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## TWO HISTORIC BURIALS IN THE THREE FORKS LOCALE

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### Introduction (by Don G. Wyckoff)

With the construction of the Arkansas-Verdigris Canal system and several highway construction projects there is increased disturbance of historic and prehistoric sites in the Three Forks locale of Wagoner and Muskogee counties, eastern Oklahoma. While archaeological salvage projects have been funded and completed on the canal system, there has been no state or federal support of a highway salvage program. Consequently, sites of significance to Oklahoma's distinctive heritage and history have been, and are being, lost. The information such sites could contribute to our understanding of the state's past is of uncertain proportion but one fact is certain, once these sites are destroyed their potential contributions are eliminated.

The following report is significant in several respects. Both burials were exposed by highway construction, and the lack of a highway salvage program meant that both finds could have been completely lost with only 1 or 2 more passes of the bulldozer and earthhauler. Fortunately, due to the concern of Mike Wilson both burials were found and salvaged. Not only were the burials salvaged but data on the burials and their associations was recorded so that the following report could be presented.

### WEALTHY INDIAN SITE

#### Historical Background

The "Three Forks" area in eastern Oklahoma has been the topic of much discussion and writings by historians and authors for many years. The confluence of the Arkansas, Grand, and Verdigris rivers along with the establishment of Fort Gibson, several trading posts, and frontier settlements brought about a great many events to be recorded and preserved in the annals of history. Certainly one of the most important events occurring in this area was the resettlement of the Five Civilized Tribes who had been forced to move from their homes in the Southeast. This resettlement began around 1828 and continued through much of the 1830's. One particular tribe, the Creeks, settled in a concentrated area on the west bank of the Verdigris River and west along the valley of the Arkansas (see Fig.1). While most surface indications of the Creek settlements are now virtually obliterated, occasional surface finds point to such occupations, and, of course, the remains of the people are scattered in shallow graves and burial grounds in this locale. The following report is a brief analysis of 2 such burials.

#### Site Location

The general site area is some 4½ miles north of Muskogee in eastern Oklahoma (see Fig. 1) The site is west of the Verdigris River and is on the second terrace which borders this area of the valley. This terrace is some 30 to 40 feet above the Verdigris floodplain and must have offered a good location for camping and more permanent settlement. The site area extends for several hundred yards although surface indications are quite scattered. The surface soil of this terrace is characterized by being black and sandy but the subsoil changes to red and sandy and finally to a red clay.

#### Site Investigations

The site area has been known for some time and has been surface hunted frequently. However, it was not until road construction crews began stripping soil for road fill that the reported finds came to attention. Grading and removal of road fill from the terrace uncovered several scattered finds of early historic artifacts. Persistent investigation of the site during fill removal also revealed the presence of at least 3 early historic burials. One of these was so disturbed that no reliable data or conclusions can be stated. The other 2 burials were salvaged under circumstances less than ideal but enough data was obtained to provide some information on this site. The site area is now a part of the new highway which intersects Highway 16 and goes west to merge with Highway 69.

#### BURIAL #1

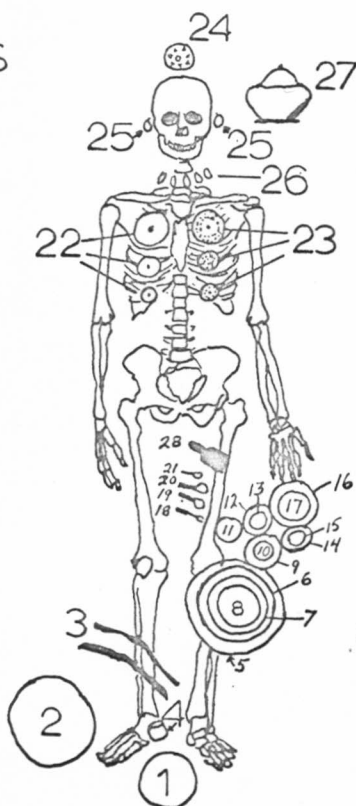
Burial #1 was the first found and was hurriedly excavated as construction operations were in progress. In situ photographs of the skeleton and its associations are not available as the

