

Alton: A Paleo-Indian Site in Southern Indiana

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Acknowledgments

I was made aware of and taken to the Alton site by Robert Edler of Bedford, Indiana. Mr. Edler had collected material from the site and told me of other people who had collections from it. One of those individuals is Donald Champion of Tell City, Indiana. I am indebted to both Mr. Edler and Mr. Champion for sharing their knowledge of the site with me.

Location and Description of the Alton Site

The Alton site is situated upon a terrace in a large bend of the Ohio River in Perry County. It is about 800 feet southwest of the river and is separated from it by floodplain. A small tributary of the Ohio River flows about 800 feet west of the site as presently defined. Beyond this to the west rises the rugged upland topography of the Crawford Upland.

Upon examining the site with Robert Edler under good survey conditions, we found a sizeable quantity of chert debris, a few campstones, some oxidized rock, and some chert artifacts scattered over an area of a few acres. Mr. Edler estimated that the Paleo-Indian material had been found in an area approximating two acres.

The Alton site may well be the same as site 12Pel71 which is briefly mentioned in an archaeological survey of Perry County (8). No Paleo-Indian component is mentioned for 12Pel71 in that report.

Artifacts from the Alton Site

During our visit to the site, we recovered 1 flint core, 22 complete and fragmentary bifacial objects of varying degrees of workmanship, 1 drill fragment, 1 Early Archaic bifurcated base point, 1 side notched Archaic point, 1 Late Archaic stemmed scraper, 1 Turkey Tail-like point, 1 small trianguloid point, 11 point fragments, 1 blade section of what appears to be a Paleo-Indian point, and the base of a Plano-like point which has ground lateral edges.

In the collection we made from the site, there are also at least 31 variously shaped unifacial flake tools which exhibit retouch or use modification on one or more edges. They were apparently utilized for various scraping and cutting functions and include a graver with a prominent beak formed by retouch, 16 elongated flakes with lateral edge modification, 5 end scrapers, and 9 other flake tools. The end scrapers also possess lateral edge modification.

A noticeable feature of the unifacial tool collection is that frequently moderate to large sized flakes were utilized. Seven of the elongated flakes with lateral edge modification, 4 of the end scrapers, the graver, and 3 of the other unifacial artifacts are large.

Mr. Edler had previously collected 10 large unifacial flake tools (Fig. 1) from the site. They include 1 end scraper, 8 elongated flakes with lateral edge retouch, and 1 elongated flake tool which has retouch on both lateral edges and possesses a pointed tip. The latter type of tool is herein termed the Alton knife.



FIGURE 1. *Flake tools collected from the Alton site by Robert Edler. Top row left: Alton knife. Top row second from left: end scraper.*

Mr. Champion's collection from the site includes 2 Alton knives, 1 fluted Clovis-like point, 29 unfluted Paleo-Indian points (some of which are basally thinned), and 13 tips and blade sections from Paleo-Indian points (Figs. 2, 3, 4, and 5).

Ten of the 12 concave based lanceolate points occurring in the top row and on the left in the bottom row of Figure 3 exhibit varying degrees of basal thinning. Eight of them are ground on their basal and lateral edges.

The point on the right in the bottom row of Figure 3 resembles Meserve and Dalton points (13, 17). It has basal grinding, is alternately bevelled, and is serrated along one side.

The point on the left in the top row of Figure 4 resembles a variant of Quad points as described by Rolingson (13). It is basally and laterally ground and is serrated along one edge.

The 5 lanceolate points on the right in the upper row of Figure 4 have concave bases and small basal "ears". The fourth point from the right is basally thinned on one side. As a group these artifacts are well made and exhibit basal and lateral grinding and a rather thin flattened cross section.

