

## Archaeological Manifestations of Owen County, Indiana

VERNON R. HELMEN, Indiana University

The Indiana Historical Bureau, aware that the archaeological past of the state becomes more difficult to recover and reconstruct with the passing of each year, has instituted county archaeological surveys that are conducted during the summer. The Bureau's hope is to eventually survey all areas of aboriginal occupation in the state. This season's investigations were carried on in Owen County.

The purpose of the survey was to determine the extent that projected flood control would effect sites in the county, as well as to determine the archaeology of the county as a whole. Initial work was made immeasurably easier by a preliminary survey made by Glenn A. Black (1) in 1932. Mr. Black kindly turned his unpublished notes over to the survey party, my wife and me.

Owen County, which is located approximately forty-five miles southwest of Indianapolis, is crossed diagonally from northeast to southwest by the west fork of White River. Eel river enters the north central portion of the county from the north and then bends almost due west to flow across the northwestern portion of the county almost to the Clay County line where it exits to the north. After looping around the county to the west, the Eel again enters in the southwest corner and flows due east for about one mile when it bends south and leaves Owen to enter Greene County.

We unceremoniously dubbed our survey method the "vacuum cleaner technique," for we tried to pick up all aboriginal material but the dirt on a site. This technique resulted in the collection of all flint chips, potsherds, and any boulders showing signs of artificial pecking or abrasion. During the evening, the material collected during the day was washed and examined for any interesting usage and the unworked material was discarded. We found that on ninety-five percent of the sites, amorphous flakes that exhibited very fine secondary chipping on one face and on a small portion of the edge of the flake were being picked up. On some of the sites, up to 60 percent of the total flakes collected showed this type of workmanship. A little experimentation showed us that we could duplicate these implements by taking an unworked flake and scraping on a stick with it. A few scrapes would form the implement, for the pressure put on the flake in scraping struck off flakes on one side only and formed a shallow concavity. It is evident then that these retouched flakes are only flakes that had been used once as a scraper, a few times at most, and then discarded.

The majority of the sites surveyed in the county and all of the major ones are located on rivers or close to them. The nine pottery bearing sites are all found in the valley of the White river. This is

only logical for the semi-sedentary, semi-agricultural, pottery-making people who inhabited these sites would choose a location where good land was available for their corn. The bottoms of the White river have the best soil for corn in the county. Then too, the river offered easy transportation to these people who lived in this formerly heavily wooded area.

The large village sites in the southern part of the county, especially Hickam Village site, show certain relationships with Greene County material reported by Black. (2) The village is accompanied by two mound groups, one of eight small mounds, and one of four. These mounds tend to be grouped in three's a Green County trait. The mounds have been pitted in all but three instances and one mound was partially destroyed when a tree growing upon it blew over. Stone slabs in the interior of the mound are revealed in the hole caused by the fall of this tree; such slabs in mounds also occur in Greene County. The pottery from this site is the common grit-tempered, cord-marked Woodland ware. One of the large vessels found here is shown on page 250 of Lilly's "Prehistoric Antiquities of Indiana." (3) The village area was under cultivation this summer and many refuse pits were apparent, showing up as dark areas in the sandy soil on which the village was located. All of the arrowheads found at this site were of the notched or stemmed type, no triangular points occurring.

The Summit Village site in the northern portion of the county does not show this close relationship with Greene County. Here there is only an artificially modified knoll instead of a mound group, over half of the arrowheads are triangular, though of the wide-based woodland type. The pottery, while Woodland, exhibits modification in that all rim sherds recovered were maleated on the lip while the clay was still plastic. This resulted in beveling the rim in a distinctive manner not seen elsewhere in the county. This type of rim treatment is seen in Castle Creek Focus (Owasco Aspect) of New York State, as is the predominance of triangular points.

One other site, the Pectol Camp site on Rattlesnake Creek, shows interesting divergence. Here, in an area approximately 100 x 100 feet, we picked up on the surface more than twenty hand mullers and slab mortars. No other site in the county produced so many of these implements, though hand mullers were quite common.

In summation, it can be said that Owen County was occupied by Woodland peoples though, as you can see, with variations from site to site. Hickam Village site and the Summit Village site need to be examined more closely to determine the extent of their divergence and their relationships to other areas.

### Bibliography

1. Black, Glenn A., Unpublished field notes.
2. Black, Glenn A., *The Archaeology of Green County, Indiana History Bulletin*, Vol. X, No. 5, 1933.
3. Lilly, Eli, *Prehistoric Antiquities of Indiana*, Indiana Historical Society, Lakeside Press, R. R. Donnelley & Sons Company, Chicago, 1937.