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The Cobb-Pool Site, A Caddo Settlement in the Mountain Creek Valley

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The Cobb-Pool site was excavated in 1985-1986 by the Archaeology Research Program at Southern Methodist University (SMU) before Joe Pool Lake was constructed. The site had been located by the late R. King Harris in the 1930s and Harris collected early Caddo pottery, a Gahagan biface, Alba arrow points, and other chipped stone tools from the surface. SMU located the posthole pattern of three house structures, a large roasting pit, and several other features. Recovered during the excavation was an assemblage that complemented the Harris collection but also included a large sample of maize unlike that found in any other site in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex. Radiocarbon dates and ceramic typology indicate that the site was occupied sometime between A.D. 1000 and 1200. I conclude that the Cobb-Pool site represents a Caddo group that settled in the Mountain Creek valley for several years. They farmed the fine sandy loam and hunted and gathered from the surrounding area. Future researchers should search for complementary sites in similar settings within North Central Texas.

Throughout the twentieth century, Dallas County archaeology was primarily equated with the activities of the Dallas Archeological Society (DAS), up until the group was disbanded in the early twenty-first century. Two individuals were instrumental in establishing and maintaining the DAS: Forrest Kirkland, the founder; and R. King Harris. Kirkland is best known for his rock art recordings (Kirkland and Newcomb 1967) and for his creation of *The Record of the Dallas Archeological Society* in 1939 (Harris 1988). King Harris first described North Central Texas sites in the *Bulletin of the Texas Archeological and Paleontological Society* (BTAPS) (Harris 1936). He subsequently went on to report on sites in north central and northeast Texas, including the White Rock Lake Spillway site (Kirkland and Harris 1941), the Sam Kaufman site (Harris 1953), and the Lewisville Clovis site (Crook and Harris 1957), as well as making major contributions to reports on the Gilbert site (Jelks 1967) and the Wichita Project (Bell et al. 1967). After Kirkland's demise, Harris continued to be a guiding force in the organization (Crook 1978; House 1978; Krieger 1978).

In his first article in BTAPS, Harris described "Dallas II" as a small prehistoric site located on Mountain Creek in Dallas County (Harris 1936:130). He thought the site appeared to have been occupied for a short time but it contained a few well-worked flint artifacts (Figure 1). Small points at the site were of western types (by that he meant west of the Elm Fork of the Trinity), but no pottery was mentioned occurring at the site. In 1941, Kirkland and Harris recorded the site with The University of Texas at Austin (41DL148) and identified it as a possible Caddo campsite. The site form indicates that "potsherds" were present but no types or temper descriptions were provided. In his review of the "Upper Trinity River Basin," Alex D. Krieger notes that Harris distinguishes archaeological sites from east of the Elm Fork of the Trinity as being related to the Caddo while those to the west were different and more like those in the Brazos River drainage (Krieger 1946:135-136). He does not mention the Dallas II site although he does reference Harris's article and activities of the DAS. In an article titled "Archeology of the Upper Trinity Watershed," C. A. Smith (1969:9) mentions the site as a "pure Alto Focus site representative of the early Neo-American Aspect" (Neo-American equates with Late Prehistoric and in this case Early Caddo period). Smith notes that Harris reports that pottery from sites east of the Elm Fork of the Trinity River is primarily clay-grit-tempered while west of the Elm Fork it is shell-tempered.