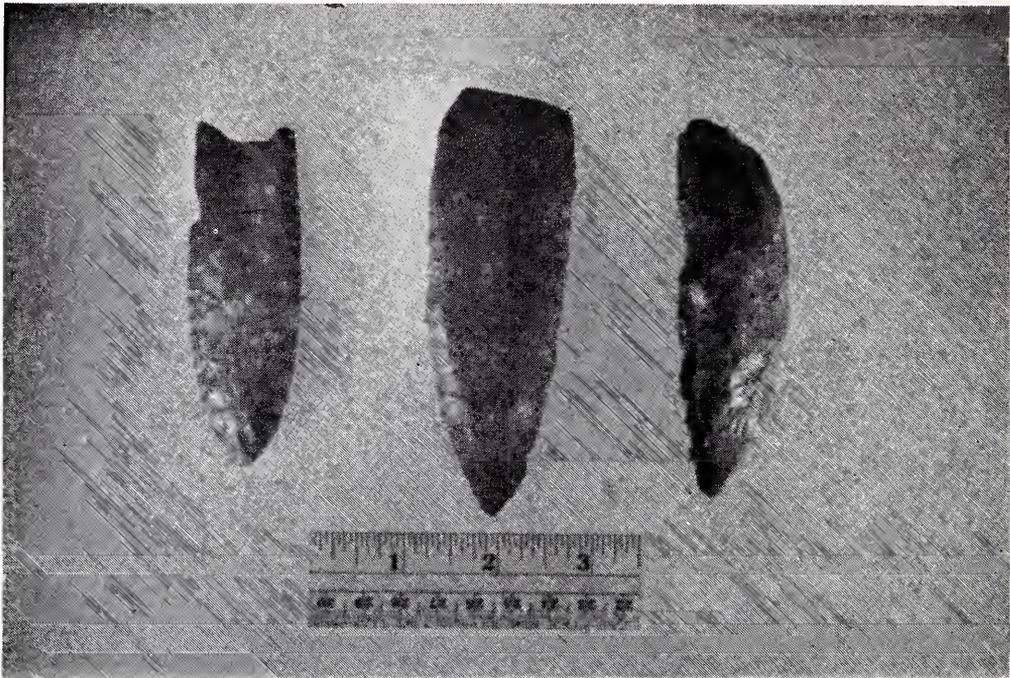


FIGURE 2. A Clovis-like point and two Alton knives collected from the Alton site by Donald Champion.

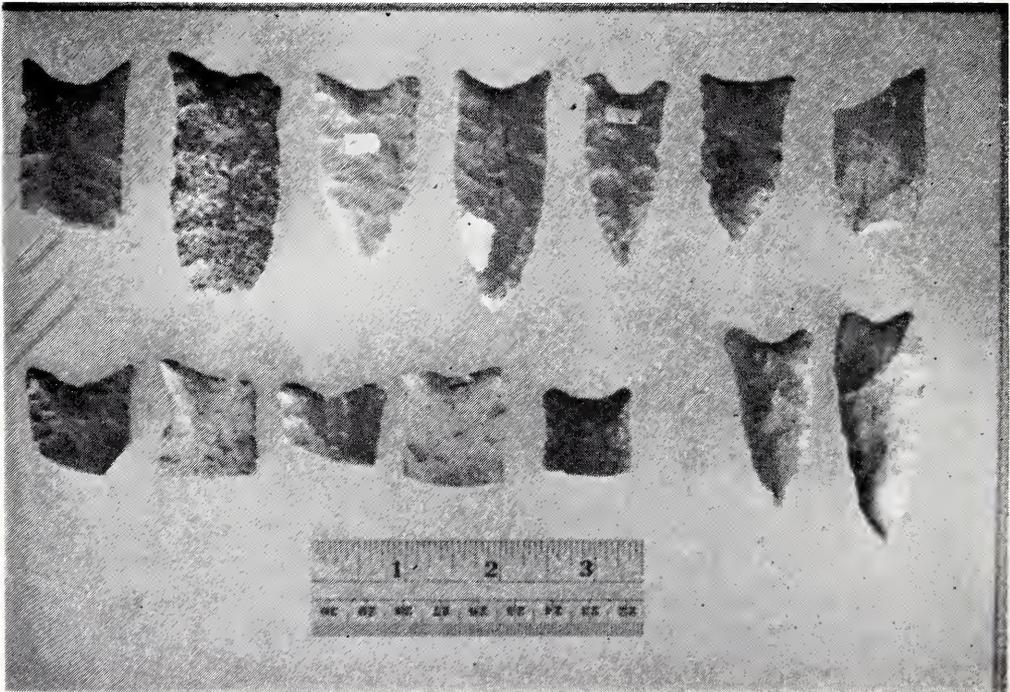


FIGURE 3. Paleo-Indian points collected from the Alton site by Donald Champion.



