

Some Unusual Artifacts from Val Verde County, Texas

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INTRODUCTION

During the past few years the Val Verde County area has come into the limelight of archeological interest in Texas, due to construction of a dam just below the mouth of the Devils River to form Amistad International Reservoir. Because many archaeological sites will be flooded in this unique area of Texas, salvage of archeological information has been concentrated in the southern part of the county by such agencies as the Texas Archeological Salvage Project, Austin. During field work in the area, individual artifacts or situations have been encountered which are either outside the area to be reported, or were not related to the current work and therefore would not be reported. A few of the important and generally rare artifacts are described in this report.

PAINTED MUSSEL SHELL

In April, 1965, a painted mussel shell (Fig. 1, a-b) was found in rockshelter site 41 VV 63 (University of Texas county site number) on the Pecos River, about 12 stream miles above its mouth. The shelter is quite large, over 100 feet long and 40 feet deep. Pictographs covering a large boulder before an altar-like platform have been described by Grieder (1966). Potholes near the back of the shelter show the dry deposits to be primarily shallow, generally less than 3 feet, and full of grass beds, yucca and lechuguilla concentrations, stick clusters, and other vegetal materials. Projectile points include *Langtry*, *Frio*, and *Ensor* points, and possibly other types.

The painted shell was one of numerous local river shells in an upper fiber zone exposed in the front, central portion of the shelter. At this location, quids, string, and large amounts of fiber and other plant remains were exposed by the natural sloping of deposits toward the shelter front. This zone, no doubt, represents the *Ensor-Frio* period (Greer, 1966) or possibly early Neo-Indian groups, sometime after A. D. 500.

The shell is 97 mm. long and 66 mm. wide. On the inner surface is a

linear drawing in black of a stylized man with 2 arrows or spears sticking into each side. The hooked lines at the head probably represent a headdress (pronghorns of an antelope?), and the painted areas above the head are of unknown significance. Paintings of similar wounded, shaman-like men are common in the mouth of Rattlesnake Canyon (site 41 VV 180) on the Rio Grande just above Langtry (see Newcomb, 1967: 9-12). Highly stylized shaman figures of this sort are reminiscent of those found within the Pecos River Style pictographs, Period 3 or 4 (Newcomb, 1967: 45; Parsons, 1967: 6-8). No other painted shells of this sort are known for western Texas.

CLOVIS POINT

The proximal section of a *Clovis* point (Fig. 1, c) was found in 1965 adjacent to a midden circle site (Greer's site TX-30) in central Val Verde County about 23 miles north of Comstock. The site is on the west bank of the Devil's River at the mouth of a canyon known locally as Burnt Canyon. Although the midden circles date to the *Ensor-Frio* or Neo-Indian periods, underlying terrace deposits range back at least into early *Pandale-Nolan* times. The point is made of a gray flint, possibly of local origin, and is covered with a smooth, white patina. The lower lateral edges are smoothed; the base is not. Channel flakes were removed from the base on both faces.

Other Paleo-Indian period projectile points have also been found in Val Verde County. *Plainview* points have been found at the mouth of the Devils River (Johnson, 1964), in Mile Canyon near Langtry (Dibble, 1965), at a small burned-rock midden about 10 miles north of Comstock near Dead Man Pass in the upper reaches of Dead Man Canyon, which drains into the Devils River (Salome Cantu, *pers. comm.*), and various rockshelters along the Rio Grande and in the Pecos drainage (*Ibid.*; Nunley, *et al.*, 1965). *Folsom* points have been found on an open site just outside of Del Rio by a local collector, and one was found in or below early *Plainview* levels of Bonfire Cave near Langtry (Dibble, 1965). I found a wide, thin, fluted point and a small, *Angostura*-like point (laterally smoothed) on a small site near Cienegas Creek just west of Del Rio. This surface site also contained abundant Archaic materials, such as *Langtry*, *Shumla*, *Frio*, and *Ensor* points. Gonzalez Rul (1959) reported the only other Clovis point from this region. It was found in a small burned rock midden on the south side of the Rio Grande just above Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila.

