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## Turquoise Pendant

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## Turquoise Pendant

*Mark Walters*

During excavations on Caney Creek in Wood County, Texas in the mid-1960s, a local collector found a turquoise pendant in a Caddo burial. In all, nine burials were uncovered in what appears to be a small family cemetery probably associated with an unknown near-by residential area. He designated the site Arnold Glenn #2, west side of Caney Creek and I more recently recorded the site as the Turquoise site (41WD586).

This collector located numerous sites, including residential sites, mounds, and cemeteries in the mid to upper regions of Caney Creek above the confluence of Caney and Lake Fork creeks. Several hundred artifacts resulted from this project that have been photographed and cataloged. Site forms have been filed on all the known sites.

This is in the northern portion of Wood County and in the Oak-Hickory forest biotic association, which is a natural transition zone between the Blackland Prairie to the west and the Oak-Hickory-Pine forest to the east. This is also on what has been considered the western edge of the Caddo area. Caney Creek joins Lake Fork Creek under present day Lake Fork Reservoir.

The collector made a sketch map of the cemetery showing that the graves were organized in rows with the heads to the east and the bodies were in an extended. Supine position. Crude drawings of the individual graves indicate grave offerings were composed of ceramic vessels (located from the shoulder to the knee and mostly on the right side), clusters of arrow points (both stemmed and triangular forms) around the left side of the knees, clay pipes (elbow style) located around the shoulder and the left side of the knee areas, and a turquoise pendant which was located in the neck area. Type names of the ceramics were included in these sketches and these were apparently based on the collector's reference to the Texas Handbook (Suhm and Jelks 1962) at the time. Unfortunately, though these artifacts are part of the collection, it is impossible to separate individual items that are referred to in the sketch maps.

From the sketch maps the following descriptions of burial offerings are noted:

Burial 1. five vessels including a red-slipped Taylor Engraved bowl, and jars with everted rims. Burial 1 also included the turquoise pendant located in the neck area (Figure 1).

Burial 2. seven vessels including one bottle and one Simms Engraved bowl.

Burial 3. six vessels including one bottle, three arrow points (stemmed and triangular), and one clay elbow pipe.

Burial 4. six vessels including one bottle, one clay elbow pipe and a cluster of seven stemmed arrow points.

Burial 5. three vessels including one Simms Engraved bowl.

Burial 6. four vessels including one bottle, and two triangular arrow points.

Burial 7. four vessels including one bottle, one clay elbow pipe, and two stemmed arrow points.

Burial 8. one engraved jar and a plain bowl.

Burial 9. one Taylor Engraved bowl.

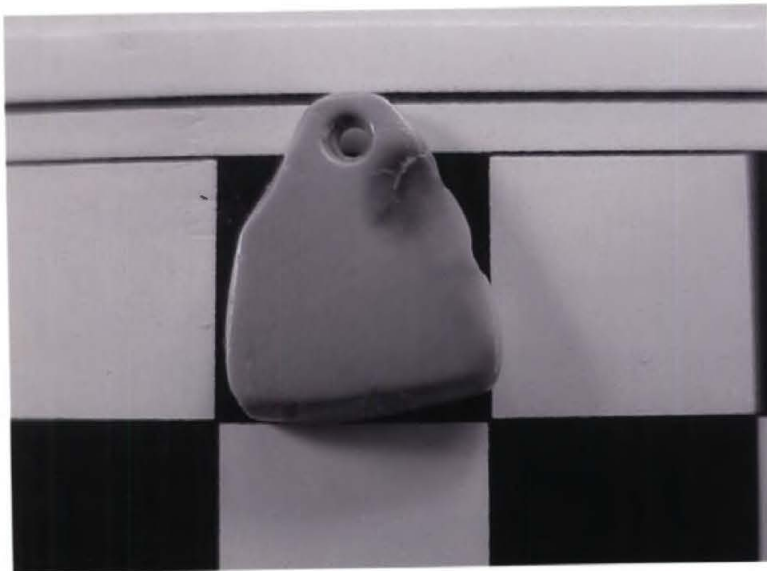


Figure 1 Turquoise pendant from the Turquoise site, Wood County, Texas.

The turquoise pendant is triangular in shape and has a drilled hole (see Figure 1). The pendant is 12.5 mm in length, 10.08 mm in width at its widest point, and 2.4 mm thick. The outside diameter of the drilled hole is 2.25 mm. The surface is polished with faint horizontal stria.

Turquoise, chemically a combination of copper and aluminum, can form only in the presence of nonacidic copper. While found widespread in the American Southwest, the major sources are located in Arizona, California, and New Mexico. Archaeology has demonstrated



that prehistoric peoples mined these deposits extensively. Efforts were made to source the Wood County pendant including X-Ray Microfluorescence conducted by the University of Texas at El Paso (Figure 2) but without a adequate data base turquoise remains difficult if not impossible to source, since sources often differ from the same mine. About all that can be said about the test is that the pendant contained high levels of copper, iron, phosphorus, and zinc with lesser amounts of several other chemical elements. During this investigation numerous contacts in the Southwest generously contributed large amounts of information about turquoise mines as well as present efforts to source turquoise. Their interest was similar to mine in that they were interested in the trade and final destination of the material from their area.

But sourcing the Wood County pendant is not the obvious concern. That it was a trade item is fairly certain since the Caddo had no history of stone bead production, especially turquoise bead production. What is of interest is the location of the bead, especially in reference to Spanish accounts of seeing Indians with turquoise beads and cotton blankets obtained from the Pueblos to the west in 1542 in the Caddo area of Texas. After the death of Hernando de Soto in Arkansas the remnants of his band led by Luis de Moscoso certainly crossed over into Texas and had contact with numerous Caddo groups. The exact route of that adventure and the placement of the groups he had contact with have been debated for years. The proposed Blackland Route (see Young and Hoffman 1993, Illustration 25) would place the Turquoise site, which is located in northern Wood County, close to the province of Nandacao.