Over the years, the site became known as the Cobb-Poole or Cobb-Pool site, although the source of that name is unknown. When first guided to the site in

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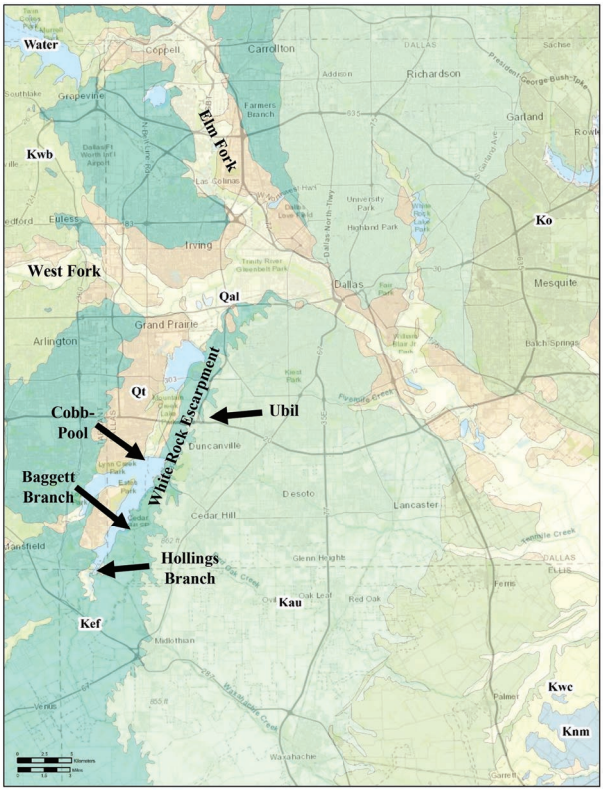

Figure 1. The Cobb-Pool site location in the DFW Metroplex showing additional sites discussed in the text and overlaid on a geological map.

1971, Harris pointed out a shallow midden along with a variety of chipped stone tools (Figures 2 and 3) as well as a sample of decorated Caddo pottery types: Canton Incised; Davis Incised; Crockett Curvilinear Incised; and Weches Fingernail Impressed (Figure 4). These are easily recognized East Texas types (Perttula 2013). In addition, 55 untyped pieces that included incised, fingernail impressed, punctated, and brushed sherds were in the surface collection from the site (Skinner and Connors 1979:Table 4). Three large well-flaked bifaces were contained in his collection, along with a Pogo dart point (Figure 2*b*), drills, and a variety of arrow points, particularly Albas. One of the bifaces has been identified as a Gahagan biface by Shafer (2006:Table 5). Harris also had some animal bones, mussel shell fragments, clay daub, and two pieces of obsidian, one of which was previously reported as having come from Mexico (Skinner and Connors 1979:37). Later review of the XRF data on the one Harris obsidian flake was carried out by the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, revealing that the source was Cerro del Medio in the Jemez Mountains of northern New Mexico (TOP 52, Texas Obsidian Project; Thomas R. Hester, personal communication 2020). Based on the surface collections, Harris considered the site important and unique and was sure that it warranted major investigation in conjunction with planned construction of Lakeview Lake/Joe Pool Lake.

The Mountain Creek Watershed/White Rock Escarpment is a unique environmental setting in Dallas County and throughout North Central Texas (Kennemer 1987). The watershed is relatively short but Quaternary terrace sediments are widespread on the west side of the creek channel (Bureau of Economic Geology 1988).

