New Material from Marion County, Indiana

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In 1948, a paper dealing with the archaeological manifestations of Owen County, Indiana, was presented before this Section of the Academy. A portion of that paper was devoted to the chipping patterns observed on amorphous flakes and speculation as to their formation and use (1). In 1951, William G. Haag published a paper concerning the flake artifacts found at the Jaketown site in Mississippi (2). The similarity of the artifacts from these two areas indicated a need for re-examination of worked flake artifacts in Indiana and for this purpose, material from Marion County, Indiana, was collected and examined.

In the past, these artifacts have been variously termed, "retouched flakes," "microflints," and "microflakes." The author would like to suggest the use of the term "used flakes" as this term would more accurately describe these artifacts and would avoid any connotation of size or specific manner of manufacture.

The used flake is characteristically an amorphous flake struck from a core, with one or more areas of fine marginal chipping on one face only (faceplan). Certain chipping patterns group used flakes into several categories: 1) those with a marginal line of very small, delicate chip scars along a relatively straight edge (D & I); 2) flakes having a line of flake scars on the margin of an excurvate portion of a flake (C); 3) flakes exhibiting an incurved or lunate margin heavily scarred by use (A & E); 4) flakes exhibiting a pointed marginal projection delineated by small flake scars (H & G); and 5) those flakes which combine several or all of the flake patterns described into a veritable prehistoric Boy Scout knife (F & B).

The method by which these artifacts were produced is still not clear. It is very probable that many of them were formed simply in the course of use, for continuous scraping of a sharp edged flint flake on a piece of wood will produce relatively fine chipping of the kind observed. Certain of these artifacts, however, were very deliberately chipped so as to provide a working edge, notably the graver types.

Unlike Haag's findings in Mississippi, the used flakes examined from Marion County are not restricted to a pre-pottery horizon. They occur in all horizons; however, from the superficial studies so far made in Indiana, they seem to occur most abundantly on pre-pottery and Early Woodland sites.

The question will be asked concerning the aboriginal use of these artifacts. While it is yet too early to do more than hazard a guess based on logic, the author would like to theorize that they were used for the shaping and carving of wooden, bone, and antler articles. Except in rare instances, only the non-perishable remains of prehistoric cultures are recovered by the midwestern archaeologist. Yet we can be quite sure that a group living in what is now Indiana would make use of the plentiful supply of wood for artifactual and artistic purposes, and we have many examples of their bone and antler craft. An analysis of scrapers and

knives indicates that such forms would be of very limited use in executing fine detail in a wood carving. However, a sharp flake of accidentally appropriate form or intentionally shaped for use on a specific feature of a specific wooden article would be a handy and useful implement superior for such work to a scraper or a knife. This type of usage would also explain the very small size and peculiar shapes of some of these artifacts.

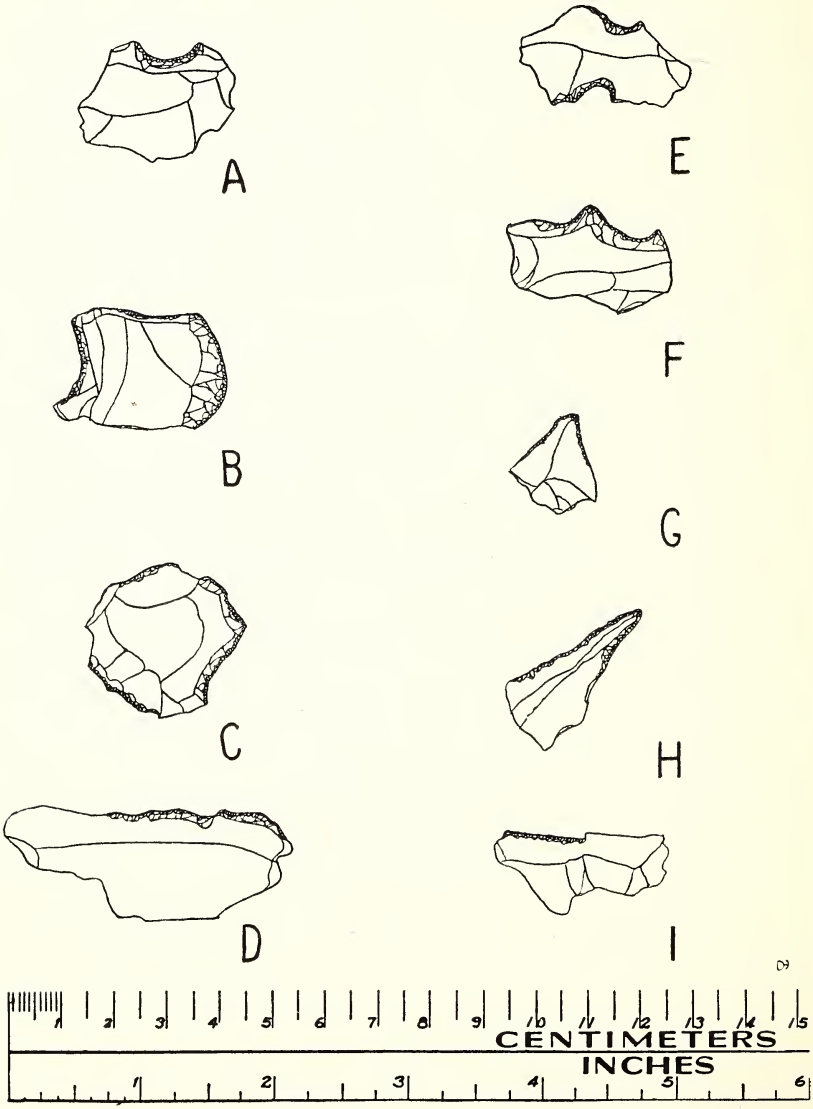

Figure 1

As to their profusion on many sites and widespread distribution, it may be surmised that on habitation areas littered with flint chips, such flakes could be quickly and easily found, fashioned, and used; and, as is usual with anything that is easily obtained, more frequently discarded and replaced than preserved for further use. It is hardly conceivable that any culture which used flint tools would overlook the plentiful supply of small, hard, sharp-edged tools ready-made as by-products of their flint industry. We may expect, therefore, that wherever we find flint chips on an aboriginal habitation site we will find that a certain proportion of them will show evidence of usage.

The present state of our knowledge concerning used flakes is very meager. This lack can only be overcome by intensive study of all flakes from a few sample sites so that the percentages of the various forms can be derived and related to the cultures represented. It is conceivable that in the light of knowledge so derived, the used flake may acquire a diagnostic significance. It is interesting to speculate about the flakes taken from mound fill and burials by excavators of the past. A re-examination of those flakes still available for study could very possibly reveal new data concerning some of the cultural values of prehistoric groups.

In areas of heavy modern occupation, many of the aboriginal sites have been so intensively cultivated and collected since the 19th century that most of the more easily recognized artifacts have been picked up, leaving only fire cracked rock and flint chips. This is the situation on many sites in Marion County. For the local archaeologist who is engaged in locating and recording the aboriginal sites of his area, any artifact that can help him in such a task is of importance; and it is in this area of endeavor that the used flakes have their most immediate usefulness.

Literature Cited

1. HELMEN, VERNON R. 1948. Archaeological Manifestations of Owen County, Indiana. Proc. Ind. Acad. of Sci., Vol. 58.

2. HAAG, WILLIAM G. 1951. The Jaketown Flint Industry. Newsletter, Southeastern Archaeological Conference, Vol. III, No. 1.