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LITTLE PIGEON CREEK CEMETERY (12 W 340): AN ARCHAIC MIDDEN-MOUND IN WARRICK COUNTY, INDIANA

Little Pigeon Creek Cemetery is a dense midden-mound approximately 400 feet by 250 feet in area, and about 9 feet high. It lies on the end of a floodplain ridge overlooking the creek for which it is named, and is the highest feature in the immediate vicinity. It was reported to the Glenn A. Black Laboratory in 1985 because of extensive vandalism. Our 1986 excavations explored the 80 by 100 foot northwest quadrant of the site that had been extensively disturbed during the previous year.

The site is a man-made elevation consisting largely of sandstone cobbles and of soil derived from sandstone and from organic materials. The midden is quite dense, and stratigraphic analysis was difficult. However, three major components can be distinguished: a modern farmstead largely confined to plowzone, an extensively reworked upper midden extending 3 to 4 feet below the surface, and a lower midden extending to 9 feet.

The lower midden reflects activities responsible for the accumulation of the midden deposits. In situ hearths, ash lenses, and smudge pits are common. The stone tool assemblage reflects a limited range of activities. There is virtually no chert debitage, and there are few finished lithic artifacts, most of these Matanzas forms. Bone and antler artifacts are common, and include flakers, beakers, socketed projectile points, spatulate forms, and incised bone pins and tubes characteristic of French Lick phase. Faunal preservation is excellent, and there is evidence for bone and antler tool manufacture.

The upper midden reflects reworking of these Late Archaic deposits from the present surface. Late Archaic, Early Woodland and Yankeetown material are thoroughly mixed, features cannot be defined, and midden soil is extremely dark and uniform. Sandstone cobbles are smaller than below, probably as a result of weathering as well as fire-cracking. Faunal preservation is poor. Like the lower midden component, the later components include little chert debitage, but finished lithic artifacts are common. Three examples suggest that bannerstones were manufactured at the site. While the lack of discernable features, multicomponency, and poor bone preservation make this zone of lesser archaeological significance than the lower midden, it is the focus of vandalism at the site.

We recovered 31 burials, including one dog, from 10 excavation units comprising just under 18,000 cubic feet. Burials were recovered from both zones, but formal similarities and the lack of ceramics with or beneath burials suggest that they belong to the French Lick phase component throughout. Grave goods include ochre, incised bone pins and spatulae, and unmodified faunal bone. Age and sex composition indicate egalitarian access to this cemetery. Density of burials at the site approximates that at Indian Knoll, and ranks Little Pigeon Creek as the most significant Late Archaic cemetery thus far discovered in Indiana.

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