An Indian Camp Site in the Northern Finlay Mountains, Hudspeth County, Texas*

Keith F. Walker and David W. Trexler

During the summer of 1939 a geological field class from Southern Methodist University, working in the Finlay Mountains of Hudspeth County, Trans-Pecos Texas, was impressed by the number of old Indian camp sites. The following summer the authors on a similar trip to the same area were able to spend several days in studying one of these. Because the time spent at the site was limited to that which could be spared from the geological field work, it was impossible to make as thorough a study as could be desired. Due to the difficulty in reaching the area there has been no comprehensive study made of the Indian camps in the Finlay Mountains, to the knowledge of the authors; hence the following material is presented as a preliminary account.

*The writers acknowledge the assistance given by Professor C. C. Albritton, Jr., of Southern Methodist University in making possible the following study and in criticizing the manuscript. They thank Professor T. N. Campbell of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Texas for classifying artifacts collected at the site. Messrs. George Potts and James Trexler are responsible for the photographs of the camp site and artifacts respectively.
AN INDIAN CAMP SITE
HUDSPETH COUNTY, TEXAS

Fig. 2. Map of the site.
Location and General Description

The campsite may be located on the Fort Hancock topographic sheet at latitude 31° 38' 20" north and longitude 105° 38' 20" west. Lying on the face of a mesa slope at the northern margin of the Finlay Mountains, the site overlooks a broad valley which extends to the east for about two miles where it terminates as Hawk Draw, and to the west where it broadens and joins the Hueco Basin. In effect, this is a re-entrant of the basin between the Diablo Plateau on the north and the Finlay Mountains on the south.

Rocks of two formations, the Cox and Finlay, both of Cretaceous age, make up the mesa and the plateau to the north. A cliff-forming sandstone layer which marks the upper limit of the site is the top member of the Cox formation (Fig. 1). This bed is a resistant, dark brown- to black-weathering, buff-colored sandstone divided into large joint blocks along widely spaced cracks. Its thickness is from 30 to 40 feet. Overlying it are limestone beds of the Finlay formation.

Fig. 3. The main shelter, showing size of blocks which have moved down-slope from the cliff-forming sandstone layer above.
Covering an area of approximately 22,000 square yards, the site extends from the valley floor 500 feet up the mesa slope to the base of the cliff-forming layer of sandstone. This resistant bed has been eroded much more slowly than the comparatively soft shale and interbedded limestone which underlies it. During the formation of the adjacent valley, great masses of the sandstone have broken off along joints, rolled, slid, or crept downslope. It is these boulders which first attract one's attention, both in the Finlay Mountains and along the Diablo Plateau where the same sandstone crops out. They must also have attracted the attention of the Indians who inhabited this area years ago, because with few exceptions their occupancy is indicated only on boulder-covered slopes of the kind here described.

It is still a matter for discussion why the Indians chose this particular spot for habitation. The boulder-strewn slopes undoubtedly afforded shelter and protection, but if any natural sources of water were once available nearby, they have disappeared.

Some blocks are as much as 45 feet long, 35 feet wide, and 25 feet high; others are only a foot or two in diameter. An interesting aspect of the boulders and most of the cliff face is the dark brown to black crust which covers the surface of the rock. This crust may have formed by the recurrent saturation of the sandstone blocks with meteoric water, the consequent solution of iron compounds within the block, and the later concentration and deposition of the iron as oxides at the surface with the evaporation of the water. It is this crust which enabled the Indians to make their petroglyphs. By pecking through the outer dark brown layer the clean buff-colored sandstone beneath was exposed. The result was a "white on brown" effect (Fig. 4).

Associated with the camp site are remnants of old fires, ash and fire-cracked rock found below the cliff where the slope flattens to meet the valley floor. Middens and hearths cover the whole lower part of the site, extending almost across its entire width and some seventy-five feet
Fig. 4. A boulder of Cox sandstone showing brown rind and numerous petroglyphs.
from the valley floor up the slope. In this same area remnants of sotol pits were noted, though these were somewhat disturbed by slope-wash from the cliff. Many broken bits of pottery and flint arrowheads were found in the hearths and around the shelters. Slope wash has tended to concentrate the artifacts downslope from the places where they were left.

Trails were noted running through the site and along the cliff. These paths are very faint and are soon lost if an attempt is made to follow them any distance.

Shelters

The shelters at this site are in huge sandstone boulders which litter the slope. Some of these boulders (as large as 25x25x25 feet) contain hollows which evidently are due to weathering. Other shelters are simply boulders so tilted as to provide protection. That shelters of both types were used by the Indians is indicated by accumulations on the floors of some and by pictographs and petroglyphs on the walls of others. Outside the shelters artifacts, ash, and other cultural debris accumulated, although a great deal of this material has subsequently washed downslope. In two of the shelters mortar holes are sunk into the rock floor.

