

Excavation Summary for Extra-Housepit Excavation 35

Sara Mossop Cousins

Extra-Housepit Excavation 35 (EHPE 35) was partially excavated in 1999 as part of a roasting pit testing program at the Keatley Creek. It is medium-sized in terms of diameter in comparison to other roasting pits identified at the site to date. It measures approximately 4.5 m in diameter across the high points of the rim, while other roasting pits at the site have measured between 2 -8 m in diameter. It is located on a terrace approximately 55 m south of HP 108 (Vol. III, Preface, **Fig. 1**). The surface depression of Extra-Housepit Excavation 35 is shallow. Other pit surface depressions have ranged from 15-40 cm in depth. The shape of EHPE 35 is roughly oval (**Fig. 1**). The “debris flow” of darkened, ashy soil, is most developed along the north-western edge of the pit. The rim is poorly defined. Based on previous survey and excavations at the site, EHPE 35 was clearly a plant roasting pit. EHPE 35 is one of several roasting pits located on the large south terrace above the creek.

Charcoal samples from EHPE 35 have been dated to 1460 and 1530 BP. It was expected from the surface size that EHPE 35 would fall somewhere in the middle to older range of the dates of other pits at the site. These range from less than 100 to 1500 years in age. The oldest pits have been large, while the middle range and youngest have been small to medium in size.

The sub-surface characteristics of EHPE 35 also identified it as a plant roasting pit. The pit is approximately 50 cm deep and contains a central group of cobbles 29-40 cm below the surface, which is typical of a roasting pit. The quantity of fire-cracked rock (up to 30% of the fill), charred plant material and fire-blackening also suggest that it was a plant roasting pit that

was used on more than one occasion, as does the accumulated “debris flow”. The pit appeared basin-shaped as can be seen in the wall profile (**Fig. 2**).

Excavation Summary

Subsquares 5, 9, and 13 of Square A were tested (**Fig. 1**). The surrounding surface was also surveyed for lithics, to 5 m beyond the rim, in all directions. Surface finds included 6 trachydacite flakes, including a pressure flake and a retouched flake, and a small trachydacite core.

Stratum I:

0-10 cm below surface: The surface deposits of EHPE were about 10 cm thick and were dark brown, silty loam with a few fire-cracked pebbles and little ash or charcoal. A small flake of unknown material, and a trachydacite flake, were recovered from the surface deposits of Subsquare 13.

Stratum II:

11-25 cm below surface: Soil is black with increasing FCR (20-30% of matrix), flecks of wood charcoal, wood charcoal pieces, (charred material 5% of matrix), and some trachydacite flakes. A flotation sample was taken.

Feature I:

26-30 cm below surface: This is a fire-cracked small-cobble feature (**Fig. 2**), with blackened soil and charred wood. A flotation sample was taken.

Feature II (Stratum III)

31-40 cm below surface: This is a fire-cracked large-cobble feature (**Fig. 2**), surrounded by large pieces of charred wood. Some pieces of wood were retained for dating and a flotation sample was taken. Large FCR consisted of up to 75% of the black matrix.

Stratum IV

41-46 cm below surface: No cobbles, 12% FCR, 0.5% charcoal. Excavated to till. Fire-reddening existed at the bottom of Subsquare 9.

Use

“Root” plants that may have been cooked in this pit include Wild Onion (*Allium cernuum*), Mariposa Lily (*Calochortus macrcarpus*) and Desert Parsley (*Lomatium spp.*), all of which grow on the site today. Other plants that may have been available and which do not require a great deal of cooking to make them palatable, according to Turner (1997) and Pokotylo and Froese (1983), include *Yellowbells (Fritillaria pudica)*, Wild Carrot (*Lomatium macrocarpum*), *Chocolate Tips (Lomatium dissectum)*, Bitter-root (*Lewisia rediviva*), and Wild Thistle (*Cirsium edule*). Prickly Pear (*Opuntia fragilis*), lichens and various berry species were also occasionally pit-cooked (Pokotylo and Froese 1983:131). No identifiable seeds or geophyte remains were recovered from this roasting pit.

Meat and fish were also pit-cooked. No bones have been recovered from any of the roasting pits excavated at the Keatley site to date, but the flesh may have been removed from the bones prior to roasting (Peters 1999). Meat and fish were usually cooked with plant materials as well (Pokotylo and Froese 1983, Peters 1999).

The cooking time was probably not long, based on the size of the fire-cracked cobbles, so a species like Balsamroot (*Balsamorhiza sagittata*) which required days of cooking is not likely to have been cooked in this pit.

Conclusion

It appears that EHPE 35 was used, and probably re-used at least several times, for plant roasting. There has been no animal bone found so far and at least some of the charred material does not appear to be wood.

