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The Buckner Dam Site (41CE339) and Four Other Caddo Sites on Gum Creek in the Upper Neches River Basin, Cherokee County, Texas

Timothy K. Perttula, Bo Nelson, and Mark Walters

INTRODUCTION

Due to recent droughty conditions in East Texas in 2010 and 2011, the water levels on the man-made lakes and reservoirs in the region have been steadily lowering. This decreasing water levels is exposing considerable areas along the lakes that not only have been underwater for considerable periods of time since the lakes were constructed, but this new land exposure is also exposing and eroding archaeological sites that are now along the new lake shore boundaries. Such is the case at Lake Jacksonville, a small lake on Gum Creek in Cherokee County, Texas, and newly recorded archaeological sites have been found along its shores. This article is a summary of efforts to document archaeological collections that have been reported from five sites at Lake Jacksonville.

SETTING

The five archaeological sites at Lake Jacksonville are along Gum Creek, or one of its tributaries. Gum Creek is a southward-flowing tributary to the Neches River, in the upper Neches River basin. They are all along the western boundary of the modern extent of the Pineywoods (see Diggs et al. 2006) and the eastern boundary of the Post Oak Savannah. The Pineywoods cover large parts of East Texas, have medium-tall to tall broadleaf deciduous forests in more mesic habitats, and shortleaf and loblolly pines are common on upland fine sandy loam soils with adequate moisture. Bottomland communities along the major river and creek drainages contain a diverse hardwood and swamp forest (including cypress, tupelo, and sweet gum), with natural levees and alluvial terraces, point bar deposits, old stream channels, oxbow lakes, and backwater swamps. A less diverse bottomland hardwood community is present along the smaller creeks and their tributaries.

The Post Oak Savannah is a narrow southwest-northeast trending woodland that marks an ecotone between the more xeric Blackland Prairie to the west and south (Diggs et al. 2006:Figure 2) and the more mesic Pineywoods to the east. The woodlands in the Post Oak Savannah consist of broadleaf deciduous forests, primarily including several species of oak as well as hickory and pecan. Small areas of tall grass prairie were present in this physiographic province (see Diggs et al. 2006:Figure 5) that ran from the Colorado River on the west to near the Trinity River on the east. Bottomland communities along the rivers and major tributaries in the Post Oak Savannah had a diverse hardwood and/or swamp forest, including cypress, sweet gum, and other hardwoods that tolerate periodic flood waters, on natural levees and alluvial terraces, point bar deposits, old stream channels and oxbow lakes.

THE SITES AND THEIR DOCUMENTED COLLECTIONS

As previously mentioned, during normal pool elevations at Lake Jacksonville, the five sites discussed in this article are under water. The Buckner Dam site (41CE339), before construction of the lake, was located on an upland landform overlooking Gum Creek; part of the site is now visible on a sandbar below

the Buckner Dam (Texas Historic Sites Atlas 2011). The Jacksonville Campground site (41CE442) is situated at the confluence of Gum Creek and Byrd Branch, on one end of a sandy ridge now used by the City of Jacksonville as a city park/campground. The third site, Cat Creek (41CE444), is along the shoreline of Lake Jacksonville, about 60 m west of an old channel of Gum Creek. The Piney Point site (41CE445) is ca. 50 m north of an old channel of Cat Creek, a tributary to Gum Creek. The site was exposed along the shoreline, and this portion of the site has been heavily eroded by lake water action. Finally, the Mission site (41CE447) is ca. 199 m east of an old channel of Gum Creek. The site did not receive its name because there is a Spanish mission at this location. Rather, there is a modern residence visible from the site that was built in 18th century San Antonio mission architecture style, and thus the site was unfortunately dubbed the "Mission" site.