CERAMICS (Fig. 1, d-e)

A small, clay pipe of Indian origin was recently collected by J. H. Word about 23 miles north of Comstock in central Val Verde County

(Devils River drainage). This is a bowl fragment with 18 vertical and over 10 horizontal parallel, incised lines covering all but the upper part of the rim (Fig. 1, d-e). During manufacture of the pipe, first the horizontal lines were made, circumscribing the entire bowl. Then the vertical lines were made from bottom up. After drying, the upper centimeter to clay was smoothed off about 1 mm. deep, thus removing the incisions in that area. A portion of the back was also smoothed at that time. The sides of the interior are nearly parallel (not converging), and the lower part of the interior is burned, obviously from smoking. The lip is flat, and the very hard paste is light gray, fine texture with no obvious temper.

Dee Ann Story (*pers. comm.*) suggests that the incised pipe is a trade item from the Frankston Focus, probably dating around A.D. 1200–1600 along the upper Neches River around Anderson County in Northeast Texas (Suhm, *et al.*, 1954: 184–189). The *Handbook of Texas Archaeology* (*Ibid.*) lists as characteristic of the Frankston Focus elbow pipes having widely-flaring bowls decorated with engraved or punctate designs. The specimen from the Devils River is nearly parallel-sided and is decorated by incising and grinding. It seems possible that this pipe is attributable to roving Plains groups who were in contact to some extent with Frankston Focus peoples (Hassinais?) to the east. There could easily have been free exchange of ideas and goods between such groups. Kelley (1955) has already indicated how some groups (e.g. Jumano) traveled great distances both across the state and into Mexico and apparently were in friendly contact with many different peoples.

This incised fragment is the only ceramic pipe of Indian manufacture known for Val Verde County. Archaic stone pipes have been found at Castle Canyon (41 VV 7), Eagle Cave (Davenport, 1938; Schuetz, 1961: 199, Ross, 1965: 105), and the Devil's Mouth Site (Johnson, 1964: 68). Historic porcelain pipes have been found at a small site near the S. P. Baker ranch house on the Devils River 23 miles north of Comstock. The ages for the porcelain pipes are uncertain, but they apparently predate the memories of the present family, i.e. back to *circa* 1890.

At a site (Greer's site TX-30) near the location of the Indian pipe described above, Word collected 2 small potsherds of a type generally called *Leon Plain*. Both appear to have come from the same vessel. These have a black exterior and a light brown to tan interior. The core is half gray and half brown, corresponding to the surface colors. The paste, of very fine texture, contains small white flecks, probably shell temper. Both specimens are 5 mm. thick.