References

Peters, Desmond

1999 Personal Communication. Desmond Peters is an elder and past chief of the Ts'kw'aylaxw (Pavilion Band).

Pokotylo, David and Patricia Froese

1983 Archaeological Evidence for Prehistoric Root Gathering on the Southern Interior Plateau of British Columbia. *Canadian Journal of Archaeology* 7(2): 127-158.

Turner, Nancy

1997 *Food Plants of the Interior First Peoples*. Royal British Columbia Museum Handbook, Victoria.

Figures

Figure 1: Extra-Housepit Excavation 35 surface view and excavation unit layout before excavation.

Figure 2: Extra-Housepit Excavation 35 profile of east wall of excavation trench and floor plan showing locations of fire-cracked rocks.

Figure 1: Extra-Housepit Excavation 35 surface view and excavation unit layout before excavation.

EHPE 35 - Plan View & Profile

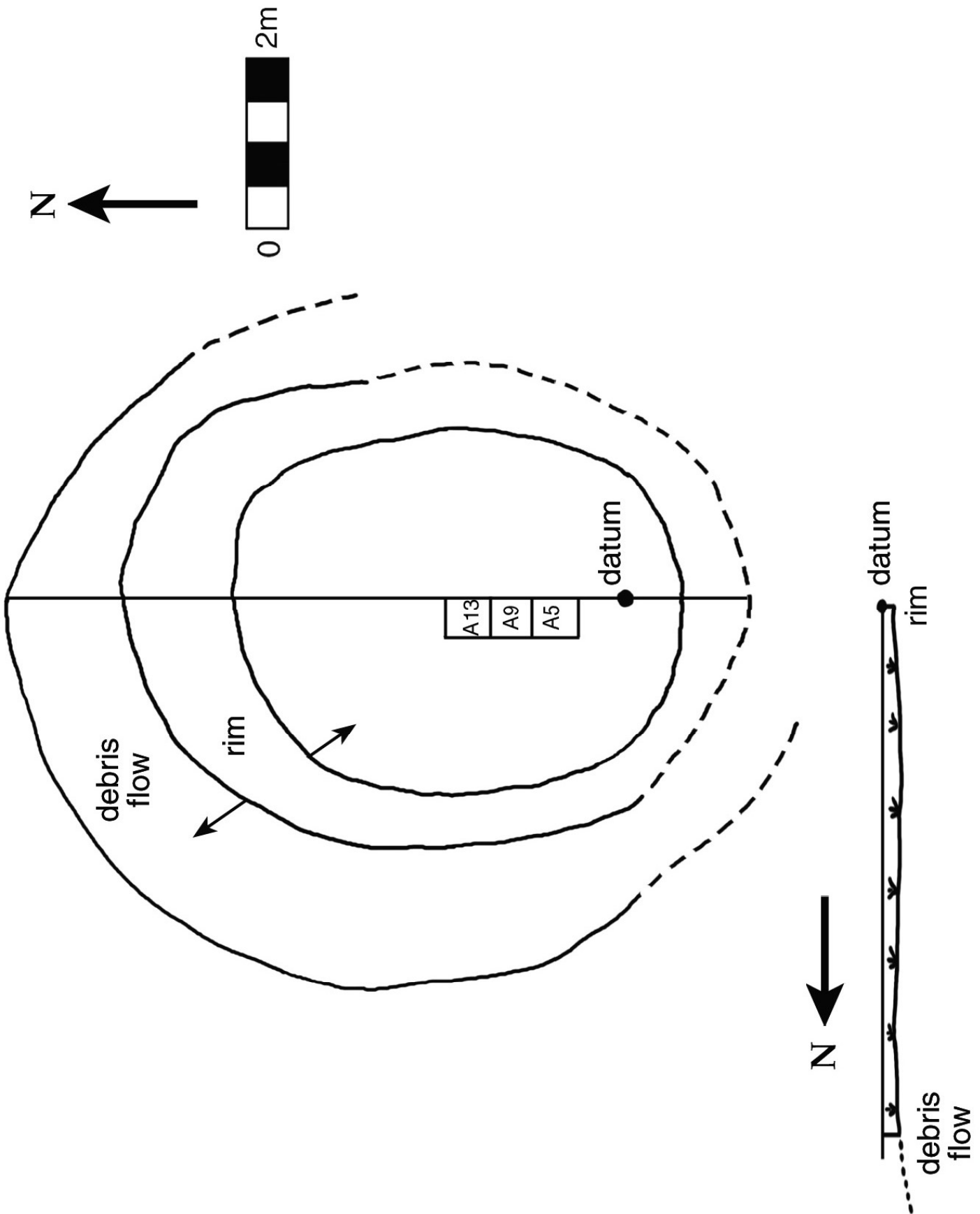


Figure 2: Extra-Housepit Excavation 35 profile of east wall of excavation trench and floor plan showing locations of fire-cracked rocks.

EHPE 35 - Roasting Pit

