represents predominantly roof fill although some slopewash deposits are also evident in its upper aspect. Recovered cultural materials include: a medium-sized corner-notched Plateau horizon projectile point from the very bottom of the stratum in Square B, a chalcedony biface fragment (also from Sq. B, about 25 flakes, and one mammal bone. Charred ponderosa pine bark and partially charred wood at the bottom of the stratum represent burned roof materials. In Square E, Stratum II strongly resembles till with no cultural material occurring in it.

Stratum II B is a fairly compact dark gray brown (10 YR 4/1) sandy silt with about 10% granules, 15% pebbles, and 20% cobbles. In 1989, this stratum was most evident in Square B and was excavated from 40-45 cm BS. Recovered cultural materials were sparse and included eight flakes, a salmon bone, and sparse scattered charcoal. A possible hearth feature (Feature 1) was thought to exist in the southern half of Square B (**Figs. 2 and 4**). It was approximately circular in plan with a saucer-shaped cross-section. It measured about 90 cm in diameter by 15 cm deep. A concentration of small cobbles, some fire-cracked, together with scattered charcoal and dark-stained sediments characterized the area of the feature.

Stratum III: This is clearly identifiable as a floor. It is a dark gray fine silty loam near the hearth with about 30% pebbles in local areas and even what appear to have been a pebble pavement and a pile of pebbles or pebble-rich dump almost like a column about 20 cm high situated on the floor in Square E Subsquare 9 (**Fig. 3**). Towards the north part of the housepit, this floor becomes much less distinctive in color and texture and is very difficult to identify. From the central hearth to the south wall and also for about a meter north of the central hearth, the floor deposits consisted of a very fine silty loam lacking any significant pebble or gravel content (**Fig. 2**). This reposed directly on the till substrate and was capped by distinctively darker floor loams with somewhat higher pebble and gravel contents that constituted the typical Stratum III deposits described above. There can be little doubt that a substantial amount of loess was brought into the structure to cover large sections of the floor immediately following its initial construction. These light colored bottom loams were generally devoid of cultural material.

Stratum IV: This stratum is a loose, light yellow brown (10 YR 5/4) sandy silt with about 5% granules, 5% pebbles, and 10% cobbles. It was encountered in the northern end of Sq. A and represents rim spoil consisting of redeposited till related to the initial construction of the house. This stratum was culturally sterile although a few bits of scattered charcoal and about six flakes were recovered at the edge of the stratum where it interfaced with Stratum II.

### **Features**

Feature 1: This was a possible hearth (**Fig. 4**) described by the 1989 excavators. It is described above in the discussion of Stratum IIB.

Feature 2: This is a large storage pit. In fact, for a small structure, this feature constitutes an unusually large interior storage pit (**Fig. 5**). It is clearly associated with the bottom floor of the structure. It is over 1 m in diameter and 75 cm deep. Similar sized storage pits have only been found in the largest housepits at Keatley Creek and in small structures suspected of serving ritual or feasting functions (e.g., HP's 9, 105, and 109--Vol. III, Chaps. 7, 10.14, and 10.18). Of particular note is the fact that HP 9 is immediately adjacent to HP 107. In neither HP 9 nor HP 107, were there any remains at the bottom of the storage pits, except that in HP 107 a pile of cobbles with a few boulders had been thrown into the bottom of the pit before it was filled (**Fig. 5**). Part of a sheep horn core, two freshwater bivalve shell fragments, some bone fragments, a few flakes, and a bipolar core or biface fragment were found in the pit fill.

Feature 3: This feature consists of large cobbles forming a circle about 90 cm in diameter situated almost in the exact center of HP 107 (**Figs. 2 and 3**). There were 3 distinct layers of fill within the rock circle, each about 5 cm in thickness. The uppermost fill unit (FU 1) consisted of a very pebble rich (40%) soil that contained no cultural material and no FCR. Under that, there was a yellow loamy fill (FU 2) which was also sterile. At the bottom was a very black loam (FU 3) which contained a few flakes and one small piece of charcoal. Solid, compact yellow till lay immediately beneath FU 3, and there was a very minimal amount of fire-reddening of the surface of this till. Moreover, the very distinctive black FU 3 deposit continued underneath the circle of rocks that formed Feature 3, and extended several decimeters beyond the rock circle as a distinctively colored deposit. It gradually graded into fine loams that appear to have been used as flooring to cover the original till surface.

