

A SERIES OF EIGHTEEN INDIAN SKELETONS EXCAVATED IN SHACKELFORD COUNTY, TEXAS

ROBERT E. FORRESTER, JR.

Located ten miles southwest of Albany, Shackelford County, Texas, is an extensive surface site in which eighteen skeletons were found. The area consists of rolling plains dotted with small hills and mesas. It is situated just east of the Albany Scarp which bounds the higher western plains. Elevation is approximately 1500 feet above sea-level. A prehistoric site, over one mile long and about three hundred yards wide, is located on the north and west side of a small stream known locally as the Salt Prong of Hubbard Creek, (Figure 4, B). Normally, the locale is covered by mesquite trees, prickly-pear cacti, pencil cacti, cat-claw brush, and scrub grasses; however, this area was cleared in 1944. At present, there are no natural springs or permanent water-holes within five miles.

The locale is well suited for fall and winter camps. It is just off the high plains where there are bitter winter winds; and the site probably afforded a constant water supply. The presence of permanent water may be deduced from two facts; first, that a large camp would probably be situated close to an ample water supply, and secondly, a great number of fresh-water mussel-shells are present in the refuse, in too large a number to have been carried any distance.

The soil, at least to a depth of five feet, is an unstratified red-colored loess. The rocks on the near-by hills are all of a compact lime type. About three to five inches of water and wind deposited earth covered the site. This soil is now eroding in many places. Burned limestone hearths abound in the eroded areas, which also reveal fragmentary bones and mussel shells, in addition to the common flint flakes. Artifacts are rare in the site, but this is possibly due to extensive "pot-hunting." The few projectile points found are of a great diversity of types, which could indicate occupa-

tion by successive waves of Indians. Fauna of the area includes bison, two varieties of deer, bear, rabbit, skunk, opossum, raccoon, prairie-dog, squirrel, badger, and a diversity of water fowl.

Of interest in this non-pottery area is a small sherd of plain red ware. This sherd has not been identified, but appears to be of a fairly late horizon.

At this site on the Salt Prong, four burial plots have been excavated. These plots contain from one to nine skeletons. Each skeleton is numbered with reference to the order of excavation. Excavation was begun in July, 1938.

Burial Plot I, (Figure 4, C), was first detected by the presence of flat rocks that had been raised from their normal position by the blade of a "bull-dozer." This burial contained one adult male about thirty-five years old. The individual was lying on the right side with the head in a westerly direction. The burial was at a depth of approximately forty-five centimeters. The "bull-dozer" had so shifted the rocks that the bones were disarranged from the original burial position. One flat rock, roughly two feet square, had been placed over the chest region. Large and small flat rocks were then thrown onto the flat slab of rock until the ground level was reached.

Burial Plot II was located one hundred and forty-seven feet west southwest of Burial Plot I, (Figure 4, C). It was placed on top of a small elevation, one hundred yards west of the Salt Prong Branch. Several rocks on the surface formed an oval five feet long and four feet wide, with the long axis of the oval running east and west. Thirty-five rocks were placed on the grave, each small enough to have been carried from the stream-bed by one man without aid. Two large rocks were laid flat over the head and chest region. The bones lay fifty cm. below the present surface. The grave floor was flat, and was without a rock lining. No ash or charcoal levels were found, although bits of charcoal were mixed throughout the grave fill. Fire traces were noted on certain bones, notably the charred lower mandible

of a child. This charred mandible lay in the chest region of Skeleton One, and was the only bone in the grave which was badly charred; it was also the only bone of a child.

Two individuals were interred in this grave. Skeleton One is a twenty year old male who was well articulated. Position of the body was semi flexed on the right side, with the head to the south. The fore-arms were crossed; the left hand lay against the right cheek, and the right hand was to the chin. A projectile point, three inches long (Figure 5, A, a) was found *in situ* directly above the proximal end of the right femur, on a plane with the head and neck of the greater trochanter. It was directly under the left ilium and under the left femur. This position precludes the possibility of the point being a burial offering. Evidently this individual was shot in the right coccygeal region from the rear.

Skeleton Two is an eighteen year old male. It was buried at the same time as Skeleton One. The bones were completely disarticulated and scattered at random from the skull to the pelvis of Skeleton One, mainly in the open space between the flexed knees and the shoulders.

