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Current Research:

Renewing Research on Holman Springs (3SV29), a Caddo Saltworks in Western Arkansas

Carl G. Drexler and Fiona M. Taylor

Arkansas Archeological Survey

The Holman Springs site (3SV29) lies in western Sevier County, Arkansas, near the Oklahoma border. It is, along with Bayou Sel (3CL27), one of two major excavations of Caddo saltworks that has not been substantially reported. Excavated between 1984 and 1986 by the Arkansas Archeological Society during their annual Training Program digs, the collections remain at the Arkansas Archeological Survey's research station (ARAS) at Southern Arkansas University (SAU) in Magnolia.

The collections lay dormant for many years. Then, in 2015, the station staff revived the project and started moving it towards completion. This is a daunting challenge, given the massive size of the collection (estimates for the ceramics alone run to 4,000 pounds of sherds). We detail some of the efforts that have been taking place.

Search for AFOs and Re-Boxing

In 2015, then-station archeologist Dr. Carol Colaninno-Meeks, with assistance from SAU undergraduate Ernest Turner, responded to a request from our Coordinating Office to search through the collections from the excavations for associated funerary objects recovered from the two definite and one possible grave encountered during the 1980s work. They located all of the requested materials, which went to the Coordinating Office in Fayetteville for repatriation.

Dr. Colaninno-Meeks and Mr. Turner re-boxed and re-bagged the 1986 Arkansas Archeological Society training program collections into plastic tubs and bags, removing them from the cardboard boxes that held them up until that point. The collections from the 1984 and 1985 training program await similar curatorial treatment.

Ceramics Analysis

In 2016, we began work on the next two steps in the analysis. With assistance from Dr. Jamie Brandon, of the ARAS's station at the University of Arkansas, we initiated the ceramic analysis, with Ms. Taylor shouldering the bulk of the work. At the time of writing, this effort encompasses approximately 9,000 sherds. Hundreds of thousands more remain.

Most of the sherds consist of wide, flat, salt pan fragments, many undecorated. There are some decorated rims in the collection, many of which correspond to the Nash Neck Banded type. More fine-grained data will be available once we have completed the analysis of a representative collection, which we hope will be in the near future.

We are excited about the prospects of this work, as there seems to be variability in the timing of when these salt sites were in use and the manner in which Caddos organized and timed salt production. Holman and the Hardman site, both in Arkansas, appear to be year-round occupations dating to the Middle and Late Caddo periods (Early 1993; Perttula 2012). Contrast this with the Salt Well Slough (Kenmotsu 2005) and Drake's Salt Works (Eubanks 2016) sites, which appear to feature only temporary occupation and date to the Late and Historic Caddo periods, respectively.

Digitization of Field Records

In aid of the renewed effort, we also scanned all of the field records from the Society training programs in 1984-1986 and are constructing databases that will aid the analyses. This effort includes the site maps, drawn from both the few large-format maps created during the field projects, and the level forms used in each 2 m excavation unit.

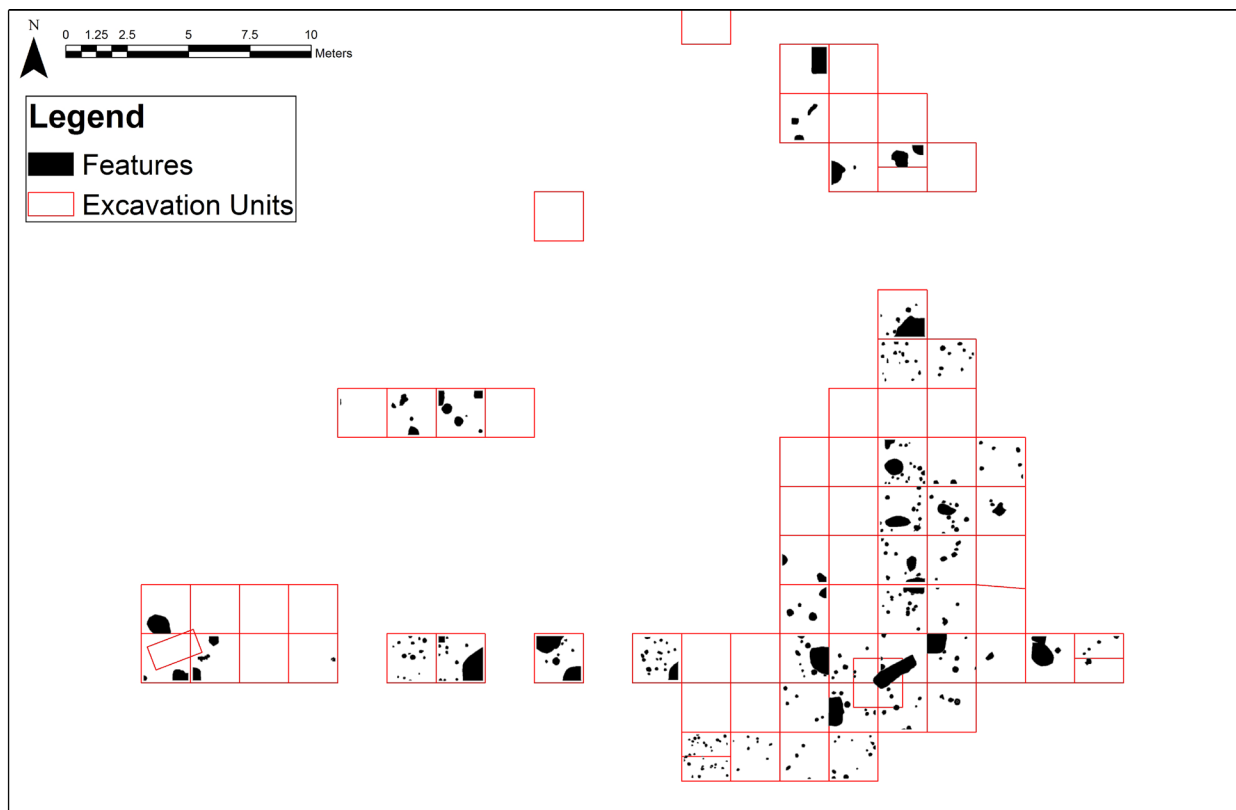


Figure 1. Features with excavation units at the Holman Springs site (3SV29).

We georeferenced the latter in ArcGIS, then digitized all of the recorded features, creating the first site-wide map of the excavated portion of the site (Figure 1). We added to this in early September 2018 by downloading and processing LiDAR data for the site, which shows the former mound tested in the 1980s, a possible second mound to the southeast (mentioned in site notes from the 1960s), and a potential third mound not previously documented.

Special Analyses

Two more detailed studies are in progress. First, Society volunteers excavated a potential basket of corn and other foods in 1986. Identified as Feature 107, the materials were bagged separately and have awaited analysis since. We recently transferred the contents of Feature 107 to the ARAS research station at Toltec Mounds State Park, where Dr. Elizabeth Horton has begun to study their contents.

Second, the site has never been directly dated, although several carbon samples were taken during the

excavations. The ARAS-SAU staff secured a grant from the Arkansas Archeological Society's Archeological Research Fund to radiocarbon date two of those samples, and that is now underway.

Next Steps

Our next efforts will involve continued study into Caddo saltmaking with specific attention towards next years' Arkansas Archeological Society Training Program, which will be a return to Holman Springs. This will be a major step in concluding the 1980s projects, as we intend to work with the Society to analyze the bulk of the ceramics recovered earlier. This will dramatically hasten the completion of the research and help us better-understand an important site that has a lot to tell us about Caddo saltmaking and environmental interactions.

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