# WEALTHY INDIAN SITE

## BURIAL #1

### SKETCH

N — S



| #     | ITEM                        |
|-------|-----------------------------|
| 1     | 3 LEGGED IRON POT           |
| 2     | 3 LEGGED IRON POT           |
| 3     | SADDLE GEAR                 |
| 4     | STIRRUP                     |
| 5     | WASH BASIN                  |
| 6-8   | BLUE FEATHER-EDGED PLATES   |
| 9-15  | CHINA CUPS                  |
| 16-17 | SAUCERS                     |
| 18    | BONE HANDLED FORK           |
| 19    | PEWTER TABLESPOON           |
| 20    | IRON TABLESPOON             |
| 21    | IRON TEASPOON               |
| 22    | 3 EMBOSSED VEST ORNAMENTS   |
| 23    | 3 PERFORATED VEST ORNAMENTS |
| 24    | HAIR ORNAMENT               |
| 25    | EARRINGS                    |
| 26    | TINKLERS-NECKLACE           |
| 27    | TUREEN                      |
| 28    | WINE BOTTLE                 |

FIGURE 2

Items 9-15 These were seven deep bowls which resemble modern cups but without handles. Some of the smaller cups were placed inside the larger ones.

Item #9 A cup with a blue overlay design of trees and buildings. Design was on both inside and out (Plate I; No. 1). Diameter was  $5\frac{1}{4}$  in. while the height was 3 in.

Item #10 A cup with white interior. Exterior has blue stripe over a brown base with swirls encircling the outside. The specimen was found inside #9. Specimen is illustrated in Plate I; No. 1. Diameter is  $4\frac{1}{2}$  in. and is  $2\frac{3}{4}$  in. deep.

Item #11 A cup with white interior. Exterior has black and blue stripes overlain by hand-painted black swirls (Plate I; No. 1). Diameter is  $4\frac{1}{2}$  in. and is  $2\frac{3}{4}$  in. deep.

Item #12 A cup with brown and blue stripes overlain by handpainted swirls on the exterior while the interior is white. Specimen is shown in Plate I; No. 1. Diameter is  $4\frac{1}{2}$  in. while the depth is  $2\frac{3}{4}$  in.

Item #13 A cup with brown, blue, and black stripes on the exterior and a white interior (Plate I; No. 1). This cup was inside #12. Diameter is  $4\frac{1}{2}$  in. while depth is  $2\frac{3}{4}$  in.

Item #14 A cup with white interior. Exterior has blue, handpainted flowers on white background (Plate I; No. 1). This cup was inside #15. Diameter is  $3\frac{1}{2}$  in. and is  $2\frac{1}{2}$  in. deep.

Item #15 A cup with white interior while the exterior has red and green flowers (handpainted) on white background. Diameter is 3 in. while depth is 2 in. (Plate I; No. 1).

Item #16 A saucer which is 6 in. in diameter. Handpainted blue flowers encircle the interior. This specimen was stacked inside #17. Specimen is shown in Plate I; No. 1.

Item #17 A saucer which is 6 in. in diameter. Handpainted design is present on interior and consists of yellow flowers and blue leaves on a white background. (Plate I; No. 1) Has the following potter's mark: Staffordshire Clews Warranted.

Item #27 A small china tureen was near the skull. It has handpainted floral design (blue and orange flowers) on a white background (see Plate I; No. 1). It has a Davenport potter's mark.

#### Glass Objects

Item #28 This was a green bottle which was crushed by the grading equipment. Estimated length is 8 in. with a 4 in. neck. Has raised letters, SEMILION, on base.

#### Beads

Bead Type I (Plate II; No. 1)

Number of specimens: 14.

Description: These are small, white, donut shaped garter beads of simple construction. They have a porcelain-like texture. They are of the size range commonly called "seed" beads.