All of the long bones of Skeleton Two were present, but many of the vertebrae, smaller ribs, and hand and foot bones were missing. Found embedded in the coronoid fossa of the right humerus was a second point, Figure 5, A, b). The tang and one barb was broken, but both this and the point from the groin of Skeleton One (Figure 5, A, a) appear to be specimens of Ray's Sand Dune culture.¹

When the point was removed from the humerus, it was

1. Ray, C. N., "A Differentiation of the Prehistoric Cultures of the Abilene Section," *Bulletin of the Texas Archaeological and Paleontological Society*, Vol. 1, pp. 12-15.

FIGURE 4

- A. Map of Shackelford County, Texas.
- B. Map of area surrounding site on Salt Prong of Hubbard Creek.
- C. Map giving distribution of camp and Burial Plots.
- D. Diagram of Burial Plot III.

found that a diagonal chip from the tip of the point was missing and the chip was not in the bone. The absence of the chip may be explained in two ways. First, that the point was broken before use; or secondly, the point first struck another object and was deflected, thus losing a chip.

The distal end of the right ulna was broken and had marks on the outer side of the bone such as would be caused by cutting with a stone implement. There were no corresponding marks on the interior of the ulna or on the radius; thus eliminating the possibility of animal teeth marks. This presents the possibility of taking a hand as a war trophy.

Burial Plot III was found undisturbed approximately one hundred and fifty yards north-east of Burial Plot I, (Figure 4, A). This burial plot contained skeletons, buried at different times (Figure 4, D). The area is roughly oval in outline, being slightly wider at the east end. Dimensions of the burial plot are fifty-four inches from north to south and seventy-five inches from east to west.

Skeleton One is an aged female. The body was placed in a flexed position on the right side with the head oriented to the west. The grave is sixty cm. below the present surface.

Skeletons Two and Three are decomposed infants. Both were buried with Skeleton Four. Depth of this grave was seventy-five cm.

Skeleton Four is an adult male. He was located directly under Skeleton One; the head has an eastward orientation. This individual had an exceptionally thick cranium. Under the occipital bone of the skull of this skeleton was a burial

FIGURE 5

- A. a. Projectile point similar to Sand Dune Culture.
 b. Projectile point embedded in human humerus.
 c. Projectile point.
 B. Engraved bone tubes associated with Skeleton 1, Burial Plot IV.
 C. Shell pendants. a. is convex side of pendant. b. is reverse side of the same pendant.
 D. Diagram of Burial Plot IV.
 E. Bone implement associated with Skeleton 4, Burial Plot III.
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offering of bone tools consisting of one deer antler tip (Figure 5, E, g), three deer split radii (Figure 5, E, a, b, and c), one unfinished awl (Figure 5, E, e), one polished deer radius awl eight inches long (Figure 5, E, e), and one flaking tool from a deer ulna (Figure 5, E, f). These seven items were bundled into a compact mass and were in a good state of preservation. A broken projectile point was found (Figure 5, A, c), which appears to fit into the Sand Dune Culture also.

Skeleton Five appeared to be a slightly later burial. It was marked off from the remainder of the grave by a vertical wall of two flat rocks (Plate 19, E). This is an adult male, lying on the left side with the head to the south in a tightly flexed position. Eight inches behind the skull was a burial offering of five items. The offering consists of two fresh water mussel shells, one laid inside the other, two deer ulna tools, and one snake skeleton without a skull. The snake skeleton had one hundred and seventy-four vertebrae, some giving the appearance of having been roasted.

Skeletons Six and Seven were infants who were buried at the same level, four inches apart. Skeleton Six was in a flexed position with the head to the northwest. The graves were one-hundred and thirty-five cm. below the present surface.

Skeleton Eight is a young female. The body position was on the back with the head to the north-east. The right hand was across the flexed knees; the left arm was bent across the chest, and the left hand was cupped about the right elbow.