Buckner Dam Site (41CE339)

The Buckner Dam site had a substantial prehistoric Caddo component, based on the estimated size of the site (6000 m, or 1.5 acres) and the large ceramic vessel sherd collection (n=670 sherds, Table 1). The vessel sherds were from grog-tempered vessels (95.5%), with a small amount of sherds that were from vessels tempered with bone, or had hematite inclusions in addition to grog temper (12.8%). About 20% of the tempered sherds had a sandy paste, suggesting the occasional use by Caddo potters of a local naturally sandy clay; otherwise, locally available clay or silty paste clays were preferred in vessel manufacture. The plain to decorated sherd ratio of this ceramic assemblage is 1.51.

The decorated sherds from the Buckner Dam site were dominated by utility ware sherds with brushing and brushed-incised (42% of all the decorated sherds) body decorations, along with incised sherds (33.3% of the decorated sherds) with various elements and motifs, and punctated sherds (9.0% of the decorated sherds). Fine ware engraved sherds were not abundant in the assemblage, comprising only

Table 1. The ceramic assemblage from the Buckner Dam site.

Sherd Type/ Decorative Type	No.	Percent	Percent with Bone Temper
Plain rim	15	2.2	0.0
Plain body	377	56.3	4.3
Plain base	11	1.6	25.0
Decorated sherds	267	40.3	4.6
Brushed-Incised	7	1.0	0.0
Brushed	105	15.7	4.5
Neck Banded	1	0.1	0.0
Punctated	24	3.5	11.8
Incised-Punctated	11	1.6	0.0
Incised	89	13.3	5.7
Pinched	10	1.5	0.0
Engraved	18	2.7	0.0
Totals	670	100.0	4.5

6.7% of all the decorated sherds (Table 2). The frequency of the two decorated wares was also apparent in the proportion of rims: 16 utility ware rim sherds and only five fine ware rims (3.2:1); plain ware rims (n=15, see Table 1) were almost as common as the utility ware rim sherds.

Table 2. Decorative elements in the Buckner Dam ceramic assemblage.

Decorative method and element	Rim	Body	N
Utility Ware			
parallel brushed	–	102	102
opposed brushed	–	3	3
subtotal, brushed	–	105	105
horizontal brushed [rim]-diagonal incised [body]	1	–	1
parallel brushed-incised	–	1	1
overlapping brushed-incised	–	3	3
opposed brushed-incised	–	2	2
subtotal, brushed-incised	1	6	7
cross-hatched incised lines	–	1	1
single curvilinear line	–	1	1
diagonal incised lines	5	1	6
diagonal and vertical incised lines	1	–	1
diagonal and horizontal incised lines	1	–	1
horizontal incised	1	–	1
opposed incised lines	1	10	11
parallel incised lines	–	40	40
broad parallel incised lines	–	1	1
closely-spaced parallel incised lines	–	1	1
widely-spaced parallel incised lines	–	3	3
single straight incised line	–	20	20
single straight, broad line, incised line	–	2	2
subtotal, incised	9	80	89
diagonal incised lines above tool punctated row	1	1	
diagonal incised lines and triangular zone of tool punctates	1	–	1
parallel lines adjacent to circular punctated zone	–	2	2
parallel lines adjacent to triangular zone of fingernail punctates	–	1	1

Table 2. Decorative elements in the Buckner Dam ceramic assemblage, cont.

Decorative method and element	Rim	Body	N
parallel lines adjacent to tool punctated zone	–	2	2
straight incised line adjacent to tool punctates	–	4	4
subtotal, incised-punctated	1	10	11
parallel neck bands	–	1	1
horizontal pinched ridges	1	–	1
parallel pinched rows	–	3	3
vertical pinched ridges	–	6	6
subtotal, pinched	1	9	10
circular punctated rows	–	1	1
fingerail punctated, rows	–	1	1
single fingerail punctate	–	1	1
linear tool punctated rows	–	2	2
tool punctated rows	4	12	16
tool punctated, frec	–	2	2
single tool punctate	–	1	1
subtotal, punctated	4	20	24
<u>Fine Ware</u>			
narrow cross-hatched engraved zone	–	1	1
closely-spaced curvilinear engraved lines	–	1	1
diagonal engraved lines	1	–	1
horizontal engraved lines	2	–	2
horizontal and curvilinear arcing lines	–	2	2
horizontal and diagonal engraved lines	2	–	2
opposed engraved lines	–	4	4
parallel engraved lines	–	2	2
single straight engraved line	–	2	2
single curvilinear engraved line	–	1	1
Subtotal, engraved	5	13	18
Totals	21	246	267