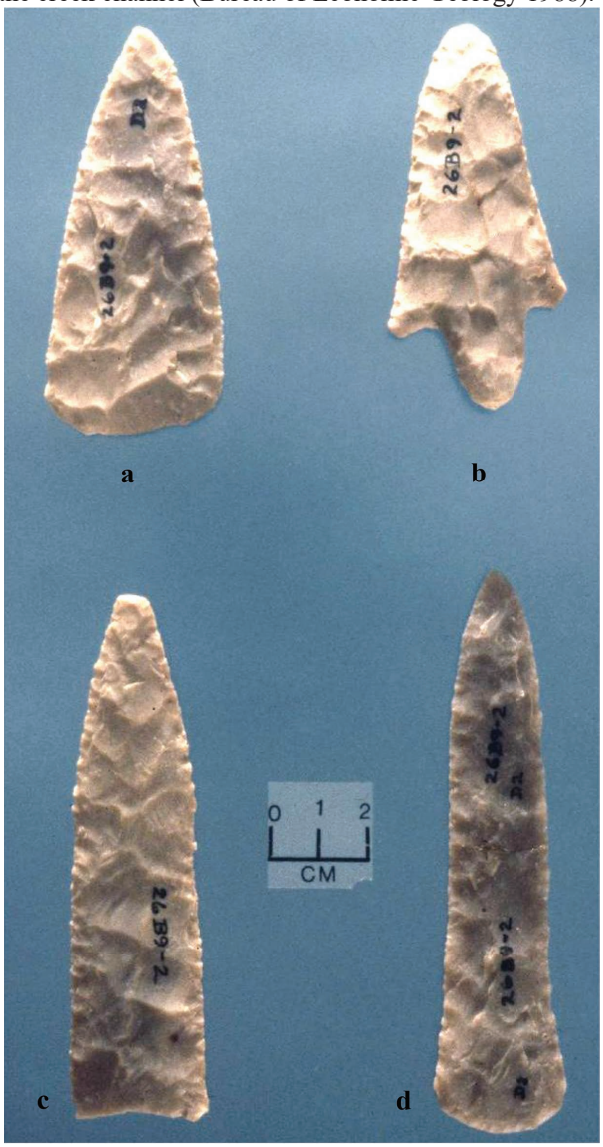

Figure 2. Bifaces (*a, d*) from the surface of the Cobb-Pool site; *b*, Pogo dart point; *c*, Gahagan biface as identified by Shafer (2006:Table 5).

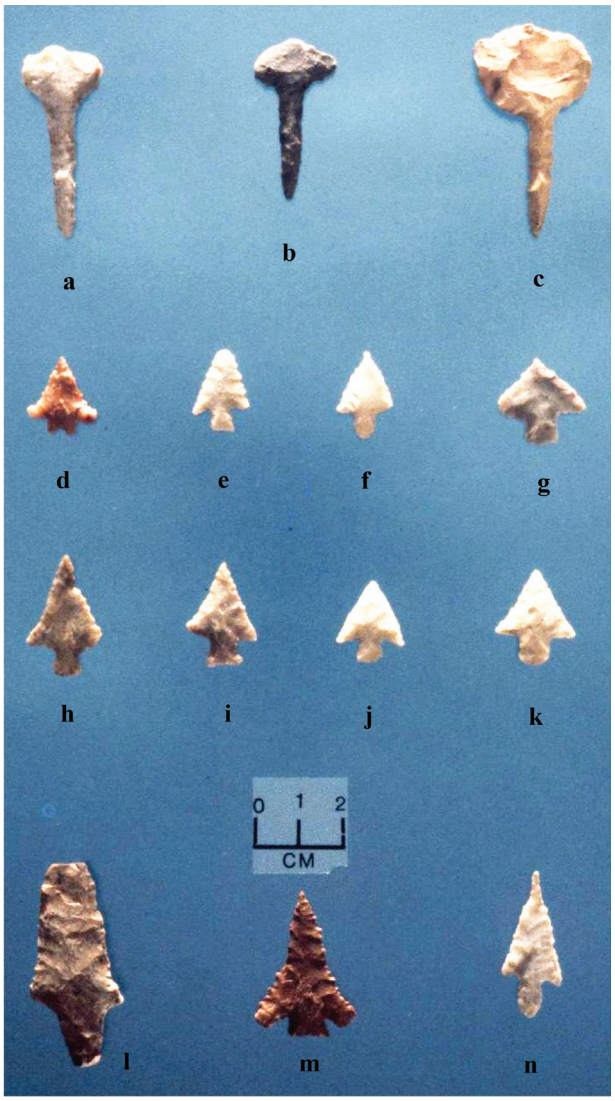

Figure 3. Artifacts from the surface of the Cobb-Pool site: *a-c,* drills; *d-k,* Alba arrow points; *l,* Gary dart point; *m,* Catahoula arrow point; *n,* Perdiz arrow point. Identifications were made by R. King Harris.