Burial Plot IV is located about seventy-five yards north-east of *Burial Plot III* (Figure 4, C), and appeared from

PLATE 19

- A. Occipital view of the skull of Skeleton 3, Burial Plot IV, showing the Inca bone.
 B. Side view of the skull of Skeleton 3, Burial Plot IV.
 C. Burial Plot II. Two adult male skeletons, one articulated and the other fragmentary. Grave orientation is to the south.
 D. Burial Plot II showing the rocks covering the grave.
 E. Burial plot III showing rocks covering graves.
 F. Burial Plot III, Skelton No. 6. An infant.
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A



B



C



D



E



F

the surface to be a number of single graves near one another. Excavation revealed that it consisted of six skeletons in a small space, surrounded by a rock "fence" (Figure 5, D). This "fence" was buried approximately four inches, although a few stones were evident on the surface. The burial plot is in the form of an oval nineteen feet long and sixteen feet wide, the long axis runs east and west. A "door" or unfinished gap six feet wide exists in the south south-east side. The "fence" was built of a single course of flat limestone rocks, averaging one foot by eighteen inches by six inches in size. The rocks were placed flat on the ground and end to end.

Skeleton One is a child. It had been buried before Skeleton Two. In the process of burying Skeleton Two, the Child's bones were disarticulated, and were found in the grave fill of Skeleton Two. Intermingled with the bone fragments of the child were the fragments of two slightly curved tubes, engraved with geometrical lines at each end and banded at the center, Figure 5, B. Some wear or polish was evident on the interior surface of each end of the tubes. The size, shape, ornamentation, and wear of this pair of bone tubes indicates that possibly they were the handles of a large basket.

In the mathematical center of this oval was found Skeleton Two, at a depth of eighty-five cm. This adult female was tightly flexed on the left side, with the left hand to the face, and the head in the direction of the "door" in the "fence." There were no artifacts associated with Skeleton Two. A few limestone slabs were vertical against the walls of the grave.

Skeleton Three, that of an adult male, lay three and one-half feet west of Skeleton Two, at a depth of seventy-five cm. It was flexed on the left side, with the right hand to the face, and the head to the south. One artifact was found; a notched and incised marine shell pendant (Figure 5, C, a and b). The small end of the pendant was touching the sacrum, indicating of a burial offering which was drop-

ped into the grave just prior to closing it. The skull of Skeleton Three contains the Inca or interparietal bone, which is large and very well defined from the occipital bone (Plate 19, A).

Skeleton Four and Five were infants associated with Skeleton Three of this burial group. They were placed on the chest and pelvis of the adult male. Both infants had their heads to the east, and were in a flexed position.

Skeleton Six is a young female. It lay on the same level with Skeleton Three with the skull six inches south of the skull of Skeleton Three. The axis of the skeleton was north-east to southwest. The left arm was crossed over the abdomen. Three or four inches west of the chin, just in front of the right humerus, lay a shell pendant (Figure 5, C, c). This pendant was made of a fresh water mussel shell and had been broken at each end, after which the broken edges were smoothed and new holes drilled for cords. The small end pointed toward the head, indicating that it was worn with the wide end down.

Summary: There seems to be a correlation between this site and the Sand Dune Culture as is evidenced by typological similarity of projectile points.

The group had trade relations with the coast as is indicated by the marine shell pendant.

The site seems to have been occupied for a long period of time, but the frequency of occupation cannot be determined.

Two individuals died unnatural deaths, presumably caused by projectile points in the body.

All of the adult crania were dolicocephalic, or long headed, Chart 1.

Burial Plot Number:	Skeleton Number:	Depth: (Cm.)	Orientation:	Side on which body lay:	Age:	Sex:	Cephalic Index:	Notation:
I	1	45	West (?)	Right	35	M	68.3	
II	1	50	South	Right	20	M	70.8	
II	2	50	None	None	18	M	73.1	Disarticulated
III	1	60	West	Right	70	F	71.5	
III	2	75	(?)	(?)	1	?	?	Infant
III	3	75	(?)	(?)	1	?	?	Infant
III	4	75	East	Left	25	M	70.4	
III	5	90	South	Left	30	M	73.0	Wormian bones present
III	6	135	North-west	Left	16 mos.	?	?	Infant (Reconstructed)
III	7	135	(?)	(?)	1	?	?	Infant
III	8	120	South	Back	14	F	77.2	
III	9	75	North-east	Right	15	M	?	Poorly reconstructed
IV	1	(?)	(?)	(?)	8	?	?	Destroyed by later burial
IV	2	85	South	Left	40	F	73.8	
IV	3	75	South	Left	40	M	72.7	"Inca" bone present
IV	4	75	East	(?)	1	?	?	Infant
IV	5	75	East	(?)	1	?	?	Infant
IV	6	75	North-east	Right	15	F	67.6	