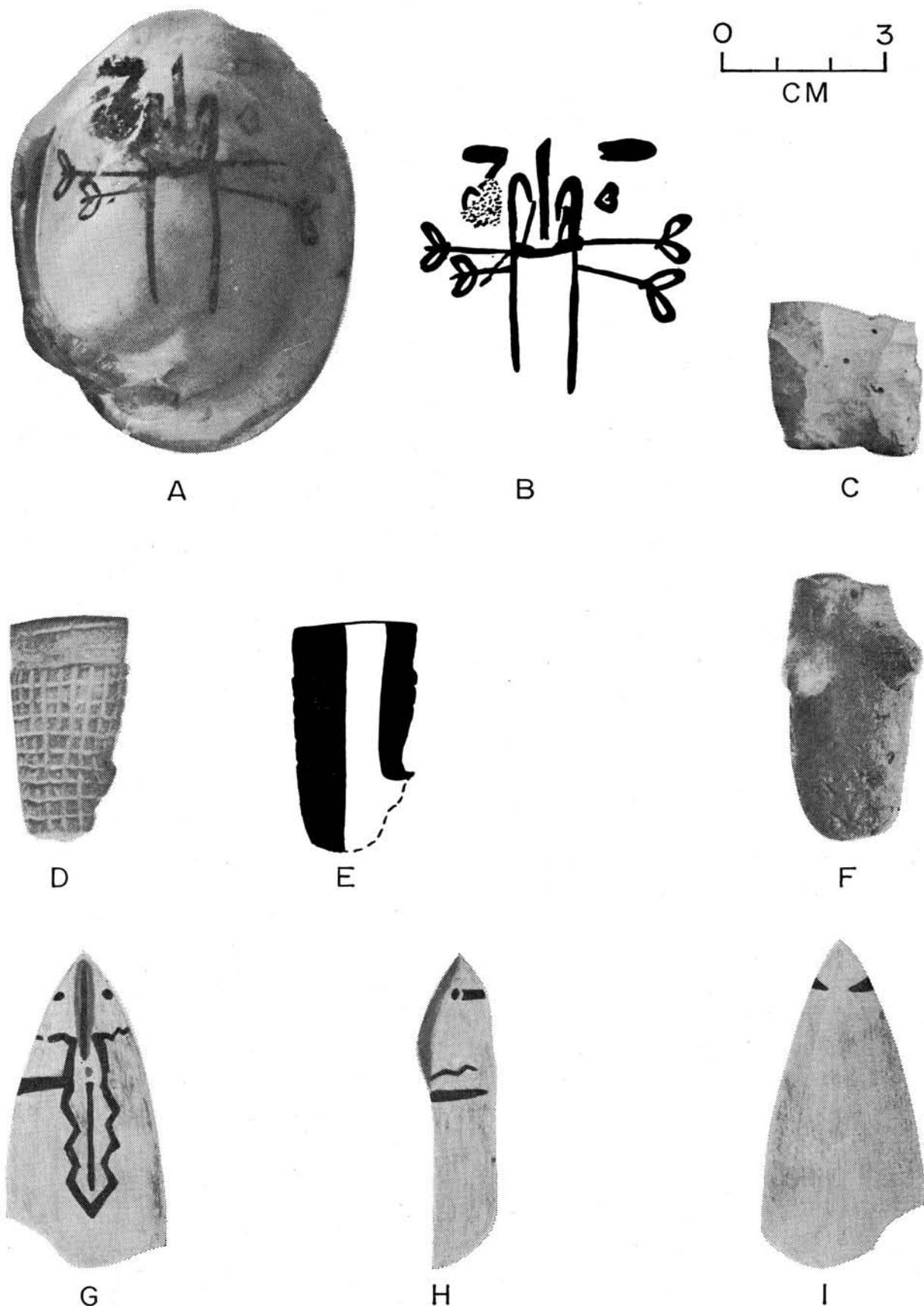


Fig. 1. Miscellaneous artifacts. a-b, painted shell; c, Clovis point; d, pipe; e, pipe cross-section; f, clay figurine (41 VV 7); g-i, clay figurine (Arroyo Caballo), front, side, and back. (Horizontal line on right side of mouth punctuation omitted from drawing.)

These sherds do not appear to be related to any Mogollon types and probably belong to the Eastern tradition of ceramic styles, possibly from the Plains area. Although pottery is extremely rare in this county, similar sherds have been found at the mouth of Devils River (Johnson, 1964) and at a midden site about 10.5 stream miles above the mouth of the Devils River (McClurken, 1967).

CLAY FIGURINES

A clay figurine (Fig. 1, g-i) from the Amistad Reservoir area was found in a dry rockshelter in Arroyo Caballo, a tributary canyon on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande (George Pappas, *pers. comm.*). It has a medium-dark gray color and is made of fine, unbaked clay, which occurs abundantly in cobble to small boulder-size chunks in the gravel bars along the Rio Grande. The figurine is relatively flat and pointed at the "top"; the "bottom" has been broken, but was probably pointed in the same manner. Decorations include punctations, raised areas of clay, and black paint on parts of the specimen. This figure is 71 mm. long (93 mm. estimated total length of the complete specimen), 31 mm. wide (maximum), 12 mm. thick at the body, and 15 mm. thick at the nose. This definitely represents a human figure without representations for arms or legs. Interestingly, the Chiricahua Apache thought it bad luck to represent human forms too exactly (Opler, 1965: 47).