There is also a narrow zone of Quaternary alluvium that parallels the stream channel south into Ellis County. According to Twitchell (1968), Mountain Creek is the only perennial drainage in the watershed, however, seep springs at the base of the Escarpment along the east side of the valley provide a reliable water source throughout much of the year and the same is true for the Eastern Cross Timbers in the upper Walnut Creek. As a result, freshwater mussels grow in the drainages and were used as a food resource prehistorically. Historically, a major floodplain forest filled the Mountain Creek valley (Jurney 1988; Martin 1988; Peter and Jurney 1988). The Escarpment edge and slope were covered with junipers and the Blackland Prairie extended to the east. The Eastern Cross Timbers vegetation zone was to the west. An area of Silawa fine sandy loam corresponds to the site location on the north side of Walnut Creek (Coffee et al. 1980:Sheet 50). This location is roughly 15 m above the valley floor and Harris reported that there was a spring in the vicinity of the site, although it was not encountered by later survey or excavation teams.

The site was located along the dam centerline west of the intersection of Walnut Creek and Mountain Creek and the site area was thoroughly tested by the Archaeology Research Program at Southern Methodist University (SMU) (Raab 1982:15-21). The artifact assemblage included chipped stone tools and ceramics that led to the site being tentatively dated between A.D. 800 and 1200 (Suhm and Jelks 1962). No radiocarbon dates were produced due to the small charcoal samples present (Raab 1982:18). It should be noted that two brushed body sherds and three Perdiz arrow points were in the Harris collection and may represent later occupation (Perttula 2013:198). A shallow midden was recognized during testing but the most interesting discovery was the definition of a feature described as a possible house in a pit. The pit had an irregular basin-shaped floor that extended over a roughly circular 7-8 m area up to 1.8 m deep. Caddo ceramics similar to those collected by Harris were recovered from the pit fill along with pollen (Raab and Woosley 1982), but no plant remains were reported although charcoal flecks were described from the midden matrix. No evidence of agriculture was found, but the Silawa fine sandy loam soil surrounding the site offered decided advantages to raising domesticated crops, including squash and maize (Raab 1982:85-86). A row of three postholes was uncovered and it was suggested that they might be part of a prehistoric structure that was located near a mussel shell concentration (Raab 1982:21). Further investigation at the site was recommended in order to mitigate the loss of this unique prehistoric site (Raab 1982:102-103).

SMU did extensive backhoe trenching, dozer scraping, and hand excavation at the site in 1985-1986 and the extent of this work is shown on Figure 5 (Peter et al. 1988a). Feature 2 is the pit feature that was previously located by trenching. Detailed excavation and subsequent stratigraphic and artifact analysis led to the

conclusion that the pit was not a house but was the result of numerous roasting activities. Animal remains (bones and mussel shells) and fire-cracked rock were found concentrated in the pit fill and immediately adjacent to the pit edges. Several artifact clusters and a basin-shaped hearth were encountered inside and outside Structure 1, which was adjacent to Feature 2. A radiocarbon date of AD 1080±79 (Beta 13960) was obtained on charcoal from the hearth (Feature 4) in the floor of Structure 1. Unfortunately this date cannot be corrected since Beta lost the records during a hurricane.

Three structural features were defined as rings of postholes. Structures 1 and 2 appear to have been houses that were lived in while Structure 3 had little evidence of occupation and may have been open sided. Structure 2 was apparently constructed after the adjacent part of Feature 2 was no longer in use and had filled in (Peter et al. 1988a:180). Structure 2 had also burned. One radiocarbon date was obtained from Posthole 7 in Structure 2 and it was dated A.D. 1275±96 (SMU-1615).

