

Jerger: An Early Archaic Mortuary Site in Southwestern Indiana

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Introduction

The Jerger Site is located in the White River Valley in Daviess County in southwestern Indiana. It is situated upon a sand ridge overlooking what was probably once a marshy area.

The site was found in a cultivated field by Mike Meade and Rick Oberst, residents of the area, and I was shown the material they had collected from the site. They reported cremated human bone, red ochre, points, bifacial objects, drills, and chert debris scattered over an area of about 2500 square feet. In addition, within the limits of the debris scatter they observed 5 dark areas which appeared to be the features from which the material had originated. Similar surface material indicated that another, seemingly isolated, feature (subsequently designated Feature 1) occurred over 100 feet away.

Fieldwork

When I was taken to the site, some 5 years after it had been found, the surface of an area of about 6000 square feet was littered with a large amount of the kinds of material that had been reported to me. At that time no features were noticeable, but it was obvious that the material had come from burial features disturbed by cultivation. I made a surface collection and subsequently conducted an archaeological excavation which lasted 23 days at the site. The excavation was done with a crew varying from 1 to 7 people in the spring and summer of 1977.

The site was excavated in 5 by 5 foot units, and some 500 square feet of it was investigated. The plowzone was removed, and most of it was screened. The underlying soil was examined for archaeological features. Features were photographed, mapped, and removed. Feature fill was screened, and most of it was saved.

Materials from Disturbed Contexts

The following descriptions of materials recovered from the site surface and the plowzone are based upon preliminary examinations. There is a large quantity of material, and it will require more time to go through it thoroughly.

The cremated bone consists of an abundance of small fragments, some of which have red ochre on them. These fragments include both human and animal bones. Some unburned animal bone is also present. A sample of the burned animal bone was examined by William R. Adams of the Department of Anthropology at Indiana University. Animals identified by him include deer, raccoon, dog or coyote, turtle, and turkey.



FIGURE 1. *Point from the surface of the Jerger Site.*

Almost all of the points (Fig. 1) are heat fractured, and many have been discolored by heat. They have a bifurcated base, many of them have basal grinding, and many have serrated blade edges. There is considerable variation in

