

Results of Excavations in Housepit 119 (Extra Housepit Excavation 5)

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Housepit 119 was originally thought to be an extra housepit area and was designated as EHPE 5. This excavation took place in a roughly circular level area in the southwestern portion of the main area of the Keatley Creek site. In contrast to the high number of basin-shaped, rimmed cultural depressions in this and other parts of the site, "EHPE 5" had an anomalous surface morphology. It resembled in many respects "flats" described at the Bell site which were interpreted as having been purposefully filled with sediments imported from the Fraser River 400 m below (Stryd 1973:301). It was thought that "EHPE 5" could have been artificially created, or used for ceremonial or other communal purposes by the aboriginal inhabitants. The goals of the 1987 excavations were to determine if the sediments revealed any distinctive patterning indicative of the hypothesized activity.

Following initial excavation in 1987, it became clear that nearly a meter of layered sediments overlay a clearly cultural stratum. The generally circular outline of this area and the presence of a weakly expressed rim suggested that "EHPE 5" could in fact be a housepit that had been naturally filled in. Upslope from this location there are dry stream beds and evidence of erosion by intermittent fluvial activity. It was supposed that the cultural stratum under the layered sediments might be older than the Kamloops horizon. For these reasons, excavation continued in 1988, with the goals of: (1) Better understanding the processes resulting in this feature's anomalous topography, and; (2) discovering the age and content of the buried cultural material.

Test Trench Excavation Results

The test trench begun in 1987 was cleared of excavation fill, and excavation continued in a 50 cm by 400 cm rectangle that had been dug to 30 cm below surface in Square B and to about 20 cm below surface in the northern 200 cm (Sq. C). Excavation was extended to Square F, northwest of Square C (see **Fig. 1.**). In total, a 1 m x 2 m area in the west of Square F was excavated to a depth of 20 cm, in 5 cm levels, employing shovels, and screened through 8 mm mesh.

Previous excavation in Squares B and C had proceeded according to natural strata, using trowels and screening all sediments through 8 mm mesh. In 1988 we began by trowelling in arbitrary 5 cm levels, screening through 8 mm mesh. Low artifact density soon encouraged the use of shovels. Finally, after reaching 95 cm below surface in Square B and 75 cm below surface in Square C, it became apparent that the layered sediments were essentially sterile. Therefore, mattocks were employed and screening discontinued. When the old surface of the buried cultural zone was finally encountered, trowelling and screening were again employed.

The sediments and a tentative interpretation are presented below. The sedimentary history of EHPE 5 can be divided into three zones, representing the results of cultural and natural processes.

Zone 1

Figure 2 presents a profile of the west wall of Squares B and C. Zone 1, just below the surface, is composed of recently deposited aeolian sediments, dark brown in color. This zone was excavated in 1987, and contained some flecks of charcoal and low amounts of lithic material. Similar results were obtained from the 1988 excavation of Square F. Zone 1 is variable in

thickness due to the contours of the fluvially deposited sediments beneath. Wind blown sediments naturally fill in irregular surfaces, and can present a fairly uniform surface. Furthermore, the presence of low densities of charcoal and lithics in aeolian deposits need not require human transport, as the area is at times subject to very strong winds with vortices that are capable of saltating heavy sediments. Thus, it is not clear if any of these deposits are anthropogenic.

Zone 2

This accumulation of layered sediments is nearly two meters deep. Both low-energy silts and clays, as well as coarser fluvial sands and gravels, testify to a fluvial depositional regime and environment considerably different from that now occurring at the site. For some time, HP 119 apparently functioned as a pond, part of a ramified system of downslope water movement that transported fine-grain sediments. Later, as the basin filled with clays and silts, and it was capable of retaining less and less ponded water, an outlet was created through a remnant of the rim in the southwest. At that time, HP 119 became a place that water traversed (as opposed to being a closed basin), and interbedded, coarser sediments can be observed in the upper portion of the zone. This could all have occurred in as short a time as 25 years (P. Goldberg, Pers. Comm.).

The greater-than-normal surficial water may have resulted from long-period fluctuations characteristic of arid and semi-arid environments or to local changes in hydrology, including the appearance of groundwater seeps which come and go according to unknown factors. The latter seems more likely, since moisture-loving aspen and other herbaceous plants occur less

than 20 m downslope of "EHPE 5", and Keatley Creek itself is known to have fluctuated dramatically in volume within the last 50 years.

By any standards, the yield of cultural material in such a large volume of sediments was minimal: a fragment of a sandstone saw, a few pieces of ungulate bone, and no chipped stone tools. What was found came from about 60 cm below the surface, suggesting that, for a short period during the in-filling of HP 119, it may have been a focus for human activity. However, in general, it can be said that little human activity occurred at Keatley Creek while Zone 2 accumulated, since everywhere else the site contains a much greater density of anthropogenic sediments.

