

COMMUNICATIONS

LATE ARCHAIC HOUSE FEATURES IN ONTARIO

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ABSTRACT

This note describes test excavations at the Thistle Hill site (AhGx 226). This Late Archaic site is the first in the Great Lakes region offering evidence of possible house features.

RÉSUMÉ

Ce rapport décrit les excavations préliminaires du site Thistle Hill (AhGx 226). Ce site archaïque supérieur de la région des Grands Lacs nous offre la première possible découverte de traces de structures d'habitation.

The Thistle Hill Site (AhGx-226), a Late Archaic site near Mount Hope, Ontario, was found while surveying ploughed fields under the direction of Dr. Peter Ramsden, McMaster University, during the spring of 1987. The site has a very dense and extensive chert scatter encompassing at least a 15m by 15m area. Fragments of two point bases, probably Innes points, were found on the surface as well as two complete and one fragmentary point blank or preform. The original landowner possesses an extensive arrowhead collection containing many Innes and Brewerton points and more fragments were found during testing, typologically dating the site to the Late Archaic period. Permission was obtained from the landowner to begin testing Thistle Hill in August of 1987.

During excavation of an east-west transect an extensive subsoil feature was located. The feature was carefully uncovered to reveal a 3.65m by 2.5m oval shaped mottled feature with nine associated postmolds. This feature has initially been interpreted as a Late Archaic house pit. The feature consists of very dark brown humic material, charcoal, many chert flakes mixed with yellow-orange subsoil clay.

Fourteen one metre squares were excavated to completely reveal the house feature. The flake distribution within the topsoil above the feature ranges from 129 per one metre square to 864 flakes per one metre square. Some units covering the house feature were excavated in arbitrary 5 cm levels indicating a majority of flakes are located within the topsoil immediately above the feature. For example, unit 508-57 contained 864 flakes, of which 504 (or 58.33%) were in the bottom 5 cm of the topsoil. The large quantity of flakes and artifacts at the base of the topsoil, the large oval-shaped feature, and the presence of post-moulds within the subsoil is further evidence that this is a house pit.

Unit 508-57, the unit described above, covers the southwest edge of feature one, but in the corner of the unit is the edge of a second feature also containing many flakes and consisting of mottled soil similar to that within feature one. Feature 2 was not completely uncovered and therefore interpreting it as a second house pit is only speculation. It seems warranted under the circumstances. A north-south one metre by 15 metre transect was excavated in approximately the centre of the site to recover artifacts from the topsoil and check for subsoil features. Two postmolds were found near the southern end of the transect, but no subsoil features have yet been associated with them.

From testing the Thistle Hill site over 6000 artifacts were recovered from only 31 one metre squares. All artifacts are from the topsoil, no subsoil features were excavated. Of the recovered artifacts most are flakes, indicating all stages of the reduction sequence. Over 70 tools were recovered, including many retouched or utilized flakes.

Due to limited time and manpower these two house pit features were not excavated. To ensure that the necessary time and care is taken to excavate properly, it was decided to postpone a complete trowel excavation until the summer of 1988. If further excavation fulfills the promise of the current evidence, Thistle Hill contains the first, and possibly the second or more, Late Archaic Pit house(s) in Ontario and possibly northeastern North America.