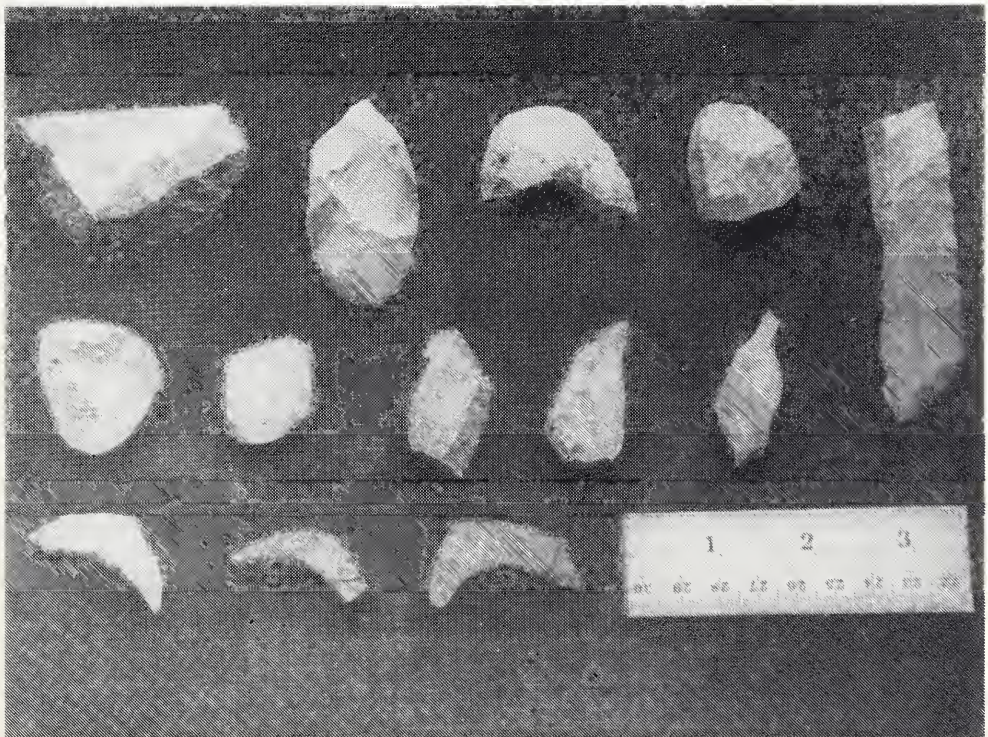


FIGURE 2. *Fragments of bifacial objects from the plowzone of the Jerger Site.*

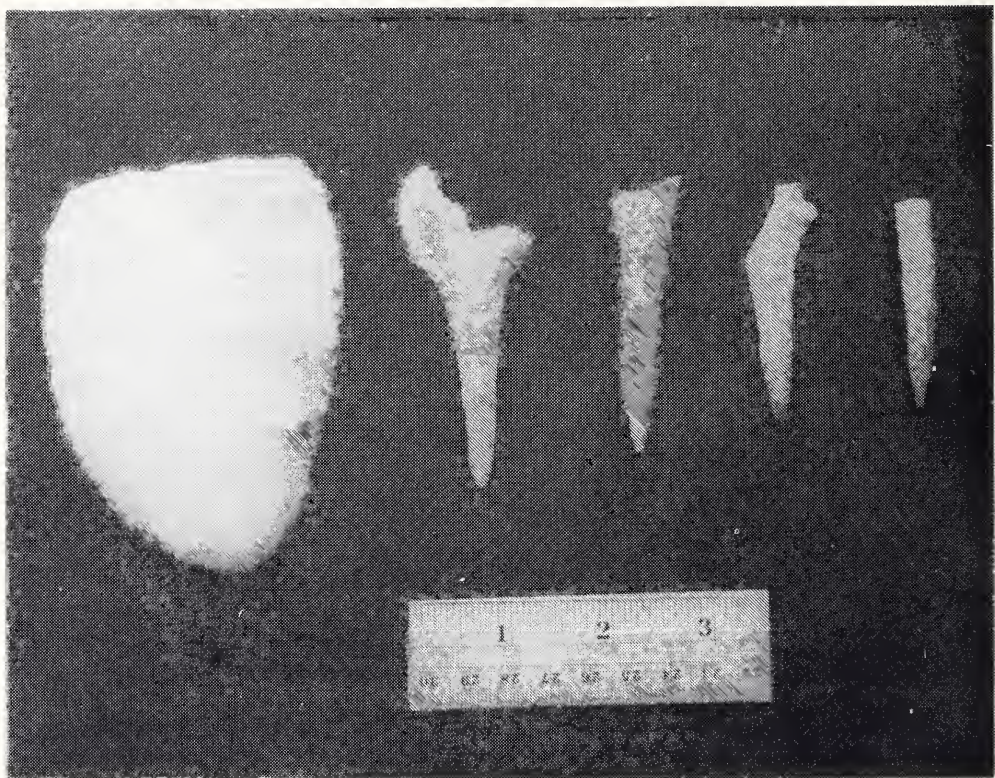


FIGURE 3. *Biface and drills from the area of feature 1 of the Jerger Site.*

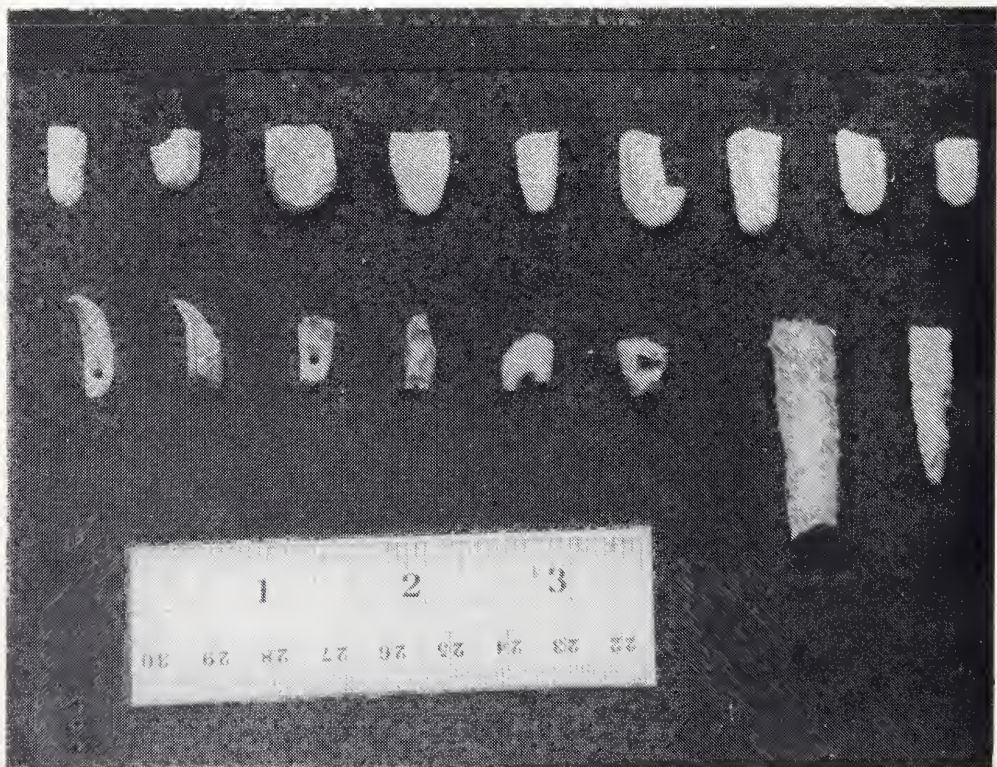


FIGURE 4. *Bone artifacts, perforated teeth, and 2 drill fragments from the plowzone of the Jerger Site.*

size. The degree of fragmentation creates measurement difficulties, but to indicate something of the size range there is a variation in length from 38 mm. to well over 65 mm. and a shoulder width range of about 25 to 50 mm.

There are numerous fragments of heat fractured bifacial objects (Fig. 2). They may include parts of preforms, points, and bifaces which are tools in and of themselves. Only 2 complete bifaces have been recovered. One was found in the area of Feature 1 by the discoverers of the site (Fig. 3). It is 102 mm. long, 74 mm. wide, 8 mm. thick, and is well made. It does not appear to have been in a fire. The second was also found on the surface. It is 56 mm. long, 52 mm. wide, and 10 mm. thick. It is a thicker, more roughly made artifact.

A few drill fragments (Figs. 3 and 4) were recovered, and they also exhibit heat damage and alteration. Four (Fig. 3) were found in the area of Feature 1 by the discoverers of the site. Two of them consist of shaft fragments, and 2 are nearly complete. One of the latter has just a small portion of the base intact and has a barbed shoulder. It was at least 60 mm. long. The other has a greatly expanded and rounded base. The shaft is 53 mm. long and 18 mm. at its widest. The base was at least 30 mm. long and at least 31 mm. wide.

Eleven teeth, presumably all animal canines, which have been perforated through the root are present in the collections (Fig. 4). They have been fractured and discolored by heat, and some exhibit polish.

Fourteen fragments constituting the rounded ends of some type of bone artifact have been found (Fig. 4). These fragments are flattened in cross section and are 2 to 4 mm. thick. They vary in width from 6 to 12 mm. and in length from 10 to 20 mm. Their colors (chalky white, gray, and blackish) indicate that they have been exposed to fire. Some similar specimens but broken at both ends were also recovered. These may be shaft fragments of the artifacts with the rounded end.

