

Munson, Cheryl Ann (Glenn A. Black Laboratory of Archaeology, Indiana University), Marjorie M. Jones (University of Southern Indiana), Bruce Eisterhold (Evansville, Indiana) and Shawn French (Indiana University, Bloomington)

SURVEYING MISSISSIPPIAN SITES: 1987

Three types of archaeological surveys were made in 1987, each of which produced new information about Mississippian sites in southwestern Indiana: a "salvage" survey; an intensive surface survey; and a survey of private artifact collections.

I. Salvage Survey -- Traylor Brothers site, 12 Vg 363.

Following the report of damage to an archaeological site at a borrow pit near Evansville, Indiana, staff and associates of the Laboratory conducted surveys of the caving bank of the borrow pit, slumped deposits along the face of the pit, and the adjacent surface of a floodplain ridge. Both surficially exposed and buried cultural deposits were evident, as were features dating to the Mississippian period. The excavation of profiles along the caving bank confirmed the presence of two distinct cultural strata and revealed in one deep cut a third cultural deposit at 1.2 meters below the surface of the ridge. The upper two strata, vertically separated in some areas by up to 30 cm of sterile alluvium, both produced ceramics characteristic of the Mississippian period. Such stratified contexts are not known elsewhere in the region. Additionally, the better exposed uppermost stratum yielded ceramics typical of two essentially sequential phases--the Mississippian, Angel Phase (ca. AtD. 1050 to 1450) and the Late Woodland, Yankeetown Phase (ca. A.D. 700 t 1100).

Due to the horizontal and vertical extent of the undamaged cultural deposits, the presence of house and pit features, the range of artifact types, and well-preserved floral (including maize) and faunal remains, the Traylor Bros. Site was recognized as a significant Mississippian hamlet. It is located immediately north of a former channel of the Ohio River (which is now the state boundary between Indiana and Green River Island, Kentucky) and 6.5 km. southwest of Angel Mounds. Salvage of the exposed features and eroding deposits was recommended by the Laboratory, as was protection of the stable deposits back from the face of the borrow pit. Instead a plan was worked out among state and federal agencies to cover the site with fill. Months later, and after some unknown degree of additional erosion, the exposed deposits and the surface of the site were blanketed by earthen fill. Portions of the site probably still hold some potential to address questions about the antiquity of emergent Mississippian horticultural settlements and the nature of cultural and economic transitions during the Yankeetown and early Angel phases.

II. Intensive Surface Survey -- Stephan-Steinkamp Site, 12 PO 33

A continuation of 1986 intensive surface survey at the Stephan-Steinkamp Site was made in April 1987 by staff and associates of the Laboratory and students at the University of Southern Indiana. Based on analysis of the 1986 survey and tests excavations, the primary occupations at the site dated to the Angel Phase. The April survey extended the controlled collection of artifactual materials to the western half of the site, where conditions had previously been unfavorable for surface survey. Like the previous survey, artifactual materials were collected in 20 ft. square blocks, except for surface features (hearths, pits, house basins?) which were collected separately. In all, 654 blocks and 44 surface features were delineated, mapped, and collected in 3 days. In a small area beyond the northwest margin of a village occupation, the survey identified surface indications of one or possibly two structures plus associated pits. The smaller settlement appears to represent an Angel Phase farmstead, which may be temporally as well as spatially discrete from the larger village settlement. The ceramics from the farmstead were overwhelmingly made up of plain varieties, suggesting an occupation that postdates the adjacent village.

III. Survey of Private Artifact Collections.

An archaeological data base enhancement project for Mississippian sites in southwestern Indiana was conducted by the Glenn A. Black Laboratory of Archaeology, Indiana University, in August and September 1987. The project was supported by funds granted by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology. Five counties comprised the target area for the project: Gibson, Posey, Vanderburgh, Warrick, and Spencer. The goal of the project was to collect new information about Mississippian sites regardless of the period of

occupation. Twenty-five interviews were conducted with artifact collectors and amateur archaeologists, all of whom graciously provided information and made their collections available for examination. The interviews and collections study resulted in the initial documentation of 91 previously unrecorded Mississippian sites and of another 33 previously unrecognized Mississippian components at sites already recorded. The 124 newly identified sites represent a 40% increase in the archaeological database for the Mississippian period. This addition to the site inventory provides a valuable contribution both to ongoing research of Mississippian cultural development and decline and to historic preservation planning. In addition, 73 new records were added for recorded Mississippian sites, and numerous records were made for non-Mississippian sites in the target area and beyond. Due to the limited scope of the project, many artifact collectors were identified who could not be interviewed, and only a very few private collections were recorded in detail. There remains a wealth of yet unrecorded information about Mississippian sites in the study area.
