

MILAM COUNTY, THE FUTURE FIELD FOR ARCHEOLOGISTS¹

By J. B. WHITE

It was late afternoon of a hot summer's day in July, 1929, that I stopped suddenly on the highway north of Cameron. For no apparent reason, except perhaps to answer that nomadic urge that sets us off from the very spot where dim trails lead away into pastures. I soon found myself swallowed up by the green woods. I came upon a ravine, went down into its depths and soon was leisurely walking along its narrow walls, when suddenly there upon the clean white sand I saw an ancient Indian Spike. I had merely been casually interested before and knew little about such things.

I picked up the brown flint piece and stood thinking. I first thought of childhood impressions of naked, yelling savages swooping down on settlements and shooting these arrows into the inhabitants. Then my mind went back and I thought of causes, and as I stood there I began to fashion in my mind a vague though thrilling appreciation of the Vanishing American. I thought of his history, his primeval background and then into antiquity my thoughts ran to search for the cradle of the race.

Somewhere in the ages that stretch back all things began. Here upon the sand I had found something that belonged to a dead race of men. Time had erased them from the prairies of Texas. To know more about them, how they lived, what they believed and thought. I began to kindle to the possibilities. I turned about and retraced my steps. From somewhere up the ravine had come this old spike. For a long time I walked up the rough bed of the stream over whose boulders had poured the waters of many rainfalls, so many in fact none can tell. Abruptly I came to its end and there on a sloping sand hill I found an ancient village site. That camp lies north of Maysfield in a vast stretch of brush and broken ground. From it I have taken hundreds of artifacts.

From this experience on that lazy afternoon in the slanting rays of a Texas sun, when I first walked into the legendary tepees of the First American, hard by the rippling waters of the stream, I began a work of pleasing adventure that had led me to more than fifty villages where lived this now extinct race.

To one whose interest embraces more than the satisfaction of mere possession of these flint indexes to an ancient race, research, even though of unscientific nature, creates an unselfish devotion to the work and leads us to share with all men the common knowledge these discoveries afford.

The whole question of archeological research has been slow to achieve public recognition for several reasons. Chief among these has been selfishness of the private collector whose interest rarely ever approaches the stage where he is willing to give to the world the benefit of what his private efforts have achieved. Second in negative importance has been the vandalism that is born of curiosity, leading the inexperienced to attempt a work for which they have neither aptitude nor experience. Third I think is the failure of the state as well as institutions of learning to recognize the importance of the work this small group of scientists have been doing for years under great handicap.

I am unwilling, even for my own private collection, consisting of approximately thirty thousand specimens, to remain permanently in my own possession, in contravention to the ultimate belief that posterity has the greatest claim upon these things.

¹ Read before a meeting of the Central Texas archeological Society.

I am indebted to Central Texas Archaeological Society for this opportunity to discuss even within the limitations of a layman's knowledge, what I consider and have found to be one of the most interesting regions in Texas. I am grateful for the vast store of information you have passed along to us who know the fields better than the crucibles of technical knowledge. I have learned to employ the all important fact of geology in its practical phases, to research among Indian ruins in Milam County, to great advantage, in fact my first discoveries led me to build about my work a heartening dependence upon topography, geology and the soil. I soon learned that the simplest rudiments of discovery lay in a knowledge of terrain.

Milam County is interesting from many standpoints. Across its surface in almost equal division of east from west lie the valleys of violent streams and rivers. Its area is subject to more than the common of devastation from erosion, so much so that its Elm Creek and watershed tributaries have been selected among the streams in American for soil control.

The eastern half of Milam County is locked in woodlands with small streams, springs and canyon-like ravines. Slightly north of east from Cameron and stretching to the Brazos on the north and east lies the territory from which I have taken more than one-third of my entire collection. The area to which I refer forms the western and northern banks of Little River along the valley of which are to be found many Indian villages. The territory covers approximately one-fifth of the area of the county. Here the principal streams are Harl Creek, Walker's Creek, Prairie Creek, Pond Creek, the largest emptying into the Brazos, and numerous smaller water courses.