In addition, a few fragments of other kinds of burned bone artifacts were found. Their functions have not been determined, but some appear to be the remains of awl-like artifacts.

Features

As in the case of the material from disturbed contexts, the discussion of material found in the features is based upon preliminary analyses.

Feature 1 designates a localized and apparently isolated area of surface material. This material is similar to that from the main area of the site, and has evidently been disturbed from an aboriginal feature. We have not excavated in the area of Feature 1.

Three aboriginal features were found during excavation. These are numbered 3, 9, and 13.

Feature 3 was about 6 feet long and 4 feet wide. Its depth from the elevation below plowzone at which it was defined to its bottom was at most about 0.30 foot. Judging from the amount of this feature remaining intact and the quantity of material in the plowzone, Feature 3 has evidently been badly disturbed by cultivation. The fill of the feature was dark and sandy, having a brown to

somewhat of a purplish brown appearance. At the edge of Feature 3, and evidently part of it, was a mottled area about 1 foot in diameter which was stained with red ochre. Hardly any material was found in this area.

Adjacent to the ochre-stained area and to Feature 3 proper was an area about 1.5 feet by 1.0 foot consisting of light tan sand subsoil with some light brown mottling. Hardly any material was found in this area. However, within this area were numerous irregular chunks of cemented light tan sand. These chunks varied in size from pieces about 6 mm. in length to about 35 mm. long. Extending from this area and the ochre-stained area across the central portion of the feature were many such chunks of cemented sand. They were noticeably concentrated near the base of the feature fill and for a depth of about 0.20 foot into the underlying subsoil. Some were also found in the fill of the feature.

The fill of Feature 3 contained material like that from the plowzone. There is cremated bone, a piece of red ochre which may have been shaped, a few point fragments including part of a bifurcated base, some fragments of bifacial objects, 1 of the thin flattened bone shaft fragments mentioned previously, a piece of polished bone, and 5 small shells (Fig. 5).

