



Index of Texas Archaeology: Open Access Gray Literature from the Lone Star State

Volume 1981

Article 26

1981

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Recommended Citation

Hester, Thomas R.; Kelly, Thomas C.; and Ligabue, Giancarlo (1981) "A Fluted Paleo-Indian Projectile Point From Belize, Central America," *Index of Texas Archaeology: Open Access Gray Literature from the Lone Star State*: Vol. 1981 , Article 26. <https://doi.org/10.21112/ita.1981.1.26>

ISSN: 2475-9333

Available at: <http://scholarworks.sfasu.edu/ita/vol1981/iss1/26>

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A FLUTED PALEO-INDIAN PROJECTILE POINT
FROM BELIZE, CENTRAL AMERICA

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Center for Archaeological Research
The University of Texas at San Antonio
Working Papers in Archaeology, No. 1

March 1981

Third Printing 1986

Center for Archaeological Research
The University of Texas at San Antonio
San Antonio, Texas
78285-0658
Thomas R. Hester, Director

Working Papers Series

- No. 1 A Fluted Paleo-Indian Projectile Point from Belize Central America. By Thomas R. Hester, Thomas C. Kelly, and Giancarlo Ligabue, 1981, third printing, 1983. Photocopy reprint \$1.50 (\$.08) + \$1.00 P&H.
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A FLUTED PALEO-INDIAN PROJECTILE POINT
FROM BELIZE, CENTRAL AMERICA

Thomas R. Hester, Thomas C. Kelly, and Giancarlo Ligabue

While much archaeological research has focussed on ancient Maya cultures in the lowland jungles and coastal region of Belize (Palacio 1976; Graham 1980), it has been only recently that the remains of very early Maya settlements, and indeed of pre-Maya occupations, have been found. Hammond et al. (1979) have defined the Early Preclassic Swasey manifestation at the site of Cuello, dating to ca. 1900 B.C., and representing a sedentary agricultural society. Most notable of the pre-Maya (preceramic) investigations is the Belize Archaic Archaeological Reconnaissance (BAAR) directed by Richard S. MacNeish (MacNeish, Wilkerson and Nelken-Terner 1980). They have proposed a very tentative Archaic sequence consisting of five major time periods (and artifact assemblages) spanning the period from ca. 9,000-2,500 B.C. Dating is tenuous for each period, and thus far, no radiocarbon dates are available. Two major sites, Lowe Ranch and Sand Hill, originally recorded by the Colha Project (Hester, Eaton and Shafer 1980) have been further studied by MacNeish and his colleagues.

The Colha Project, initiated in 1979, has been oriented toward the study of the lithic technology of Maya culture from Early Preclassic through Early Postclassic times. The large lithic workshops at the site of Colha (cf. Shafer and Hester 1979), have produced evidence of stone tool mass production in the Late Preclassic, Late Classic and Early Postclassic periods. Additional data on the lithic technology of Middle and probably Early Preclassic periods comes from middens and construction fill deposits at Colha (Early Preclassic lithics are documented at Cuello; cf. Hammond et al. 1979; Shafer, et al., ms.)

Part of the research design of the Colha Project (Hester 1979; Hester, Eaton and Shafer 1980) has involved three seasons of regional survey within the chert-bearing zone in central and northern Belize, as defined by Wright et al. (1959). Major objectives of the survey are to search for lithic workshops and other chert tool production sites (to help set the massive industries at Colha in perspective) and to better determine the distribution of tools produced at, and exported from, Colha (cf. Kelly 1980). Further, the survey has sought to establish and define the nature of lithic tool forms aside from those made at Colha and to map the occurrence of various types and qualities of chert within the zone mapped by Wright et al. (1959).

However, during the course of the survey, all observed sites are being recorded as much of the region within which the survey team has operated has not been previously examined by archaeologists. Thus, in addition to lithic scatters, workshops, and debitage mounds, the survey team has also recorded house mounds, mound groups, settlement areas, and other types of sites. Many of the lithic sites exhibit quarrying and chert-working activities ranging from probable preceramic times well into the various periods of Maya culture (e.g., at Sand Hill and Lowe Ranch; Hester, Shafer and Kelly 1980; Shafer, Hester and Kelly 1980).

