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# The Pine Tree Mound Site and the Entrada of the Hernando De Soto Expedition of 1542

*Ross C. Fields*

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## INTRODUCTION

The entrada into Texas of the Hernando de Soto expedition in July 1542, which was led by Luis de Moscoso after de Soto's death in June of that year, is relevant to the Pine Tree Mound site (41HS15) because it appears that the site was occupied at that time, and the entrada likely followed a path that brought it very close to the site. In fact, we hypothesize that the Pine Tree Mound site, along with associated villages nearby, is specifically mentioned in entrada accounts as the province of Nondacao. These may have been the forebears of the Nadaco (Anadarko) Caddo, who apparently lived in this same area through the first quarter of the 19th century (Pertulla 1992:175–177) before moving west to north-central Texas and then to Indian Territory in Oklahoma. The three components of this hypothesis deal with the age of the site, the route of the entrada, and the persistence of Nadaco settlements in this area long after the time of the entrada, and these are addressed in turn below.

The Pine Tree Mound site is a Middle to Late Caddo period ceremonial and civic center in central Harrison County, Texas. It occupies a broad upland surface between Potters and Starkey creeks, about 7.3 km north of where Potters Creek flows onto the floodplain of the Sabine River. The site is large, covering an area 800 m east-west by 720 m north-south. Its most conspicuous features are three earthen mounds that stand 0.4 to 2.4 m above the modern land surface. The three mounds are within an area measuring 210 m east-west by 150 m north-south. These mounds are associated with a possible buried mound, at least five areas with off-mound structures, a plaza, and at least one cemetery. Together, these constitute the core of the site, measuring about 360 m both east-west and north-south and covering 27 acres. This core area is owned by The Archaeological Conservancy.

Test excavations in 2004 identified eight possible associated village areas ringing the core on the west,

and Prewitt and Associates, Inc., conducted intensive excavations at three of these in 2006–2007 under a contract with the Sabine Mining Company. These excavations uncovered the remains of dozens of houses, as well as outside activity areas, middens, and 27 human burials. Analysis of the wealth of data recovered from the site is ongoing and will not be finished for several years. This article provides a preview of one of the topics that the analysis will address.

## THE AGE OF THE PINE TREE MOUND SITE

The 26 radiocarbon dates obtained from the Pine Tree Mound site as a result of the 2004 testing (this number will change dramatically once dates are obtained from the 2006–2007 excavations) indicate that occupation of the site could have started as early as A.D. 1300 and extended throughout the A.D. 1400s (Figure 1). Based on the dates, occupation through the A.D. 1500s and well into the A.D. 1600s is possible, although using radiocarbon evidence to identify a terminal date for occupation is a problem because of the nature of the calibration curve. Using the two-sigma calibrated results, none of the 14 assays with intervals in the A.D. 1500s–1600s are restricted to this period; all also have intervals in the A.D. 1400s. Figure 2 illustrates this problem. It shows the calibration graph for an assay with a conventional radiocarbon age of  $310 \pm 40$  B.P. While this age provides two intercepts (A.D. 1530 and 1550) that bracket the time of the entrada, the wriggle in the curve and its shallow slope make it impossible to get a calibrated date range that centers narrowly on A.D. 1542, either at one or two sigma. The two-sigma date range is almost 200 years, A.D. 1470–1660, and thus not much help in resolving chronological issues. At one sigma, however, the assay produces two ranges at A.D. 1510–1600 and 1620–1650, which make occupation at the time of

the entrada, or even afterwards, plausible. The 2004 excavations yielded two 310 B.P. assays: one from what appears to be a burned floor associated with an early construction episode in Mound B, and one from an area interpreted as containing the remains of one or more burned ceremonial structures just north of Mound B. Hence, it appears that use of the core part of the site for ceremonies may have continued well into the 16th century, if not beyond.

No non-native artifacts that would indicate contemporaneity of occupation at the Pine Tree Mound and the entrada, such as the small brass bell and glass chevron-style bead found at the Parkin site along the entrada route in Arkansas (Morse 1993), have been found at the Pine Tree Mound site, either during the 2004 and 2006 excavations or during the many episodes of surface collection by avocational archeologist Marshall McIntosh starting in the 1980s. Of course, no entrada-related items have been found anywhere in East Texas, and it is true that by the time the expedition reached Texas, it had been in the New World for over three years, endured a series of major and minor battles, and lost almost half its men. By that point in their journey, expedition members may not have had many European-made items to leave behind.