From the southwestern boundary enters Little River the principal stream from Bell county. Its course lies across the black lands in major part and its wide bottom has been a rich source for collections. From the south comes the San Gabriel, its channel following somewhat the line of the Balcones Fault upon which the ancient Missions were built by the early Spanish priests, in a settlement now known to be near the town of San Gabriel. Eight miles south of Cameron the Gabriel merges with Little River. From the south flows Brushy Creek, emptying into the Gabriel about eight miles south of the juncture of Little and San Gabriel Rivers. To the east lies the Milano Uplift, an interesting geological phenomena. The course of all principal streams and their tributaries is north as opposed to gravity and general elevation. Four miles north of Cameron, Little River carrying the combined waters of these streams and their numerous tributaries, turns abruptly east and flows into the Brazos near the site of old Fort Nashville at Gause.

Along the banks of these streams lie numerous villages. The sites are somewhat concentrated in the vicinity of Cameron so far as Little River is concerned, due to the mouth of Sandy Creek lying only two miles southeast of the city, draining a large area in the sand country to the east.

West lies the black clays and north they stretch to the Bell and Falls county lines. From these very little has been taken.

Along the San Gabriel a large number of camps have been found and along Brushy Creek villages have yielded many interesting artifacts. Private collections are owned by a number of citizens in the section, notable the Clement and George Doss accumulations.

Sandy Creek with its eastern banks touching the lignite coal region of the southeastern part of the county, remains the greatest Indian stream in Milam County with

the exception of Little River, which because of its greater length, has produced more. Sandy Creek lies entirely in a sand and clay section of the county. Its tributaries are spring creeks. One of the largest camps to be found anywhere in Texas borders east on Sandy and beyond an ancient oyster reef that juts along toward the coal deposits. This camp covers a large section of the Will Day and Winston farms. Exactly opposite and for an equal distance on the western bank lies a camp of such magnitude, its limits are difficult to determine.

HOG ISLAND CAMP.

Only two known caches have been uncovered in Milam County. One on Hog Island southeast of Cameron between Sandy Creek and Little river. The other on the S. W. McClaren farm northeast of the city of Cameron a short distance from where Little River turns east to the Brazos. So numerous have been the yield of artifacts from these camps that it is not reasonable to suppose that the nominal midden could have existed in such numbers of richly yielding deposits as to produce literally thousands of as fine flint implements as are known to the world. Hog Island has thus far been the outstanding camp so far as numbers of flints taken. While my own collection has some 5,000 taken from this camp alone, other collectors have profited greatly by plundering its remains.

The camp, strange to say, lies at the base of a gravel bed chain that forms a cliff and the eastern boundary of Sandy Creek a short distance from its juncture with the river. West lies Little River. Running east and west is an ancient channel, north the river turns to hem in and make complete this Baskin farm of about 100 acres. In the violent overflow of 1921 and again in 1926 the current of the river dipped into the high ground on the old channel and spread the hidden camp debris across the field for more than a quarter of a mile.

From this camp in one afternoon I took 300 arrows, lances, general blades and other implements. With each succeeding overflow the yield was rich. Today a large portion of this old channel bank, which resembles a levee, remains intact. Locked within its soil I am convinced lie hidden many additional flints. My work has been all of a surface nature. I have had no funds with which to excavate.

Just east of the Hog Island treasure lie the gravel banks and on a large hill now covered with farm houses, ancient shop sites can be seen where the artisan fashioned his blades, and projectiles.

McCLAREN CAMP.

In almost similar position with the exception of the island feature, the camp on the S W. McClaren farm, rivals Hog Island both in the number of flints taken and the quality of workmanship. Violent water action spreading across a fertile bottom fringed by sand and gravel hills, uncovered this cache and spread its contents across a vast area of the farm. It was a simple matter to gather them in. In my opinion at least twenty-five thousand have been taken from these two camps. Even now I obtain arrows and the like from these almost exhausted sites.

Where the San Gabriel quits its banks in flood time at the foot of a gravel escarpment near the town of San Gabriel the heaviest deposit of camp debris has been

found. I am certain here once was a thickly settle Indian area and while there is nothing to indicate a cache the middens are exceptionally heavy and numerous fine flints have been taken. Excavations here would yield many things of interest. The largest and finest conk shell beads I have ever seen were dug from the roots of a giant pecan in the bottom of this camp by Clarence Baird of San Gabriel.

