

Biface Cache from Milam County, Texas

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ABSTRACT

A cache of four small bifaces found on a prehistoric occupation site near Sugarloaf Mountain in northeast Milam County is reported and discussed. This cache is of the type representing point reduction activities at a campsite, most likely unrelated to the pattern of large biface caches involving the movement or trade of Edwards Plateau chert.

THE SITE

The locale at which this biface cache was found is an uplands occupation site on an unnamed tributary of the Little River in Milam County, approximately one mile north of the river. The geographical terrain is best described as being in the Post Oak Savannah. The site covers approximately four acres of sandy uplands overlooking the Little River valley to the south with an excellent view of Sugarloaf Mountain, a very obvious landmark of the local area and on which is a recorded, heavily occupied site (41MM253).

The present site was occupied during the Early Archaic through Late Prehistoric based on time diagnostic dart and arrow point types. Projectile point types found at the site are as follows: Angostura, Axtell, Ensor, Pedernales, Wells, Darl, Carrolton, Yarbrough, Kent, Godley, Perdiz, Scallorn, Ellis, and Edgewood (Turner and Hester 1993). Various "gouge" and scraper forms were also found at this site. The collection also includes several large pieces of red ochre with many abrasion marks on them, as well as a possible burial placed in a pottery (to be reported at a later date). Lithic material are available near the site consisting of Uvalde Gravels from the bedload of the Little River.

The Cache

This cache of four small bifaces (Figure 1) was found in an uncontrolled excavation in the southwest quadrant of the site. The finder reports that the cache was found buried approximately 12 inches deep. The bifaces were stacked one atop the other, each being placed with the longitudinal axis perpendicular to the one above or below it. Specimens were placed in the presumed cache pit with Specimen #1 at the bottom to Specimen #4 which was on the top.

Specimen #1. The specimen (Fig. 1, A) is a pointed ovate biface of tan medium grade chert, and is biconvex in profile. It was probably made of a large flake spall. Flaking is random, soft hammer, percussion. Some edge grinding/dulling is evident. For its overall size, the specimen is still fairly thick. Length, 105 mm; maximum width, 55mm, maximum thickness, 19 mm; width/thickness ratio, 2.89. The longest percussion flake on the specimen is 42 mm long.

Specimen #2. This long ovate specimen (Fig. 1, B) is made from dark gray, medium grade chert. It was stacked second from the bottom in the cache pit. The