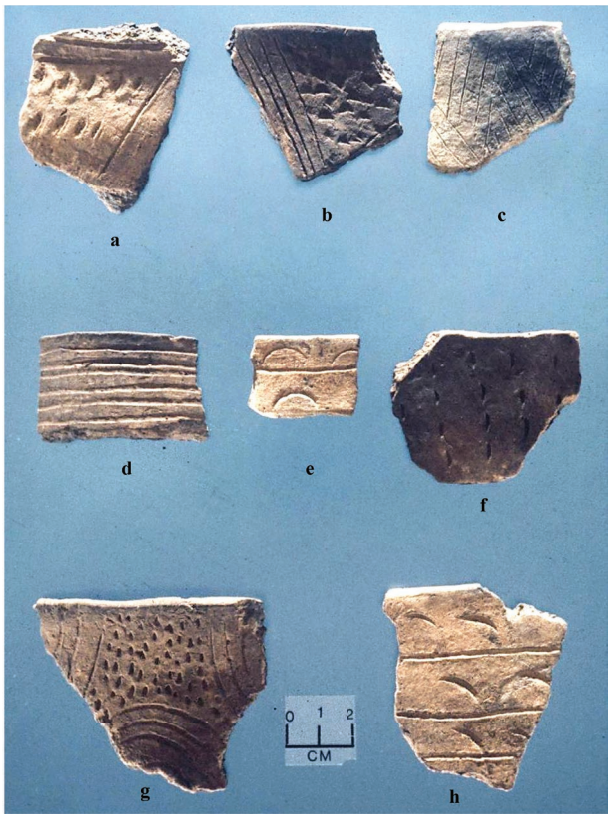

Figure 4. Decorated sherds from the surface of the Cobb-Pool site from the Harris collection: *a-c,* Canton Incised; *d,* Davis Incised; *e, h,* Weches Fingernail Impressed; *f,* untyped incised and punctated; *g,* Crockett Curvilinear Incised. Identifications were made by R. King Harris.

Maize was not found in this posthole but was recovered from other postholes in the structure. A third date of AD 1247±24 (SMU-1742) was obtained on charcoal from Feature 10, the largest hearth feature at the site and where maize was also recovered. When corrected, the dates are statistically averaged at AD 1246±18 (Britt Bousman, personal communication 2020). Other thermoluminescence dates and radiocarbon dates on humates from postholes have a wide range and do not concur with these dates. A series of 21 postholes east and south of Structure 3 and extending south to Feature 2 did not define any feature outlines.

The artifact assemblage from Cobb-Pool is not large in number but it is decidedly different from the other Joe Pool Lake sites (Peter and McGregor 1988). Lithic debitage included more than 5,000 broken flakes, of which 97.2% were chert. This is the highest amount of chert from any of the reservoir area sites. Fine-grained quartzite made up 1.8% of the sample. Only three arrow point preforms were found while 59 Alba arrow points and more unidentified and fragments were collected. Other bifacially flaked tools were present along with end and side scrapers. Three manos and a grinding stone were also recovered during excavation.

A sample of 641 ceramics was recovered during excavation and was complemented by analysis of 80 sherds from the R. King Harris collection at the Smithsonian. At least 44 different vessels were represented by 133 sherds from the SMU excavation. Grog was the most common temper and the various incised decorations led to the site being considered a single component dated between A.D. 1000 and 1200. In discussion with Tim Perttula, it was noted that this is not a large ceramic sample for a Caddo village site but it might be reasonable based on a short-term Caddo occupation. Furthermore, the full extent of the site is uncertain due to the presence of the gravel pit shown on Figure 1.

Approximately 7000 pieces of bone were recovered with deer and turtle being the most common. No bison bones were recognized. Walnut shell fragments were present but maize was the most abundant plant found. More than 70% of the plant remains recovered from flotation were maize. A small amount of maize was found at the nearby Baggett Branch site but the Cobb-Pool sample is amazingly large. The variety of identified

