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Caddoan Archeology

ALCOA #1 (41AN87): A Frankston Phase Settlement along Mound Prairie Creek, Anderson County, Texas

Clyde Amick, Ed Furman, Timothy K. Perttula, James E. Bruseth, and Bonnie C. Yates

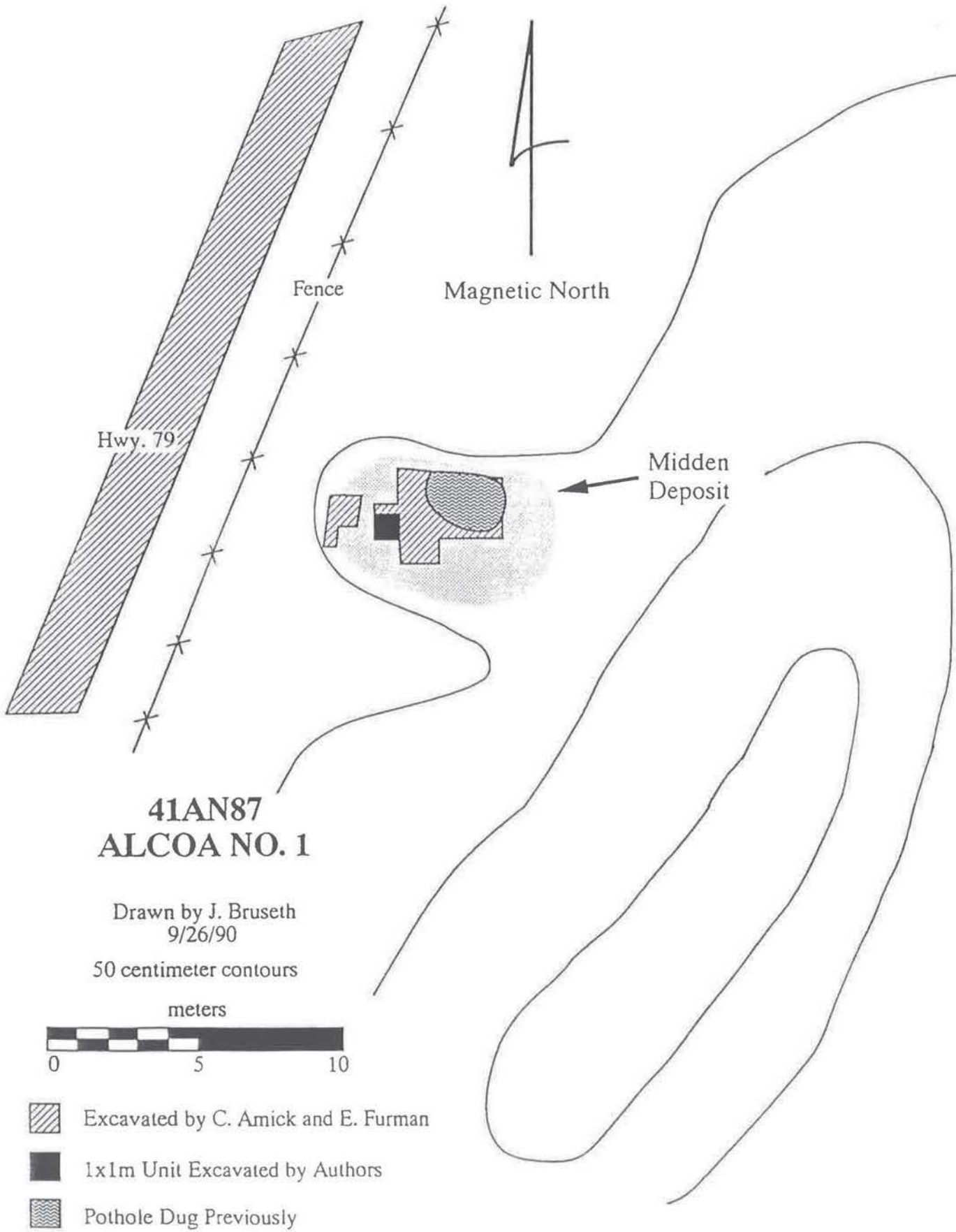
The ALCOA #1 (41AN87) site is a Frankston Phase (ca. A.D. 1400-1650) site located on a high alluvial terrace of Mound Prairie Creek, about seven kilometers northeast of Palestine, Texas. Mound Prairie Creek, a perennial stream, flows southeast to east across the county and drains into the Neches River. The site is approximately 10 meters above the Mound Prairie Creek floodplain, and the creek channel is 300 meters to the south.

