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Current Research: Current Research in the Upper McGee Creek Drainage, Oklahoma

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In recent years the Choctaw Nation has acquired a roughly 80 square mile ranch in the western edge of the Winding Stair Mountains of southeastern Oklahoma (Figure 1). The land is currently a working ranch and timber management area. Choctaw Forestry manages timber activities and range management with the intention of returning the land to an oak savanna setting. Active logging of pine and selected hardwoods and on-going controlled surface burns are included in Forestry activity on the ranch. The project is supported by the Choctaw Nation Historic Preservation Department, which is responsible for the inventory and protection of the cultural resources found on the property.

Archeological surveys were conducted in the McGee Creek Reservoir area in the 1970s and 1980s (McGuff 1980; Perttula and McGuff 1993) and a wide range of significant cultural resources were located in the reservoir area, less than 10 miles south of the ranch. Only one previous survey was conducted on the ranch property, by the Oklahoma Conservation Commission in the 1980s (Brosowske and Vehik 1999) ahead of construction of an upland flood control reservoir. Significant archeological resources were recorded. Since very little was known about the ranch property itself, it was presumed that this portion of the McGee Creek drainage would also have a similar archeological importance.

The ranch is primarily mountainous with steep ridges, narrow to wide bench terraces (Figure 2), and generally flat and narrow floodplains along McGee Creek on the southern half and Brushy and Peaceable Creeks along the northern edge of the property. At the present time, archeological investigations have been confined to Atoka and Pittsburg Counties, Oklahoma. Approximately half of the land is heavily timbered and half is brushy pasture. Extensive outcrops of chert gravels are found throughout the area, both on slopes and along drainages. Briscoe Archeology is also

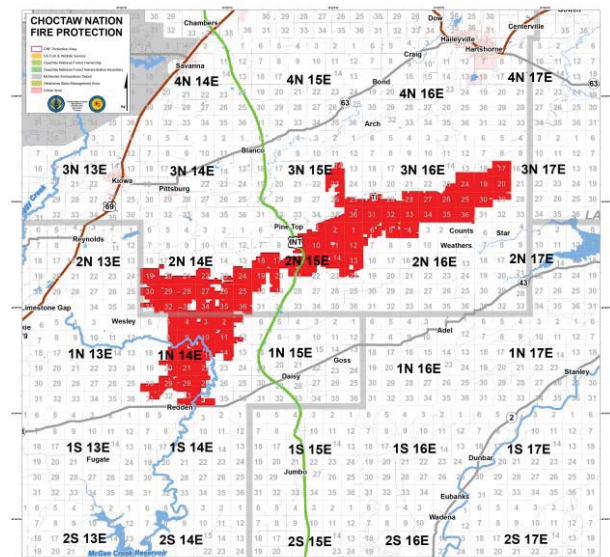


Figure 1. The Winding Stair Property. Daisy Ranch (current study area) has been designated for the portion west of the Indian Nations Turnpike (green line). Ti Valley Ranch has been designated for the portion east of the turnpike.

working with the Oklahoma Geological Survey to map and identify important lithic resources in the area.

Briscoe Archeology was contracted to begin large scale surveys on the property in 2015. So far approximately 14,000 acres have been covered (Briscoe 2015, 2016a-2016d, 2017a-b). Special attention is being placed on a 60 m-wide corridor along proposed fire fuel breaks and fence lines. Interior areas are covered by surface reconnaissance along transects of about 20-30 m intervals, walked in an ambling zigzag pattern. Around 400 archeological sites have been recorded so far.

Prehistoric sites ranging from Paleoindian through the Woodland Fourche Maline periods are common, with Fourche Maline black earth middens prevalent along major and minor stream terraces. Several large midden mounds were located along McGee Creek, suggesting that a large population occupied the area during the latter portion of the Late Archaic and possibly Early Woodland periods. Smaller encampments and activity areas are generally located



Figure 2. Typical mountain scenery of a feeder stream in the McGee Creek drainage.

on or near lithic resource areas and seasonal springs throughout the mountains (including ridge tops and ridge line benches). A basic pattern of substantial prehistoric camps/villages located along streams or along the ridgetops, surrounded by smaller camps or activity areas, has been observed.

Thus far, however, no Caddo era sites or artifacts have been recorded during the survey. The absence of evidence for Caddo occupations in this portion of the mountainous uplands may relate to the nature of a surface survey (intensive shovel testing was not performed due to a lack of soils and extremely rocky conditions), but is more probably an indication that areas this far from arable bottom lands were seldom visited or used by Caddo peoples. A similar conclusion was reached by Perttula and McGuff (1985, 1993:114) for the McGee Reservoir area, where only temporarily occupied Caddo localities were found.

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