Bead Type II (Plate II; No. 2)

Number of specimens: 19.

Description: 14 blue and 5 white beads are large and multifaceted. They taper quite distinctly from the center towards each end. All appear to be of simple construction. The white specimens vary from milky white to translucent in color.

Bead Type III (Plate II; No. 3)

Number of specimens: 14.

Description: These are large white, round beads. They are of 2 piece construction and show a seam. They are milky white in color and are translucent.

## Bead Type IV (Plate II; No. 4)

Number of specimens: 128.

Description: These are medium size, rounded beads of maroon color. They appear to be of 2 piece construction and tend to split apart when handled. Most examples have a discolored patina.

## Bead Type V (Plate II; No. 4)

Number of specimens: 110.

Description: These are large clear beads which have been cut from tubes. They are barrel shaped and have facets (around 20).

## Bead Type VI (Plate II; No. 6)

Number of specimens: 104.

Description: Essentially the same as Type V but smaller and have fewer facets (around 15). They are barrel shaped and translucent.

## Bead Type VII (Plate II; No. 7)

Number of specimens: 162

Description: These are blue, faceted beads of a size comparable to Type V. They have been cut from tubes and have a faceted, barrel shape.

## Bead Type VIII (Plate II; No. 8)

Number of specimens: 248.

Description: These are large, blue beads of compound construction (exhibit a cane core). They are barrel shaped and have some 20 facets.

## Bead Type IX (Plate II; No. 9)

Number of specimens: 7

Description: Blue, compound (cane center) beads of small size. Except for size, these are like Type VIII. There is one example which has only the ends faceted; all others have around 20 facets.

### BURIAL #2

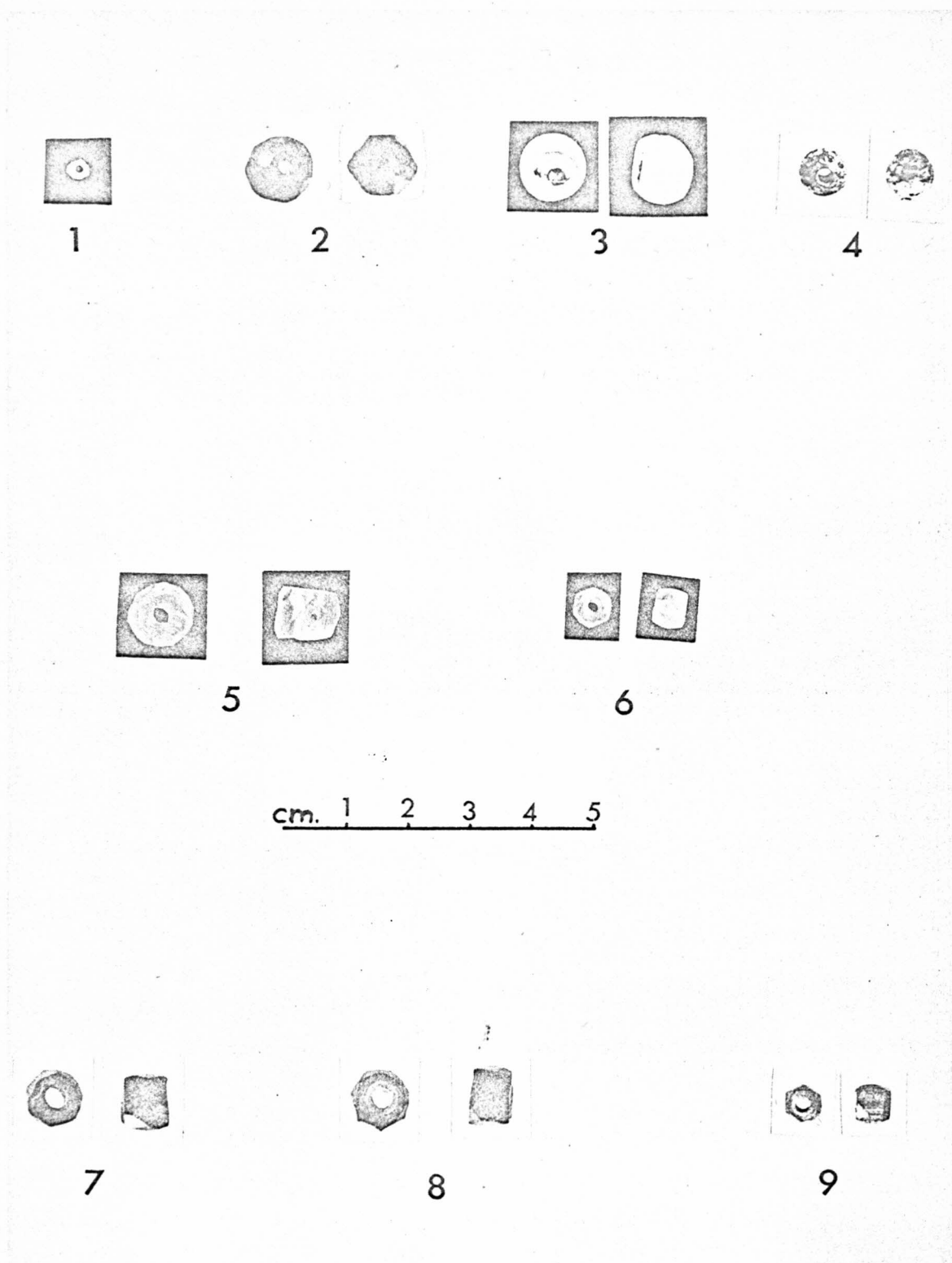
Burial #2 was found about a month later than Burial #1. At this time, rains had washed the disturbed soil and had exposed other artifacts relating to the early historic utilization of this terrace. In a stripped area some 100 yards northeast of Burial #1, the grading excavations had exposed a couple of early historic house sites. Along the east edge of this graded area the rain had washed out a series of blue glass beads. Further investigations revealed the remains of another burial.