Unfortunately there are no dates from the Turquoise site but artifacts described in the turquoise burial and other associated burials in the small cemetery indicate a late Titus Phase occupation (which would date in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries). According to the Handbook of Texas Archeology (Suhm and Jelks 1962: Plates 75, 76) Taylor Engraved occurred in the A.D. 1200-1500 time-span and Simms Engraved would date somewhat later from ca. A.D. 1500-1700. The discovery of a Keno Trilled *var. Phillips* vessel at the nearby Spoonbill site (41WD109) (see Walters 1998:46-48), which commonly occurs on sites with European trade goods, indicates a possibility that native groups were present in the area during the contact period. No historic European artifacts were reported by the collector at this site or any of the other numerous sites he reported in the general area. Whether this site was occupied during the period when the Spanish were in the area is unknown though there were probably few artifacts from the staggering Moscoso expedition that made it into the native's hands.

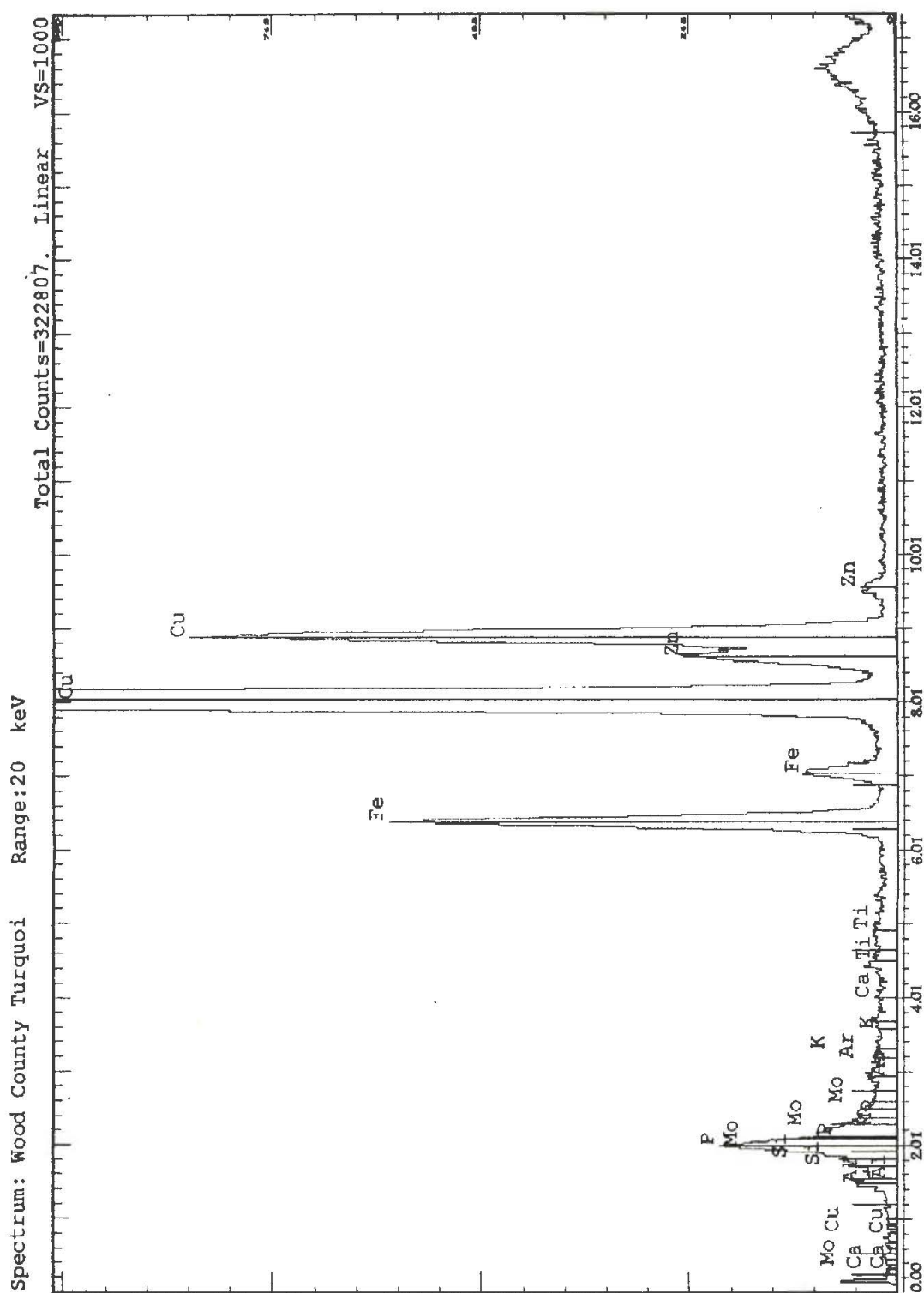


Figure 2. X-ray Fluorescence of turquoise pendant from the Turquoise site, Wood County, Texas.

Two turquoise pendants and 260 turquoise beads from a necklace were reported in Fannin County at the Goss farm (41FN12). (see Housewright 1941) The pendants were similar in shape and design to the Wood County pendant. Other finds include two burials

from the Sam Kaufman Site (see Harris 1953; Skinner et al. 1969) containing turquoise artifacts and three turquoise artifacts from the Sanders site (Harris 1953).

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