Although initially, it seemed clear that this was a hearth, the precise nature of this feature is somewhat enigmatic. Prior to the construction of the cobble ring, it appears that the general area of floor under and immediately surrounding the ring of rocks was used as some sort of hearth, producing a very rich black deposit (perhaps resembling Feature I higher in the stratigraphic sequence). However, the fires made in this area do not appear to have been particularly intense or frequent because there is very little fire-reddening of the underlying till. Why there should be so little charcoal but such dark discoloration of sediments is a bit puzzling. Either after the initial use of fires in this space, or perhaps after the space had ceased being used for fires, a ring of stones was arranged around the center of the space, perhaps some being pushed into the FU 3 deposits. However, there appears to be no fire-reddening of these rocks, nor any significant buildup of ash or other deposits inside the ring of rocks. Thus, either no further fires were lit inside the ring of rocks, or any fires that were lit were few and of minimal duration. Instead, shortly after the ring of rocks was set in place, a layer of yellow loam was spread out within the ring, but not outside it, and finally the ring was filled to the top with a pebble-rich deposit. It is rather enigmatic why people would take the trouble to create a ring of rocks but not use it as a fire pit, and fill it up with sterile soil shortly after creating it.

### **Discussion and Summary**

Housepit 107 is certainly one of the more unusual structures that we examined at Keatley Creek. It is small in size but has an unusually large storage pit (Feature 2). It has what appears to be a rock lined fire pit (Feature 3) with no clear evidence that it was ever used as a fire pit after the

rock lining had been put in place. It also has one of the clearest occurrences of a floor that was intentionally covered with loess that had been brought in for that purpose. These are characteristics that make this structure distinctive at Keatley Creek, but they are also characteristics shared with the structure only 15 m away, HP 9 (except that the rock lined hearth in HP 9 was intensively used). Based on diagnostic artifacts found in them, both structures appear to have been occupied during the same period (the Plateau horizon) and the commonality of the above distinctive features makes it seem almost certain that the users of both structures were in contact with each other. However, the differences are also important, notably that there are abundant food (especially fish) remains, bone artifacts, prestige items, and lithic items in HP 9 during all periods of occupation whereas HP 107 is remarkable for its paucity of any kind of cultural material. From all the test excavations in HP 107, the floor deposits yielded only 12 salmon bones and one mammal bone fragment. The much thicker roof deposits (including the possible ephemeral floor) only included 52 salmon remains, 2 squirrel bones, 8 mammal bone fragments, a deer phalanx and metapodial, and a bird bone.

It is always possible that HP 9 and HP 107 were occupied successively by the same family, perhaps HP 107 only being used for a very short period either due to a death or for other reasons. However, the minimal use of the hearth, its intentional filling, and the general lack of evidence for frequent or prolonged use of HP 107 inclines me to view the other alternative with more favor. That is, I think it is more likely that HP 107 was, in fact, used as a specialized structure for occasional meetings of a ritual or secret society, and that the residents of HP 9 (if there were permanent residents) were possibly the custodians, and probably some of the leading cult members, of

this group. Secret societies tend to characterize the more developed types of complex hunter/gatherers (Owens and Hayden 1997), and they are typically created by elites in order to further their political and social control within communities. While such societies are often technically “open” to a wide range of people from varying socioeconomic statuses, there is usually a pronounced hierarchy in these societies. The highest and most costly positions in this hierarchy are generally reserved for rich and politically powerful elites. It appears to be only the highest ranking members that are admitted to the most secret ritual sanctuaries to commune with powerful spirits, whether in caves or special structures. Typically, too, these societies control significant labor and resources (largely drawn from aspiring members) in order to conduct their rituals and other activities. Costuming alone generally involves the use of exotic and precious skins, feathers, and decorations. Rituals undoubtedly required similarly rare paraphernalia.