Although the investigations at the site have been rather limited to date, it appears that the ALCOA #1 site is a single component Frankston Phase homestead, or possibly a small hamlet (see Story and Creel 1982:30-33). Other Frankston phase sites are known on Mound Prairie Creek, Hurricane Creek, Walnut Creek, and Brushy Creek, all Neches River tributaries, and the possibility exists that these may be part of a larger related Caddo community and settlement system.

In area, the site may cover 0.5 to 1 acre. Habitation debris has been found scattered on the crest of the landform, but is particularly concentrated in a trash midden deposit on the slope of the terrace (Figure 1). The trash midden deposits are about 100 square meters in area and between 60 and 70 cm in thickness. Faunal and floral remains are well preserved in the trash midden, and large ceramic sherds, burned clay nodules, and ash concentrations are found throughout the deposit.

A caretaker at the ALCOA Aluminum Plant discovered the site, which is thickly wooded with pines and hardwoods, a few years ago. This individual carried out uncontrolled digging in a midden area, churning approximately four square meters of deposits while looking for whole ceramic vessels; no records were apparently kept of these diggings. Amick, Furman, and Dr. Jacklyn Bass, concerned avocational archaeologists from the Palestine area, were able to relocate the site. They took it upon themselves to learn more about the site, and in 1989 initiated their own investigations at ALCOA #1. Proper notes and records have been maintained throughout the work to document the horizontal and vertical provenience of the cultural remains, and the dirt from the midden excavations has been screened through quarter-inch mesh. All ceramic, lithic, and faunal remains recovered from these excavations have been retained, including lithic debris, fire-cracked rocks, burned clay, and identifiable/unidentifiable faunal remains, and are under detailed study by the authors at this time.

Because of the integrity of the site, and the excellent preservation of faunal remains from a Late Caddoan Period component, Bruseth and Perttula visited the site with the two senior authors in August 1990. The purpose of the visit was two-fold: (a) to gather datable samples of charcoal from controlled contexts in the midden, and (b) obtain a large and representative sample of preserved faunal and floral remains from the deposit. These types of data, which are critical for addressing important regional research questions concerning chronology, settlement patterns, and subsistence (Story 1990:320), are almost totally lacking for the Late Caddoan archaeological record in the Neches River Basin (see Story 1990: Table 83 and Figure 54; Perttula 1991: Appendix V).



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The authors, with the assistance of Dr. Bass, excavated a 1x1 meter square in the midden adjacent to the midden excavations opened earlier by the two senior authors. The area was selected because of the known thickness of the midden, and on preliminary assessments of the density of cultural materials across the midden based on the previous work. The 1x1 meter square was excavated in 10 centimeter thick levels, and screened through quarter-inch mesh. Approximately 25 percent of each of the seven levels was screened through nested sixteenth-inch and quarter-inch mesh to aid in the recovery of small faunal remains and certain macrobotanical remains. Twenty liter flotation samples were also obtained from arbitrary levels 3-5 (20- 50 cm below surface) and 7 (60-70 cm below surface) in the midden.

The results of this recent work are discussed in the remainder of the paper. A more comprehensive presentation, incorporating the analysis of all materials recovered in the various investigations at the ALCOA #1 site (and related sites in the vicinity), is in preparation.

Two radiocarbon samples of charred nutshell were submitted to Beta Analytic Inc. from levels 4 (30-40 cm) and 6 (50-60 cm) in the trash midden. The uncorrected radiocarbon dates are 490 +/- 60 B.P. (Beta-43537) from level 4 and 550 +/- 60 B.P. (Beta-43538) from the level 6 sample. The calibrated ages of the samples are A.D. 1406 and A.D. 1425, with calibrated date ranges of A.D. 1387-1426 from level 6 in the trash midden and A.D. 1403-1442 from level 4 (Stuiver and Becker 1986).