### Burial Description

Burial #2 was also a single individual and apparently an adult (male?). This interment was almost destroyed by the grading, and only the left femur, tibia, and fibula were in articulated position. The right leg was crushed, and the upper part of the skeleton had been graded away (see Fig. 5). The burial would seem to have been laid out in an extended, supine position with the head to the southwest. Although little remained of the original interment, a sketch was made of the burial and associations (see Fig. 5).

### Burial Associations

Excavation revealed the presence of several items with Burial 2. It seems quite likely that other artifacts may have been present but were displaced by the grading operation. However, only a series of 14 artifacts were recovered with or very near Burial #2 (see Fig. 5). These artifacts include:



# PLATE II

Wealthy Indian Site Artifacts: 1. Bead Type I; 2. Bead Type II; 3. Bead Type III;  
4. Bead Type IV; 5. Bead Type V; 6. Bead Type VI; 7. Bead Type VII; 8. Bead  
Type VIII; 9. Bead Type IX.

### Iron Objects

Item #1 Section of a bone handled butcher knife (see Fig. 6) found in disturbed context.

Item #4 Bone handled clasp knife (see Fig. 6) found in disturbed context.

Item #6 Three legged pot with a diameter of 6½ in. found near fragments of right leg. Specimen is somewhat like those found with Burial #1 but has less body curvature.

Item #8 Key found near fragments of right leg. Specimen is 2 in. long and is illustrated in Fig. 6.

### Silver (German silver ?) Objects

Item #3 A circular gorget or vest ornament which is 1-5/8 in. in diameter. The specimen is undecorated. It was found in the graded area some 6 ft. southeast of the burial.

Item #5 A small (1¼ in. diameter) circular gorget or vest ornament which was found near the fragments of the right leg. The specimen has etched concentric circles on its surface.