The decorated rim sherds provide an indication of the range of motifs and elements in the Buckner Dam site ceramic assemblage, as well as the popularity of particular kinds of decorations. In the utility wares, 56% of the 16 rims had incised decorations, including diagonal incised lines, opposed diagonal incised lines (Figure 1a), and horizontal and/or diagonal incised lines. These are probably from Maydelle Incised jars (see Suhm and Jelks 1962). Other common rim decorative treatments in the utility wares included jars with rows of tool punctations on the rim (25%); these rows typically were placed under the lip, at mid-rim, and then at the rim-body juncture; vessel bodies may have been plain or had any number of decorative methods applied to cover the exterior surface. Other rims among the utility wares includes one with horizontal brushing on the rim and diagonal incised lines on the vessel body; a Killough Pinched jar with horizontal pinched ridges covering the rim; and a jar rim with diagonal incised lines forming one side of an incised triangle, with the incised triangle filled with tool punctates (see Table 2). This particular rim may be from a Maydelle Incised vessel (see Suhm and Jelks 1962:Plate 52e). The neck banded jar sherd is from a LaRue Neck Banded vessel.

Utility ware vessel bodies in this assemblage were most commonly covered with brushing marks, most likely vertical in orientation. There were also vessels with various incised, punctated (free or randomly placed), and pinched body decorations (see Table 2). Incised-punctated vessel decorations were most likely confined to the rim of vessels.

Among the fine ware sherds, the rims have either diagonal, horizontal, or diagonal engraved lines. The horizontal engraved sherds may be from Hickory Engraved vessels (see Suhm and Jelks 1962:Plate 36), which would suggest a Caddo occupation here that occurred prior to ca. A.D. 1300, according to the best estimates on the age of this and related East Texas types such as Holly Fine Engraved, Weches Fingernail Impressed, Pennington Punctated-Incised, or Crockett Curvilinear Incised (cf. Story 2000). None of the other pre-A.D. 1300 East Texas ceramic types occurred in the Buckner Dam site collection, leaving open the possibility that horizontal engraved vessels may also date after ca. A.D. 1300, and not be exclusively associated with these early ceramic types.

Other distinctive engraved sherds, but found among the body sherds, were two sherds of the Poynor Engraved type. These have horizontal and curvilinear arcing engraved lines (see Figure 1c), and are probably part of curvilinear hatched-filled triangles, a common Poynor Engraved element (see Perttula 2011:Figure 6-15). There was also a body sherd with a narrow engraved zone filled with cross-hatched engraved lines (see Figure 1b). Such narrow cross-hatched or cross-hatched zones are a common feature in 14th and 15th century upper Neches River Caddo ceramic assemblages (see Perttula 2011:Figures 6-13 and 6-14).

In addition to the ceramic vessel sherds, there were five ceramic pipe sherds in the Buckner Dam site collections. Four are relatively thick (4.6-6.5 mm) elbow pipe stem sherds, one with an incised line on it, and the other is a bone-tempered elbow pipe bowl rim. The one incised elbow pipe stem sherd is from either an Var. B, Var. C, or Var. D elbow pipe form, varieties of pipes recently established in the upper Neches River basin (Perttula 2011:215 and Figure 6-23). Such elbow pipes were made and used by Caddo peoples between ca. A.D. 1400-1560.

Also noteworthy in the Buckner Dam collections was a single piece of daub. This suggests there may have been a thatch and clay-covered Caddo structure on the site during its occupation.