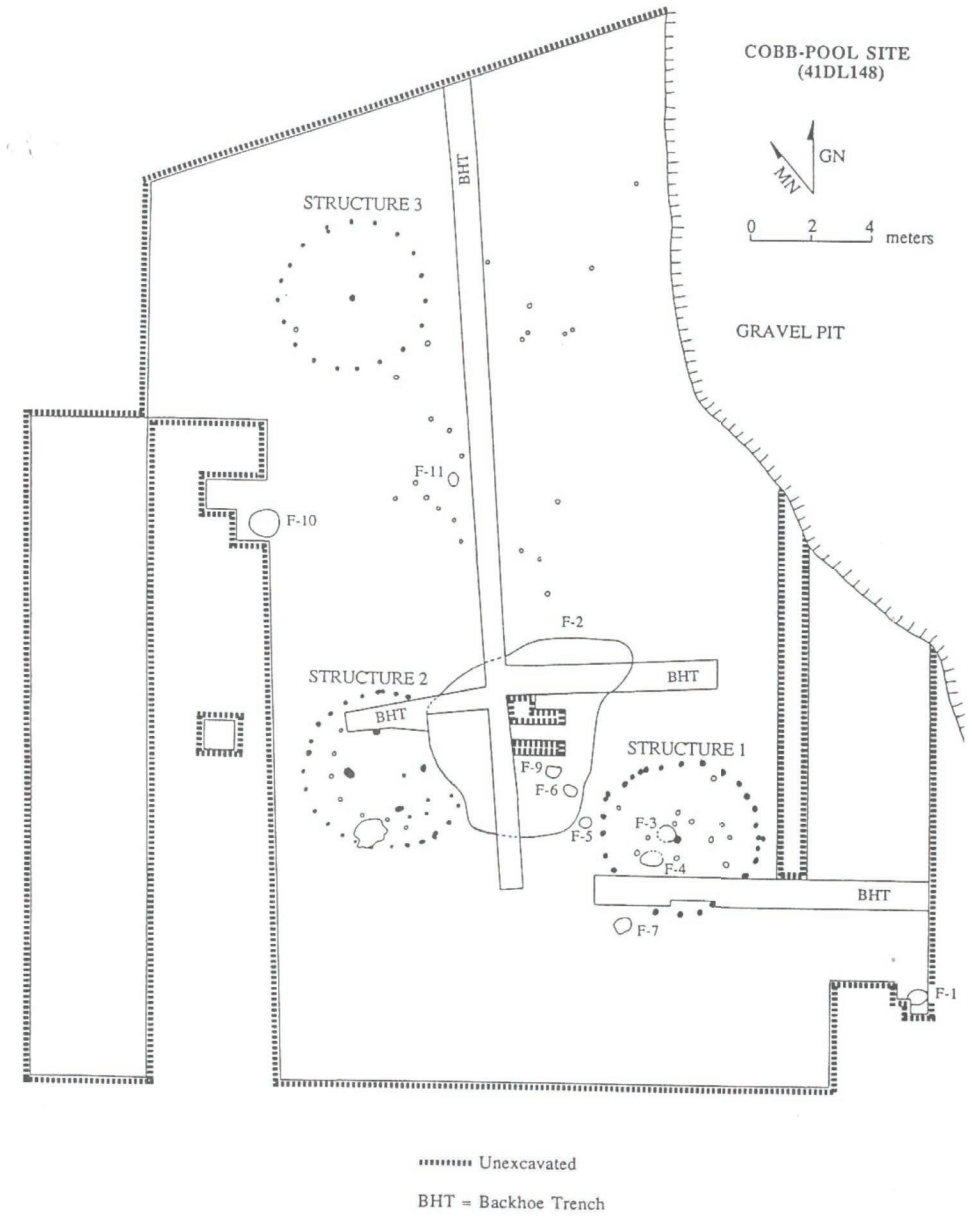

Figure 5. Plan map of the Cobb-Pool site showing mechanically stripped areas, backhoe trenches, and feature/structure locations (from Peter and McGregor 1988:Figure 9-7).

wild plants were shown to be evidence of year round occupation.