Item #11 This was a tinkler or necklace trinket which was flattened by the earthmoving equipment. It is 1-1/8 in. long and like those found with Burial #1.

Item #13 A small piece of silver metal found near left leg.

### Lead Objects

Item #10 A small musket ball which was found near fragments of the right leg.

### China Objects

Item #2 Sherds of a polychrome bowl were found in the graded area directly south of the skeletal remains. Sherds have white interior and black, white, and brown stripes on exterior. Serpentine-like swirl occurs on the brown band. The bowl is somewhat like a cup (Item #10) found with Burial #1.

### Glass Objects

Item #12 This is a small, bitters or condiment bottle of light green glass. It appears to be molded and has 4 sides. It has LONDON in embossed letters on its side and is 5½ in. high. Illustrated in Fig. 6.

Item #14 This is a series of 30 glass beads of which 3 are clear and the rest are blue. All are faceted and appear comparable to Bead Types V and VII found with Burial #1. These beads were scattered around in the area south of the skeletal remains. ✓

### Clay Objects

Item #7 This is an elbow pipe of unglazed clay and is illustrated in Fig. 6. It was found near fragments of the right leg.

Item #9 This is a small bowled pipe of unglazed clay which was found near the right leg. End of stem has band in which raised crosshatched design occurs (see Fig. 6).

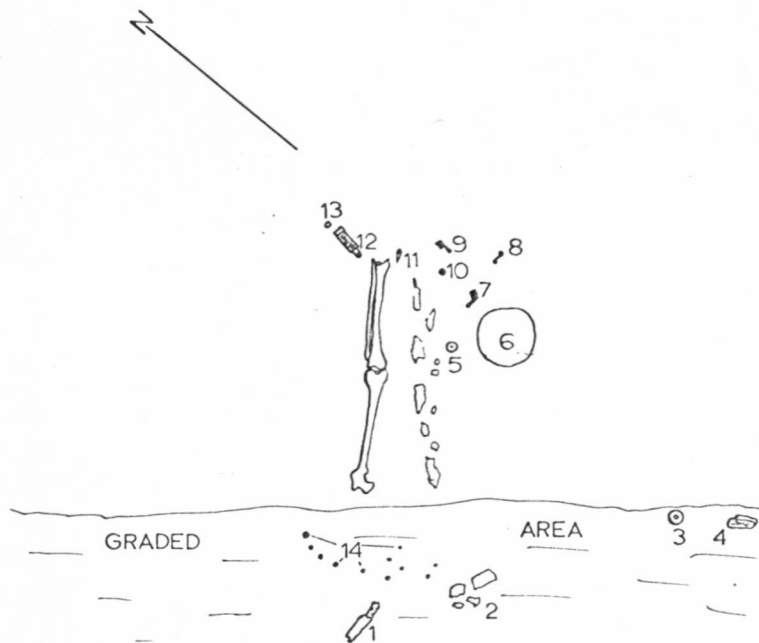
### Interpretation of the Burials and the Site (by Mike Wilson and Don Wyckoff)

The site and burials herein reported definitely relate to the early historic period for eastern Oklahoma. Problems arise, however, in establishing the chronological and cultural affiliations of these burials.

Both burials contained specific artifacts which are comparable and which suggest the burials are roughly contemporaneous. Among the artifacts common to both burials are the blue and clear faceted beads, the polychrome china with serpentine-swirl design, the circular gorgets or vest ornaments, and three-legged iron pots. These shared burial associations as well as the proximity of the 2 burials to each other and to the early historic house sites which were destroyed by the grading allows some basis for considering that the 2 burials relate to a single occupation of this site.



