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AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF THE CABORN SITE (12 PO 32), POSEY COUNTY, INDIANA

The Caborn site (12 Po 32) is one of the two type sites of the Mississippian Caborn-Welborn phase, the latest prehistoric occupation recognized in southwestern Indiana and adjacent states. From sites other than the Caborn site, several radiocarbon dates suggest this phase may begin as early as A.D. 1400, and both radiocarbon dates and a handful of historic materials (brass, glass beads) are some evidence that this aboriginal occupation extends into the Euro-American contact period, perhaps as late as A.D. 1700.

The Caborn site, like other large villages of the phase, is located along the Ohio River in an area of abundant backwater sloughs. Initial surveys and surface collections of artifacts were made at the site in the 1950's by avocational archaeologists, Mr. and Mrs. George F. Martin of Newburgh, Indiana. Other collections were made over the years; significant among them are the remains of a number of plowed-out and floodwashed human burials which were salvaged by Mr. Charles R. Lacer of Evansville, Indiana. These extensive collections were instrumental in recognizing the association between certain types of ceramic decorations and lithic tools, and ultimately in defining the kinds of material remains that distinguish Caborn-Welborn phase sites from those of the earlier Mississippian Angel Phase.

In the spring of 1985 floods further damaged the Caborn site, exposing a large number of artifact concentrations and revealing surface soil discolorations. Volunteers and students were marshalled to conduct an intensive surface survey before plowing could mix the discrete areas of material remains. The distribution of different types of artifacts and surface features within the eastern two-thirds of the site were documented by flagging, transit mapping, and provenienced surface collections.

The spring of 1986 again brought excellent exposure of the surface of the village, and another intensive survey was conducted in the western one-third of the site to complete the controlled surface survey. Additionally, data were collected to map the extent of the late Mississippian settlement and to distinguish it from earlier occupations at the same locus.

In all, the two seasons of intensive survey produced maps and made surface collections of 82 surface features and 56 artifact concentrations. Additionally, over 440 individual diagnostic artifacts, including two brass gorgets, were mapped, and 46 controlled surface collections were made at regular intervals within the site.

Preliminary results of the survey are: (1) the late Mississippian occupation of Caborn site, covering approximately 10 acres, is more extensive than previously recognized, because - sands and silts which once covered part of the site have recently washed away; (2) the range of surface features at the site is similar to those at other large Caborn-Welborn phase villages; (3) surface features strongly suggest the presence of a large number of house basins and pits; (4) human interments are present but are probably confined to the habitation area of the village; (5) unlike some other large villages of the Caborn-Welborn phase, no surficial evidence of a plaza or a discrete cemetery area is present; (6) a stockade enclosure and warfare are suggested by the distribution of triangular points, daub, and burned earth along the perimeter of the site; and (7) the rare occurrence of brass along with an unusually large proportion of decorated pottery suggest that the site dates to the later portion of the Caborn-Welborn phase, a time when the Mississippian inhabitants were in indirect contact with Europeans. These results, in combination with more detailed analyses of distributional data, make it possible to design small-scale excavations to adequately investigate the range of aboriginal behaviors and the community pattern of this large village.