Facial features include 2 punctate eyes and a raised nose. The eyes, at the edges of the front side, are painted black; and painted lines lateral to the eyes run just to the back of the head. The nose is raised, has a painted black stripe on the dorsal ridge, and is bordered by black lines toward the lower end. Midway down the nose, zig-zag lines begin at the edges of the nose and go laterally onto the edge of the figurine. The nose terminates at a single, centered punctation, possibly the mouth. A horizontal, black line running laterally on each side of this punctation¹ is suggestive of some of the designs on painted pebbles. This straight, black line continues onto the edges of the specimen, the same as the zig-zag line from the nose, but does not continue around to the back.

A single straight black line, bordered by 2 zig-zag lines which meet just below the end of the straight line runs vertically down from the central punctation. These zig-zag lines are painted on slightly raised ridges. It is probable that the lines are some sort of distinctive or

¹ The line on the right side of the figurine is shown in the side view, Fig. 1, h, but was inadvertently omitted from the front view, Fig. 1, g.

symbolic markings, such as the tatoos mentioned by Ruecking (1955: 359) for the Coahuiltecan bands and Kelley (1955: 983) for the Jumano. Still the question arises as to why the lower painted lines are on raised sections of clay.

This specimen was found in deposits containing *Shumla* and *Conejo* points and probably dates to that age (*circa* 1000 B.C.). Since the digging was not controlled, the associations can only be speculative.

Another clay figure (Fig. 1, f) was found in the reservoir area at site 41 VV 7 by Tom Munnerlyn (*pers. comm.*) of Del Rio. This is a small, headless figurine of dark gray, unfired clay, the same type material as the Mexican specimen just described. It has a smooth, cigar-shaped torso with prominent breasts and no arms or legs. Although the head is missing, the break is not sharp and gives the appearance of being slightly smoothed or of having occurred while the clay was still damp. The torso has a maximum length of 57 mm. and a maximum width (just below the breasts) of 23 mm. The maximum thickness (same point) is 19 mm. Seven millimeters above the breasts and centered just below the break at the neck is one small punctation. This specimen was found during uncontrolled digging, but from deposits yielding primarily *Shumla* points.

Fragments of unbaked clay figurines have been found in Val Verde County in caves near Langtry (Davenport, 1938; Schuetz, 1961: 203; Ross, 1965), near Shumla (Davenport and Chelf, 1947: 6), and on the Rio Grande below the mouth of the Pecos (Nunley, *et al.*, 1965). Similar figurines are reported from Brewster County (Coffin, 1932: 57). Almost all specimens of recognizable form are female figures, and the one from Muertos Cave near Shumla bears painted designs similar to those on painted pebbles (Morss, 1954: 46, 113). Considering the amount of archeological work done in western Texas, it can be said with certainty that clay figurines are not only quite rare, but their variation, age, and function are unknown.

GROOVED STONES

In May, 1967, Antonio Reyes (*pers. comm.*) found a grooved stone on a small burned-rock midden a few miles north of Langtry (Fig. 2). The fine-grained, black stone appears to be a chert-like igneous material. The cobble is unaltered except for a very highly polished groove which takes on a very dark greenish-black luster. The stone is 166 mm. long, 50–55 mm. wide, and 39 mm. thick. The groove across the center of the stone is 43 mm. long, 7 mm. deep, 17 mm. wide at the top (maximum), and 7 mm. wide at the bottom (minimum). The type of midden