Two kinds of artifacts recovered in the 2006–2007 excavations beg some explanation, however.

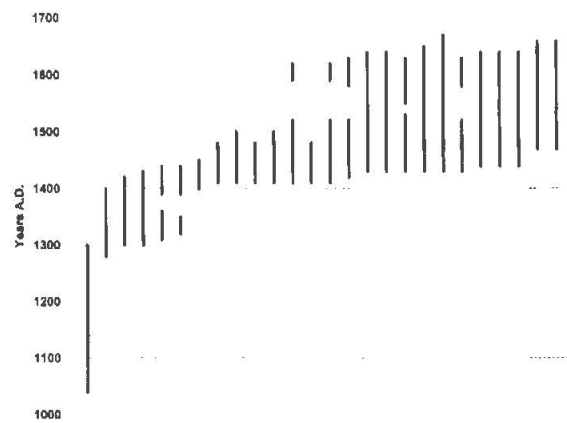


Figure 1. Graph of the calibrated radiocarbon dates (two-sigma) from the 2004 excavations at the Pine Tree Mound (41HS15).

The first, and more easily dealt with, consists of three gunflints, two of dark gray English chert and one of local chert. While these do reflect use of the site in the early historic era, they do not relate to use in the time of the entrada, as firearms used by de Soto's men would have been of the matchlock variety and not employed flints (Jay C. Blaine, personal communication 2007).

The second class consists of a single ceramic vessel from a grave (Figure 3). It is of a form often

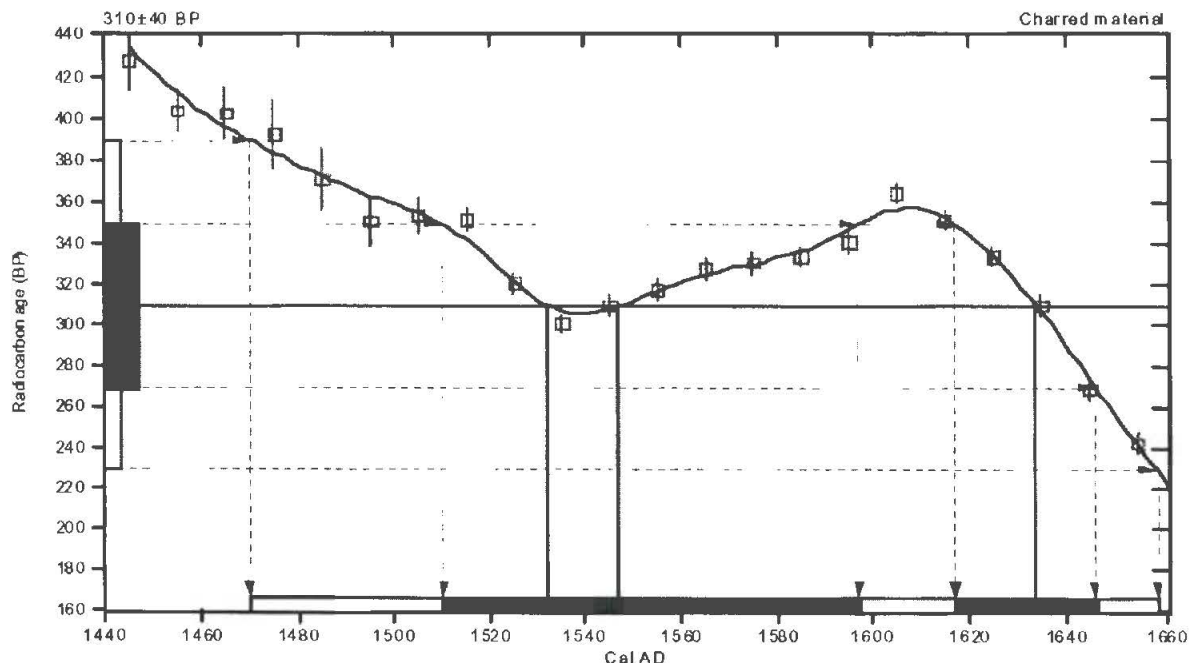


Figure 2. Graph of the radiocarbon calibration curve and a 310 B.P. assay.