In a subsequent article that more fully discusses the plant remains from Cobb-Pool, Gayle Fritz (1993) describes the assemblage as indicative of a farmstead rather than a hunting/gathering campsite. Maize was present in more than 72% of the 43 flotation samples she analyzed while nut remains were in less than a quarter of the samples. Kernel fragments were found in 10 samples and cob pieces occurred in 31 samples. The total number of sorted cupule and glume pieces was 475. Most of the cupules were fragmentary so the actual number would be lower. Forty percent of the maize came from Feature 4 in the floor of Structure 1. A squash or gourd rind, edible wild seeds, and a possible tuber were also recovered. This intrusion into the Blackland was apparently before the Caddo adopted beans (Perttula 2008:79). Based on the fact that Silawa sandy loam is the best soil in the region for crop production (Coffee et al. 1980), and the abundance of maize remains,

Fritz (1993:241) concluded that the Cobb-Pool people were Caddos who ventured into the Blackland Prairie. However, the SMU team had concluded that "the Cobb-Pool site represents an example of a local group of people who borrowed some ideas from neighbors" (Moir et al. 1988:32). Further discussion of prehistoric Caddo farming is provided by Perttula (2008).

Other sites at Joe Pool Lake are reported to be hunting/gathering campsites based on features and artifact assemblages, although they may have been occupied during the time span of Cobb-Pool. Specifically, these sites include Baggett Branch (Peter et al. 1988b) where 163 sherds from more than 12 vessels were encountered. Most of the pottery is shell-tempered, and thus later in time than Cobb-Pool. Part of five maize cupules and a single kernel were the only evidence of maize discovered in the flotation samples from this hunting/gathering campsite. At site 41DL184, a total of nine sherds of early grog-tempered pottery and Nocona Plain (Krieger 1946:109-111) were recovered in this site's deposit, which was considered to be a foraging campsite. No maize or plant remains were recovered during flotation.

At about the same time, DAS members were going through site backdirt from a recently excavated pond at the nearby Lester Lorch site (Hartig 1988) where a single shell-tempered Late Prehistoric sherd was found. In 1992, avocational archaeologists from Dallas and Fort Worth tested the Ubil site where half of a U-shaped pit had been found exposed in the bank of Artesian Creek in the Camp Wisdom Boy Scout camp. Mussel shells and deer bones were found along with a campsite assemblage. Six pieces of Nocona Plain pottery and an Alba arrow point were recovered. Two radiocarbon dates from the bisected pit are 950±60 BP (Beta 200411) and 980±110 BP (Beta 200412). The pottery, point, and dates may indicate occupation contemporaneous with Cobb-Pool but no evidence of corn was found in the flotation samples and the site is situated on the creek bank in the center of a narrow floodplain, a setting where houses would not be built even though a deep storage or cooking pit was present (Skinner et al. 2007).

Subsequent investigations further south along Hollings Branch reported small prehistoric campsites that were situated on low benches out of the creek floodplain (Skinner 1998). Fire-cracked rock, lithic debris, and fragmentary faunal remains were noted but the sites were not massive like Baggett Branch or Cobb-Pool and they remain undated.

The following discussion describes sites where Caddo trade goods and evidence of agriculture might have been discovered in the Metroplex. Over the past fifty years, avocational archaeologists have reported finding pieces of Caddo pottery at sites along the East Fork of the Trinity. The most comprehensive report of this work is a recent monograph by Wilson W. Crook, III and Mark D. Hughston (2015). Crook stated that he does not believe that the East Fork sites are Caddo (Ellis et al. 2015). On the western side of the Metroplex, the late Homer Norris of Aledo reported finding sites in Parker County along the upper West Fork of the Trinity (Todd et al. 2009). At the Bell Camp and Railroad sites, Norris recovered Weches Fingernail Impressed, Davis Incised, Crockett Curvilinear Incised, Pennington Punctated-Incised, and fingernail and cane punctated sherds along with Alba arrow points, animal bones, and fire-reddened limestone in apparent hunting/gathering sites (Perttula 2020:26-27). Perttula concludes that the vessels and their contents were likely traded/exchanged between the Caddo and the local South Fork aboriginal peoples, probably for bison products and lithic raw materials.