In February, 1981, in the midst of our 1981 season, the regional survey team, headed by Kelly, conducted field work in the southern part of the chert-bearing zone (Fig. 1). Near the town of Ladyville, north of Belize City, the survey team recorded a site (Ladyville #1) with an abundance of exposed surface lithics. The lithics were, in general, heavily patinated and were not particularly distinctive as to form or type. Some appeared to be distributed into workshops or specific tool-making (or tool-use) areas. There are some tool forms and other materials that resemble the Sand Hill and Lowe Ranch materials (MacNeish, Wilkerson and Nelken-Terner 1980; Shafer, Hester and Kelly 1980; Hester, Shafer and Kelly 1980). We will report on these at a later date.

During the examination of the surface materials at Ladyville #1, a fluted lanceolate point was found (Fig. 2). It is quite different from the Archaic materials that MacNeish's studies have recorded. Further, it appears to be the first fluted point of Paleo-Indian style to be reported from the coastal lowlands, and certainly the first from Belize.

The Ladyville fluted point is finely flaked. The chert is patinated to a white, and in places yellow-white, color. It is 9.16 cm long, 3.59 cm wide, and has a maximum thickness of .83 cm. Weight is 29.7 gm. Basal dulling present on the lateral edges and on the remaining basal corner (Fig. 2). On one face, the base has been fluted, with a scar 2.0 cm long and 1.4 cm wide; a secondary thinning flake was also removed (Fig. 2, right). On the other face, a slightly larger flute, 2.5 cm long and 1.5 cm wide, is present (Fig. 2, left).

The basal portion of the point is slightly constricted, although this may be attributed to the heavy lateral edge grinding. The technology and morphology of this fluted point, and its occurrence in an aceramic, apparently non-Maya context, suggests to us that it is of Paleo-Indian age.

Fluted points are reported from various areas of northern Mesoamerica (cf. Avelleyra Arroyo de Anda 1964), from the Highlands of Guatemala (Coe 1960; Gruhn and Bryan 1977; Brown 1980), from other highland areas in Central America (Sander 1959, 1964; Snarkis 1977; Swavger and Mayer-Oakes 1952), and at numerous localities in South America (see Lynch 1978; Heizer and Hester 1978). In South America, there are typological problems involving "fishtail" fluted points (also known as Magellan I or El Inga points; cf. Mayer-Oakes and Bell 1960; Mayer-Oakes 1963; Willey 1971: 44-45; Lynch 1978) and lanceolate points technologically reminiscent of the Clovis type of North America.

Clovis-like points are documented from Costa Rica (Snarkis 1977). One of these specimens, from the site of Turrialba, seems rather similar to the Ladyville point (Snarkis 1977: Fig. 2, d).

It is our present opinion, in briefly reviewing the fluted point data from North, Central and South America, that the Ladyville specimen should be probably included within the Clovis type. Obviously, such a typological evaluation could be better tested if we had