FIGURE 4. *Paleo-Indian points collected from the Alton site by Donald Champion.*

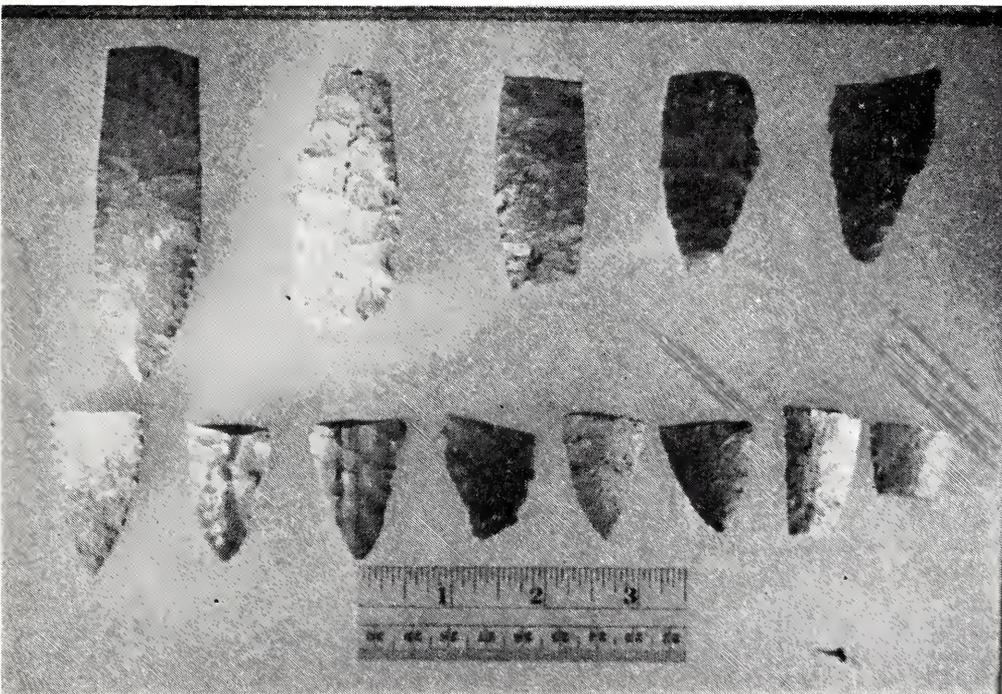


FIGURE 5. *Paleo-Indian points collected from the Alton site by Donald Champion.*

The 8 lanceolate points in the bottom row of Figure 4 have a straight to slightly convex basal edge. As a group they are well made and exhibit basal and lateral grinding and a fairly thin flattened cross section.

The group of 13 lanceolate points mentioned in the preceding two paragraphs resembles specimens from Kentucky classified as Paleo-Indian (13) and examples from Ohio ascribed to the late Paleo-Indian Plano Complex (11). They also resemble late Paleo-Indian Angostura and Agate Basin points described from sites west of the Mississippi River (17).

The flake tools from the Alton site are comparable to those described for Paleo-Indian assemblages in the eastern United States as can be seen by referring to the literature pertaining to a number of eastern Paleo-Indian sites (2, 4, 9, 10, 12, 14, 16).

Paleo-Indian Sites in Indiana

Hundreds of Paleo-Indian points have been found in Indiana, but these are by and large scattered finds. To my knowledge the Alton site is one of the few locations recorded for the State which has produced any quantity of Paleo-Indian material and at this time appears to be unique in Indiana in terms of the amount of Paleo-Indian material recovered. To illustrate the situation, the following is a tabulation of locations known to me in the State which have or reportedly have produced more than a single Paleo-Indian item.

