

Excavations At Horseshoe Bend, Alabama

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ABSTRACT

The report describes the excavations at Horseshoe Bend National Battlefield Park near Dadeville, Alabama where Andrew Jackson defeated the Creek Red Sticks in 1814. The search for remains of the Indian fortification was unsuccessful. Excavations in the village of Tohopeka produced a small quantity of historic Creek brushed, plain, and incised pottery. An earlier occupation was represented by Dadeville Plain, a previously undescribed rather late Mississippian pottery type. Excavations at the historic site of Nuyaka on the left bank of the Tallapoosa revealed an historic Creek trash pit and a small pit filled with charred corn cobs. An unusual feature of the trash pit was the presence of many fragments of hen's egg shells.

With the establishment of Horseshoe Bend National Battlefield Park it was realized that archeological excavations would be the most likely source for the information needed to demonstrate the significant episodes of the local history. Early in the spring of 1961, the National Park Service proposed that Florida State University undertake the work as the University of Alabama was already committed to other programs for the summer. Accordingly, the 1961 Summer Field Session of the Florida State University undertook the investigations. As outlined by the National Park Service, the purposes of the excavation were threefold:

1. To discover if possible the location, form, and extent of the Prophets' fortifications attacked by Jackson's Army, in 1814.
2. To discover the location and extent of the Prophets' village, Tohopeka.
3. To verify the precise location of the Nuyaka village on the left bank of the river.

In the limited time available only a tentative answer to any of the three problems could be expected. From the standpoint of park development and interpretation, the location of the fortification line was the most crucial. The greater part of the time was devoted to a largely unsuccessful attempt to solve this problem. Ten students, with the author as instructor, made up the field crew.

Six trenches, with a total length of 1030 feet were excavated in the narrow waist of the bend in a generally north to south direction. After these trenches had been excavated by hand, an additional series of trenches 1210 feet in length was excavated by ditching machine. The only features were burned stumps and windfall-trees. Erosion during the early agricultural period seems to have completely destroyed all traces of the Prophets' barricade.

During the first period of work a survey was conducted of the lower flats bordering the river. Scanty sherds of Indian ceramics were found in the southern flat in the toe of the Horseshoe. Accord-

- 112 Chattahoochee Brushed representing at least 3 vessels
10 Childersburg Incised representing at least 4 vessels
128 Ocmulgee Plain

masses of unburned potter's clay

many pieces of thick, grass-tempered, fired clay floor

34 pieces common green bottle glass

1 sherd white semi-porcelain china

4 pieces melted lead

1 lead musket ball, 52 cal.

1 flattened lead musket ball

1 piece iron nail

3 pieces thin flat strap iron

1 flattened rolled copper cone, "jangler"

1 earpiece of silver earring with ball

1 sheet silver annular ornament 15 mm. dia., 2 mm. wide

1 rolled silver tube, pinched end, 2.5 mm. x 30.5 mm.

1 bone knife handle (1/2), with 4 rivet holes, 105 mm. long

1 fragment of similar knife handle.

numerous hen's eggshell fragments including 1 complete shell

3 peach seeds

1 fragment of hickory nut shell

1 piece of resinous pine 12 inches long

1 crudely ground sandstone whetstone 13 x 29 x 150 mm.

6 pieces of fire cracked quartzite

1 Childersburg White Oval glass bead 5 x 5 mm.

3 Childersburg Opalescent Pink Oval, glass bead 8.5 x 4.5 mm.

3 Georgia White Cylindrical glass beads 3.0 to 4.5 dia., 3.0 to 6.5 mm. long

1 Georgia Translucent Blue Cylindrical glass bead 2.5 x 7.5 mm.
animal, bird, reptile bones: cow, pig, deer, terrapine, turkey,
bird, fish.

The bone has been submitted to Stanley Olsen, Florida Geological Survey, for identification. The corn cobs have been submitted to Dr. Hugh Cutler, of the Missouri Botanical Garden for analysis.

The pit was certainly an abandoned storage pit which accumulated about a foot of dirt and a little midden at the bottom. It was then filled with trash, probably when a house was refurbished. The numerous fragments of baked clay floor suggested this filling took place when a fire area was rebuilt. The many sherds which make up the large sections of pots came from a number of places within the pit, but they all fit into seven large sherds. The sherds were counted after as much repair as possible had been done, so the total number of recovered individual sherds is higher. None of the seven sherds made up a complete pot. Evidently the jars and bowls had been broken previously to being placed in the pit.

