

The Mockingbird Gap Clovis Site: 2007 Investigations

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From May 29 to June 29, 2007, students of the University of New Mexico Summer Archaeological Field School excavated Locus 1214, a spatially discrete Clovis occupational locus of the huge Mockingbird Gap Clovis site (LA

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26748) (Huckell et al. 2006, 2007; Weber 1997; Weber and Agogino 1997). The site is located approximately 40 km southeast of Socorro, New Mexico, in the desert grassland of the northern Jornada del Muerto. Occupation occurs in surface and near-surface contexts along a low ridge paralleling Chupadera Wash. In 2006, we discovered Locus 1214 at the northern end of the site; two 1-m² test pits (units 12 and 14, thus the designation) produced nearly 60 flaked-stone artifacts, including the basal corner of a Clovis point (Huckell et al. 2007). Weber previously recovered three Clovis point fragments from the surface at the slightly eroded northern edge of this locus. These results demonstrated that excavation would be productive. The goals of the 2007 investigations were: 1) to determine the internal organization and kinds of activities undertaken; 2) to investigate Clovis lithic technological organization; and 3) to assess lithic evidence for Clovis mobility patterns through source identifications of recovered artifacts.

After creating a 1-m grid system encompassing the 10-by-19-m probable extent of the locus, we chose a 10 percent random sample of units (19); we completed 14. Within all excavated units we encountered a distinctive stratigraphy. The uppermost deposit is a sand with a 5- to 25-cm-thick reddish brown Bw soil horizon that gives way to a 2- to 10-cm-thick underlying gley (Bg) horizon. This deposit is separated by an erosional contact from an older reddish brown Pleistocene sand that exhibits a well-developed Btb horizon. Excavation was carried out by these natural divisions—Stratum 1 being the Bw, Stratum 2 the Bg, and Stratum 3 the Btb—and by arbitrary 5-cm levels within each stratum.

The excavations yielded one Clovis point base, 4 biface fragments, 9 small whole and fragmentary flake tools, 5 graters, 4 utilized flakes, and 956 pieces of debitage. Fifty-eight percent were recovered from Stratum 3, 19 percent from Stratum 2, and 23 percent from Stratum 1 or at the modern surface. No evidence of post-Clovis occupation was found. Twenty-eight small pieces of tooth enamel were recovered, morphologically consistent with bison or, less likely, camel or horse. Also recovered were 13 small, highly weathered large-mammal bone splinters. The stratigraphic distribution of the enamel and bone fragments mirrored that of the stone artifacts. Taken as a whole, the assemblage suggests that Locus 1214 is a short-term camp and processing area.

The most abundant lithic material (49.2 percent) was a chert varying from light green to dark green to black from an unknown, but perhaps nearby, source. Second in abundance (15.9 percent) was a red rhyolite locally known as Socorro jasper, available from sources in the Chupadera Mountains 55 km west of the site. Third most abundant (4.1 percent) was Chuska chert, derived from the Chuska Mountains approximately 400 km to the northwest. Present in smaller quantities (2.7 percent) was Correo China chert, found in the eastern Zuni Mountains ca. 200 km to the northwest, and two flakes of Mt. Taylor (Grants Ridge) obsidian from near the town of Grants 190 km to the northwest. A third obsidian flake is likely from Cerro Toledo in the Jemez Mountains. These data suggest a general northwest-to-southeast path of travel that brought the occupants to this locus.

Stratigraphic studies in Chupadera Wash adjacent to the site continued in 2007 using a Giddings soil-coring rig. We now have four cores that approached

or penetrated 11 m deep, all refusing in bedded sand and gravel encountered at ca. 10 m below present ground surface. These fluvial deposits are overlain by 2–3 m of dark, organic-rich gray-to-black mud with interbedded sand and gypsum of lacustrine/palustrine origin. Radiocarbon dating of bulk decalcified samples from the carbonaceous muds in core 07-9 yielded ages of 10,285 ± 115/-110 RCYBP (745-765 cm; A-14713); 11,245 ± 180 RCYBP (830-845 cm; A-14714); 11,870 ± 230/-225 RCYBP (857-876 cm; A-14790); 11,665 ± 135 RCYBP (930-950 cm; A-14791). Undoubtedly the stream/marsh setting on the floor of the wash attracted both animals and people.

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