On a sand and clay hill that rounds with the sweep of Elm Creek near the trestle of the Missouri Pacific north of Thorndale lies the old Morrison farm. This is the site of one of the rich Indian village sites of my county. From this camp about 500 pieces were taken and which now belong to the W. J. Linke collection owned by a son at Thorndale. In this collection is a blue flint blade 11 inches long and 7 ½ inches at the shank base. The blades from this camp are very fine.

Indian villages dot the banks of Little River near Cameron. A chain of gravel hills feature the ancient bed of this stream which now throws its floods against the east bank. Down the valley of the river lie ancient lakes and around these depressions that once was the channel of the stream camps are found. In fact from Bell County on the west to Brazos on the east Little river remains our greatest Indian stream.

The presence of camps in sections far removed from streams of any kind gives evidence that in many places once flowed great springs. Camps are numerous. Comparatively only a few have made yields, although in my collections there is representative flint work from all sections of the county.

Hidden in the deeply made silts of the bottom lands lie many camps. An occasional overflow uncovers portions in both Elm Creek and Little River bottoms. Due to the great area of the county and the limited time I have had to work, much of the territory remains unprospected and unworked. I confidently believe its artifact resource are only about fifty per cent exhausted.

Visiting collectors have marveled at the sweep of my camps, the ease with which they are able to find flints. This condition is due to the fact that almost half the area covered by these known villages is in the sand fields and thereby cultivated. Many known camps lie in abandoned fields long since out of cultivation and not infrequently do I find evidences of camps in pastures, notably in the case of Block House Springs on the banks of the Brazos in Milam County near Calvert. The Milam County Indian camps lack the heavy deposits so true of those found in mountainous counties. I am convinced that within the soil of stream bottoms are many yet to be found.

Although the Milam County camps have yielded and continue to yield some of the best flint work known to archaeology the absence of quarries explains the enormous detail of nodule workings and the predominant chert implements. No quarry site has ever been found in Milam County. Lack of suitable materials at hand led to a vast experimentation with ordinary flint boulders, the rejects from which litter all the camp sites. The Georgetown lime is the nearest outcroppings of flint. This accounts for the better character of work taken from the Brushy Creek, San Gabriel and Western Little River camps.

Topography of Milam County indicates that here once was a great game country, and although one would believe that the older and more permanent abodes were in the hill country west, still research leads me to believe that Milam County harbored for centuries in permanent domicile a population almost half its present figure. The uniform

distribution of villages leads to the belief also that Aborigines found in this section a vast habitable area as against more untenable ground in the western regions.

Some of my most interesting work has been done in the Brazos Valley.

I give you as my opinion that within the valley of this Father of Texas Waters from as far north as McLennan, thence south and east to the coastal region, touching in turn Falls, Milam, Brazos, Burlison, Grimes and Waller counties, will some day be found in rich profusion Indian remains comparable in value to that of the Valley of the Kings in Egypt. For millions of years the prongs of this great water course have been bringing down from the red lands of the South Plains the silt that now forms the bottoms of this great area. So deep is the deposit that buried beneath it are once great forests of timber. That it was for millions of years a never failing source of water can be imagined by its great drainage area and the diversity of climate its course touches. Within this valley I have found burials that I have guarded and still hold untouched. All along the yellow sweep of this great river in Milam and Robertson counties are some of my richest possessions in discovered village sites.

If I am any judge of Indian country here lies the future theater to which archaeologists will go in increased numbers to find what I confidently believe will climax the study of Aboriginal life in Texas and on the Continent of North America.

I have discovered within recent weeks a determined drive by eastern collectors to get out of Texas her rich possessions in Indian relics. If I followed my inclinations tonight I would urge upon the members of this Society a solid front of opposition to this carting away of these priceless finds.

Not only is the east grasping for our rich heritages in Indian lore and in fossil remains, but universities in Europe are constantly taking from the confines of our state the last vestige of evidence bearing upon the life of these ancients, while in nominal silence our educators and our lawmakers view with apparent small concern these impoverishing raids.

I want these products of our research, from layman to learned man, preserved in Texas for Texas posterity. I want them placed within reach of all, so that in the end we shall have reaped full benefit from the noble task begun in years past by men of your patriotism and high resolve for education advantages.

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