Figure 3. Chalice from the Pine Tree Mound site (41HS15).

called a chalice, which some researchers have suggested represent native-made copies of stemmed vessels (wine glasses, cups, and goblets) carried by members of the entrada (Perttula 1992:27; Turner 1978:98–100). These vessels are not at all common, with just five other published examples from the following sites<sup>1</sup>: Tuck Carpenter and Johns in Camp County; Frank Smith in Upshur County; Mattie Gandy Farm in Franklin County; and either Spencer in Upshur County or Susie Slade in Harrison County (Jackson 1938:99, 105; Perttula 2006:56, 95; Thurmond 1990:155–158; Turner 1978:98–100). The restricted area over which these vessels have been found (Figure 4), the proximity of this area to the likely route of the entrada, the fact that all appear to be from Late Caddo contexts, and the absence of an earlier tradition for making such vessels among the Caddo, all would support the contention that they were inspired by vessels brought by the Spanish. Also supporting this idea is the fact that all six vessels look like essentially traditional forms (five bowls and one bottle) with stemmed bases simply attached to their bottoms. The context that the Pine Tree Mound site chalice came from (Feature 8.1085) produced no other artifacts that would prove a historic age. The grave contained no historic materials, and the seven ceramic vessels other than the chalice look typical of the Late Caddo Titus phase (two Ripley Engraved bowls with slanted scroll motifs, one plain carinated bowl, three Pease Brushed-Incised jars, and one red-slipped bottle with an odd engraved design). Dating of human bone from the grave could help

answer the question, although we have not been able to obtain permission to do this.

### THE ROUTE OF THE ENTRADA

A variety of researchers have examined possible routes for the Moscoso expedition in Texas (e.g., Bruseth and Kenmotsu 1993; Hudson 1993; Kenmotsu et al. 1993; Perttula 1992:19–27; Schambach 1993; Strickland 1942; Swanton 1985:274–278; Williams 1942; Woldert 1942), a task complicated by two things: (1) this part of the journey is documented in only the “Elvas” (Robertson 1933) and Biedma (Bourne 1904) accounts without any corroborating information from the Ranjel narrative, which is missing for the period after November 1541 and was the “best and most detailed of all the de Soto documents on the day-to-day movements of the army” (Schambach 1993:79); and (2) what was documented was sketchy, perhaps because the much-diminished expedition was focused on finding an end to the journey rather than recording their movements and observations. While some have argued that the expedition entered Texas after moving west across northern Louisiana, the most-critical studies conclude convincingly that the army traveled across southwestern Arkansas before crossing the Red River. While Schambach (1993:86–90) places Naguatex, the first Caddo province along the Red encountered by the expedition, in southwestern Arkansas east of Texarkana, Bruseth and Kenmotsu (1993:210–212) conclude it more likely was above the Great Bend northwest of Texarkana.

Either way, it is clear that, upon leaving Naguatex, Moscoso and his men followed an existing trail southward into Caddo country. This trail likely was the Hasinai Trace, which connected Caddo groups on the Red River with those living in the Neches and Angelina drainages to the south. This trail, known as Trammel’s Trace by the 19th century, “extended from Fulton, Arkansas southwest through Bowie County, crossing the county line at Epperson’s Ferry on the Sulphur River. At this point, it proceeded to the western Cass County line, passing through the community of Hughes Springs, and then turning more southeastward toward Jefferson. The trace crossed Cypress Creek slightly west of Jefferson and made a bend around the eastern side of Marshall, the seat of Harrison County. At this point it turned again toward the southwest, crossing the Sabine River at



