2009

Book Review: *The Allen Site: A Paleoindian Camp in Southwestern Nebraska* Edited by Douglas B. Bamforth

Daniel S. Amick
Loyola University Chicago

The Allen Site: A Paleoindian Camp in Southwestern Nebraska. Edited by Douglas B. Bamforth. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007. xvi + 284 pp. Maps, figures, tables, references, index. $55.00 cloth.

Douglas Bamforth and his colleagues demonstrate in this edited volume the valuable role in modern archaeology for thoughtful reinvestigation of previously studied site locations and archaeological collections. Containing 14 chapters by 11 contributors, *The Allen Site* includes comprehensive paleoenvironmental research and detailed reanalysis of cultural materials recovered from renowned excavations conducted in the Medicine Creek Basin between 1947 and 1949, deposits that hold a series of human occupations ranging from 10,550 to 8,000 radiocarbon years in age. These new studies provide valuable improvements to our understanding of environmental change and early human adaptations during the Terminal Pleistocene and Early Holocene on the Central Great Plains. The book also offers essential perspectives on the original paleontological and archaeological research in this region with a primary focus on the Allen Site (although updated geomorphic and paleoenvironmental information is presented for the nearby sites of Red Smoke, Lime Creek, and Stafford).

The first chapter presents an introduction to the project and its research questions by principal investigator Douglas Bamforth. The second, by the late E. Mott Davis (the project's original principal investigator), provides historical perspective on earlier research. Chapters 3 through 7 lay out the study's environmental background and should be of particular interest to students and researchers of Great Plains environments and their dynamics though time, demonstrating, as they do, how significantly environmental conditions differed from today's. David May's careful work on alluvial stratigraphy clearly illustrates how local variation in landforms can affect the processes of site formation. Sedimentation rates slowed during the Early Holocene, resulting in the formation of stable surfaces containing the most substantial archaeological deposits. Study of the limited sample of freshwater mussels (25 valves) by Robert Warren indicates a slowly aggrading floodplain between 10,700-7,600 cal BC when these sites were first occupied. Medicine Creek seems to have been a relatively high-discharge stream with a meandering, coarse-bedded channel and muddy backwater ponds. Today such aquatic environments in the Great Plains are usually found much closer to the Missouri River.

Proxy indicators of past vegetation communities studied by Linda Scott Cummings, Thomas Moutoux, and L. Anthony Zalucha are augmented with a high-resolution archaeoclimatic model under the guidance of the late Reid Bryson. Between 10,850 BP and 7,600 BP, it appears that short grasses decreased in abundance while warm-season tall grasses increased within the valley, reflecting higher water tables and changes in seasonal flooding regimes. During this period, the uplands contained a greater abundance of tall grasses in comparison with the short-grass dominated community of today. Interestingly, a severe decline in spruce pollen is recorded at Lime Creek prior to 13,720 BP, suggesting this shift may have occurred more than 1,000 years earlier in southwestern Nebraska than at other locations to the north and east. Gallery forests seem to have become established in the region shortly after this time.

Studies of the archaeological artifacts and features (Douglas Bamforth and Mark Becker) and faunal remains (Jean Hudson) from the Allen Site are contained in chapters 8 through 14. Animal remains indicate a progressively more generalized and mobile subsistence strategy through time at Allen. Here and in other publications, Bamforth has used data from the Allen Site to argue for distinctive kinds of Paleoindian land use and lifeways that contrast with current models sometimes characterized as high-tech mobile foraging. For this reason alone, the archaeological data presented in this volume provide a critical basis for evaluating the empirical foundations of such arguments.

Bamforth and his colleagues should be commended for bringing contemporary research questions and modern methods to bear at this important place, which had been largely underappreciated by the scientific community of researchers interested in the postglacial history of the Great Plains. Ongoing work at similar sites such as Claussen (Kansas) and Clary Ranch (Nebraska) among others will likely offer continued opportunities to reexamine and refine the interpretations that have now been developed at Medicine Creek. **Daniel S. Amick**, *Department of Anthropology, Loyola University, Chicago.*