The chipped stone artifacts in the Buckner Dam site collection were meager. The few tools included a unifacially flaked Godley dart point made from a gray chert and a Gary point preform, also of gray chert. Their occurrence at the site suggests it was used by a Woodland period group of people sometime between ca. 2500-1200 years ago, perhaps as a hunting camp. Lithic raw materials and chipped stone tools were knapped at the site, as evidenced by a small amount of lithic debris: quartzite (n=2), petrified wood (n=7), brown chert (n=1), dark gray chert (n=2), and gray chert (n=2). The gray and dark gray cherts were from non-local sources, perhaps Neches River or Trinity River gravels, while the other raw materials were likely gathered from local stream gravel sources.

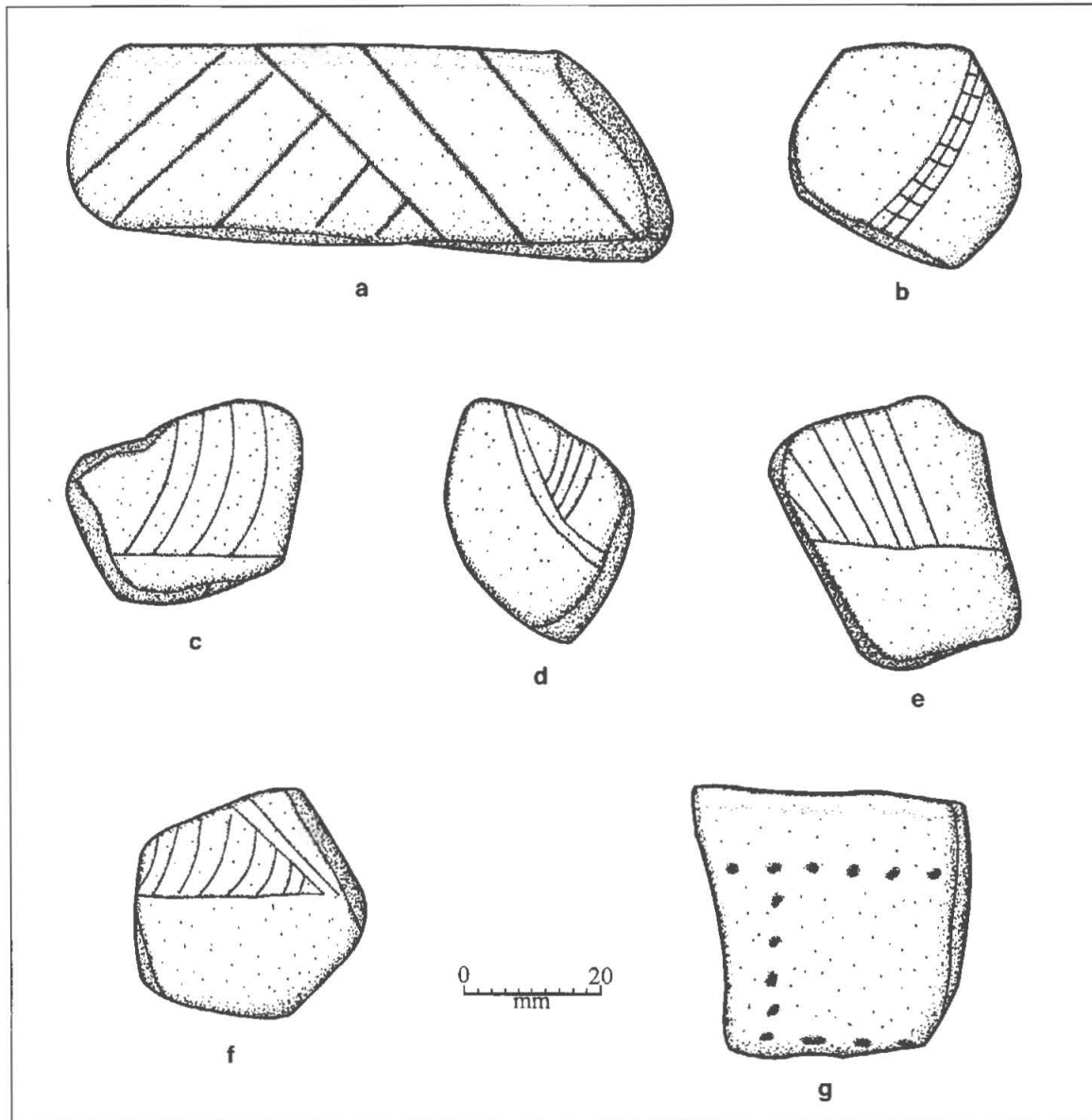


Figure 1. Selected decorated sherds from the Lake Jacksonville sites: a, opposed diagonal incised rim sherd; b, cross-hatched engraved zone; c, cf. Poynor Engraved body sherd; d, curvilinear and vertical arcing engraved lines, bottle sherd; e, opposed engraved lines; f, cf. Poynor Engraved body sherd; g, tool punctated rim. Provenience: a-c, 41CE339; d, 41CE442; e-g, 41CE445.

Jacksonville Campground (41CE442)

The artifacts documented from the Jacksonville Campground site indicated that there were both Woodland and Caddo occupations here. The Woodland period occupation was denoted by five sandy paste Goose Creek Plain, *var. unspecified* body sherds. Sherds of this Woodland period type were also noted at the Cat Creek site.

The Caddo ceramic assemblage had 55 plain rim (n=1), body (n=53), and base (n=1) sherds as well as 24 decorated rim and body sherds. The P/DR is 2.29. The Jacksonville Campground Caddo sherds were grog-tempered, but 5.1% were noted to also contain burned and crushed bone temper inclusions.