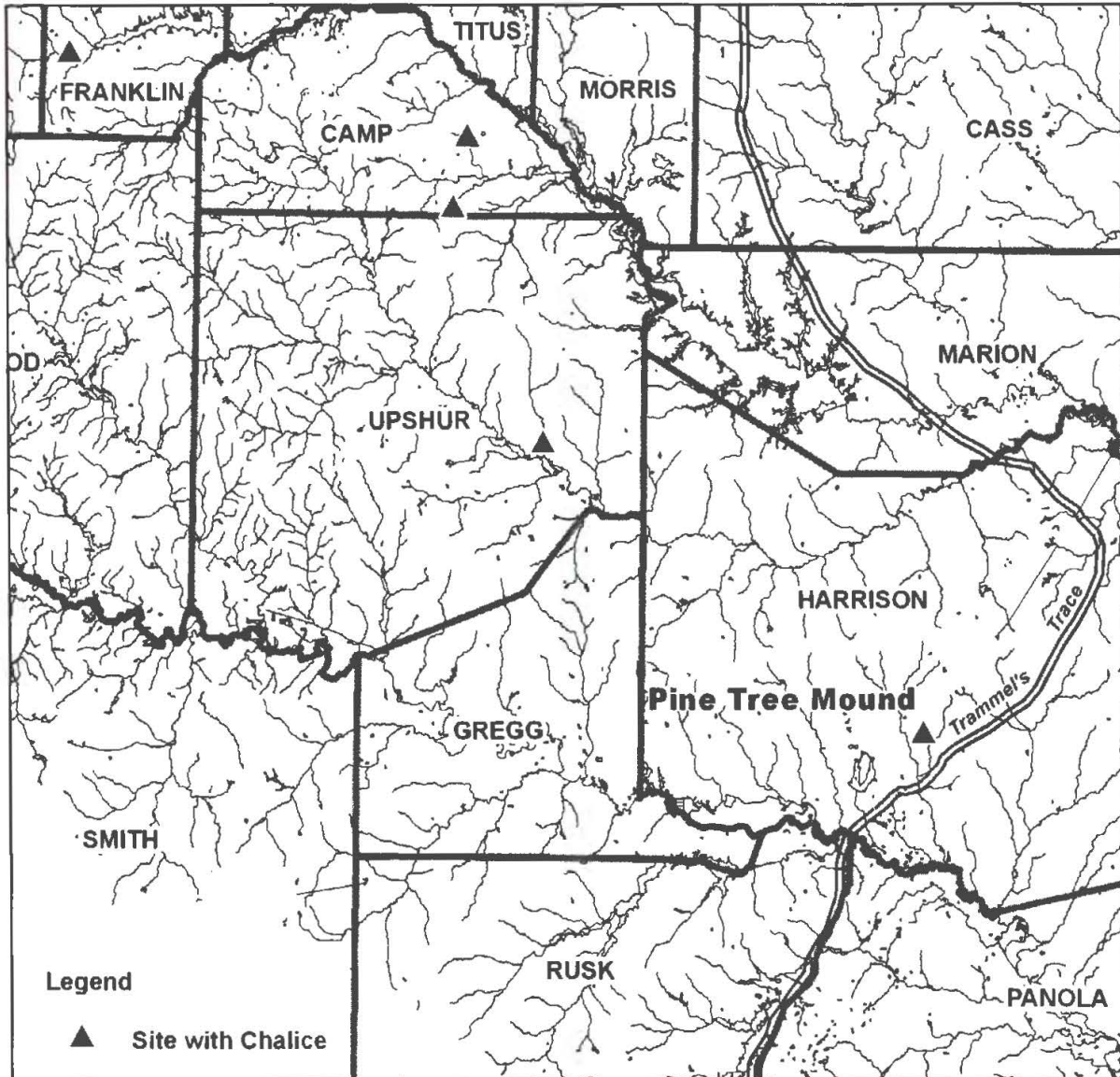


Figure 4. The locations of published sites that have yielded chalices (excludes one problematical example, which is from either the Spencer site in Upshur County or the Susie Slade site in Harrison County).

the boundary between Rusk and Panola Counties” (Bruseth and Kenmotsu 1993:213). Bruseth and Kenmotsu (1993:213) suggest that the first two Caddo provinces the expedition encountered after leaving Naguatex—Nissohone and Lacane—were on the trace near where it crossed the Sulphur River and Cypress Creek, and that the third province—Nondacao—was on the Sabine River, in the vicinity of the Pine Tree Mound site.