Two fluted points were reported from site 120w117 which is situated on a terrace along the West Fork of White River in Owen County (Rector Parks, personal communication). One fluted point and an unfluted Plano-like specimen have been recovered from site 12Gr378 in the upland of eastern Greene County (15).

A number of Paleo-Indian points have been reported from sites located near the mouth of Guthrie Creek along the East Fork of White River in Lawrence County. One fluted point is said to have come from site 12Lr8 situated on an elevation at the base of upland adjacent to river bottom (Willis Coombs, personal communication). A nearby site, 12Lr42, which is located on a terrace has reportedly produced 3 fluted points and a Quad-like point (Robert Edler, personal communication), and another fluted point is reported from 12Lr43 which is about 900 feet from 12Lr42 (Robert Edler, personal communication). In addition, E. Y. Guernsey (6) reports several fluted points from what he terms the Guthrie Creek site. I have reason to believe that the Guthrie Creek site is the same as 12Lr42.

John Richardson has informed me that there are 2 Paleo-Indian points from Vigo County site 12Vi68 in the collections at Indiana State University. This site is situated on an elevation in bottomland along the Wabash River.

Two fluted points are reported from the well known Bone Bank site in Posey County (3). Bone Bank was a large heavily occupied Mississippian site located on the bank of the Wabash River. It has now been

destroyed by the cutting action of the river. There is some evidence that one of the Paleo-Indian points was buried beneath the Mississippian zone. A discussion of Bone Bank occurs in Adams' Posey County report (1).

Dorwin (3) states that the Mann site in Posey County is a likely candidate for classification as Paleo-Indian, but he does not elaborate. The Mann site is a very large and important site situated on a terrace along the Ohio River. It is best known for its Middle Woodland component (1).

Eight Paleo-Indian points consisting of both fluted and unfluted examples have recently been reported from site 87-38 in Warrick County (Randy Rasure, personal communication). This site is situated on upland adjacent to what was probably a marshy area.

Another site at which Paleo-Indian material may be or may have been buried below later components is the renowned Crib Mound site in Spencer County. Crib Mound is a shell midden situated on the bank of the Ohio River, and unfortunately much of it has been eroded away by the river in the past 30 years. This site is primarily known for its Late Archaic occupation (7). Dorwin (3) reports 3 Paleo-Indian points from Crib Mound which possibly originated below the shell deposit.

E. Y. Guernsey (5, 6) indicates that many Paleo-Indian points have been found at sites near the Falls of the Ohio River in Clark County and "upon an extensive low terrace upon a branch of Silver Creek in Monroe and Union Townships". Some of the sites are said to be on islands near the falls. In addition, Dorwin (3) mentions the Schafer site in central Clark County. He states that there are 10 fluted points in the collections of the Indiana Historical Society (now at the Glenn A. Black Laboratory of Archaeology at Indiana University) which reportedly were found at the Schafer site by Guernsey. Unfortunately the exact location of the Schafer site has not been determined. It is possible that the material attributed to the Schafer site actually came from a general area rather than from one specific site.

Summary

The Alton site is a multicomponent site situated on a terrace of the Ohio River in Perry County. A major component(s) of the site is Paleo-Indian, and the Alton site has produced considerably more Paleo-Indian material than any other site known to me in Indiana. In fact there are few sites recorded for the State from which more than a little Paleo-Indian material has been recovered.

Based upon comparisons with materials from other Paleo-Indian sites in the eastern United States, there are many items from the Alton site which are or may well be Paleo-Indian. At a minimum these include end scrapers, a graver, Alton knives, a variety of other unifacial flake tools, and several kinds of Paleo-Indian points consisting of both fluted and unfluted examples. Some of the points resemble previously described styles (e.g. Clovis, Meserve, Dalton, Quad, and Plano) and suggest utilization of the site in both early and late Paleo-Indian times.

The Alton site appears to be a significant early site, and further research is intended.

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