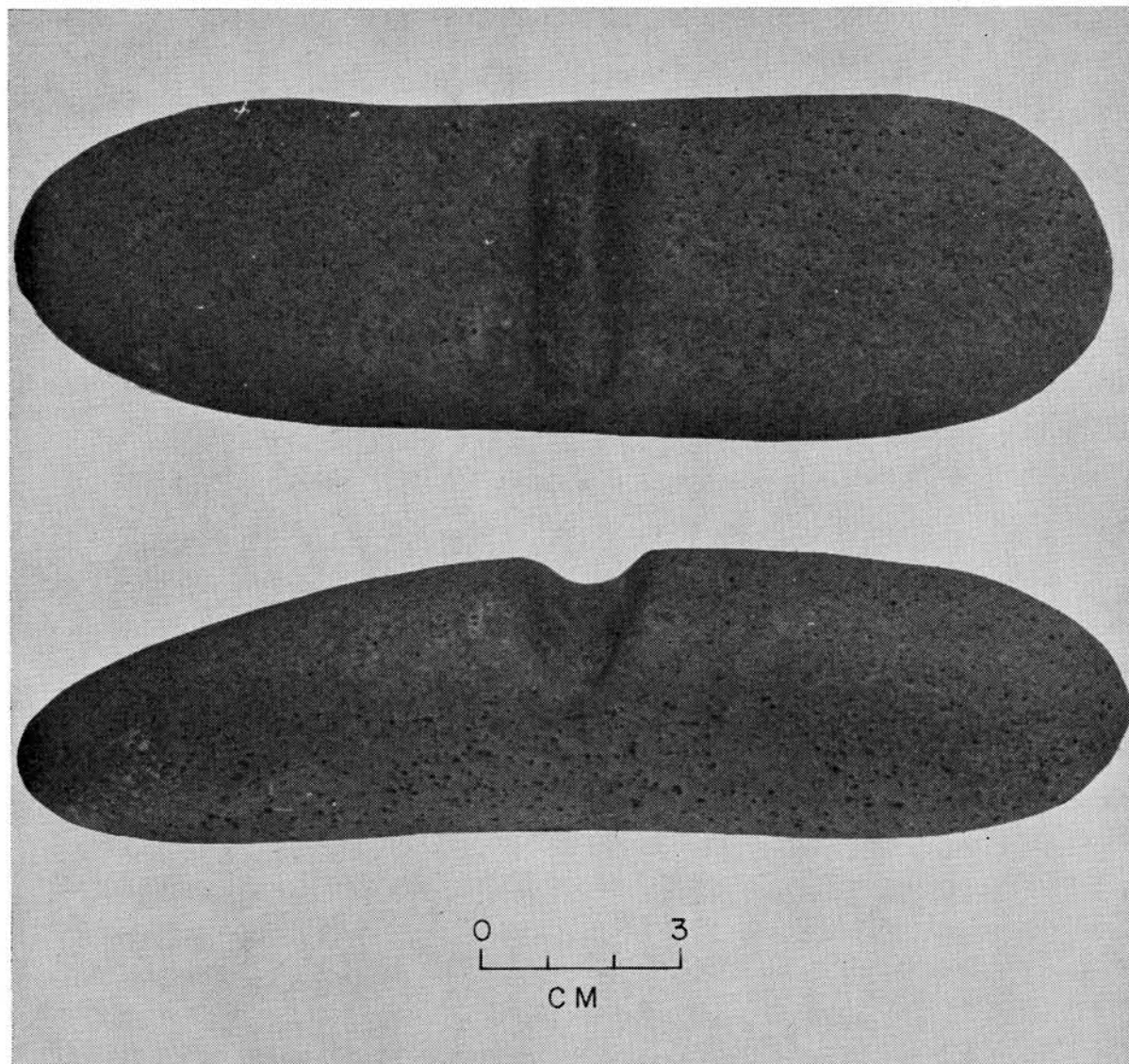


Fig. 2. Grooved stone.

on which this stone was found is unknown, nor is it known whether arrowpoints were associated.

In November, 1967, I found another grooved stone of the same type on the surface of midden circle site TX-30, the location of the *Clovis* point. This stone and the Langtry specimen are of the same type of back, semi-porous material. It is 130 mm. long, 51 mm. wide, and 38 mm. thick. The centrally located groove is 35 mm. long, 8 mm. deep, 17 mm. wide at the top (maximum), and 7 mm. wide at the bottom (minimum). All measurements (except the total length of the natural stone) are nearly identical with the previous specimen. The stone was found on the upper part of the hillside site in an area of material dating almost exclusively from the *Ensor-Frio* period or Neo-Indian stage.

P. M. Baker, the owner of an adjacent ranch previously found an almost identical grooved stone on a nearby midden site. Unfortunately,

the age of this specimen is also uncertain, but it probably dates from the *Ensor-Frio* period or later.