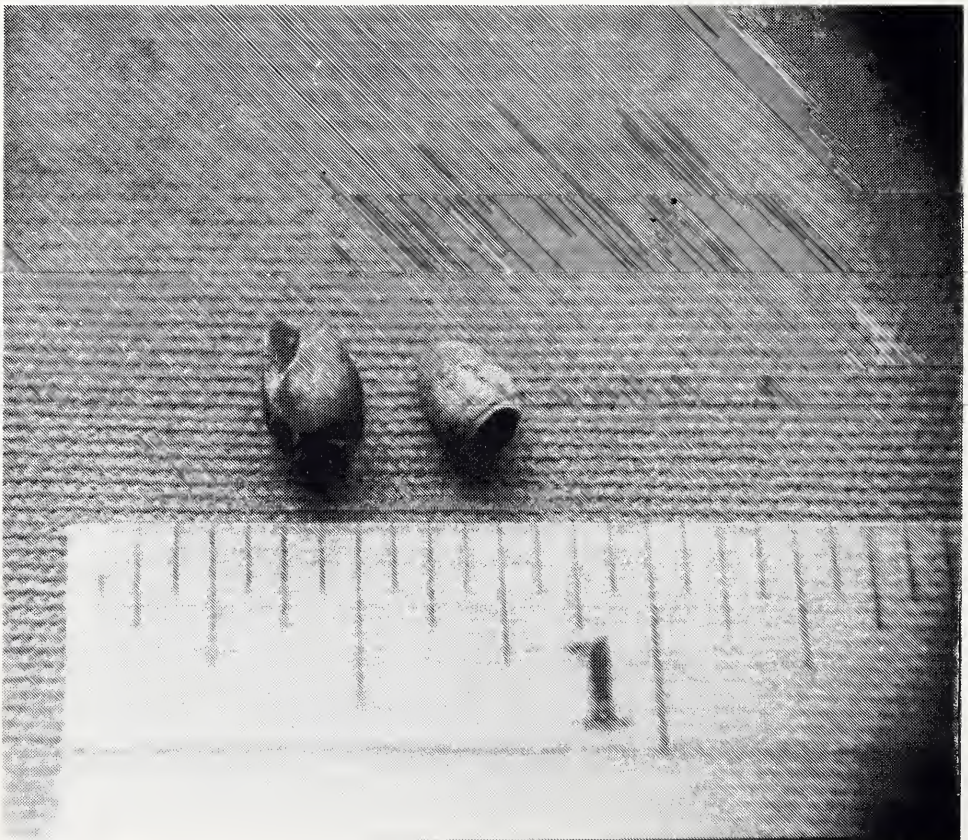


FIGURE 5. *Marine shells from feature 3 at the Jerger Site.*

The shells are black and gray in color indicating their presence in a fire. The largest shell is 8 mm. long and about 4 mm. in greatest diameter. All of them have a broken spire, and they may have been used as beads. These shells were identified by Mr. and Mrs. William B. Adams of Bloomington as marine shells,

possible *Detracia bullaoides*. This is a species found in Florida and the West Indies.

Feature 9 was about 3 feet long and 1.5 feet wide. It extended at most 0.33 foot below the surface at which it was defined. Little remained of this feature as it had been badly disturbed by cultivation. The fill of Feature 9 was sandy and was mottled with browns, the darkest areas having somewhat of a purplish brown appearance. Among the items in Feature 9 were cremated bone and some fragments of points and bifacial objects.

Feature 13 was about 3 feet long and 1.5 feet wide. It extended a maximum of 0.37 foot below the surface at which it was defined. This feature had also been badly disturbed by cultivation. The sandy fill was dark, having somewhat of a purplish brown appearance. The material in Feature 13 included, among other things, cremated bone, some fragments of bifacial objects, and 2 bifurcated base point fragments.

Artifactual Assemblage

The Jerger Site provides evidence for an artifactual assemblage for one of the aboriginal occupations of the White River Valley. It has been known for some time that this occupation existed in the area, being evidenced by the presence of bifurcated base points like those from this site. These points were termed "Category B" and were discussed in a study done several years ago (5). However, until now nothing had been clearly associated with these points in this area.

Based upon my observations and those of the discoverers of the site, little archaeological material occurs at the Jerger Site excepting that originating in the mortuary features. No other kind of aboriginal feature has been found at the site, and it appears that the location was used mainly for funerary purposes. The material from the plowzone is like that found in the features, and material from the two contexts can be associated on the basis of having been burned.

The evidence from this site indicates an artifactual assemblage consisting at a minimum of bifurcated base points, bifacial objects, drills, perforated teeth, bone artifacts with a rounded end, awl-like bone artifacts, marine shells possibly used as beads, and the use of red ochre.

Interpretations

All three of the excavated aboriginal features functioned as graves for the reception of cremations and accompanying items. Since the remains have been in a hot fire and the earth adjacent to the features was not oxidized, cremation evidently occurred elsewhere.

At some point(s) in the mortuary activities red ochre was utilized. It occurs on some of the cremated bone fragments. In addition, a piece of red ochre was recovered from Feature 3, and there was ochre stain in that feature.

The heat-altered points, bifacial objects, drills, perforated teeth, bone artifacts, shells, and animal bone presumably were also burned in the crematory fire(s). Artifacts such as the perforated teeth and the shells may have been worn by the individuals, could have been attached to or been part of an accompanying

object, or have been placed separately. The unworked fragments of animal bone may have been artifactual in concept, e.g. part of a medicine bundle. They may reflect something of the belief system or have been added for some more prosaic reason. It is possible that the treatment of the dead and/or the quantity of and kinds of artifactual accompaniments are indications of status.

Cultural Affiliation and Chronology

Based upon the characteristics of the bifurcated base points recovered, the cultural affiliation of this site is Early Archaic.