During the winter, HP 107 may have been used for the most secretive aspects of secret society rituals from which normal people would have been excluded (probably including wives and children or other helpers of high ranking members). Once the secretive ritual and political business of the highest ranking members had been concluded in their special ritual structure (HP 107), they might adjourn to the nearby residence of the ritual custodian in HP 9, where his family and the assistants of other cult member families could have a warm fire and feast waiting. Such a scenario makes logical sense and would account for some of the major unusual features of both of these structures. For instance, the very large storage pits would make sense in terms of resource and ritual paraphernalia storage places for secret society feasting, rituals, and pooled finances. This scenario would also explain the similarities in hearths between the two structures and the low level of use of

the HP 107 hearths. It would also explain the dramatic differences in food remains at the two housepits, and perhaps explain the unusual emphasis on fins and heads in HP 9 as components of soups or other specialized kinds of feasting foods. Small titbits of fish or meat might be taken into the special ritual structure by some individuals as snacks, but no formal meals were probably consumed there.

This scenario would also be consistent with the unusual number and diversity of prestige items found in HP 9 (see Vol. II, Chaps. 7, and 13), especially if most of the participants in feasts were from elite families in the community who participated in secret societies. The number and diversity of the prestige items in HP 9 is very unusual for such a small structure; while the size of these structures is consistent with their use by a small, very select number of high ranking secret society members. Such a scenario is also consistent with the tentative indicators of shamanic material remains found in HP 9 and with the unusual remote location of these structures. Such a scenario would also explain why special efforts were undertaken to cover the floor of HP 107 (and to a lesser extent HP 9) with fine loess, for Grant Keddie (personal communication) recorded oral histories from the Interior that related the covering of structure floors with "clay" for special dancing lodges (Vol II, Chap 1, p. 21).

Finally, such a scenario is also consistent with a very similar occurrence of apparently specialized structures on Terrace 2: HP's 104, 105, and 106. Although these structures are Protohistoric in date, they share some striking similarities with HP's 9 and 107. Like the Plateau horizon special structures south of the creek (HP's 9 and 107), the Terrace 2 structures are situated in a remote part of the Keatley Creek site. Although the Terrace 2 structures have not been fully excavated, they are all relatively small and we know that

at least one of them (HP 105) had an unusually large storage pit. From this storage pit there came clear evidence of the storage of some prestige (probably ritual) paraphernalia--notably what was probably a button blanket--see Vol. II, Chap.13, Fig. 3A). Most striking, however, is the near proximity of these structures to each other and the dramatic differences in artifact contents which resembles the differences found between HP's 9 and 107. Specifically, HP 105 has an unusually high density of animal bones, fish remains (once again, especially fins and head parts), and other artifacts, whereas the structure immediately to its east (HP 106) is almost devoid of any cultural material at all. On the other hand, there are several indications of ritual behavior in both of these structures (HP's 105 and 106). In both of them there were long bones or antler thrust vertically and completely into the floors (see Vol. III, Chaps. 10.14 and 10.15). Impressionistically it also seems that both lithic assemblages were dominated by pressure and billet flake debitage indicating primarily men's participation in the activities in these structures. There were also indications of unusually intense and large fires associated with HP 106, but there is little evidence that the structure was used either very frequently or for a very prolonged period of time.

While it is unfortunate that more material remains were not associated with HP's 106 and 107 so that we might be able to confirm their use as special structures used for rituals or secret society meetings on the basis of positive evidence rather than inferences from broader patterns (including the lack of artifacts), I feel that there are enough peculiarities, enough indications, and enough distinctive patterns in the data to warrant a cautiously tentative interpretation of these structures as ritual or secret society structures that conform to a basic pattern among the largest complex Interior Plateau villages established at least during the Plateau horizon, if

not before, and persisting at least up until the Protohistoric period. That pattern consists of a pair of specialized ritual structures. One (to the east?) used for the most secret rituals and meetings of the highest ranking members of the cult or secret society; the other structure (to the west?) being used for feasting after the secret rituals. The feasting structure was probably open to lesser ranking cult or secret society members, including wives, and younger family members who prepared and participated in the feasting.