One of these shelters, the outstanding feature of the area, is a huge hollowed boulder (25x25x15 feet), located near the center of the site (Fig. 2). This boulder evidently was the nucleus of this Indian camp (Fig. 3). Within the hollow interior ten men may sit comfortably. Nine mortar holes can be counted at the edge of the opening, and a sandstone pestle was found nearby. Faint pictographs along the walls and ceiling have been stained by smoke as has most of the interior. Fine silt, ash, and flint chips cover the floor. More ash and artifacts were found in this particular shelter than in any of the others, and petroglyphs are numerous on the outside walls. Most of the artifacts, including projectile points, drills, and a great amount of broken pottery, were found immediately downslope from this shelter. Faint paths lead away from it in all directions.
The only pictographs found at this camp were on the walls and ceiling of the shelter described above. These are painted predominantly in black and red, with some white and purple intermixed. So faint are the designs, it is difficult to distinguish exactly what they were supposed to represent. One of the clearer ones, however, seems to indicate a conventionalized man leading some animal, similar to that described by Kirkland (1940) at the Hueco Tanks thirty miles to the northwest.

Petroglyphs

Petroglyphs have been pecked into many of the boulders (Fig. 4) on the slope, and on the ledge of sandstone from which the boulders were originally broken. Some of these boulders are completely covered with figures and designs.

A great majority of the petroglyphs have been inscribed in the vertical sides of the boulders and sandstone ledge. Very few designs were found on the tops of the boulders.
and none of the top of the ledge. There seems to have been no particular face preferred by the artists; petroglyphs occur in almost equal numbers on the sides facing in different directions.

Perhaps the most common subject for portrayal at the site is the arrow point (Fig. 4). This particular figure is found in great numbers on almost all of the petroglyph-covered boulders. The points of all these arrows are directed downward. Other petroglyphs represent conventionalized human and animal forms, geometric figures, and other designs which seem to have no definite form or shape. Some of these figures may be correlated with those described by Jackson (1938) for this area and with others described by Osburn (1941) in his paper on another site nearby.

**Pottery**

Although no whole article of pottery was found at the site, nearly one hundred and fifty fragments were collected. These range in size from one to thirty square centimeters. The most common type of pottery is El Paso Polychrome, plain and painted. At least half the sherds found at this site were of this type. A few specimens of El Paso scored and El Paso corrugated wares were picked up, these types being somewhat rare at this particular site. Next in number were fragments of Chupadero, black on white (Fig. 5); Three Rivers, terracotta; and Three Rivers, red on terracotta. The pottery assemblage suggests that the site was occupied within the interval 1300 to 1500 A.D.

**Artifacts of Flint and Chert**

Drills, projectile points, and great amounts of flint chips are found around shelters and in middens. Of the flint objects discovered, few were perfect specimens. As the flint artifacts in general are very difficult to identify, it was impossible to correlate them with any particular cultural phase.

The following are general descriptions of the best flint artifacts found:

---

¹This pottery was identified by Professor T. N. Campbell, Department of Anthropology, University of Texas.
No. 1—a flat, chipped, projectile point of steel gray flint. The base has been flaked so that concavities appear on either side; evidently these served for binding to a shaft.

No. 2—a small, chipped, projectile point of charcoal-gray chert.

No. 3—a long flat, chipped flint point of rawsienna-colored chert; perfect except for one broken barb.

No. 4—a long, rounded drill chipped from agate-gray chert; broken at the base.

No. 5—a small flake of dover-gray chert; incompletely worked.

No. 6—a flat, crudely chipped projectile point of shell-gray chert.

No. 7—Terminal portion of a piece of flat jasper; part of a projectile point or possibly a blade.

No. 8—a small point of chipped jasper, Spanish-cedar in color.

No. 9—a flat projectile chipped from liver-brown jasper; point broken; edges notched.

No. 10—a small, flat, chipped, peach-colored, chert projectile point. It has been broken just below the base, which has very definite barbs.

Petroglyphs as Criteria for Stability of Boulders on Slope

Not only is the site interesting from the point of view of the archaeologist, but also from that of the geologist. It has been pointed out by Campbell, Howard, Albritton, and Osburn (1941) that the orientation of petroglyphs on boulders may indicate whether or not the boulders have moved since the petroglyphs were formed. In every instance it was noticed that the petroglyphs at the site described in this paper were in their normal position; that is, the long axes of bipeds were vertical and the long axes of quadrupeds were horizontal. According to Professor T. N. Campbell, who classified the pottery from the site,

\(^a\)Numbers refer to specimens in Fig. 6.

\(^b\)Colors after Maerz and Paul (1930).
the date of habitation of the camp is between 1300 and 1500 A.D. Therefore it may be concluded that the boulders on the slope have been relatively stable for at least four hundred years.

References
Osburn, D. N., Petroglyph and Pictograph Site in the Finlay Mountains, Texas, *Field and Laboratory*, (1941), Vol. IX, No. 1, pp. 30-35.