

## A BLUFF SHELTER IN EAST CENTRAL OKLAHOMA

By H. R. Antle

In the fall of 1934 the writer excavated a large bluff shelter located one mile east of the City Lake of Ada, Oklahoma. Due to the find being in a previously unreported region and as reports on this type of habitat are so meagerly given in the previous issues of the *Chronicles of Oklahoma*<sup>1</sup> justification for the present article's publication is expressed.

The shelter is located in a deep, water-worn canyon whose sides are marked with jutting boulders, bluffs and small caves. A twelve foot thickness of cherty conglomerate contains the bluff under discussion. From all geological evidence water erosion carved the formation into its present shape at a time when the stream level was at that height.

The shelter opens to the east and overlooks a permanent stream twenty feet below. The area is crowded with many different species of trees and shrubs. A narrow ledge enables one to go up or down the canyon to the other caves and bluffs.

In measuring the extremes of the opening, the depth from front to back, height of the ceiling at front and back, the following dimensions were recorded:

Opening width .....	36 feet
Rear width .....	14 feet
Depth, front to rear.....	16 feet
Ceiling height, front .....	8 feet
Ceiling height, rear.....	3 feet

The floor debris was on an average of twelve inches in thickness. The material composing it consisted of disintegrated rock from the ceiling intermingled with dust and ancient campfire ashes. This substance was examined in sections one foot square

<sup>1</sup>*Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. III; page 243. Secretary's Report, Jos. B. Thoburn, Aug. 4, 1925.

*Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. IV; pages 144-145. Oklahoma Arch. Explorations in 1925-1926, Jos. B. Thoburn.

and sifted to recover any artifact that might have been present. As each article was removed its position was noted as to vertical and horizontal position and recorded on a sectional map of the floor. All indications of a pre-historic occupancy were found not less than eight inches deep.

In the most northern portion of the shelter and lying ten inches deep, a well-polished fist hatchet was found alongside a pile of mammal bones. As they were split into many fragments an identification was impossible.

As work progressed toward the rear, charcoal in an increasing amount was found. In the very back of the shelter and at a point where experiment proved the best draft could be obtained, great deposits of ashes and charcoal were uncovered. As they were topped with several inches of debris, hard-packed to the point that a pick had to be used to loosen it, its antiquity cannot be doubted.

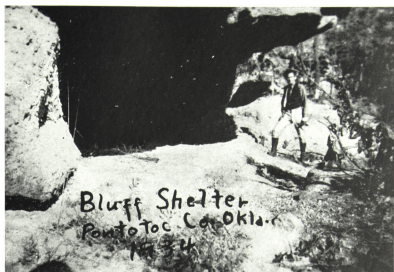
Over the floor and nearly on the same level with the camp-fire site, flint spear and arrow points, whole and broken, were found. A pit, ten inches deep and eight inches across, at the southern extreme of the opening yielded five arrow heads and about a quart of roughly-dressed flakes.

No pottery, ornaments or vestiges of such were found.

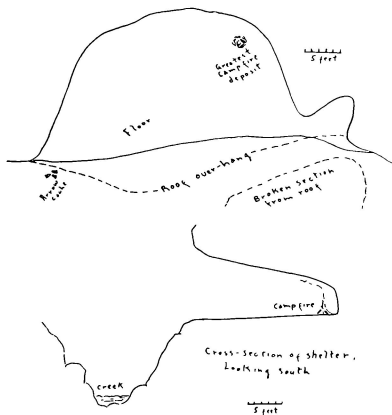
Signs that the shelter was formerly a permanent habitation were not indicated. Lack of domestic utensils among the finds bears out this conclusion.

As bluff shelters are quite a common type of pre-historic habitation sites of rugged country, a brief description regarding them will be given. As a rule the site was chosen with an eye to proximity to water and shelter from the elements. Variations range from simple camps at the base of a jutting rock to elaborate cliff dwellings. In any rough country, with the above two factors included, excavation at the base of almost any protected area will reveal archaeological material of more or less importance.

Considering only the cave-dwellers and bluff-dwellers of this state, doubt is expressed whether they were a distinct cultural group or not. Research has not been carried to the point where



H. R. ANTLE, Bluff Shelter in East Central Oklahoma



DRAWINGS OF BLUFF SHELTER



a definite statement can be made. However, studies of cave dwellings in the Ozarks of Missouri and of cave deposits of Northwestern Oklahoma<sup>1</sup> have brought to light interesting facts regarding the people responsible for them. Various estimates have been given for the age of certain sites in the Ozarks, the finds in Jacob's Cavern, McDonald County, Mo., for instance, being placed at 1226 B. C.<sup>2</sup>

The writer theorizes that any bluff dwelling in the region herein reported is merely a camp, either temporary or permanent, of some former pre-historic race whose regular abode was in some local village, the camp being used by occasional hunting or war party. Within the last three years, two villages have been excavated within twelve miles of the bluff shelter reported in this article.<sup>3</sup>

Being protected, material from bluff and cave shelters is generally in an excellent state of preservation. Future studies of such habitats will doubtless reveal many interesting facts about the pre-history of Oklahoma.

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<sup>1</sup>*Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. III, page 243. Secretary's Report, Jos. B. Thoburn.

<sup>2</sup>Estimate of antiquity made from cross-sectional study of pottery and bone fragment inclusions in stalagmites of cave. Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History, Vol. XIX, pages 297-335, Dr. Vernon C. Allison.

<sup>3</sup>*Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XII, pages 444-446. Excavation of a Caddoan Earth-Lodge, H. R. Antle.

*Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XIII, pages 191-195. Report on an Archaeological Site, H. R. Antle.