Recent research by Bob Vernon (personal communication, 2007) of the Texas Archeological Stewards Network and Gary Pinkerton supports the contention that the Hasinai Trace passed close

by the Pine Tree Mound site. Using Texas General Land Office county headright maps and original surveyors’ field notes, they have been able to plot the location of Trammel’s Trace with some precision across most of Harrison County. According to that plotting, the trace ran 1.4 km east of the Pine Tree Mound site on its southwestward course to the Ramsdale Ferry crossing of the Sabine, about 9.3 km southwest of the site.

There is nothing in the entrada accounts that conclusively places Nondacao in the vicinity of the Pine Tree Mound site. The Biedma account is particularly uninformative about this, and all that is

said in the Elvas account (Robertson 1933:199) is the following: “Two days later, he reached another wretched land called Lacanc. There he captured an Indian who said that the land of Nondacao was a very populous region and the houses scattered about one from another as is customary in mountains, and that there was an abundance of maize. The cacique [of Nondacao] and his Indians came weeping like those of Naguatex, that being their custom in token of obedience. He made him [the governor] a gift of a great quantity of fish and offered to do as he should order. He took his leave of him and gave him a guide to the province of Soacatino.” The limited picture of Nondacao that these comments present certainly would be consistent with the archeology of the Pine Tree Mound site vicinity, but probably no more so than many other parts of the Caddo area. In fact, there is no specific mention that Moscoso actually saw the Nondacao settlement, since it sounds like the cacique came to meet Moscoso (on the Hasinai Trace?), and there is no indication that the expedition members stayed at Nondacao for any time at all. Nonetheless, Bruseth and Kenmotsu’s (1993) reconstruction seems sound, relying as it does on multiple lines of evidence. Assuming that Moscoso and his men traveled down the Hasinai Trace and that the Pine Tree Mound site was still occupied as argued above, it is almost inconceivable that the Spaniards and Portuguese and the Pine Tree Mound Caddo remained unaware of one another.

#### **THE PERSISTENCE OF NADACO SETTLEMENTS NEAR PINE TREE MOUND**

The final piece of this argument relates to identifying the Nondacao, who are poorly documented, as the forebears of the Nadaco, who are better documented in the ethnohistoric records. Making this connection helps place the Nondacao province on the landscape and is an important part of Bruseth and Kenmotsu’s reconstruction above. The first issue here is whether these are two versions of the same name; there appears to be consensus that they are (Bruseth and Kenmotsu 1993:213; Perttula 1992:175; Schambach 1993:97; Swanton 1942:11, 1985:61), with Chafe (1993:223) equating Nondacao with the Caddo word “Nadaakuh,” meaning “the place of the bumblebee” or the people of that place.

The presence of historic Caddo sites in the vicinity of the Pine Tree Mound site has long been

recognized, with such sites forming the basis for what Buddy Calvin Jones called the Kinsloe focus (Jones 1968; Perttula 2007a; Webb et al. 1969:7–9). He included the following sites in this construct: Ware Acres (41GG31) near Longview in southern Gregg County; Kinsloe (41GG3) near Kilgore in southern Gregg County; Cherokee Lake (41RK132) in northern Rusk County, southeast of Kilgore; Millsey Williamson (41RK3) in Rusk County southwest of Tatum; C. D. Marsh (41HS269) on Eightmile Creek about 1.6 km north of where it flows into the Sabine River in southern Harrison County; and Susie Slade (41HS13) and Henry Brown No. 1 (41HS261) in southern Harrison County. None of these sites is more than 35 km from the Pine Tree Mound site, and the latter two are on Potters Creek just south of Pine Tree Mound (Figure 5). They, along with two other similar sites nearby (Henry Brown No. 2 [41HS262] and 41HS770), contained Native American graves, some of which had European trade goods such as glass beads, metal knives, bridle parts, brass disks, gunflints, and hawk bells accompanied by Caddo ceramic types clearly dating the burials to the 17th and 18th centuries (Jones 1968; Keller 2000:112; Perttula 2006:49–68, 84–85; Webb et al. 1969:7–9; see Perttula [2007a] for a summary of the artifacts from all the Kinsloe sites). Jones (1968:211–212) noted that the Kinsloe focus sites could be related to several named Caddo groups, but he concluded that the most likely association was with the Nadaco Caddo. Other researchers subsequently have agreed with this conclusion (Bruseth and Kenmotsu 1993; Perttula 2007a).

