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THE 1988 ARCHAEOLOGICAL TEST EXCAVATIONS AT THE CABORN SITE, A PROTOHISTORIC MISSISSIPPIAN VILLAGE IN POSEY COUNTY, INDIANA

Archaeological test excavations were conducted over a four-week period in June and July 1988 at the Caborn Site, 12 Po 32, in Posey County, Indiana. As one of the type sites of the Caborn- Welborn Phase (dating sometime between A.D. 1400 and 1700), this late Mississippian village has been extensively surveyed since the 1960s by avocational archaeologists and intensively surveyed in 1985 and 1986 by the University of Southern Indiana and the Glenn A. Black Laboratory of Archaeology, Indiana University. The latter surveys were made after floodwaters washed the site and exposed concentrations of cultural materials, fragmentary human bone, areas of dark soil, and patches of burned soil or melted daub. As part of these intensive surveys, surface features and artifact collection units were mapped, as were limited indications of earlier occupations at the site. Surface distribution data were a primary tool in planning the test excavation of the Mississippian village. The 1988 investigation was supported by the Indiana Historical Society, the Laboratory, and the University of Southern Indiana; it was made possible by the generous cooperation of the landowners and tenants.

The goals of the test excavations were: to evaluate site surface and subsurface structure, in order better to define the diversity and distribution of constructions and intact cultural deposits within the Mississippian community to collect samples of artifacts and ecofacts suitable for characterizing the material culture and subsistence activities; and to obtain materials to date the Caborn-Welborn village. Hand and machine assisted excavation units were placed in two areas of interest: along the southern perimeter of the site, to check for the presence of stockade walls and other structures, and in the center of the site, where surface survey indicated pit features were likely to occur.

No evidence of stockade walls was found in the areas tested instead, the southern margin of the site contained shallow surface fires, wall trench structures, scattered postholes and small pits (including a cache of mussel shells containing two shell hoes), and a "buried midden." The midden apparently was covered by alluvium after the abandonment of the Mississippian village, and much of it lay beneath the plowzone and culturally sterile silts. Because of the richness of this intact refuse deposit and good bone preservation, the midden was a focus of hand excavation.

In the central portion of the site small and large pits were found, one of which contained distinct strata of refuse that were excavated as discrete units. Although historic trade goods have been found on the surface, unambiguous historic artifacts were not found in testing; nevertheless, small bits of completely oxidized copper base metals, either native copper or brass, were recovered from the stratified pit. In addition, closely spaced postholes representing one or more undefined wooden post structures were found in the central area.

In all, over 2,000 sq. ft. representing less than 1% of the Mississippian area of occupation was tested and yielded more than 3,200 cataloged samples. Although site structure is not yet clearly defined, the large array of artifactual materials and plant and animal remains (collected) are typical of those occurring at other sites of the Caborn-Welborn phase. Preliminary examination of this collection suggests that the frequencies of decorated ceramics, stone tool types, and animal species vary from those found in test excavation at the Hovey Lake site (12 Po 10). Numerous samples of charcoal were collected in the hope of finding radiocarbon samples that have not been contaminated by the fragments of coal which are abundant in the excavated deposits.