Almost 80% of the decorated sherds from the site were from utility ware vessels, with the remaining 20% coming from fine ware bowls, carinated bowls, and bottles. Over 60% of the utility wares had brushed decorations, including a horizontal brushed rim, and parallel (n=10) and overlapping (n=1) brushed marks on vessel bodies. Sherds from vessels with incised decorations were also common, including parallel lined (n=2), cross-hatched (one rim), and a rim/body sherd with opposed incised lines; this latter sherd may be from a Maydelle Incised jar. Two other utility ware sherds had incised-punctated elements, including zones of tool punctations adjacent to straight or cross-hatched incised elements. One body sherd had a row of tool punctations across it.

The five fine ware sherds from the Jacksonville Campground site were body sherds, one from a bottle. This sherd had opposed arcs of closely-spaced engraved lines (see Figure 1d), possibly from a Poynor Engraved bottle (Suhm and Jelks 1962: Plate 63e, g). Two other engraved sherds had straight or parallel engraved lines, another had a hatched zone, and the last engraved sherd had a cross-hatched engraved zone or column element.

A few chipped stone artifacts were documented in the collection. They comprised temporally undiagnostic lithic debris and a core fragment, the product of some chipped stone tool manufacturing efforts during the course of one or both prehistoric components. These materials include a local brown chert core fragment and 10 pieces of lithic debris. All but one of these pieces are from locally available quartzite (50%) and petrified wood (40%); the one flake from a non-local raw material is a non-cortical piece of grayish-brown chert.

Cat Creek (41CE444)

Only a small number of artifacts were documented from the Cat Creek site. These included a hematite pitted stone, a quartzite hammerstone, and five pieces of lithic debris (1 brown-dark brown chert; 2 petrified wood; 1 brown chert; and 1 quartzite); 80% of the lithic debris had cortical remnants.

There were also five plain ceramic body sherds in the collection. Three were from grog or grog-bone-tempered vessels, while the other two were from a plain sandy paste Goose Creek Plain, *var. unspecified* vessel (cf. Aten and Bollich 2011). Such vessels are found in Woodland period contexts (ca. 500 B.C. to A.D. 700) in East Texas.

