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Robert Richey

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The Robert Richey Site in Northern Van Zandt County, Texas

Timothy K. Perttula and Robert Richey

Introduction and Site Setting

This article discusses a collection of ancestral Caddo ceramic and lithic artifacts found at the Robert Richey site in northern Van Zandt County in East Texas. The site is in a pasture on an upland landform facing year-round flowing Caney Creek about 130-180 m to the east, a northern-flowing tributary that merges with the Sabine River about 2.2 miles to the north (Figure 1). The site lies within the flood pool of the long-defunct Mineola Reservoir (Malone 1972), but the Robert Richey site was not recorded at the time of the early 1970s archaeological survey of the reservoir. Sites 41VN53-56, prehistoric sites of either uncertain age (41VN53), Woodland period age (41VN54, 41VN55, and 41VN56), as well as ancestral Caddo (41VN55), likely Early or Middle Caddo period in age, were recorded on alluvial terraces on both sides of Caney Creek not far from the Robert Richey site.

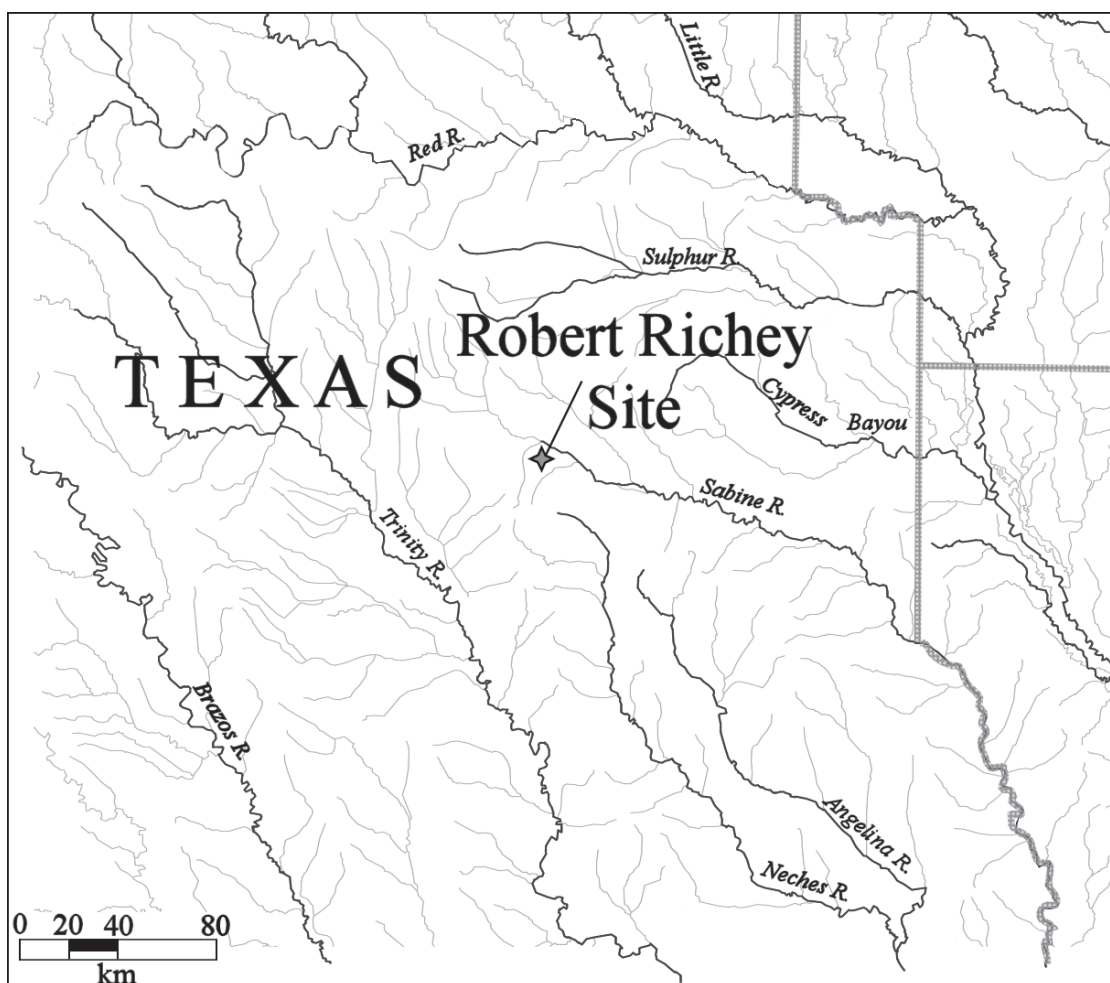


Figure 1. The general location of the Robert Richey site in East Texas.

For years, Mr. Richey's father had been advised by one of the old-timers who owned the adjoining ranch about a rise in his field "that particular mound in the pasture was an Indian mound." Richey's father identified the structure to him years ago. So, it was a known and identifiable rise in their land that had (tongue-in-cheek) been called an Indian mound for many years.

Richey's investigation into the rise was prompted by the fact that he had found a ceramic vessel sherd along the banks of a dam of a recently constructed pond. That sherd was discovered approximately 180 m south of the Robert Richey site, on a landform with tan sandy loam sediments; this place may be 41VN55 recorded by Malone (1972). Malone indicated the site had plain sherds, scrapers, lithic debris, Gary points, as well as an ancestral Caddo sherd with a cross-hatched incised rim and rows of fingernail impressed punctations on the vessel body.