The Chattahoochee Brushed belongs to two subtypes. The first, represented by the sherds of two deep jars with smoothed rims, is heavily tempered with coarse prepared grit. The brushing also is

heavy and coarse. The second is represented by about half of a small rather shallow jar. The texture is much finer, and the tempering is fine sand. It also has a smoothed rim. All three have everted, notched lips. The basic shape is highly similar to some jars from Oklahoma (Schmitt and Bell, Okla. Arch. Soc. Reprint, Plate 6 B).

The Childersburg Incised represents parts of certainly three, perhaps four, large cazuelas. One has a completely rectilinear design. Two have combined curvilinear and rectilinear designs. In all these vessels the surfaces are finely smoothed and the incised lines fine, clear, sharply cut. The designs might almost have been cut with a iron graver, so sharp they are. This incised type is in sharp contrast to the bulk of the related type from Georgia. In the Georgia sites the surfaces are carelessly smoothed and the incising slovenly. These Nuyaka sherds represent the work of a highly skilled and meticulous craftswoman. Aside from the care of execution and somewhat simpler lip treatment the sherds do not differ from the Ocmulgee examples.

The great similarity between the Nuyaka sherds and those from Ocmulgee Old Fields is worthy of comment. The Ocmulgee Trading House seems to have been occupied from 1686 to 1716. Nuyaka was occupied from 1777 to 1813. Thus the two sites are distant in space some hundred miles, in time at least 60 years and possibly 127 years. Ocmulgee represents a time when the great dislocations of Creek culture were just beginning. The deer skin trade with South Carolina was in its early years and acculturation was probably less than a generation old. At Nuyaka, three to five generations later, the acculturation had progressed to the point where a revitalistic reaction had developed, the Red Stick Movement. The picture painted by Hawkins of the Creek towns on the Tallapoosa in 1799 is one of well-advanced acculturation to the American mixed farming model. Many fields were fenced and European domestic animals were common. The presence of these cultigens is confirmed by the animal bones in the pit. How then could the ceramic industry remain practically unchanged?

I believe the conservatism of the pottery reflects the fact that pottery was manufactured by the women and that the society was matrilineal and matrilocal. In the 18th century the impact of European and American culture was primarily on the men. They were the hunters of the deer whose skins formed the backbone of the Indian trade. They were drawn ever more into more lengthy fall and winter hunts away from their towns. Participation in trade was evidently the sphere of the men. Increasing military and political involvement with Europeans and Americans added to this economic and technological acculturation.

The women on the other hand remained more often at home and were less technologically involved in the acculturation process. It is true that Hawkins had begun to introduce spinning and loom weaving

among the women. But, the women remained at home at marriage. Each girl probably learned potting from her grandmother or other older lineage member. Thus the impact of acculturation was weakened by the presence of older women of her matrilineage. Thus the household crafts were more resistant to change than the hunting and fighting technology of the men. It may well be that the culture lag which thereby developed between women's and men's technological spheres contributed to the personal stress which in turn gave rise to the revitalistic Prophets' Movement.

The other materials in the pit seem to all fit into what might be expected from household trash. The silver ornaments and glass beads were probably jewelry lost and swept into a trash pile. The earring with ball at the ear and a conical pendant (missing in this case) appeared in early Carolina trade stores and continues very late. It was evidently an article of high appeal to the southern Indians. None of the beads are very distinctive. Their types have been named by De Jarnette (De Jarnette & Hansen, 1960, p. 57): Childersburg White Oval, Georgia White Cylindrical, Georgia Translucent Blue Cylindrical, and Childersburg Opalescent Pink Oval. All seem to have been drawn beads and are generally quite common on late Creek sites. The Childersburg Opalescent Pink Oval is one form of the type called "barleycorn" beads by the traders. These beads were seemingly originally a rather dark pink. They patinate very rapidly and usually are extremely fragile when found in clay soils. For this reason very few whole ones are available for study. The opalescence is evidently due to the decay of the glass.