Piney Point (41CE445)

Caddo ceramic sherds were abundant in the documented collection from the Piney Point site, with 191 plain sherds (seven rim sherds, 175 body sherds, and nine base sherds) and 80 rim and body sherds with decorations. The P/DR is 2.39. The sherds were almost exclusively from grog-tempered vessels, although 5.5% of the sherds (5.8% of the plain sherds and 5% of the decorated sherds) were bone-tempered.

Among the decorated sherds, almost 89% were from utility ware jars, and only 11.3% were from fine ware bowls or carinated bowls (Table 3). Half of the utility ware sherds had brushing on them, primarily parallel (vertical on the vessel body?), including one that had both brushed marks and incised lines parallel to the brushing. Sherds from vessels with incised lines comprised 25% of the decorated sherd assemblage; the incised sherds emphasized straight line and geometric elements. Tool punctated rim and body sherds accounted for 6.3% of the decorated sherds, and these consisted of rows of tool punctates, typically horizontal to the rim, but in one case both horizontal and vertical punctations comprised the decorative element on the sherd (see Figure 1g).

Five percent of the decorated sherds from the Piney Point site had incised-punctated elements (see Table 3). These had incised triangles filled with either tool punctations or small circular punctations. There were two utility ware sherds that had applied elements (i.e., straight applied ridge or applied fillet) associated with either incised lines or tool punctations. The applied elements were employed to divide the body of utility ware jars into panels filled with decorations executed with another method such as zones of tool punctations or panels filled with opposed incised lines.

Table 3. Decorative methods and elements in the Piney Point site ceramic assemblage.

Decorative method and element	Rim	Body	N
Utility Ware			
applied ridge adjacent to a tool punctated zone	–	1	1
applied fillet and opposed parallel incised lines	–	1	1
parallel brushed	–	33	33
overlapping brushed	–	3	3
horizontal brushed	–	1	1
opposed brushed	–	1	1
curvilinear brushed	–	1	1
parallel brushed-overlapping parallel incised	–	1	1
diagonal incised lines	1	1	2
diagonal opposed lines	–	1	1
parallel incised lines	–	12	12
straight incised line	–	5	5
horizontal-diagonal incised lines and incised zone filled with circular punctations	–	1	1
triangular incised zone filled with circular punctations	–	1	1
straight incised lines adjacent to tool punctated zone	–	2	2
tool punctates in rows	–	4	4
tool punctates in horizontal and vertical rows	1		1
Fine Ware			
curvilinear engraved lines	–	1	1
horizontal engraved lines	–	2	2
opposed engraved lines	–	2	2
parallel engraved lines	–	3	3
triangular element with arcing lines	–	1	1
Totals	2	78	80

The fine ware sherds are primarily straight line or geometric designs (see Figure 1e and Table 3), although there is one sherd with curvilinear lines that may be from a bottle. The most distinctive engraved sherd (see Figure 1f) is one that compares favorably to several varieties of Poynor Engraved (Perttula 2011:Figure 6-64), including *var. Blackburn*, *var. Cook*, and *var. Lang*. These particular varieties are most common in the early and middle parts of the Frankston phase, from ca. A.D. 1400-1560 (Perttula 2011:Table 6-37).

The lithic artifacts documented from the Piney Point site included several tools and tool fragments as well as lithic debris. The tools were a quartzite Gary point preform, indicative of use of the site in Woodland period times, two petrified wood biface fragments, and a polished celt fragment made from a dark gray diorite; this material came from source areas in the Ouachita Mountains of southeastern Oklahoma (see Banks 1990), or was traded/exchanged from a Ouachita or Red River Caddo group to one of the East Texas Caddo communities living in the upper Neches River basin.

Lithic debris (n=33) from the site was primarily a product of the knapping of local lithic raw materials, among them quartzite (n=16), petrified wood (n=7), red chert (n=3), and brown chert (n=1). Cortical flakes comprised 80% of the lithic debris from these materials, clearly indicating that the initial reduction of pebbles and cobbles was an important knapping activity at the Piney Point site, probably to produce flakes usable for tools. Non-local lithic debris was a brown to dark brown chert (n=5) and a gray chert.