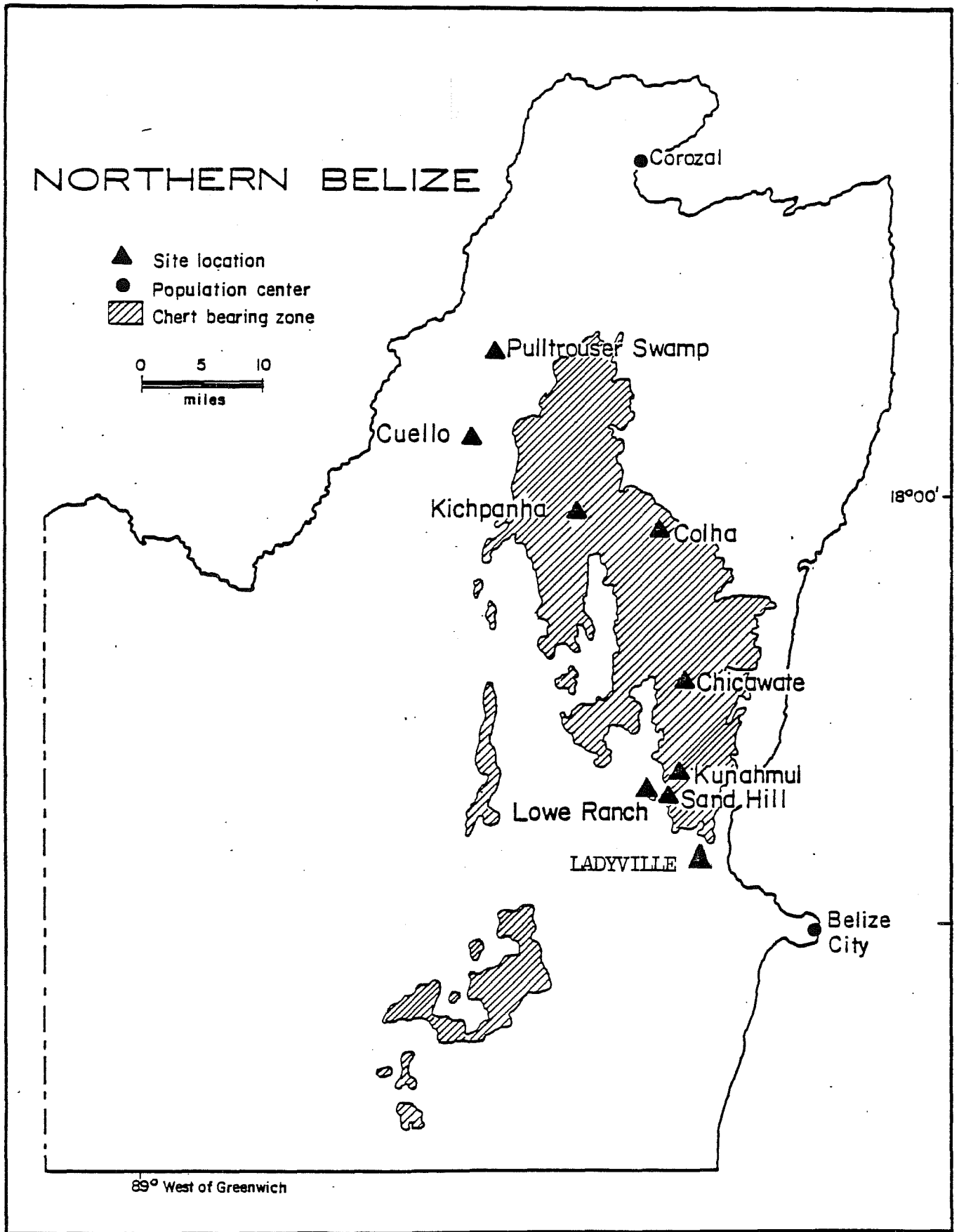


Figure 1. Map of Northern Belize Showing Chert Bearing Zones and Site Locations.

additional specimens of this form from the Maya lowlands. As it now stands, the specimen reported here is, as far as we know, the first fluted lanceolate point from the region. That it occurs is not surprising, as MacNeish has already found, in his 1980 season, many sites that are of Archaic age. But, the discovery of this specimen indicates new potential for further expanding the known cultural sequence in Belize. If we are correct in linking the Ladyville specimen to the Clovis type, it would date to ca. 9,200 B.C. (cf. Haynes 1967), and would make it the earliest documented artifact from Belize.

The Ladyville fluted point will be registered, at the end of our 1981 season, with the Department of Archaeology, Belmopan, and will become part of the permanent collection of the department. Other than to put this specimen on record (and, later, the other lithics found in the survey), no extensive investigations are planned by the Colha Project at Ladyville #1. We will, under the terms of our Antiquities Permit (70/2/81) and within the scope of our research design, do very limited testing to ascertain if any of the extensive lithic materials can be linked (as is the case at the Sand Hill locality; Shafer, Hester and Kelly 1980) to Maya lithic workshop activities.