The animal and vegetable remains give us a good deal of insight into the diet of the late Creek. Peach seeds clearly indicate the beginnings of orchards among the Creek. Hawkins mentions the peach trees at Okfuskee in 1799 and does not indicate that they were introduced as part of his acculturation program. Probably the Indians themselves secured peaches from the Spanish or English. The hickory nut hull indicates that collecting was still important. Hawkins said (1938, p. 58) that he regularly purchased hickory nut oil for the agency table at \$.75 per bottle. Probably most of the nuts were processed for oil.

The presence of cow and pig bones indicates how much these European animals had entered into the life of the Creek. Hawkins records numerous cows, horses, and pigs among the Creeks in 1799 period. He does not specifically mention cattle or pigs for Nuyaka but all the other villages had them during this period. Most surprising was the number of egg shells, apparently all from domestic chickens. Hawkins recorded, in this list of agency supplies, that he purchased capons, fowls, and eggs from the Indians. Evidently the Creek adopted both chickens and eggs, although it is far from clear how the eggs were cooked. The presence of at least one whole eggshell in the pit suggests a "setting" that failed to hatch. The whole picture seems to be that large domestic animals had nearly

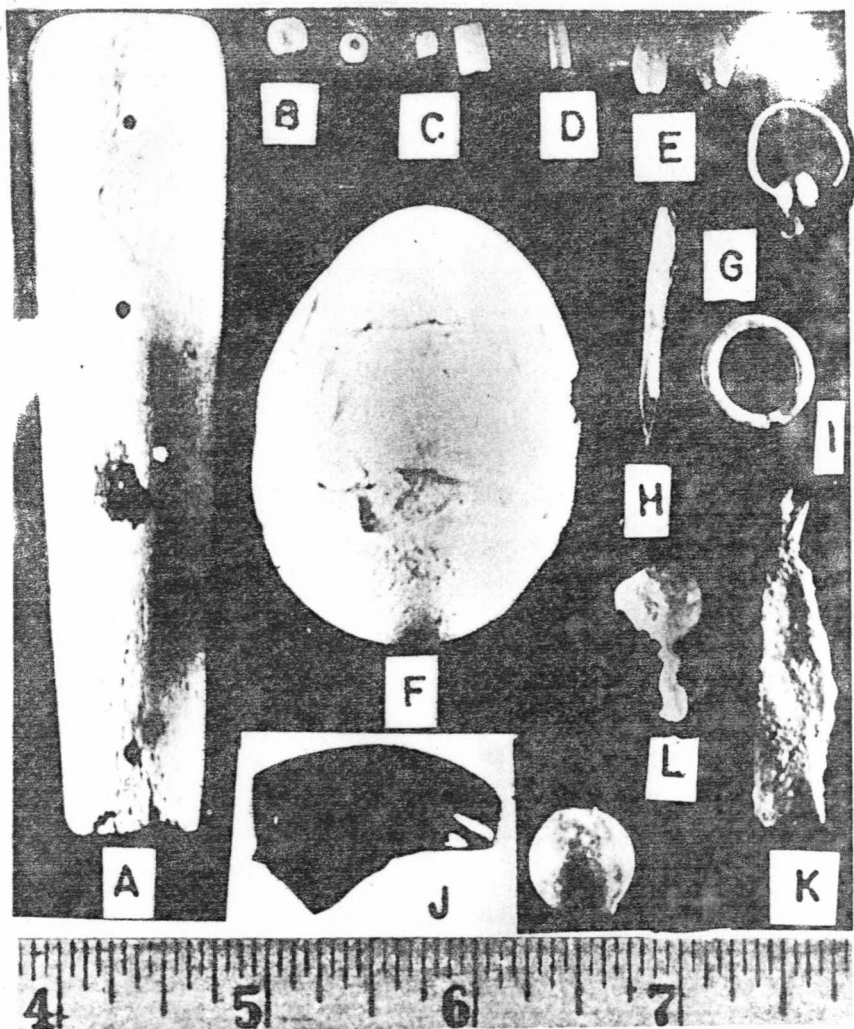


PLATE IV. Artifacts from trash pit, Nuyaka. A. Half of bone knife handle; B. Childersburg White Oval bead; C. Georgia White Cylindrical beads; D. Georgia Translucent Blue Cylindrical bead; E. Childersburg Opalescent Pink Oval bead; F. Hen's egg; G. Silver earring; H. Silver tube ornament; I. Flat silver ring; Neck of green bottle; K. Copper cone; L. Lead musket ball and lead droplet. Scale in inches.