Mission (41CE447)

The prehistoric Caddo archaeological materials documented from the Mission site consisted of one piece of lithic debris (brownish-gray chert, from a non-local raw material source) and 79 ceramic vessel sherds. This included 59 plain body sherds, four plain base sherds, and 16 decorated rim and body sherds. The P/DR for this assemblage, although not of optimal sample size, is 3.94.

The ceramics were predominantly grog-tempered; 10.1% of the sherds also had crushed and burned bone added to the vessel paste as a temper. All of the decorated sherds were from utility ware jars, including brushed (50%), incised (44%), and one incised-punctated body sherd (6.3%). This sherd had an incised circle filled with tool punctations. Two of the incised sherds were rims with either diagonal or horizontal lines. The brushed sherds had parallel brushing marks on them, probably from cooking vessels with vertical brushing on the bodies.

SUMMARY

The documentation of the collections from five aboriginal sites along Gum Creek in the upper Neches River basin in East Texas indicates that the five sites had both Woodland period (ca. 2500-1200 years ago) and Caddo era occupations and associated material culture remains. Sparsely occupied Woodland components at the Buckner Dam (41CE339), Jacksonville Campground (41CE342), Cat Creek (41CE344), and Piney Point (41CE445) sites are marked by a few plain sandy paste Goose Creek Plain, *var. unspecified* ceramic sherds and Godley and Gary dart points. These sites must have been the scene of a few small camps episodically occupied for short periods of time, and not the scene of more permanent Woodland habitation. Such sites may be present along the Neches River and/or larger tributaries to the river, where resources were more predictable and seasonally abundant.

The prehistoric Caddo occupations at the Lake Jacksonville sites, especially those documented at the Buckner Dam and Jacksonville Campground sites, likely had more substantial use, probably as farmsteads or small hamlets that would have been dispersed along Gum Creek and in the upper Neches River valley and small and large tributaries. The Caddo occupation appears to have been extensive, at least during some part of the Caddo era in East Texas. Ceramic comparisons between the four sites with Caddo ceramic vessel sherds (Table 4) suggest—if one ignores the P/DR values, which are suspect in the case

Table 4. Ceramic comparisons of the Lake Jacksonville sites.

Sites	P/DR	% brushed	% wet paste	% bone temper	N
41CE447	3.94	50.0	50.0	10.1	79
41CE445	2.39	50.0	40.0	5.5	271
41CE442	2.29	50.0	29.2	5.1	79
41CE339	1.51	42.0	53.2	4.5	670

of the Jacksonville Campground and Mission sites because they do not meet the 200 plain and decorated sherd sample size threshold for reliability) – that these sites may well be from a generally contemporaneous community of Caddo peoples living along Gum Creek whose material culture included a distinctive array of ceramic characteristics.

These characteristics include the manufacture of ceramic vessels primarily using local clays and crushed sherds (grog) as the predominant temper, with little use of bone temper (4.5-10.1% of the sherds). These vessels were intended for domestic, and household, use. Utility wares, both sherds from brushed jars and vessels with wet paste decorations, including incised, punctated, incised-punctated, and pinched methods, make up the vast bulk of the decorated vessels (between 79.2-100% of the sherds) from the four Gum Creek sites. Maydelle Incised and Killough Pinched types are present in the assemblages. There are also post-A.D. 1400 Poynor Engraved sherds from two of the sites, and elbow pipes at the Buckner Dam site. Taken in concert with the fact that brushed sherds comprise between 42-50% of the decorated sherds—and such proportions of brushed sherds in assemblages are seen only in the earliest part of the Late Caddo Frankston phase (Pertulla 2011:Table 6-38) in the upper Neches River basin—the Lake Jacksonville sites likely were occupied between ca. A.D. 1400-1480. As such, it is concluded that the Lake Jacksonville Caddo sites were part of an upper Neches River basin grog-tempered ceramic tradition shared by Caddo peoples specific to this area (Pertulla 2011:315-318 and Figure 6-71).

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