

THE BURIED CITY OF THE PANHANDLE.

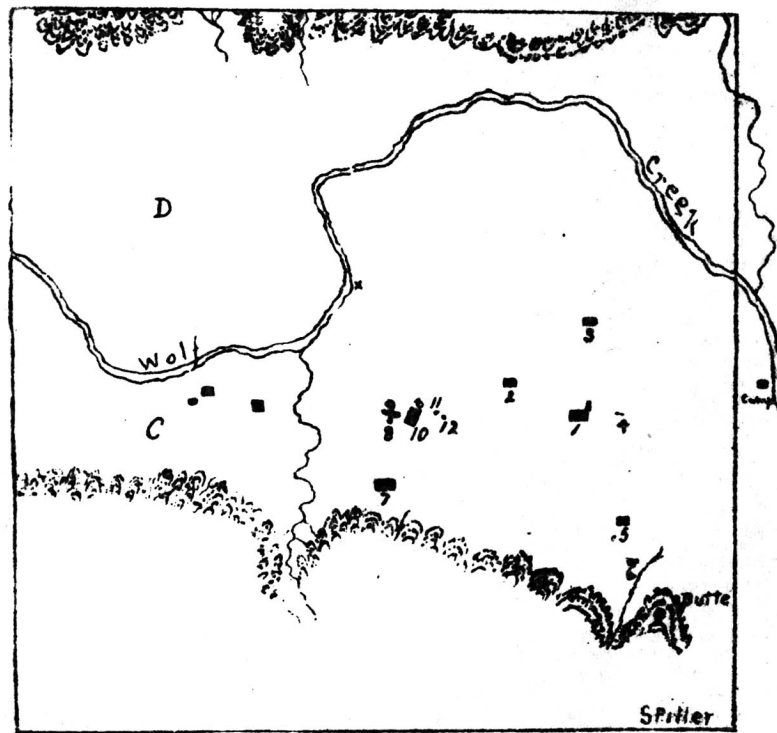
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In Ochiltree county, Texas, on the south bank of Wolf creek, is a group of stone ruins which has aroused the interest and curiosity of all who have visited them, and caused much speculation among those who have tried to formulate a theory to account for their existence. It is a firmly established opinion of many who live in the vicinity that the place where these ruins are was at one time the site of a pre-historic town. This opinion was deduced largely from the fact that the remains resemble to a marked degree foundations of large buildings. So prevalent has this idea been that some of them have received names, such as "The Temple," "The Watchtower" and others, from some fanciful suggestion as to the location or form that would render them fit to serve the purpose of the structure named. The place has been known as "The Buried City" so long that the appellation is retained above, although recent researches have proved the remains to be of a different nature from that generally supposed.

The place has been visited by a number of scientists, and a superficial examination of the ruins made a number of times. But as far as known no report of the work has ever been published, nor has any sufficient argument been produced to support any of the various theories that have been advanced to explain their origin. It has been an object of such interest to the people of the Panhandle that it was considered by Canadian (Texas) Academy to be of sufficient importance to demand a more careful examination. With this end in view an expedition consisting of twelve members was equipped and sent out by the scientific department during March of 1907 for the purpose of excavating among the ruins.

The place is situated twelve miles southeast from Ochiltree, the county seat, on section 525, block 43, which section is part of the large ranch owned by Mr. James Fryer. The ruins stand on a level stretch of land covered by native grass, and at the base of a high escarpment caused by a limestone caprock in the Tertiary formation. The immediate surroundings are very picturesque and pleasing to the eye. Situated in a bend of Wolf creek, with its abundant supply of crystal waters, and covered at this place with plenty of timber, the site was well fitted to attract with its beauty the hearts of whatever people may have constructed these walls which now lay in ruins. This creek forms the north and partially the eastern boundary. The western boundary is a deep ravine fringed with cedars, and the southern the high walls and buttes of the cliff before mentioned. Thus surrounded it would appeal either to the instincts and superstition of the savage or to the culture and esthetic sense of the Aztec.

Among those who still live in the community, the first to take notice of these remains was Mr. Thomas Connell, who resides at present in Canadian. In 1877 he settled on Wolf creek, on a ranch which he still owns, a few miles from the ruins. The place was at that time known to the old buffalo hunters, who maintained their camps in this region. But of its origin they could tell nothing. The same fall Mr.



Map of Section 565, Block 43, Ochiltree county, Texas, showing site of "Buried City".

(See page 1.)

Connell came he took with him Spotted Wolf, chief of the Arrapohoes, to the site. This chief was at that time near eighty years of age, and he declared that the ruins were never the work of Indians and were placed there long before he was born. Spotted Wolf had more than the ordinary intelligence of the Indian and could understand English well. He attributed the ruins to the work of white men.