From there, Mr. Richey took that rumor a step further last year and dug four test trenches about 3 feet deep and 10 feet long in the rise and waited for rain. Frankly, he did not expect to discover anything as he has not found much in the way of artifacts on the place. After digging the trenches he waited for rain. After a rain, the artifacts discussed in this article were found over an area about 15 m in diameter; they represent about 50 percent of what had been noted there. He did not note any charcoal in the trenches.

The soil on the Robert Richey site appears to be a reddish-brown loam, and not the black lands characteristic of the soils in the Sabine River floodplain. There is an old and majestic Oak tree growing along the edge of the rise. Generally speaking, this is pasture land.

Artifact Assemblage

The artifacts from the Robert Richey site include both prehistoric lithic and ceramic specimens, as well as a single late 19th to early 20th century brown lead-glazed stoneware sherd. The lithic artifacts consist of 13 pieces of lithic debris from the reduction of raw materials and the manufacture of stone tools. The lithic debris includes a coarse grayish-white quartzite (n=8), petrified wood (n=2), and chert (n=3), including gray, brownish-gray, and dark gray colors. The coarse grayish-white quartzite, which turns pink when heat-treated, comes from a local quarry recorded by Malone (1972) at 41VN39 about 8 km to the west-southwest of the Robert Richey site on Mill Creek, another northward-flowing tributary to the Sabine River. According to Malone (1972:32), the quarry covers between 3-4 acres of an upland landform, manifested as outcrops of large boulders (Malone 1972:Figure 13) with "partially decorticated cores, as well as numerous flakes."

This material was commonly used in Late Archaic to Woodland period sites in this part of Van Zandt County, including at the Yarbrough site (41VN6, Johnson 1962), a few miles to the east of the Robert Richey site, and at 41VN63 (Perttula et al. 2017), about 2 miles to the northeast. The use of this material at the Robert Richey site indicates the continued use of this quartzite raw material in ancestral Caddo times, from ca. A.D. 1100-1300 or thereabouts. There, almost 70 percent of the Gary dart points from 41VN63 are made on the grayish-white quartzite (Perttula et al. 2017:Table 1); 70 percent of the dart point tips are also made from this material. At the Yarbrough site, about 4 percent of the dart points are made from this distinctive quartzite, mostly having been heat-treated. This includes 5.2 percent of the Gary points (n=328), 2.1 percent of the Wells points (n=47), 5.3 percent of the Marshall points (n=19), 15.2 percent of the Ellis points (n=33), 6.0 percent of the Edgewood points (n=50), and 20.0 percent of the Wesley points (n=5); none of the arrow points (n=9) were made from this white/pink quartzite.

The ceramic assemblage at the Robert Richey site has 16 sherds from grog-tempered vessels. This includes 10 plain body sherds and one base sherd, as well as five decorated sherds from at least four different vessels. One body sherd has a ochre-rich red clay slip on its exterior surface, perhaps from a Sanders Slipped bowl (Perttula et al. 2016), and a rim sherd had several horizontal engraved lines on

its flat lip; the exterior surface of the rim is plain. There is a body sherd from a bottle that has at least two curvilinear engraved lines, and two other sherds are from Canton Incised jars (see Suhm and Jelks 1962:23 and Figure 12). These body sherds have either straight or curvilinear incised zones filled with tool punctations (Figure 2a-b). Possible Canton Incised rim and body sherds have been found at 41VN55 on Caney Creek.

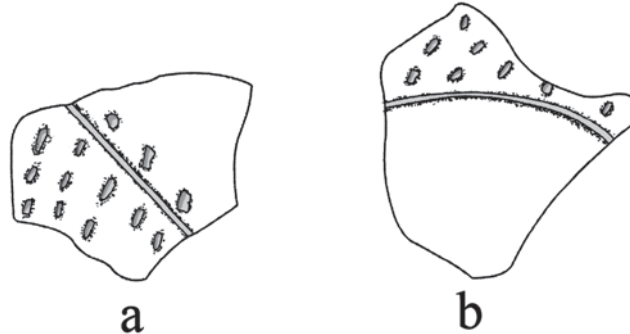


Figure 2. Decorative elements on Canton Incised body sherds from the Robert Richey site, Van Zandt County, Texas.

Summary and Conclusions

The Robert Richey site is an ancestral Caddo settlement on Caney Creek in the upper Sabine River basin in northern Van Zandt County; it is on a private ranch in an area of East Texas that does not have a well-known archaeological record, other than what was obtained during a 1971 survey of then proposed Mineola Reservoir. Limited investigations of the site by Mr. Richey, on a natural rise on an upland landform, recovered a small sample of lithic and ceramic artifacts, including lithic debris from local raw material sources, including pieces of a coarse-grained grayish-white quartzite from a nearby quarry, and 16 grog-tempered ceramic vessel sherds. The few decorated sherds include one possible Sanders Slipped vessel sherd, two engraved sherds (one from a bottle and the other with the engraved decoration confined to the lip), and two body sherds from Canton Incised vessels that have incised-punctated decorative elements. These suggest that the Robert Richey site may have been occupied during the Middle Caddo period, during the Sanders phase, dating from the 12th to the 14th century A.D.

Hopefully, future archaeological investigations can be conducted at the Robert Richey site to determine more about its archaeological character and age, and whether there are preserved features in the archaeological deposits. It will also be important to determine how the Robert Richey site is related to other ancestral Caddo sites in this part of the upper Sabine River basin (including previously recorded sites 41VN53-56), and archaeological survey of private lands in the area can be done to identify these Caddo sites, or sites of other temporal periods.

Acknowledgments

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