Over 900 ceramic sherds were recovered in the single 1x1 meter square excavated by the authors in the ALCOA #1 trash midden. Amick and Furman have at least 1500 sherds from their excavations at the site; their collection has been photodocumented by Bruseth and Perttula, but it has not been thoroughly studied at this time. Between the two collections, over 510 sherds with surface decoration or treatment (i.e., brushing) have been identified.

As with other Frankston phase occupations in the Neches River Basin (e.g., Shafer 1981; Anderson et al. 1974), brushing is the most common ceramic surface treatment at the ALCOA #1 site. Brushed sherds, including Bullard Brushed as well as brushed varieties of Maydelle Incised and LaRue Neck Banded, account for more than 46 percent of the sherds with any type of surface treatment. Poynor Engraved accounts for about 21.5 percent of the decorated sherds, followed by Maydelle Incised, Killough Pinched, and LaRue Neck Banded with between 4 and 19 percent of the sherds. These ceramic types are also well represented in nearby Frankston phase components.

The generally low frequency of brushed sherds in the ALCOA #1 ceramic assemblage suggests that the occupation occurred primarily during the earlier part of the Frankston phase. This is supported by the two radiocarbon samples from the lower part of the trash midden.

It is interesting to note that brushed sherds in Frankston phase sites at Lake Palestine comprise between 46 and 84 percent of the decorated sherds; these are from assemblages with at least 290 decorated sherds. The latest Frankston phase sites are thought to have the highest frequencies of brushing (e.g., Kleinschmidt 1982). However, the frequency of brushing increases from 33-44 percent in the lower midden deposits (30-63 cm) to more than 60 percent in the upper midden deposits at ALCOA #1. This may indicate that the trash midden deposits have some time depth, or that more than one Frankston phase component is represented at the site, and that it dates after ca. A.D. 1450.

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Ceramic pipes are usually quite common at local Frankston phase sites (cf. Anderson et al. 1974; Kleinschmidt 1982), and the ALCOA #1 site is no exception. Pipe sherds (N=7) from elbow pipes were found throughout the trash midden, particularly in the top 30 cm of the deposit. None of the pipe sherds from the site have any decoration of them.

Burned clay pieces were abundant throughout the trash midden deposits; a total of 141 pieces were identified from the 1x1 meter square. Twenty burned clay pieces had grass and stick impressions from them being used as daub from a Caddoan structure, and two pieces

of a mud dauber nest were found between 40-50 cm. Most (N=118) of the burned clay pieces lacked impressions of sticks or plants, and their function is unknown. A clay coil fragment, recovered from near the base of the midden, provides some evidence for the production of ceramics at the site.

Only a small amount of lithic artifacts have been recovered in the trash midden excavations. These lithics include one possible arrowpoint fragment from 20-30 cm, one possible ferruginous sandstone metate fragment from 10-20 cm, five pieces of fire-cracked rock, and 26 pieces of lithic debris. The lithic debris is most common in the upper 30 cm of the deposit, and is dominated by local cherts and quartzites that were probably procured in upland gravels (e.g., Anderson 1971, 1972). Amick and Furman have recovered a single Perdiz arrowpoint from 16-30 cm below surface in their trash midden excavations.

A wide variety of faunal remains are preserved at the site, including several hundred identifiable fragments from the following species and genera: Gar sp., Catfish, Buffalofish, Frog sp., Box Turtle, Wild Turkey, medium and large birds of indeterminate species, a Raptor (cf. *Buteo* sp.), Opossum, Cottontail, Swamp rabbit, Fox or Gray Squirrel, Raccoon, White-Tailed Deer, and Bison. The faunal assemblage is dominated by White-Tailed Deer, which is typical for Late Caddoan Period samples in Northeast Texas. Bison is represented by only one element, which was recovered near the base of the midden. Although we know from ethnographic accounts that the East Texas Caddo hunted Bison in historic times, there is very little archaeological evidence available that documents the Caddoan use of this important animal species (Pertulla 1990). None of the faunal samples from nearby Lake Palestine contained evidence of Bison use (Anderson et al. 1974).

Summary

The ALCOA #1 site is a well-preserved Frankston phase settlement with abundant faunal and floral remains in a dense trash midden. The habitation area has not been investigated, and hopefully it can be protected (along with the remaining portions of the trash midden), either by State Archeological Landmark designation and/or site acquisition. The Archaeological Conservancy has expressed an interest in acquiring the property, and steps are under way to pursue this option.

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