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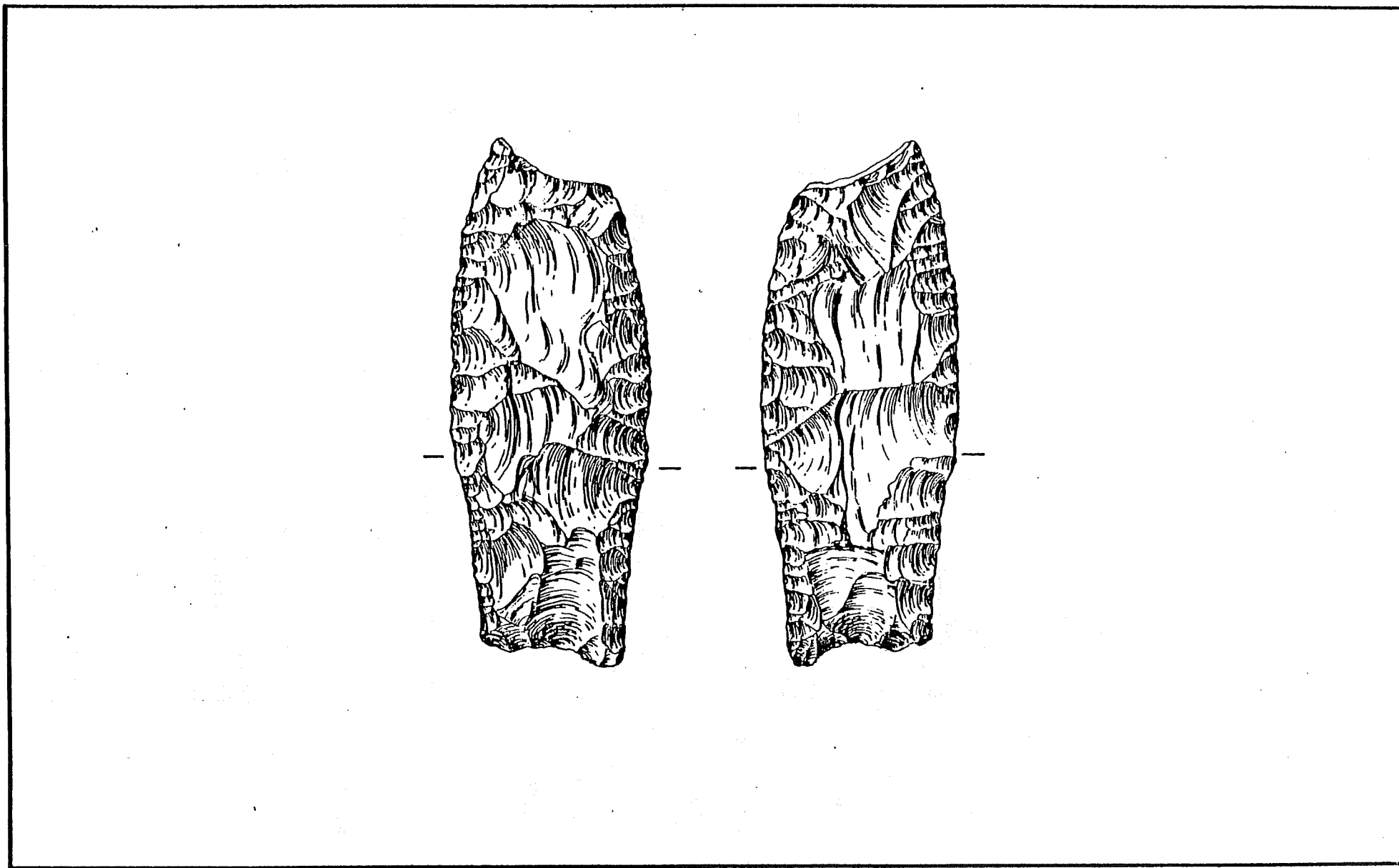


Figure 2. Fluted Point from Ladyville Site, Belize. Both sides are shown at actual size. Horizontal lines indicate extent of dulling of lateral edges.

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