The points are similar, at least in concept, to MacCorkle Stemmed, St. Albans Side Notched, and other Early Archaic bifurcated base points from the stratified St. Albans Site in West Virginia (1). Radiocarbon dates place the specimens from St. Albans from about 6000 B.C. to approximately 7000 B.C. Radiocarbon and archaeomagnetic dating indicate similar antiquity for Early Archaic bifurcated base LeCroy and St. Albans Side Notched points at the stratified Rose Island Site in Tennessee (2).

Discussion

The Jerger Site not only furnishes new cultural and paleoecological data regarding a particular Early Archaic population in Indiana, but also provides information which is relevant to this early time period in general.

Knowledge of Indiana's Early Archaic occupations, even artifact assemblages, is quite limited. To my knowledge there is just one other excavated site in Indiana from which there is reasonable indication of an Early Archaic artifactual assemblage. Evidence for this was recovered from and adjacent to a possible living floor buried by alluviation at the Haag Site in Dearborn County in the southeastern part of the State. The Early Archaic assemblage from Haag is thought to include Charleston Corner Notched-like points, bifaces, drills, end scrapers, other unifacial tools, and hammerstones (6).

The Jerger Site provides tangible evidence for the time depth of some kinds of artifacts and cultural practices and furnishes data regarding cultural development in the eastern United States. An important aspect of the Jerger assemblage is that it contributes some information regarding non-lithic artifacts. The presence of marine shells is interesting as an indication of exchange and the use of exotic items as burial accompaniments at this early date.

The Jerger site is one of the few early mortuary sites reported for the eastern United States, and provides increasing indication of the early occurrence of mortuary ceremonialism in the eastern United States. It appears that the Jerger burial features are located in a special cemetery area, and a certain amount of attention, if not special treatment, is indicated by cremation, red ochre, and burned artifacts. The marine shell beads are made from an exotic material and may have special significance. In addition, a sizable quantity of artifactual material accompanied the burials.

At least two other early mortuary sites in the eastern United States which indicate some attention given to the dead are reported in the literature. One is the Renier Site in Wisconsin for which the authors suggest a date of 6500 to 4000

B.C. (3). The Renier burial consisted of cremated bone and fire fractured artifacts including Eden and Scottsbluff points, a side notched point, bifaces, and a scraper. The other site is the Lawrence Site, a multicomponent habitation and burial site in Kentucky (4). Feature 72 contained two individuals accompanied by a Kirk Serrated point, two large points with some Kirk characteristics, a lanceolate point, drills, flake tools, necklaces of dog canines and beaver incisors, several pieces of animal bone, and red ochre. A radiocarbon date of about 5400 B.C was obtained for this feature. The Renier, Lawrence, and Jerger Sites suggest the existence of widespread mortuary ceremonialism at an early date in the eastern United States.

The faunal material recovered from Jerger is important for at least two reasons. It provides data regarding the paleoecology of the area and indicates resource utilization by this Early Archaic population.

In sum, the Jerger Site is significant for a number of reasons, and we plan to continue research and excavation at the site.

Acknowledgements

I wish to express my gratitude to the many people who have assisted me with this project. The site was discovered by Mike Meade and Rick Oberst, and Mr. Meade informed me of the site and took me to it. I am very grateful to both of them for sharing their knowledge of the site with me. Without their aid the excavation would not have been undertaken. I am very much indebted to the landowners, Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Jerger, for permitting excavation and for their many courtesies. Their help is sincerely appreciated. I would also like to thank Craig Kinnaman, Mike Meade, Terry Meade, Rick Oberst, David Sonner, and Garrett Tomak for volunteering their time to help with the excavation. I am especially indebted to Norma Tomak who has helped with all phases of the excavation and analysis. I want to thank Craig Kinnaman for taking photographs of artifacts and of the site. I am grateful to William R. Adams of the Department of Anthropology at Indiana University for examining some of the faunal remains and am grateful to Mr. and Mrs. William B. Adams for examining the shells.

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