

FOREWORD

On June 1, 1965, Dave Dibble and I visited site 41VV99 for the first time since John Allen Graham and William A. (Bill) Davis recorded it in the spring of 1958. It had been described as a 150-foot or more long stratified terrace site on the west bank of the Pecos River between U.S. Highway 90 and the mouth of the river. The spring of 1965 was somewhat wet by Lower Pecos standards (the deadly Sanderson flood occurred on June 10th), and the vegetation was relatively lush. We poked around the site for an hour or so trying to get a better handle on site size and the nature of the materials exposed in the small gully near the center.

In the process, Dave asked me to scramble up the head of the gully and crawl through the dense brush (with due diligence for rattlesnakes) to measure the distance to the canyon wall. Much to my surprise, I crawled into a low alcove that was not visible from the front of the terrace. The curvature of the overhang suggested there might be a moderate-sized alcove buried at the back of the terrace. Both of us were favorably impressed with the stratigraphic potential offered by the site, and we concurred with Graham and Davis's recommendation that the site should be excavated.

Dave revisited Arenosa Shelter (as it was later named for the sandy nature of the upper sediments) with his bride Anne in July while I was testing sites 41VV88 and 41VV90 a mile or two upstream. His original opinion of the site's importance was reinforced, and we resolved to put it next on the list of sites to be excavated, postponing a third season of work at the Devil's Mouth site (41VV188). We spent several evenings at Comstock planning the initial testing strategy we would use when the fall excavation season started.

Unfortunately for me, President Lyndon Johnson had other plans—I was drafted into the U.S. Army in August for a two-year tour of duty. Dave proceeded with the excavations in October 1965 as described in this preliminary report. Major surprises included the size of the shelter, which doubled the width (and volume) of the site, and the discovery of a huge roof spall (dubbed "Big Mother Rock"), which effectively protected cultural and natural deposits from being washed away by the periodic floods experienced along the Pecos River.

Dave led a second season of excavations at Arenosa Shelter from June 26 through September 26, 1967. Work was concentrated in the center of the shelter behind "Big Mother Rock." The central block excavation was enlarged toward the rear wall of the shelter in an attempt to find the bottom of the huge roof spall or to determine if the spall formed the effective floor of the shelter. By the time the lip along the rear edge of the spall was defined, the season was drawing to a close and there was room to dig only a 5-foot by 10-foot grid north-south unit behind the spall. This test unit revealed stratified deposits extending underneath the giant rock. They contained early Archaic projectile point forms, and bison bones (cf. *Bison antiquus*) were found in some of the lower strata.

A week after my release from the Army, I was back in Comstock and volunteered work on the Arenosa crew for a week or so until I had to return to Austin for fall classes at The University of Texas. The field season ended with Dave fretting over the fact that he still had not found the floor of the shelter and that the sample of materials from under and behind "Big Mother Rock" was so limited.

With major efforts being directed toward other sites such as Devil's Mouth, Parida Cave (41VV187), and Conejo Shelter (41VV162), and with Dave enrolled in graduate school at Washington State University, there was little support left for continuing the work at Arenosa. He managed to wrangle one month of fieldwork with a small crew for the 1968 season. The goal was to open an east-west line of 5-foot by 5-foot units north of the 5-foot by 5-foot unit dug in 1967 in order to get a larger sample of the early materials behind and under "Big Mother Rock."

To accomplish this, it was necessary to remove about 12 or 15 horizontal feet of unexcavated fill from top to bottom along the rear wall of the 1967 excavations (see Figure 7 of this report for an earlier version of this wall), but Dave did not want to breach the deposits by cutting all the way to the rear wall of the shelter. I was dispatched to comstock a few days ahead of time with a backhoe and operator ("Uncle" Harold L. Beall) and a small crew to undertake the chore of moving uDibble's Hypotenuse." It was gut-wrenching to take a backhoe to such a beautifully stratified section of deposits and dump them into the Pecos River, but by the time Dave arrived, the rear wall profile was straight, clean, and beautiful again-it was simply 15 feet closer to the rear wall of the shelter.

The line of 5-foot (east-west) by 7-foot (north-south) units was dug rapidly to sample the lower deposits. As time ran out, the bottom of the units were stopped at a series of large slabs of rock tightly wedged together at a depth of about 42 feet below original ground surface. Very sparse charcoal flecks or stains and little else in the way of cultural materials was noted in the last 1 foot or so of excavations. We were not sure we were on the floor of the shelter; I found a gap between two of the slabs large enough to get my hand and trowel through and found a last charcoal fleck. We never made it to the floor of the shelter. Interestingly, the deepest projectile point we found looked sort of like an overgrown Perdiz point although the size was clearly that of a dart point. Dave, volunteer Dessamae Lorrain, and I spent an extra 3 or 4 days making a final measured profile drawing of the entire wall of the central excavation block. That ended the fieldwork.

Many people have spent countless hours processing and analyzing the materials and data recovered from Arenosa. For example, Michael B. Collins wrote a dissertation on the lithic debris, and Christopher Jurgens is currently writing a dissertation on the faunal remains. Thomas Patton wrote a thesis on the sedimentary history of the site on the basis of soil monoliths collected during excavations; he found the October 1954 flood on the lower Pecos River was a one in over 10,000-year event.

Dave never completed a final report of the excavations at Arenosa. Shortly after his return from graduate studies at WSU, he was named Assistant Director of the Texas Archeological Salvage Project, and when Frank W. Eddy resigned in late 1970, Dave was named Acting Director. He became Director in 1973 after receiving his Ph.D. Dave was a consummate "dirt archeologist." Those of us who worked with him in the field were constantly struck by his ability to "read" the dirt, and this trait was admirably demonstrated at Arenosa. Dave's death in December 1993 ended an era of Lower Pecos archeology. I am pleased that Texas Utilities Service Company has funded this reprinting of the preliminary Arenosa report. Dave would shuffle his feet, cock his head, and say the report is not good enough to deserve this fresh attention, that it is too far out of date and all effort should go toward reporting the subsequent seasons. But, we never did agree on everything anyway.

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