One reason for identifying the Kinsloe focus sites with the Nadaco Caddo is that a Nadaco village was described in 1788 by Pedro Vial, who was traveling from Sante Fe to Natchitoches, as being on Cherokee Bayou in northern Rusk County (Perttula 1992:174). This observation has led to the interpretation that the Nadaco split into two groups between 1542 and 1717, with one group moving south to live near the Hasinai Caddo in the Angelina River drainage and the other staying in the middle Sabine basin (Perttula 1992:175). Based on the presence of certain artifacts in some of the Kinsloe sites, Perttula (1992:177) concluded that the Sabine basin Nadaco remained in the area into the first quarter of the 19th century.

#### **An Inconvenient Truth?**

But there is one line of evidence that is hard to reconcile with the scenario outlined above, and that



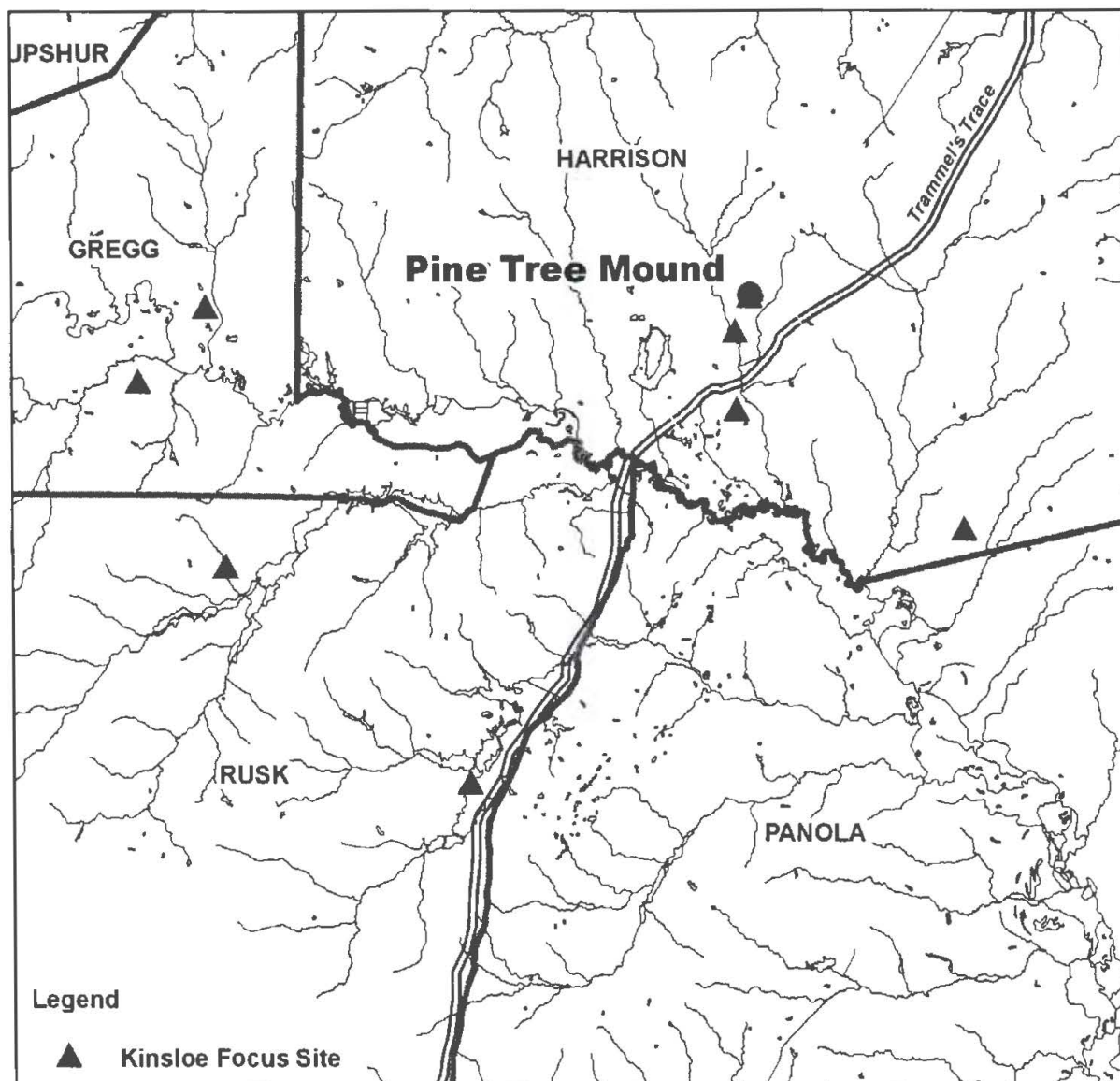


Figure 5. Map showing the locations of Buddy Calvin Jones's Kinsloe focus sites.

relates to the fact there appears to be a discontinuity in material culture between the Pine Tree Mound site Caddo and the historic Kinsloe sites. It is hard to discuss this discontinuity in a serious way because we are in the early stages of analyzing the Pine Tree Mound site materials, because the Kinsloe materials are not well reported, and because the Kinsloe assemblages come solely from mortuary contexts. But it is our impression that the discontinuity is substantial.

At this preliminary stage, the discontinuity can be seen most readily in the vessel assemblages from the graves at Pine Tree Mound and those at the Kinsloe sites. The Pine Tree Mound site assemblage appears to be dominated by Ripley Engraved and

Pease Brushed-Incised, with types such as Wilder Engraved and Harleton Applied also present. Bowls are the most common kind of vessel in the graves at 55%, but jars and bottles are well represented at 23 and 21%, respectively. We believe that, when all is said and done, we are likely to interpret the Pine Tree Mound community as a Titus phase subcluster comparable to the four identified by Thurmond (1990:229–233) in the Cypress and Sabine basins north and northwest of our study area.

The ceramic assemblages from the Kinsloe sites differ dramatically, with the most-common decorated types being Simms Engraved, Natchitoches Engraved, and Emory Punctated-Incised (Pertula