Zone 3

This zone manifests the characteristic cross-section of an archaeological housepit: the same parabolic surface, a nearly horizontal "contact" with sterile sediments beneath, and burned beams indicative of a collapsed wooden superstructure. Throughout, the sediments are variable in composition, but they nevertheless present sufficient internal consistency to allow recognition of a reworked soil horizon at the surface, collapsed roof, and the reworked sterile substrate upon which activities within the house occurred. Due to constraints of time, and the low information yield, the test trench was not excavated to sterile everywhere. Only Subsquares 8, 12, and 16 of Square B and Subsquares 8 of Square C were taken through to the glacio-fluvial sands and pebbles. The character and content of the cultural sediments are summarized below.

Stratum III

Stratum III is a moderately compact, silty sand with indistinct upper boundary with the clayey/silt of Zone 2. Generally, it is very dark gray-brown (10 YR 3/2), containing 10–30% fine pebbles, 30–50% 2–4 mm size particles, and less than 10% charcoal.

The cross-section of Stratum III thickens away from the center, suggesting it may be collapsed roof sediments. Such collapse sediments occur in other housepits and have similar cross-sectional morphologies. That it was originally sub-aerial for a time is evidenced by, in places, a darker upper portion which is discontinuous and disturbed by (possibly) trampling of the sub-aqueous, mucky basin bottom.

Moderate amounts of lithic debitage occur in Stratum III, together with some fish and mammal bone. A Kamloops horizon projectile point pre-form confirms a no-later-than Kamloops age in the late Prehistoric period. However, its presence near the surface of roof collapse does not altogether rule out an earlier age for this housepit. At the time the preform was manufactured, the housepit may have been abandoned for some time. Thus, in the absence of any clear diagnostic associations with the interior living floor of HP 119, a tentative age of 1,200 BP–200 BP must be assigned to this stratum.

Fire cracked rocks in low amounts, but variable in size, further support the inference that this is roof collapse. Large (i.e., 10 cm and above) pieces of rock would not be expected to accumulate on a living floor.

Burned structural material occurs near the bottom of Stratum III. Elsewhere at Keatley Creek, charred beams are characteristic of the roof/floor boundary. That these generally occur near sterile, and horizontally

near the center of the deposits further reinforces the proposition that these are roof collapse sediments. Good samples of the burned wood were taken for radiometric determinations.

Stratum IV

Stratum IV is a quite unconsolidated, black silty sand and probably represents a thin expression of the interior activity zone (the floor). It was only excavated in Subsquare 8 of Square C and Subsquares 8, 12, and 16 of Square B, but nevertheless seems to be a characteristic "floor." A thin band (i.e., < 1 cm) lying just above Stratum IV, and which resembles sterile sediments, is one more argument for considering Stratum IV as floor. One would not expect roof collapse which consisted of a pristine "lens" of redeposited sterile to maintain its integrity during collapse. Thus, the band of sterile, which parallels the contact of the floor with basal till, but which sandwiches the black sediments of Stratum IV, is best interpreted as having been deposited on the living surface of the house during occupation—perhaps the material excavated from a pit of indeterminate size inside the house.

Finally, a 3 cm x 4 cm basalt flake was secured from the surface of Stratum IV. It had been broken in five pieces in the past. Whether broken when the surface was being lived on, or at the time of collapse is irrelevant, it clearly supports the conclusion that Stratum IV was the floor.

Stratum V

Stratum V is a very compact to loosely consolidated, olive brown (2.5 Y 4/4) glacio-fluvial deposit, containing no cultural material. This Stratum was first encountered about 185 cm below the surface.

Excavation Summary and Conclusions

Excavations in "EHPE 5" during 1987 and 1988 revealed a naturally buried Kamloops horizon housepit of characteristic size, shape, and content. For this reason, EHPE 5 was renamed HP 119. It was originally nearly 2 m deep and approximately 12 m from rim top to rim top. The now-almost flat cross-section is clearly the result of natural fluvial action. The excavations have discovered no evidence to support hypotheses concerning the use of the area for communal or ceremonial purposes. The almost complete lack of artifactual material in the Zone 2 water-laid deposits indicates that the site was essentially abandoned during the infilling of this housepit. This latter inference is consistent with the notion that the site was completely abandoned in early Kamloops times.

Housepit 119 resembles the "flats" excavated at the Bell site, which June Ryder suggested had been filled with material imported from the river, far below. This led some people to think that HP 119 was a dance or ceremonial plaza. At the time, material infilling was ruled out. However, it seems most likely that at the Bell Site, as at Keatley Creek, the vicissitudes of hillslope hydrology turned a disused housepit into a pond.

Figures

Figure 1: Housepit 119 location of Features.

