

plains ANTHROPOLOGIST

Volume 11

November 1966

Number 34

LINCOLN

THE GILLETTE SITE (39ST23), OAHÉ RESERVOIR, SOUTH DAKOTA

by

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ABSTRACT

Fieldwork at the Gillette Site primarily consisted of the partial excavation of three circular houses, a cross section of a fortification ditch, and the removal of a burial. The latest occupation, Component A, is identified as a manifestation of the Stanley or Snake Butte focus, dating from about 1700 to 1800 A.D. Component B represents a circular house tradition probably belonging to an earlier period in the Coalescent Tradition than does Component A. The limited data from Component C implies a village occupation of an indeterminate cultural affiliation earlier than Component B.

INTRODUCTION

The Gillette Site (39ST23) is located on the right or west bank of the Missouri River a short distance downstream from the mouth of the Cheyenne in central South Dakota. It was first recorded in 1947 by the Missouri Basin Project, Smithsonian Institution during an archeological survey of the Oahe Reservoir

area, undertaken as a part of the Inter-Agency Archeological Salvage Program (Cooper, 1953: 36). The following year two cache pits exposed in an eroded ravine were excavated, and in 1952, further investigations resulted in the excavation of a burial situated in the same area. During the field season of 1953, additional test excavations produced evidence of at least three components at the site. Finally, large scale excavations were accomplished from July 29 to August 22, 1957 by a crew from the Missouri Basin Project under the direction of Don Hartle, staff archeologist.

Mr. Hartle left the Missouri Basin Project soon after the Gillette Site was excavated and before a descriptive report could be prepared. This report was written in 1963 and 1964 from the notes and records on file in the Lincoln office.

When the site was first reported, artifacts were found in the wall of a badly eroded ravine cutting into a high terrace standing some 70 feet above the Missouri flood plain (pl. 1, a). Eleven house de-

used as an ornament of some kind,
probably either as a pendant or a brace-
let. It is 43.0 mm. long and 8.0 mm.

Shell Bead
(1 specimen)

A disc shell bead, 10.0 mm. in diameter and 2.0 mm. in thickness, has a hole 3.0 mm. in diameter drilled in the center.

Bone Needle (?)
(1 specimen)

A very thin section of a long bone
worked on all surfaces and broken at
both ends was probably used as a bone
needle. It is 65.0 mm. long and 2.0 mm.

Contact Materials

Trade Beads ✓
(23 specimens)

Twelve tubular trade beads with rough
or broken ends range from 2.0 to 3.5
mm. in length and another is similar
but much longer (8.0 mm.). Seven are
white, three are black and two are blue.
Eight globular seed beads are about 2.0
mm. in length. Six of these are white,
one is green, and one is black. Three
small seed beads, two blue and one red,
are less than 1.0 mm. in diameter.

Bone Tube
(1 specimen, pl. 11, s)

The shaft of a long bone of a large
animal that has the articular surfaces
removed and the ends rounded and
smoothed. Bone tubes are described in
the description of dice and hand
knives where incised and plain tubes were
found in pairs (Culin, 1907: 283-323). The
Gillette Site specimen is 115.0 mm. long,
and 14.0 mm. in diameter.

Metal Knife
(1 specimen, pl. 11, n)

A badly corroded triangular iron
knife blade with cancellous tissue adher-
ing to one side of the specimen suggest-
ing that it was hafted in an antler or bone
implement. The blade is 69.0 mm. long,
10.0 mm. wide at the base, and 1.0 mm.
thick.

Cut Rib Fragments
(8 specimens, pl. 11, p, t)

Miscellaneous sections of rib bones
that have been cut through to the can-
cellous tissue on both ends and the ends
chipped off. Three specimens have
shaped scars on one end similar to the
gliders recovered from the Gillette
Site. It is likely that these three exam-
ples are unfinished ice gliders. Four
specimens range from 137.0 to 360.0
mm. in length and four range from 42.0
to 55.0 mm. in length.

INTERPRETATIONS

The architectural features and arti-
facts recovered from the Gillette Site
suggest the presence of three compo-
nents. The site was excavated in six-
inch stratigraphic levels; however, this
proved to have little utility since a large
portion of the rim sherds were mixed as
a result of multiple occupation. Three
putative components were separated
according to features and ceramic
remains on the basis of a priori know-
ledge regarding the temporal and spatial
occurrences of features and pottery from

Shell Scrapper or Spoon
(1 specimen, pl. 11, c)

A broken mussel shell, 83.0 mm.
long, has one smooth edge, probably
worked from use either as a scrapper or
scraping utensil.