A similar pattern of special ritual structures reserved for the most important members of the communities also seems to have existed on the Coast, although it is not clear from ethnographic accounts where any feasting associated with these cult structures may have taken place. On the Plateau, the auxiliary feasting structures may have been the residences of secret society shamans or priests and their families, and either one or both of each pair of structures may have been used for the storage of pooled society food resources, wealth, and ritual paraphernalia. Alternatively, all structures may have been uninhabited except for ritual feasting events. The substantial lithic remains in some of these structures (e.g., HP 9) appear more consistent with the idea of permanent residents while the often still-articulated vertebrae of fish and mammal bones (in HP's 104 and 105) would seem to indicate a more episodic use rather than a constant presence. Considerably more excavation will be necessary in order to determine if this constitutes a genuine pattern or if it is only a fortuitous coincidence of remains and observations at Keatley Creek.

## References

Owens, D'Ann, and Brian Hayden

1997 Prehistoric Rites of Passage: A Comparative Study of Transegalitarian Hunter-Gatherers. *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 16:121-161.

## Figures:

- Figure 1: Plan view of HP 107 showing the designation of excavation squares and the area excavated.
- Figure 2: Cross sections of the east wall of the test trench excavated in 1999 (above) and the west wall of the test trench excavated in 1987 (below).
- Figure 3: The plan of objects found on or in the floor deposits (Stratum III) of the test trench in Squares B and E (1999 excavations).
- Figure 4: Plan of the possible hearth (Feature 1) identified in the 1987 excavations.
- Figure 5: Plan and cross section of Feature 2, the large storage pit adjoining the south wall of HP 107.

Figure 1. Plan view of HP 107 showing the designation of excavation squares and the area excavated.