WEALTHY INDIAN SITE  
BURIAL #2  
SKETCH

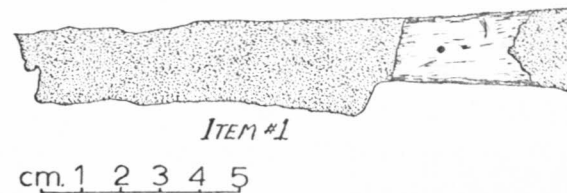
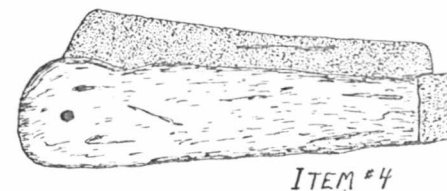


Burial Associations

- 1 BONE HANDLED BUTCHER KNIFE
- 2 SHERDS-CHINA BOWL
- 3 VEST ORNAMENT
- 4 CLASP KNIFE
- 5 VEST ORNAMENT
- 6 3 LEGGED IRON POT
- 7 CLAY ELBOW PIPE
- 8 KEY
- 9 UNGLAZED CLAY PIPE
- 10 MUSKET BALL
- 11 TINKLER
- 12 BOTTLE
- 13 METAL FRAGMENT
- 14 BEADS

FIGURE 5

WEALTHY INDIAN SITE  
BURIAL #2  
ASSOCIATIONS



cm. 1 2 3 4 5



FIGURE 6



Of the several items included as associations with Burials #1 and #2, the china pieces with potters' marks provide some chronological reference points with which to view this site. Of particular interest is the saucer from Burial #1 with the Staffordshire, Clews Warranted mark. James and Ralph Clews operated a plant at Cobridge, Staffordshire, England from 1818 to around 1834 (Moore 1944:26-35). The remaining 2 marked pieces include a blue featheredged plate and the tureen found with Burial #1, and both of these objects bear Davenport marks. These marks relate to the firm of John Davenport who operated at Longport, England, from 1793 to 1887 (Thorn 1947:60). The blue featheredged plate also bears the following: Henderson Walton & Co., Importers, New Orleans. This importing firm had a definite span of operation ranging from 1807 to around 1841 (C.B. Hamer, letter of Sept. 10, 1968).

Other inferences concerning chronology are derived from comparisons with material from salvage excavations at 2 other sites in this locale. One such site is Wg-19 (the Posey site) which may represent a part of the Chouteau's Three Forks trading post (1823-1833) (Wyckoff and Barr 1968:77-84). Site Wg-19 is located on the east side of the Verdigris River and is less than 2 miles northeast of the Wealthy Indian site. On the west side of the Verdigris and almost directly opposite Wg-19 is Wg-16 (the Vandever-Haworth site). Wg-16 was tested in the summer of 1966 (Schneider 1967:128-149) and more completely excavated in the spring of 1968. Although there are some problems in identification, some evidence suggests that Wg-16 may represent the location of the Love trading post (1831-1834 ?) and subsequent commercial buildings (see map of Bonneville in Foreman 1926:245). Artifacts found at these 2 potential trading post locations and which are represented with either Burial #1 or #2 of the Wealthy Indian site include: clear and blue faceted beads, unglazed clay pipes with crosshatched band on stem, bone handled forks, blue-black-brown banded china with serpentine swirls, and blue featheredged china. These shared artifacts suggest some contemporaneity between the Wealthy Indian site occupation and interments and the existence of early 1800 trading establishments in this locale.

From the evidence gained through the burial associations and comparisons with other excavated sites, it seems likely that the burials described herein date around 1830 to 1840. Culturally, it is suspected that both burials relate to the same occupation. Although grave orientations differ (Burial #1-head is east; Burial #2-head would have been to southeast), the style of burial, the placement of grave associations, and the kinds of grave associations are similar and reflect the same burial practice.

Groups occupying this part of northeast Oklahoma during the period of 1820-1840 include the Osages and the resettled Cherokees and Creeks (McReynolds 1960:128; Gibson 1965:84). By 1836, it was the Creeks who had settled most intensely the Three Forks area of the Verdigris and Arkansas valleys (Debo 1941). In view of the Creek settlement pattern during the 1830's, it seems probable that the Wealthy Indian site and its 2 interments are of Creek affiliation.

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