

A Preliminary Report on Martin County

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At the present time under the employment of the Indiana Historical Bureau and the direction of Mr. Glenn Black, an archaeological survey is being made in Martin County. Since there is probability of dam construction which will flood White River Valley between Shoals and Williams, special attention has been given to this pool area.

White River is located in a deep meandering valley into which the larger tributary streams flow in flat valleys. The minor ravines descend from the irregular ridge-tops as steep U-shaped trenches in which bed rock is prominent. The flat valleys contrast with their steep rocky sides where vertical bluffs of massive sandstone are prevalent. Bluffs of from twenty to fifty feet are common and vertical ones one hundred feet or more in height occur. On the outsides of the meander curves of White River these bluffs are particularly prominent and precipitous.

The two northern townships of Martin County are closed to examination since they are within the Naval Ammunition Depot, although from reports of former inhabitants there is little of archaeological interest there. Lost River township in the southeast has several good sites in it, although work there is hampered by the roughness of the land. Little work has been done so far in the most southwestern township, but I think it will likely yield some very interesting sites. In the central five townships are located the majority of the 130 Martin County sites found thus far.

For the county in general, six shell mounds have been located while reports of three more are on hand. These range from forty to one hundred and fifty feet in diameter, and are on high bluffs, with two exceptions. One is located at the foot of a vertical cliff and may represent material thrown over from a hill-top camp, since I have a report of shells having been seen on top of this cliff. The other is on a low sand ridge extending into the old river bottom.

I have visited about half of the twenty-seven overhangs or rock shelters reported. Four overhangs yielded small quantities of pottery, three have hominy holes, and three show no indication of use.

Fourteen locations have been designated as village sites—either on the basis of pottery presence or quantity of material found. One site within the pool area is of special interest and might be worthy of exploration. Here White River in flooding has produced a washout close to the edge of a level tract of several acres, most of which would probably show habitation debris if tests were made. This is in pasture now and the owner prohibits digging. Many pottery sherds are found there mixed with quantities of every fine flint chips and animal bones. The artifacts found by the survey consisted mainly of about a dozen finely-made trianguloids and a small expanded base drill less than an inch long.

One other village of some size is located in the southern end of Martin County. It is situated on a flat-topped ridge a quarter mile

from White River and is perhaps one hundred feet above the river. This site is approximately three hundred yards long by one hundred yards wide. Contained in this area, more or less at the edge, are three or four concentrations where shell, bone, flint, and fire-cracked rock are in abundance, and which I think constitute refuse pits. No pottery has been found at this site, although for surface material this is one of the richest sites in the county.

With the exception of possibly one small earthen and one or two stone mounds, all reports of mounds in Martin County have been unproductive.

Several burial grounds have been reported, but only one offers any evidence. This is located at one end of a half-mile length of river bottom which shows continuous traces of occupation, and which is supposed to have been a favorite camping site during historic times. Here the flood of 1882 washed out skeletons, associated with sherds of clay pottery and iron kettles.

A section of Indian trail approximately one-half mile in length has been reported to me in the southeastern corner of the county, but not other traces of it have been located.

The remainder of the sites are simple campsites—small areas showing only slight amounts of camp debris—and are of no particular interest at this time.

We hope to be able to finish the survey this season, and although looking forward to interesting developments, it is likely that the pattern for Martin County will remain predominately at a campsite level.