Numerous CRM studies in the DFW area have reported the presence of Caddo ceramics from sites but none of the assemblages included an abundance of maize associated with Alba or Bonham arrow points, posthole patterns, or other evidence of houses. Probably the most thorough analysis and discussion of Caddo presence from a single site in the surrounding area is in the report on site 41COL172 (McKee 2010). The ceramic sample is not large but several sherds were typed as Pennington Punctate. The author concludes that "the few Caddo artifacts that were identified were interpreted as trade items and not as evidence for Caddo people moving into the region" (McKee 2010:192).

The concept of the Prairie Caddo was proposed by Harry Shafer (2006:1), who posited that the material culture of the Blackland Prairie people is distinctive and can be distinguished from contemporary assemblages in adjacent geographic regions. Dallas County is included in an area Shafer (2006:Figure 1) describes as the Northern Prairie Caddo, but this northern area is

not his focus. The key connection to the Prairie Caddo is the shared relationship of the South Prairie Caddo sites and the George C. Davis site in Cherokee County (Newell and Krieger 1949; Story 2000). The relationship is based on a series of distinctive artifacts that include metapodial beaming tools, bone sprinter needles, early Caddo pottery, Bonham-Alba arrow points, and Gahagan bifaces. Shafer (2006:4, 40-42) argues that Gahagan bifaces were manufactured at sites located along the Balcones Escarpment edge of the Central Texas Prairies. Many Bonham-Alba points were made of the same chert resources (Shafer 2006:41). Beamers he argues were particularly Caddoan, so the conclusion is that the people of the prairie were Caddo. Furthermore, this exchange model is based on the lithic artifacts at George C. Davis being tribute from the prairie folk and maybe the results of feasting and other exchange activities. As a result of excavation at the J. B. White site in Milam County, Ross Fields (2017) argues that the residents were not Caddos but were hunters/gatherers, and that they did not provide tribute or labor for the ceremonial center at George C. Davis, rather their chipped stone tools were obtained by the east Texas Caddo during hunting and/or trading trips made to the west of their homeland.

In summary, the Cobb-Pool site is clearly a unique Late Prehistoric Caddo farmstead located in a sea of hunting/gathering camps within the DFW Metroplex. Does the site represent an attempt by a Caddo group to expand into the Great Plains (Bellwood 2005:247, 250) with maize being the driving force? There are numerous pieces of Caddo pottery at prehistoric sites in the surrounding area (Ellis et al. 2015) and in the prairies and cross-timbers to the west and south, but I agree with Ross Fields that these sites are probably not Caddo but were campsites occupied by Metroplex hunters/gatherers who acquired pottery from the Caddo. Acquisition may have occurred when Caddo groups were traveling west to hunt buffalo or were trading for knappable chert with the prairie people who had access to upland gravel sources (Byrd 1971; McGregor 1995). Whatever the case, the Cobb-Pool site is different from the campsites of prairie hunters/gatherers based on the presence of posthole patterns that confirm the presence of houses not reported anywhere else in the area. Furthermore, Caddo pottery is abundant at the site and maize was a common plant found in flotation samples but not at other sites where flotation had been carried out.

So how and why did the Caddo come to settle at Cobb-Pool site and how did they know that maize would grow there? Had they passed through the Mountain Creek valley in conjunction with hunting or trading activities and recognized a particular soil or a suite of plants they recognized as likely to facilitate maize cultivation? It is incumbent upon investigators working in the Prairie Caddo area described by Shafer to be on the lookout for sites that match the conditions encountered at Cobb-Pool. Furthermore, petrographic and Instrumental Neutron Activation analyses of ceramic sherds could determine if they were made locally or in East Texas. To date, no such sites have been reported but areas of fine sandy loam such as Silawa are present throughout north-central Texas.

Acknowledgments

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