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AN ARCHAIC HORIZON CACHE FROM
SOUTHERN MINNESOTA

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The Archaic horizon in the upper Mississippi River valley watershed is a preceramic archeological complex characterized by chipped and ground stone implements; a hunting, fishing, and food gathering economy; and primary burials in pits or shallow graves. The important archeological marker is the lack of pottery. While this complex is poorly known in Minnesota, it has received more attention further south in Illinois and Missouri. The Modoc Rock Shelter on the Mississippi River in southern Illinois, for example, contained a deeply stratified deposit showing a well developed Archaic complex ranging in time from slightly before 8,000 B.C. to approximately 2,000 B.C. (Fowler, 1957). The Archaic site described here is important for it exhibits affinities with the Archaic complex of Illinois and Missouri and because it documents one of the few sites from this horizon known in Minnesota.

The cache described here includes 43 complete and fragmentary chipped stone blades found by Stephen Franz of Mountain Lake during plowing of a field on his father's farm in Cottonwood County. The field from which the blades came is located on a terrace thirty feet above an intermittent creek flowing northeasterly into the basin of Mountain Lake, now drained. The creek is two miles south of the city of Mountain Lake in Section 10 of Township 105, Range 34 West. Stephen located the precise area of the find and notified Professor Lloyd A. Wilford of the University of Minnesota. In August, 1958, Professor Wilford and the writer spent part of two days excavating a 10 x 10 foot test pit adjacent to the spot where Stephen had located the cache. The cultivated topsoil extended six inches below the surface and lay above a strongly contrasting yellow clay subsoil. All of the topsoil lay within the plow zone, but shallow plowing had left the subsoil undisturbed. Two six inch levels were excavated, level one consisted of the topsoil, and level two the yellow subsoil. The excavated earth was sifted through $\frac{1}{4}$ inch mesh screen. The only cultural material recovered consisted of two white chert blades like those found previously and a single broken side-notched projectile point. These three objects came from the topsoil; the yellow subsoil was sterile.

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The chert blades are of three types. The majority (24) of the specimens are symmetric, bifacially flaked blades which taper from a slightly rounded base to a point at the opposite end (Fig. 1, Nos. 1, 2, 7, 9, 13). These long, leaf-shaped blades are double convex in cross section and are flaked by percussion flaking only. The second type consists of 9 symmetric, bifacially flaked blades which are again flaked only by percussion flaking, but which differ from the first group in shape. These blades are tablet-shaped, with two long, nearly straight, parallel edges and rounded ends (Fig. 1, Nos. 4, 32). The third group differs considerably in that these specimens are asymmetric in form and are flaked by percussion flaking on only one surface. The opposite surface has not been modified, but shows the original flake scar formed when the blade was removed from the chert nucleus (Fig. 1, Nos. 5, 18, 25, 30, 38). These blades are not uniform in shape, but tend to have one long straight edge opposite a curved edge. The single broken projectile point seems out of place and unrelated to the blades. It is probably a stray, perhaps associated with the Woodland village site on the island in Mountain Lake, and subsequently mixed with the earlier materials during cultivation of the field.

Large chert blades of the types described here are sometimes called "blanks" by archeologists and are assumed to be roughly shaped objects which were kept to be finished into projectile points at

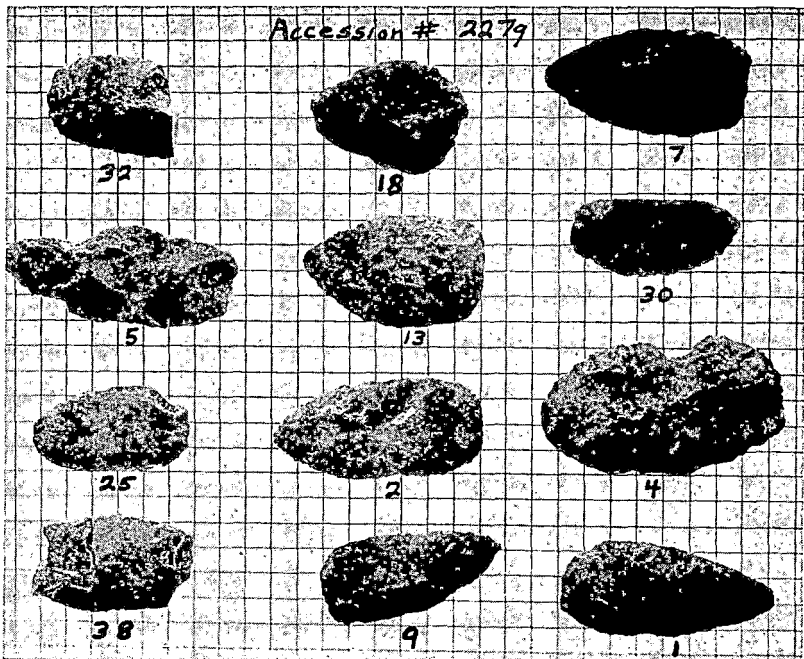


FIGURE 1. Selected Blades (1 cm. grid scale)

a later time. This may be true of the pointed symmetric blades from the Franz Site. The tablet-shaped blades and the irregular asymmetric blades, however, appear to be knives in a finished form. The edges of these latter blades are sinuous, due to flaking from alternate faces of the blade, and are admirable cutting edges.

All of the blades are large, ranging from 44 to 95 mm. in length, 23 to 53 mm. in width, and 8 to 14 mm. in thickness. All are made of a very fine white chert which is very uncommon in the Minnesota area, but the prevailing material further south. Typologically, the blades are identical to specimens from the Starved Rock Site, an Archaic horizon site in Illinois (Mayer-Oakes, 1951).

CONCLUSIONS:

It is apparent that the site described here is not a habitation site. The absence of any flint chips, the by-products of the manufacture of the blades, and the total absence of all other cultural remains indicate that the large, white chert blades were shallowly cached and somewhat scattered at a much later date by agricultural activities. Large knives of white chert are not typical of the Woodland or Mississippian horizons in Minnesota and because of their typological similarity to Illinois Archaic blades, are concluded to represent an Archaic horizon cache.

LITERATURE CITED

- FOWLER, M. L. 1957. Modoc Rock Shelter: an Early Archaic Site in Southern Illinois. *American Antiquity*, 23:3.
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