

Extra-Housepit Excavation 20: A Large Roasting Pit

Brian Hayden

Just upstream from the point where Keatley Creek leaves the Clear Range bedrock and begins to flow through glacial till, there are two pithouse-sized features, which were originally given housepit numbers. These are the easternmost features that were located as part of the Keatley Creek site (Vol. III, Preface, **Fig. 1**). Their peripheral and unusual location (in the streambed) led to the testing of the most distinctive of the two features in 1992 (**Fig. 1**). This 8 m depression turned out to be a roasting pit of exceptional size and was designated EHPE 20. The other feature a few meters upstream has not been tested, but was designated HP 121. Another possible flat round area about 50 m downstream in the creek bed may also be related to the main site occupation but appears to be a structure quite different from a normal pithouse. This has not been explored and no housepit or other designation has been given to it.

This roasting pit feature is potentially very important because of its large size and because of potential implications that this size carries for the quantities of roots being roasted at one time, as well as for the number of people that must have cooperated to use such a facility, and for the possible use of such a feature in connection with feasting. Therefore, further testing of this feature was conducted in 1997 in order to obtain flotation samples in an attempt to determine what kinds of plants were being roasted in this feature. Since the 1992 excavations did not extend to sterile till in the southern part of the test trench, this was reopened and finished in 1997 (**Fig. 2**). Unfortunately, no identifiable plant remains besides wood charcoal

were obtained from the flotation samples, however, the feature was dated to 1580 BP, that is, contemporaneous with the major occupation of the site.

Excavators in 1992 distinguished 5 different strata within this feature, although in 1997, the excavator only distinguished 3 strata (**Fig. 2**). In both cases, it was clear that the feature had undoubtedly been used many times. This is also apparent from the extensive debris cone that has accumulated downslope from the central depression and from the apparent slope of the till under the south rim which may indicate the location of an earlier roasting pit under the debris cone. Except for the surface accumulations (Stratum III), it was difficult to identify distinct separations of the strata largely because of the intense dark color of all strata and the constant occurrence of FCR.

Stratigraphy

Stratum I: This was defined as the extant organic litter mat.

Stratum II: This was identified as thrown up debris cone material consisting of very dark sandy silt with charcoal flecks and moderate amounts of FCR. A few bone fragments occurred in the deposit, but no lithic materials.

Stratum III: This appears to represent reworked debris cone material that has been transported by runoff back into the central depression, although it contains considerable FCR as well as a few flakes and bone fragments.

Stratum IV: This is probably the main matrix remaining from cooking episodes. It has the highest amount of FCR (up to 105 per 10 cm level for a single subsquare--i.e., 40% of the matrix), and also displays patches of

reddish-brown soil within an overall black matrix, especially towards the bottom of the stratum. Charcoal flecks occurred throughout and 2 lithic flakes were recovered from these levels.

Stratum V: In places, this was indistinguishable from Stratum IV, and was initially only identified because of some local fire-reddening at the top of the stratum. This stratum, too, probably represents matrix from roasting events. Towards the center of the feature, very black, baked soil was noted by one excavator. Small amounts of burned bone were recovered from this stratum, but no lithics.

Stratum VI: This is described as sterile till which has been discolored from staining or fire-reddening from the activities in the overlying strata.

While it has not been possible to positively identify the materials being roasted in this feature, it is interesting to note that there are no boulder sized, or even large cobble sized heating elements associated with this feature, whereas very large heating elements were associated with the larger roasting pits on the southern terraces of the site (EHPE 33 and 35). It is possible that between major large scale use episodes of this feature, in which the entire area was in active use, smaller use episodes may have occurred in which only a portion of the feature was used, as perhaps indicated by the relatively small but sharp pit outline in the till at the north end of the 1997 profile.

It is also interesting that the till contact slopes down underneath the rim in the south end of this profile, possibly indicating the existence of an earlier roasting pit offset slightly to the south of the present depression. This is certainly one of the most important roasting pit features at the site in terms of its potential importance for feasting and cooperative exploitation of plant resources, and it could be investigated in greater depth with

considerable benefit. It certainly seems far from coincidental that this feature dates to the time of maximum sociopolitical complexity at the site and maximum housepit corporate group size. Whether it was used by members of a single corporate group or whether it was used for inter-group feasting events remains to be determined by future research.