The field containing the remains forms an almost exact equilateral triangle, with its apex to the west and with sides one-half mile in length. This makes the area approximately seventy acres. Within this area are situated twelve mounds, some quite noticeable, others so low that their presence is not discovered except on close approach. Some of these mounds are about two feet above the surface of the surrounding plain and are quite regular in their form. On each of these it is easy to distinguish the outline of an enclosure made of stone, which bears a strong suggestion, if not resemblance, to the foundation walls of a building. With the exception of one or two, these outlines are rectangular in shape and vary from a few feet to over sixty in their length, and have proportional widths. The stones, however, are not laid as for a foundation or wall of a building, but are set on edge in much the same fashion as the borders of a walk made of unhewn stones would be. The stones vary in size from a few inches in diameter up to a foot or more. None of them show the least trace of a tool ever having been used on them. They are of the same appearance and character as the stone in the ledge of the escarpment adjoining the field and doubtless were obtained from the debris of the talus slopes, which comes within a short distance of the mounds. Excavation revealed the fact that there is more than this surface row of stone. They extend down for a depth of two or three feet, or a little lower than the bottom of the mounds. Throughout this distance they appear to have been placed in a similar manner as on the surface and no indication was found to suggest that a solid wall had ever been made of them.

So far as could be ascertained, these mounds were not arranged in the field in any regular order. But there are certain characteristics common to all which are extremely interesting. The state of the remains prevents an exact measurement of the stone outlines, but in general their dimensions are in an even number of feet. With one exception they all face due east and west, with the greatest length in this direction. Instrumental determination found the walls of one to be at exact right angles and appearance indicates this to be true of all of them. In most of them the width of the outline is to the length as three is to four. They all appear to have had an opening in the center of their east wall. From this last fact some have referred this work to sun-worshippers of remote antiquity. The mounds may all be seen from a high butte marked in the map, and this contains remains to be described later. All excavations have yielded remains of human bones, flint chips, pottery and charcoal. The finding of the latter has suggested to some the idea that the stone remains were covered with wooden structures which were all burned. The finding of the human bones impresses some with the belief that the inhabitants were all massacred. The discovery of a broken arrow head in one of the bones, and the position in which the imperfect remains of a skeleton were found, has strength-

ened this belief. Over the entire field are scattered flint chips and small pieces of mussel shells. A number of fragments of pottery and some mutut stones—mills used for grinding corn—have also been found on the field.

By reference to the map the location of the different mounds, and their position with respect to one another and to the surrounding territory, may be ascertained. A detailed description of each one will be given in the order in which it is numbered on the map.

Mound No. 1. has, with the exception of the Temple, been of more interest than any other. More excavation was made here and more remains uncovered. It was here that the most perfect skeleton was found. A large mutut stone, a quantity of pottery, and other material such as this, were discovered in this mound. The space inclosed by the stone remains measures 38 x 28 feet. It was on this one that the instrumental measurements were made which resulted in determining the fact that it was laid out with exactness in regard to the cardinal points.

No. 2 measures 44 x 32; No. 3 is 50 x 25. This ratio of one to two in the dimensions of this varies from the ratio existing in most of the others.

No. 4 consists of two small enclosures, each a few feet in its dimensions. Both of these yielded traces of bones.

No. 5 is 30 x 23; No. 6 measures 32 x 26. These are both prominent elevations, but little excavation has been done in either of them, and nothing of especial interest has ever been taken from them. These two lie close to the base of the cliff and the stone borders are quite perfect.

No. 7 is also close to the talus slope and the elevation prominent. The irregularity in the dimensions here is greater than in any of the others, unless it be the Temple. The best measurements which could be determined were, in length, forty-seven feet, and in width, thirty-two feet at the west wall and thirty-seven at the east wall. But this difference could easily be accounted for here by the scattered condition of the stones.

No. 8 is small, measuring but 7 x 6. A number of fragments of skull and rib bones were taken from here at a depth of a foot and one-half or less.

No. 9 shows the stone outline indistinctly and has but slight elevation above the surrounding surface. No remains were taken from this one.

No. 10, referred to as the temple, somewhat irregular in its dimensions, measuring approximately 60 x 20, is the single exception of the entire group in not facing the cardinal points; but instead it stands with its length due south-west and north-east, facing the butte before mentioned, and with indications of an opening in the center of the wall nearest it. A skull was found here, and fragments of the materials before mentioned.

No. 11 has yielded no remains of especial importance. It is 37 x 28, with the mound prominent but the stone outline rather indistinct.

No. 12 is a circular mound ten feet in diameter. From here a number of fragments of bones, pottery and flint chips were taken; and with these was found a smoothed stone of granite resembling an Indian hammer, which is similar to the ones used with the stone mills for crushing corn.

A brief description of the region contiguous to this field is of importance, as it will furnish additional proofs for the support of the theory that will be

given as to the origin and antiquity of the remains. On the high butte which is marked on the map, and of which mention has been made, is a circular mound of slight elevation, about twenty-five feet in diameter. It is by all who visit the place connected with the rest of the ruins. There is nothing to confirm this opinion except its close proximity to the field, and the flint chips and arrow heads, similar to those found in the field, which were taken from this mound. Numerous Indian graves are found on the prominences and buttes which border Wolf creek, for some distance up and down and on both sides. These graves are of recent origin, in some cases at least, and the mound in question may be one of these.