2007a:117). They are more similar in terms of vessel forms; bowls and bottles are somewhat less common than in the Pine Tree Mound site graves (49% and 19%), while jars are more common (32%) (Perttula 2007a:118). It was on the basis of the ceramics that Corbin (2007:14–18) proposed that the Kinsloe sites, presumably representing the Nadaco Caddo, mark a distinct subcluster with associations downstream with the Ais and Adai Caddo (the Many Subcluster) and upstream with what he called the Gilbert Subcluster.

Efforts such as Corbin's, in which material culture assemblages are used to define socio-cultural units, are a hot topic in Caddo studies these days (e.g., Perttula 2007b), and for good reason given their potential to connect archeological remains with people. Applying this approach to the Pine Tree Mound site and the issue of discontinuities between it and the later Kinsloe sites raises several important questions:

- Does such discontinuity mean that the people who lived in this part of the Sabine basin in the late 17th, 18th, and early 19th centuries were not descended from the people who lived there before?<sup>2</sup>
- If that is the case, what happened to the Pine Tree Mound community Caddo, and where did the newcomers come from?
- If that is not the case, why are the later ceramic assemblages so different from the earlier ones? What cultural processes would account for this?

In the end, it may be hard to answer these questions with certainty, in part because the Kinsloe site collections are not available for restudy. Progress will be made, however, as analysis of the Pine Tree Mound site materials continues. Additional radiocarbon dating will lead to a better understanding of the chronology of the site, and analysis of the ceramics and other artifacts will allow us to more fully characterize the assemblage and relate it to the broader picture of Caddo spatial and temporal systematics.

#### ENDNOTE

1. Tim Perttula reports that he has seen a chalice from a site on the Red River, and Bo Nelson knows of two other chalices, one from a site near Jacksonville, Texas, and one reportedly

from the Susie Slade site in Harrison County (personal communication 2007).

2. This would mean that Nondacao/Nadaco refers to a place, not a people, an interpretation favored by Tim Perttula when this paper was given at the 2007 East Texas Caddo Research Group meeting.

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