Although grooved stones of this sort are found periodically in the La Junta (Presidio) and El Paso areas and throughout the Mogollon region, they have not been reported for the Val Verde County area. The western specimens are thought to have been used as arrow straighteners or shaft smoothers (Kelley, 1948). The possibility that these stones date from the *Ensor-Frio* period again suggests that the bow and arrow was introduced during an earlier period than previously expected. It seems quite possible that the grooved stones are part of the midden circle complex, in which the small side-notched *Ensor* "dart points" were hafted on arrows. Midden circles generally date after A.D. 1000 (unpublished dates from the University of Texas Radiocarbon Laboratory) and range west throughout the Jornada district, where grooved stones are generally found.

FOUR-EDGED BEVELED KNIFE

In the collection of P. M. Baker of Comstock is a Plains-type 4-edged knife beveled on the left edge of the distal two-thirds (70 mm.) and the right edge of the proximal third (33 mm.) of the blade. The specimen is 103 mm. long, 32 mm. wide at the widest point (the juncture of the beveled sections), and about 6 mm. thick. It is made of a non-local, bluish-gray flint with a yellow cortex. The shoulders are rounded and the base dully pointed, although other knives of this type are often quite diamond-shaped with angular corners and pointed bases. The lower 20 mm. of one edge and 12 mm. of the other edge next to the base are smoothed, probably from use.

The knife was found on the surface of an area of scattered midden material on a terrace of the Devils River about 20 miles north of Comstock near Camp Hudson. No diagnostic projectile points were reported from the site.

Only 3 other 4-edged knives have been reported from Val Verde County (Poteet, 1938: 262), all of unknown cultural context in cave sites. They are also rarely found by collectors over most of Texas as far south as the Rio Grande below Del Rio, east into the Caddo regions, and west into the area of the Jornada Branch of the Mogollon. In Texas they become increasingly more common as one moves north from the southern edge of the plains country around Sheffield up through the Panhandle toward their primary distribution on the Great Plains.

In Texas, knives of this type, usually made of a bluish flint similar

to the Baker specimen or of alibates dolomite, are often found with notched and plain triangular arrowpoints (e.g. the *Harrell* type), but stemmed arrowpoints (e.g. *Perdiz*) occasionally occur in the assemblages. This data would suggest a probable date of after A.D. 1350 or 1400. For the central plains area, Wedel (1959: 559, 561, 564, 566, 613) lists the 4-edged beveled knife (designated the *Harahey* type) as a trait of the Upper Republican (beginning *circa* A.D. 1100), Nebraska (A. D. 1100), Smoky Hill (A. D. 1000), and Great Bend (A. D. 1500) aspects. Poteet (1938) and Krieger (1946: 142) both stress that the beveled knives are also quite late in Texas and were probably introduced in protohistoric or early historic times.

This style of 4-edged knife, possibly beveled as a result of resharpening, is presumed to be attributable to Plains groups ranging down well into the Texas Panhandle. As one continues to follow the plains country south from Midland, he begins to encounter mountainous areas, or more properly, high steep-sided mesas. The drainage is usually north-south at this point, and the plains areas follow the streams into the mesa country in broad "troughs" of flat grasslands bordered by steep escarpments. Traveling southward, one would naturally follow the grassy plains and water courses, avoiding the bare, rocky hills. He would thus be channled into the natural troughs, which must have served as major thoroughfares for plains groups moving south in prehistoric times.

These trails continued to be used through the 1800's, when one such trail went from Fort Lancaster south to Howard's Well (in Howard Canyon), from there branching with the main trail continuing eastward up a canyon to just below Beaver Lake (the present town of Juno) on the Devils River. There the trail branched again with one route following the river south to Camp Hudson and San Felipe Springs (Del Rio), passing by the sites reported here containing the Clovis point, 2 grooved stones, the pipe and potsherds, and the beveled knife. It is stated throughout early reports (e.g. Bliss, n.d.; Bieber, 1938) that the military road followed the earlier Indian trails, along which Indian groups were often sighted.

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