Figure 2: Housepit 119 profile of west wall of Squares B and C at 65 m west of Datum

Figure 2 Stratum Legend

Stratum III* 10YR3/2 very dark grayish brown silty sand. Quite compact, with 10–30% pebbles, 30-50% gravels, some (<10%) charcoal, some lithics, probable roof.

Stratum IV 7.5YR2/0 black, quite unconsolidated silty sand with (10% pebbles, <10% cobbles, 30–50% gravels, with <10% charcoal, <10% FCR, <10% mammal bone (small), <10% lithics.

Stratum V 2.5Y4/4 olive brown very compact glacio-fluvial deposit. 0% material.

* some soil development apparent.

Figure 1: Housepit 119 location of Features. Housepit 119 - Location of Associated Features

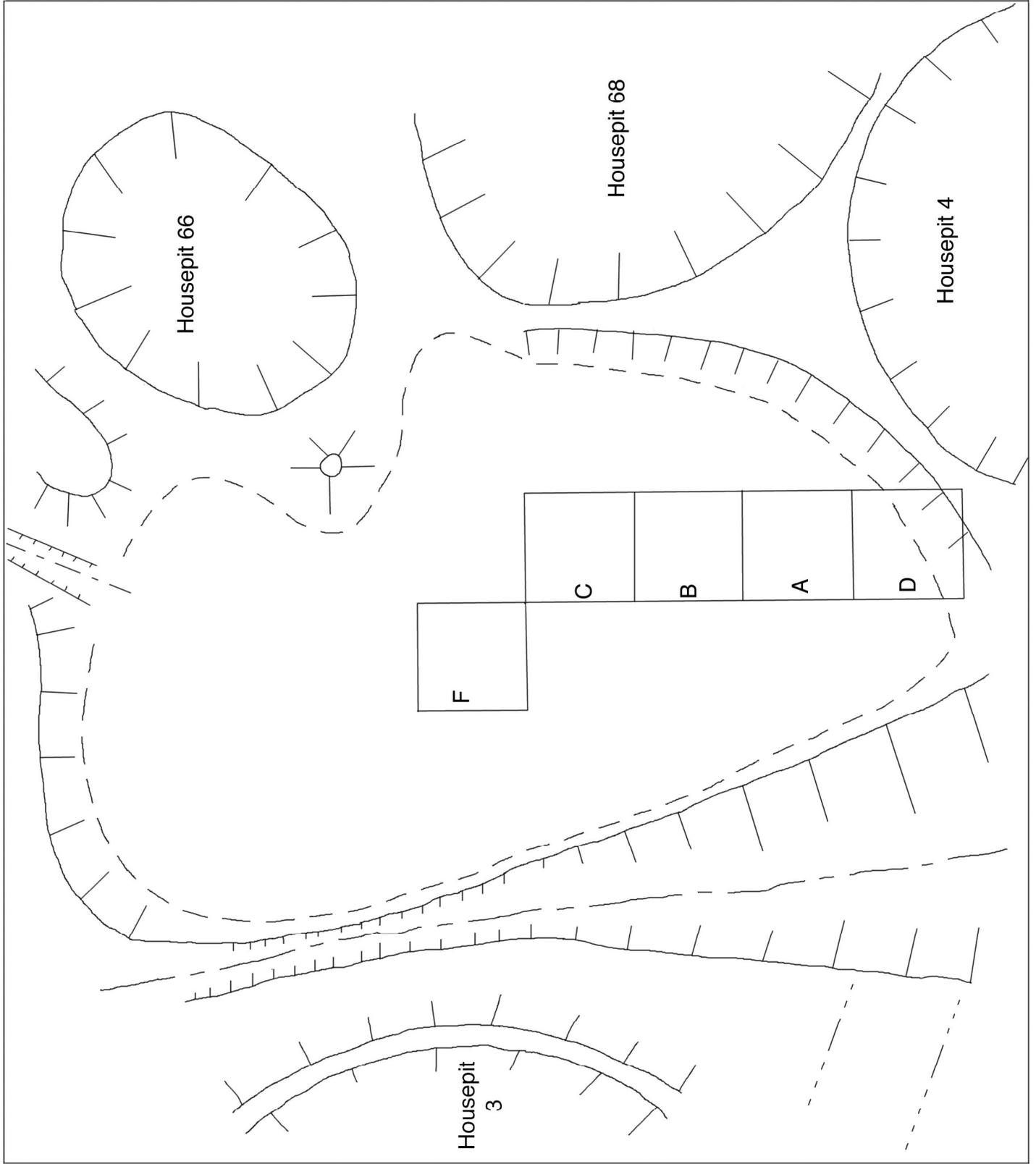


Figure 2: Housepit 119 profile of west wall of Squares B and C at 65 m west of Datum