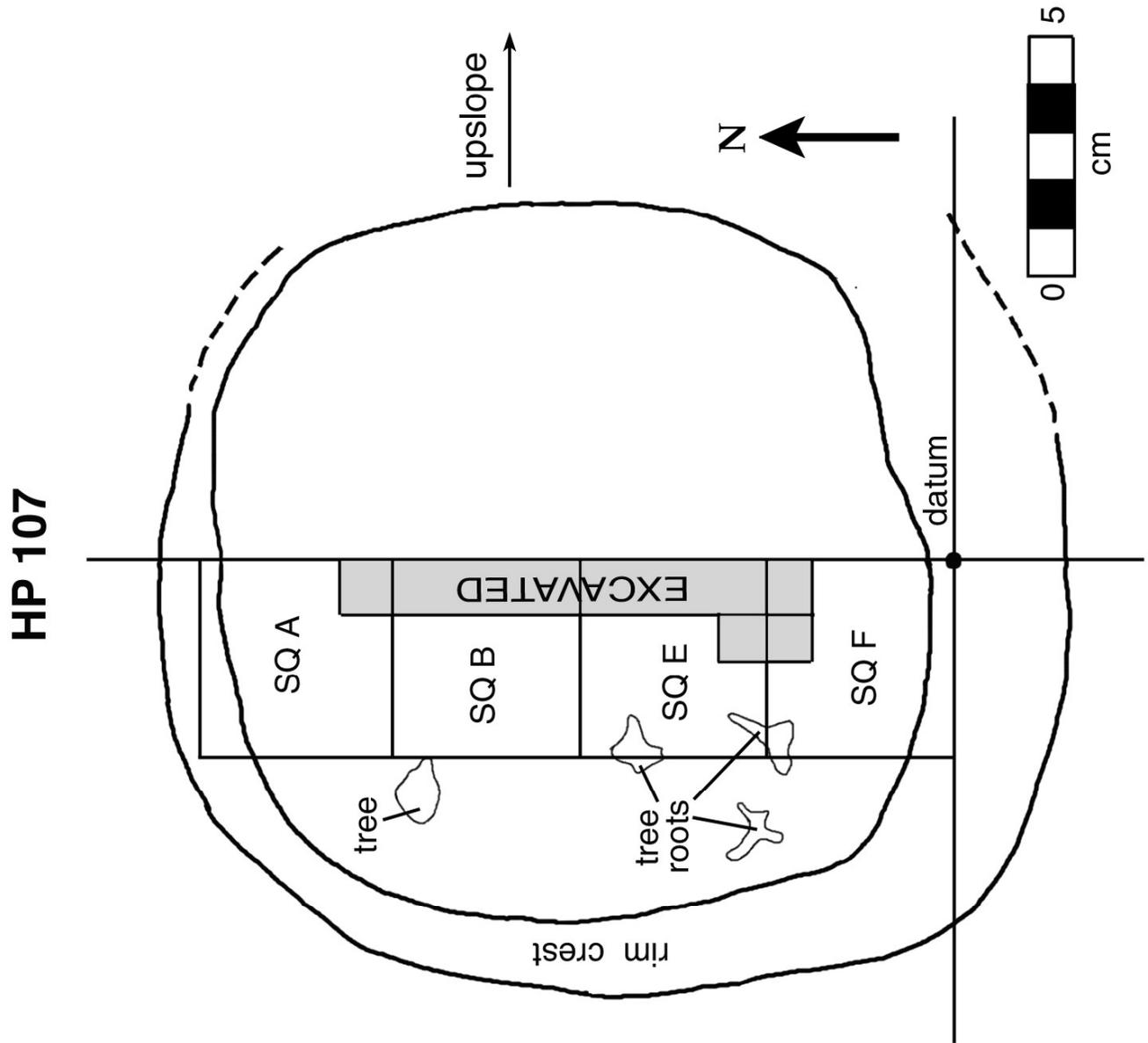
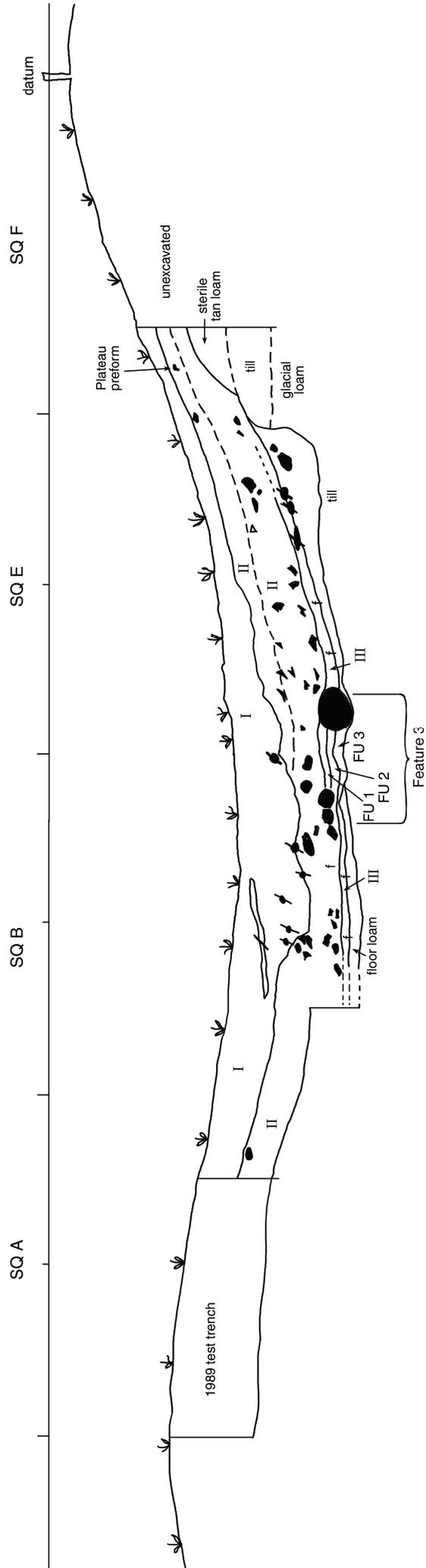


Figure 2. Cross sections of the east wall of the test trench excavated in 1999 (above) and the west wall of the test trench excavated in 1987 (below).

