

Extra Housepit Excavation 10 Excavation Results

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Location and Description

Extra Housepit Excavation 10 was dug into a large, deep, well-defined circular cultural depression feature located in the eastern part of the site on the first terrace overlooking the main village area (Vol. III, Preface, **Fig. 1**). It is one of several other similar circular cultural depressions in this general area that range between about 2 m and 4.5 m in diameter. Surficially, the depression is somewhat oval in plan and measures approximately 4.3 m north-south by 4.2 m east-west by 0.75 m deep.

Three conjoining excavation squares measuring 1 m north-south by 0.75 m east-west were dug into the eastern half of the feature forming a trench measuring 3.0 m north-south by 0.75 m east-west. They were designated as Squares A, B, and C from north to south. The western walls of the units intersected the approximate center of the surficial depression.

Excavations were undertaken to determine the function and relative age of this depression, and the nature of its contents and structure. It was selected because of its large size and unusual surficial depth, and because it was not directly associated with other features that could have disturbed its original integrity or composition. The squares were dug in 10 cm-thick arbitrary levels using trowels, square-nosed shovels, and 1/4" mesh screening. Four basic stratigraphic units were identified (**Fig. 1**).

Stratigraphy

Stratum I

Stratum I consists of the surface littermat and a light semi-compact, grayish-brown, sandy silt (10 YR 4/2). Its maximum thickness is only about 4 cm. This stratum appears to have been deposited primarily by aeolian processes, but a low (approximately 10%) pea gravel content and a few angular pebbles and cobbles were also encountered near the center of the pit. No cultural materials were recovered from this stratum, and it represents post-depositional natural infilling by aeolian and gravitational processes.

Stratum II

Stratum II was a lens of dark gray brown (10 YR 3/2) sandy silt with high ash content, a low quantity (10%) of pea gravel, and the occasional pebble. It was encountered in the southwestern corner of Square B and the northwestern corner of Square C between about 5 cm and 25 cm below surface. This lens tapered out at about 30 cm east of the west walls of these squares. It may have been functionally associated with Stratum III, which appears to be a hearth feature that lies directly beneath it (see below). Alternately it may represent refuse that was subsequently dumped in this pit from a house located to the immediate northeast.

Stratum III

Stratum III was a thick lens of semi-compact, dark gray brown (10 YR 3/1) sandy silt with some (5%) ash, moderate (30%) pea gravel, moderately high (40%) pebble content, and several large cobbles. A dense concentration of charcoal and burnt bark were noted in Square B between about 12 cm

and 15 cm below surface, and several small superposed lenses of dark stained matrix lay immediately above and below.

The majority of this stratum (i.e., its center) was represented in the western half of Square B between about 10 cm to 35 cm below surface. This lens thinned out in the southwestern corner of Square A and in the northwestern corner of Square C. It thinned out rapidly and terminated about 35 cm east of the western wall of Square B. It seems that this stratum, and possibly Stratum II (see above) are activity-related.

The abundance of charcoal associated with Stratum III, and the paucity of other cultural materials, suggests that it represents a probable hearth feature built in the center of the pit feature after it had been initially used as a storage pit and had been partially infilled. It is unlikely that it represents a refuse dumping episode, as the bark and wood appear to have burnt *in situ*. Also, natural aeolian and gravitational infilling processes must have contributed to these two strata. The large cobbles probably rolled into the feature depression from upslope, or may have been intentionally included in the hearth construction.

Stratum IV

Stratum IV is a semi-compact, dark brown (10 YR 3/3) sandy silt containing a moderately high amount (25%) of pea gravel, angular pebbles, and a few large cobbles. In Square A, this stratum was lighter and more gray (10 YR 4/2) than it was in the other two squares. Two small boulders were encountered in Squares B and C.

In Square B, some salmon bone and wood fragments were found between 45 cm and 60 cm below surface. At approximately 65 cm to 90 cm below surface, an abundance of fish bone was encountered in association

with charcoal, pieces of decayed wood, and several large mammal bones (possibly elk). The latter included three sections of long bone, one rib, one complete distal end of an ulna, a distal end of a tibia, two vertebrae, and one metacarpal. Most of the bone was recovered at the interface between Stratum IV and Stratum V at about 90 cm below surface, indicating the original pit outline. One piece of wood was found protruding from the east wall (**Fig. 1**). In level 10, between 93 cm and 95 cm below surface in the upper northeast corner of Square B, some charcoal and the epiphysis of a mammal bone were exposed in the wall.

Contours of the feature as indicated by the interface of Strata IV and V indicate that it was initially a deep storage pit with a basin-shaped bottom and flaring upper edge. It was revealed that it stored dried fish (salmon), and possibly dried meat. The latter is suggested by the presence of several large mammal (elk) bones.

Stratum V

Stratum V is a fairly compact, grayish brown (10 YR 5/2) sandy, clayey silt containing a high proportion (about 50%) of pea gravels and angular or rounded pebbles and cobbles. It represents culturally sterile glacial deposits.

Summary and Conclusions

Excavation revealed that the small circular cultural depression intersected by the three squares comprising EHPE 10 was initially a deep, steep-sided, storage pit with a basin-shaped bottom and a flaring top (**Fig. 1**). The storage pit originally measured about 2 m in diameter by about 80 cm deep, and had an approximate capacity of about 2 cubic meters. The abundance of fish (salmon) remains and mammal bone recovered from

Stratum IV, which is associated with the initial use of the pit as a storage facility, indicate that dried fish and perhaps dried meat were the primary food commodities being stored. Other cache pits in the immediate vicinity probably functioned in similar capacities, and presumably belonged to the housepits lying several meters to the northeast.

Subsequent to its use as a storage facility and after it had been partially infilled by slumping, aeolian deposition, and gravitational infilling, a hearth was constructed within the depression to cook food, or perhaps burn refuse. This use-episode is represented by Strata II and III.

Figures

Figure 1: East and west wall profiles of EHPE 10, showing Squares A, B, and C

Figure 1. East and West wall profiles of EHPE 10, Squares A, B, and C

Stratum	Munsell		Description
I	10 YR 3/3	Dark brown	Fairly loose, semi-compact, sandy silt with moderate content of organics, pea gravel, and angular pebbles.
II	10 YR 5/2	Grayish-brown	Fairly hard, compact, sandy silt with high content of pea gravel and angular pebbles. Sterile.

Figure 1. East and west wall profiles of EHPE 10, showing Squares A, B, and C