Figures

Figure 1: General plan of the large roasting pit EHPE 20 in the upstream part of the Keatley Creek streambed.

Figure 2: Stratigraphic cross-section of the east and west walls of the test trench in EHPE 20.

Figure 1. General plan of the large roasting pit EHPE 20 in the upstream part of the Keatley Creek streambed.

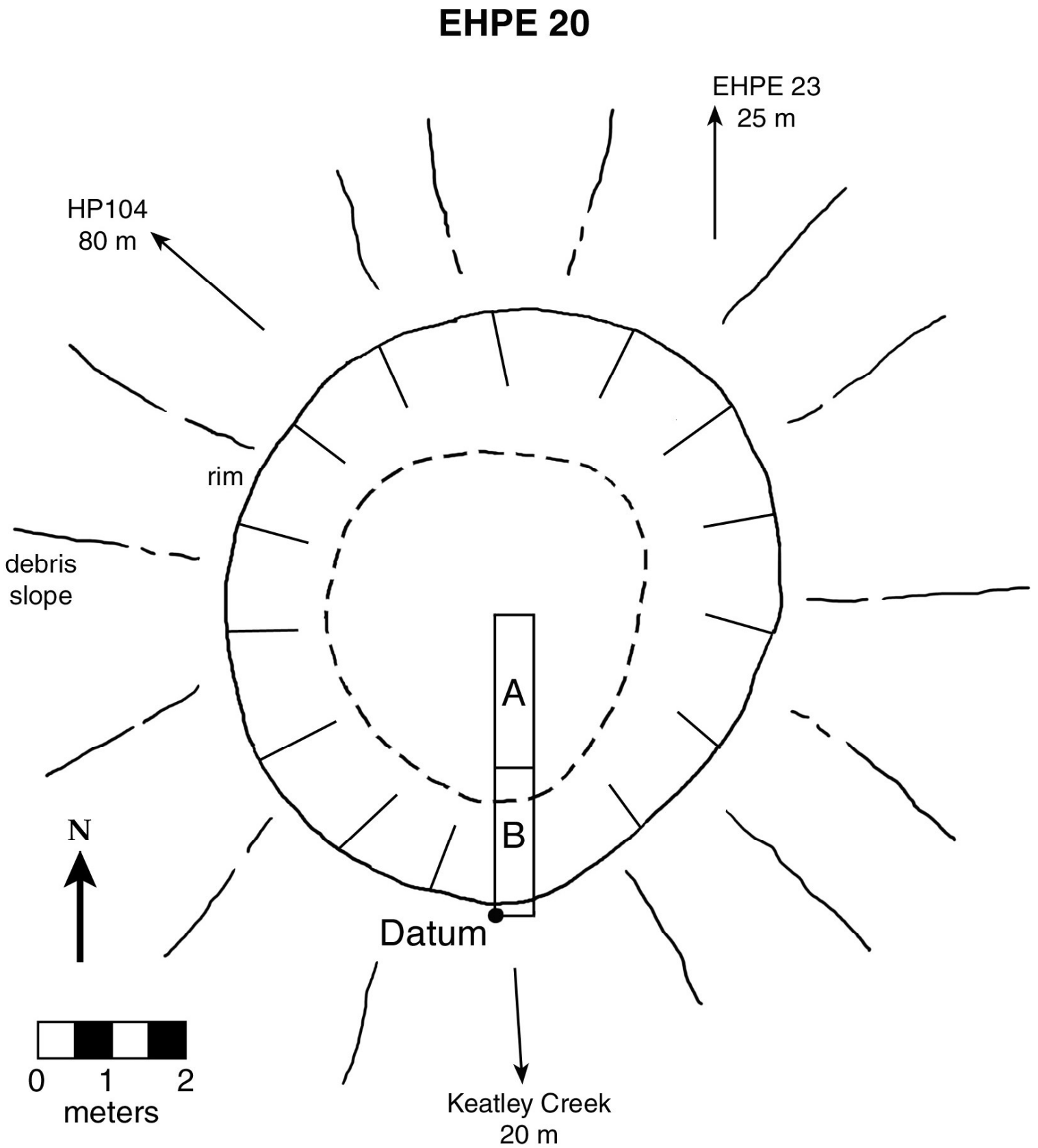


Figure 2. Stratigraphic cross-section of the east and west walls of the test trench in EHPE 20.