In addition to these Indian graves, which are so frequently found on the high buttes bordering Wolf creek, some four miles down from the "buried city," on land owned by a Mr. Jackson, is situated a burying ground. Excavations here yielded the same class of relics as found in the fields of this description. In one grave was found a small iron hammer badly oxidized. In another a string of glass beads.

To the west of the field containing the mounds, and separated from it by a deep ravine, are to be found remains of a similar nature. This place is designated on the map by C. The mounds found here are not so prominent nor are the stone borders so well marked. For a distance of two miles up the creek and on the same side are indications of a like nature. One of these, with large dimensions, is on the bank and has been cut half in two by the stream, exposing to view remains of the same character as those described, and, in addition, a number of buffalo bones and a rib of a small child were taken from here. At this place there is at a depth of from three to four feet a layer of soil in which is mixed small pieces of charcoal. On the creek bank at the place marked in the map with a cross, there occurs the same layer at about the same depth.

In the northwest corner of the section, and on the north side of the stream, marked on the map as D, there are indications of an Indian village having been there at one time, and the adjacent ground cultivated. Scattered over this field are found remains of pottery, flint chips and shells very similar in character to the specimens of the material taken from the ruins on the south side of the creek. A crushing stone for a stone mill, almost an exact counterpart of the one found in mound No. 12, and described in the details of that place, was picked up here. Parts of tepee poles, in a state of fair preservation, lie about the field. This space occupies about twenty acres of ground.

As in the case of other remains found in this country whose exact origin is unknown, the prevailing opinion has been to ascribe to the "Buried City" a greater age than the evidences will warrant and to relegate them to the works of antiquity. As yet nothing has been discovered to indicate an age greater than a few centuries, and the probable age is much less. This estimate is based on the character of the remains, their state of preservation and the depth at which they were found. The pottery and flints can with certainty be identified as those of the Plains Indians. The bones found in the mounds, while being badly decayed for the most part, in some cases are fairly well preserved. Making all allowance possible for the climatic conditions in this section, which tends to prevent decay, their age could not be greater than that assigned. The depth at which they are found, generally from one to two feet below the surface, indicates but little deposit of material on these ruins. The erosion in this section of the country is very rapid and the situation of the mounds:

at the very base of the talus slope render the site exposed to the deposition of the soil from this source.

Either of two theories has generally been accepted to account for the origin of the ruins. According to one they are considered the work of prehistoric Aztecs; the other holds them to be the remains of camps left by early Spanish explorers. In considering the first enough has been said concerning the age to prove the impossibility of the antiquity that it ascribes. But as some will insist that the Indian remains found may not have any connection with the stone ruins additional argument will be given. This region is farther east than the remains of the Pueblos, the nearest of living tribes allied to the Aztec, although it must be admitted that it is the borderland between these on the west and the Plains Indians on the east. But the strongest proof against this theory is the fact mentioned in the beginning of the article, that the stone outlines remaining could never have been foundations to houses, much less remnants of walls of structures; the amount of stone present is not sufficient for this, and there is no reason to believe any has ever been removed. The supposition that the Spanish explorers left these remains is as unfounded as the former theory. As far as we know from historical accounts, Coronado in his march from Mexico up into the region now comprising Kansas, passed nearer to this place than any other of these Spaniards. Cabeza de Vaca, in 1528, marched from the present site of Galveston northwest to the Rio Grande, and from thence toward the Pacific coast. But this region, far from the path of either, is too remote from the Spanish settlements to admit of its being an outpost, even if the remains indicated the site of a town, while the exposed position they occupy would preclude the possibility of their having been built for fortifications.

That the Plains Indians were the builders of these mounds there can be no doubt. The pottery and flints found here are the culture of these tribes and can be found all over the plains region northward and eastward from this section. The Wolf creek valley was for years the trail over which the migration to and fro of these tribes from the Indian Territory and adjacent country to Mexico and Arizona took place. Their remains are scattered along the entire way; but these remains of recent times are not to be confounded with those of the "buried city," which certainly antedated these by many years and form a distinct subject for ethnological research.

The use for which these mounds were intended was, we believe, solely for burial purposes. Every one of them that has been excavated has yielded human bones; but not in greater quantity than to indicate that each one was the grave of a single person. In more than one place in the Iowa reservation in northern Kansas we have seen the graveyards of the Indians of recent times laid out in a crude way, and each grave edged with wooden pickets in much the same way that these mounds are set with stone.

There are certain peculiarities in the remains of the "buried city" that deserve careful attention and are worthy of future research. The size of the enclosures, the marked regularity of the walls in respect to dimensions, directions and openings toward the east, indicate the work of a tribe more advanced in civilization than were the majority of the Plains Indians. As their remains are meagre and their history unwritten, an air of the mysterious and the unknown will always cling about this place, "the Buried City of the Panhandle."