HP 107 EAST WALL PROFILE



1989 WEST WALL PROFILE

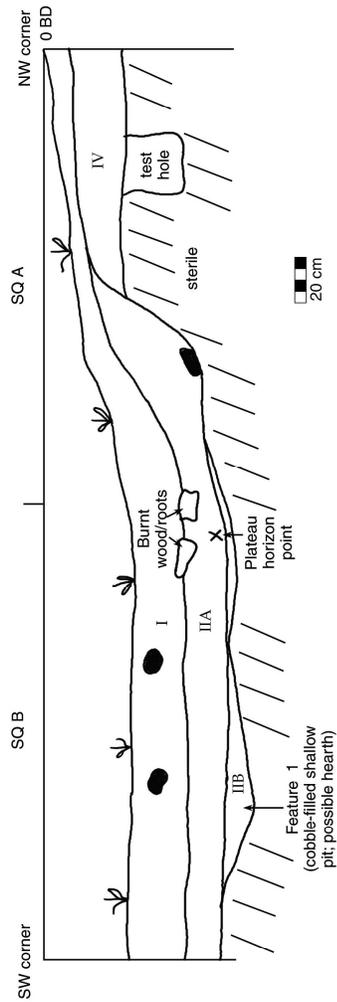


Figure 3. The plan of objects found on or in the floor deposits (Stratum HP 107 III) of the test trench in Squares B and E (1999 excavations).