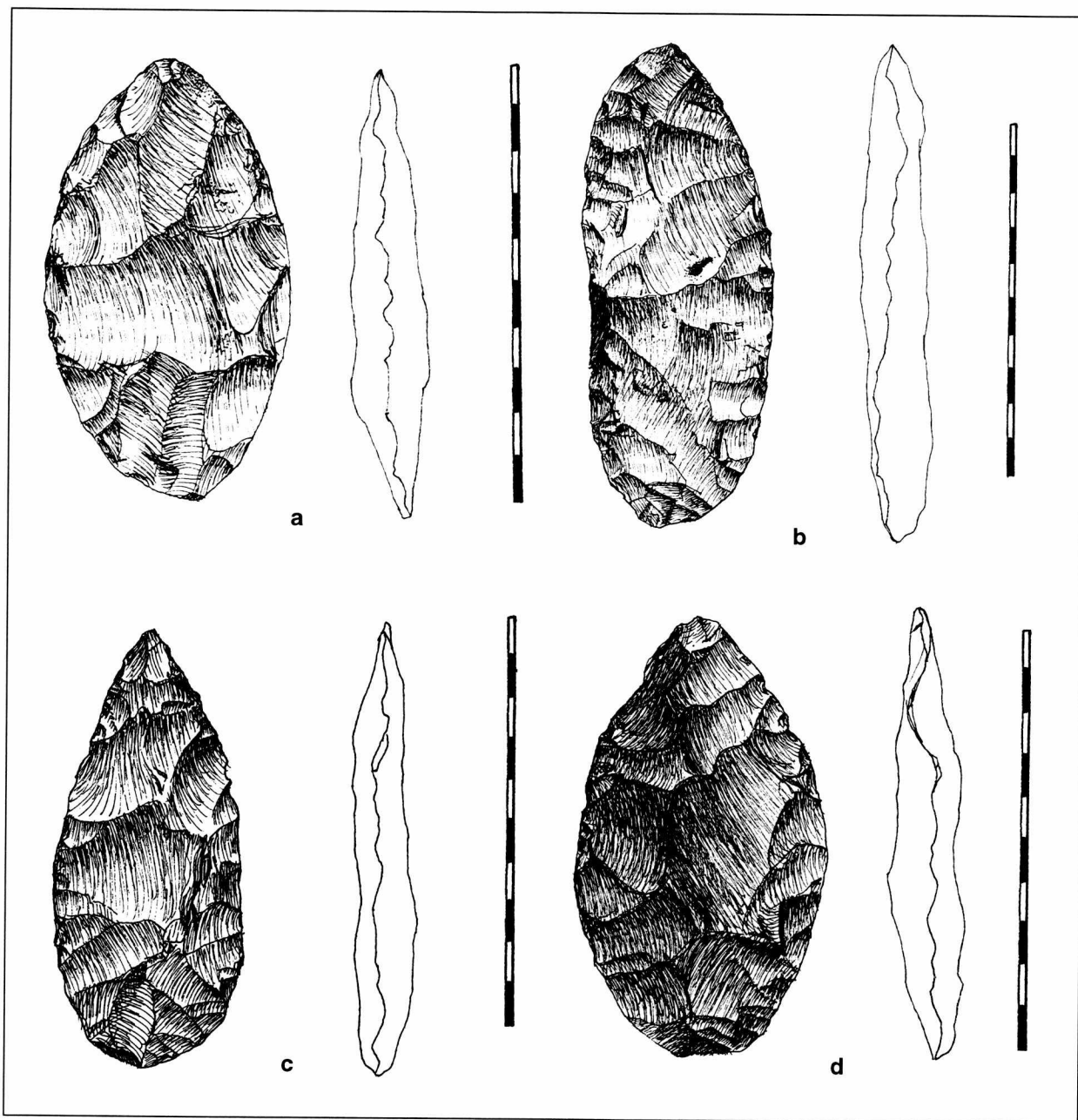


Figure 1. Biface Cache, Milam County, Texas. a) specimen 1; b) specimen 2; row, c) specimen 3; d) specimen 3. Drawings by Ryan Fain. Note separate scale (10 cm) for each biface.

biface exhibits a twisted profile created by alternate edge “beveling” or lowering in terms of platform preparation. No edge grinding or dulling is evident. Flaking is random soft hammer percussion with no basal thinning flakes. Specimen was probably made from a whole cobble. Length, 137 mm; maximum width, 42 mm; thickness, 20 mm, width/thickness ratio, 2.10. The longest percussion flake on the biface is 38 mm long.

Specimen #3. Made from tan, medium grade chert, the biface is pointed ovate in outline (Fig. 1, C) and biconvex in profile. When viewed from the sides, the lateral edges are very uneven and sinuous. It exhibits soft hammer percussion flaking and shows some edge dulling or grinding. The biface may have been made on a large flake. It had been stacked third from the bottom in the cache pit. Length, 105 mm; width, 55 mm, maximum thickness, 19 mm; width/thickness

ratio, 2.89. The longest percussion flake on this artifact is 48 mm long.

Specimen #4. This is a bipoined ovate biface (Fig. 1,D), biconvex in profile. It is made of medium grade, light brown chert. A small amount of cortex remains near the distal tip. The biface is marked by some basal thinning and generally random soft hammer percussion. No edge dulling or grinding is apparent. Specimen may have been made a large flake spall. Specimen was stacked in the cache pit on top of the previous three bifaces. Length, 107 mm; maximum width, 48 mm, maximum thickness, 13 mm, width/thickness ratio, 3.69. The longest percussion flake on Specimen 4 is 43 mm in length.

DISCUSSION

As a general observation, most biface caches reported in this part of Texas, as well as in adjacent areas, are much larger in size (Miller 1993). Further, they are often triangular in outline and percussion flaked. Such caches are usually considered to be “banking caches,” or isolated spots where a large number of bifaces were hidden or stored during—or after—the trading process.

In contrast, the four bifaces from this Milam County cache are similar in size and outline, and exhibit soft hammer flaking. In terms of context, they were found “cached” within a large occupation site. Most likely, these are preforms set aside to be used in dart point manufacture at some later date. Somewhat similar caches include one with three Castroville points, a Castroville preform, and a small marine shell at the Blue Hole site (41UV159) in Uvalde County. Mueggenborg (1994:62, 64) speculates that this cache may have had “ritual” importance; alternatively, it could have been more utilitarian in nature, such as finished points (or ones to be re-tipped) along with a preform, stored by the owner. At the Eckols site in Travis County (Karbula 2000), the 1992 field school from The University of Texas at Austin, uncovered

two or three instances of two finished points “cached” together, especially a couple of the Bulverde type (Thomas R. Hester, personal communication, 2006). Bifaces of the form in the Milam Cache would fit into Karbula’s biface stage 4, most of which he considers to be “knives,” though Hester sees them mainly as final-stage performs.

The Milam County cache reported in this paper, and those noted above, have no link to the pattern of large biface caches resulting from ancient trade involving biface production on the Edwards Plateau and export to surrounding areas. But, they remain “biface caches” linked to ongoing, campsite activities involving projectile point manufacture.

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