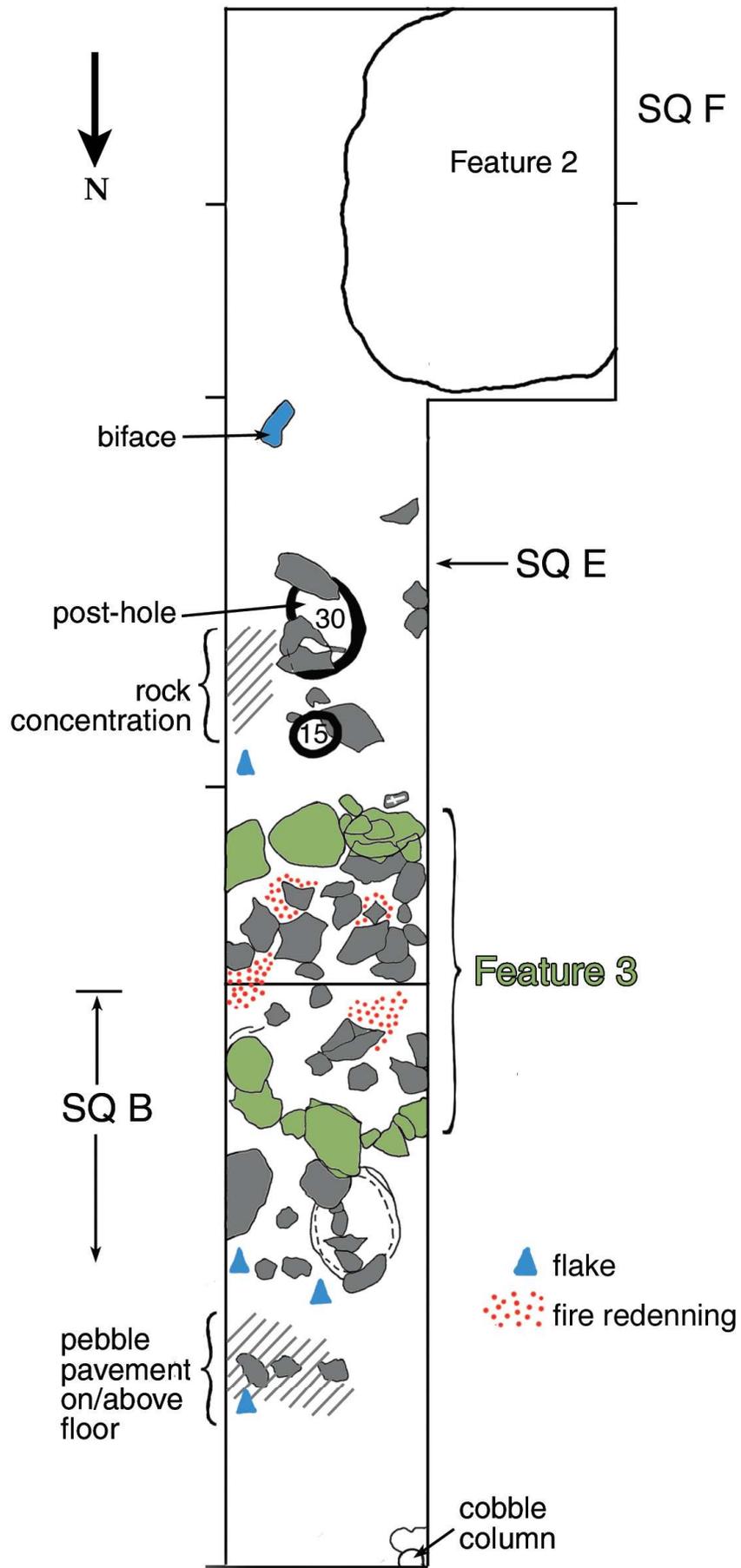


Figure 4. Plan of the possible hearth (Feature 1) identified in the 1987 excavations.

# HP 107

## Feature 1

-  rock
-  fire cracked rock
-  feature boundary



50 cm

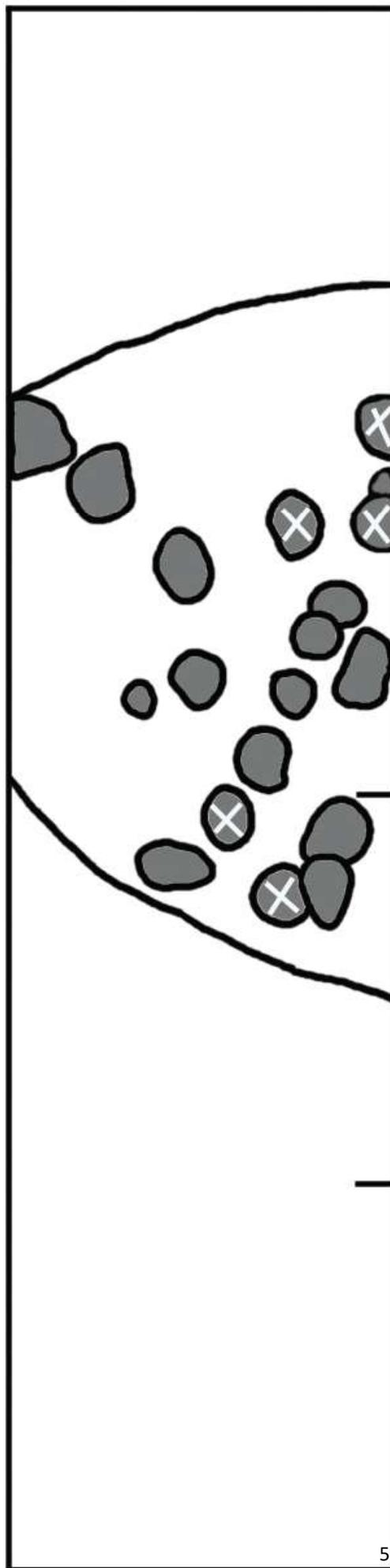


Figure 5. Plan and cross section of Feature 2, the large storage pit adjoining the south wall of HP 107.

**HP 107**  
 Feature 2  
 217 BD

