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AN HISTORIC INDIAN TOWN SITE

in

RUSSELL COUNTY

ALABAMA

by

David W. Chase

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D.W.C.

AN
HISTORIC INDIAN TOWN SITE
IN
RUSSELL COUNTY, ALABAMA
(1-RU-63)

Throughout most of the currently available historical accounts pertaining to the western Georgia region dating from DeSoto's explorations through the Indian Removal Period of 1836-39, frequent reference is made to the Yuchi Indians. Except for these random accounts, little is known historically, or in the archeological context, of the people themselves. Several sites have been explored in eastern Tennessee and are described in the archeological literature as the Mouse Creek Focus (Lewis and Kneberg, 1941).

Historical reference to the Yuchi Town on the Chattahoochee River is confined almost exclusively to the John R. Swanton descriptions as extracted by him from early accounts of William Bartram in the 1770's and Benjamin Hawkins in 1799. These men visited the site at about those times. Bartram described the site as '...the largest, best situated Indian Town I ever saw...walls plastered with reddish well tempered clay, houses covered with cypress bark or shingles of that tree.' (Swanton, Early History of the Creeks and Their Neighbors, p. 309). It is certain that, during his journeys through the southeast, Bartram had seen many large Indian towns. If the Yuchi town was the largest he had ever seen, it must have been huge. Despite the foregoing documented indication of an unusually large Indian community, extensive efforts

to find this site covered a period of two years before its location could be finally confirmed. The difficulty was traceable mainly to the repeated reference to the site as being 'at the mouth of the Uchee Creek'. This is certainly inaccurate. Exhaustive testing on both banks of the Uchee Creek at its confluence with the Chattahoochee and for at least two hundred yards up and down river from that point did reveal the presence of aboriginal habitation sites, but this evidence failed to satisfy the description of a large historic period village site of the type described by Bartram and Hawkins.

It was not until the spring of 1958 that such a site was finally found. Its location was a full mile below the mouth of the Uchee Creek. This discovery was made in conjunction with the Smithsonian River Basin Surveys which, at the time, was under the direction of Mr. Harold A. Huscher, Smithsonian Institution archeologist. At his suggestion, the writer explored the river segment in question as it seemed to be ideally suited for a habitation site. This was on a gentle bend of the river and bordered on the north by a small spring-fed stream. At this point also, the river bank was somewhat higher than the surrounding terrain.

Following a ploughed-up fire break conveniently made through the area under examination by the Fort Benning fish and game association, the writer was able to gather surface evidence in considerable quantity. The collection consisted mainly of broken pottery, fresh water mussels, broken animal bone and fire cracked river pebbles as well as an impressive amount of burned or fired clay wall daub. This evidence was exposed for nearly half a mile along the river bank.

Included in the surface collection were fragments of bottle glass, white clay pipe fragments, a pistol flint and two scraps of sheet brass. Later shovel tests indicated that these evidences of European contact were in direct association with objects of Indian manufacture. Subsequent cleaning and examination of the collected sample, revealed that the pottery was mostly of the shell tempered burnished incised and plain wares, occasionally with pinched rim fillets regarded generally as characteristic of the Ocmulgee Fields Period pottery (Jennings and Fairbanks, 1939, 1940). The paucity of Chattahoochee Brushed types, which is typical of the later phases of the Ocmulgee Fields Period, suggested that the site was, at least in part, occupied during the earlier phase of this time. Pottery types recognized were: Ocmulgee Fields Incised, Dallas Plain and Walnut Roughened.

Operations on the site during the following two years confirmed the Ocmulgee Fields associations which, together with the historical artifacts, related the occupation to a period within the 18th Century.

The aforescribed explorations and observations led the writer to assume that we had finally found the settlement of the Yuchi of Bartram and Hawkin's day.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE YUCHI

Most historians agree that the Yuchi were in what is now the general area involving the eastern portion of Tennessee and western North Carolina when Spanish explorers first encountered them in the 16th and 17th centuries. One of the early village sites of the Yuchi which is mentioned for the period is Tsistuyi (Cherokee name) which was located on the north bank of the Hiwassee River at the entrance to Chestua Creek in Polk County, Tennessee (Swanton, The Indian Tribes of North America, p. 117). Detailed accounts of the Spanish-Yucuman contacts are practically non-existent, at least, none which are very reliable. DeSoto's chroniclers refer to encounters with the "chiscas" or "chichimecs" whom some historians regard as Yuchi (Swanton, *ibid.* p. 118).

Sometime after the beginning of the 17th century, the Yuchi appear to have moved down the Savannah River. Exactly what motivated this move is not clear, however, they may have been driven out of their mountain home by the Cherokee. A later conflict with the Shawnee in 1674 resulted in further displacement of the Yuchi along the Savannah. In the year 1715, some of the Yuchi were known to have lived in a town called Hogaloge some 20 miles above Augusta (Swanton, *ibid.*).

There is reason to believe that a band of Yuchi had established themselves before this time on the Chattahoochee River. On the 28th of September, 1716, Diego de Pena, acting on orders of the governor of Florida, held a meeting of the principle chiefs of the large towns at the village of Appalachicola (this site is located about two miles east of Blessed Trinity Mission, Seale, Alabama). Attending this meeting were the chiefs of the following tribal groups of the region:

Ocmulque (Okmulgee), Acheto (Hitchiti), Uche (Yuchi), Tasquique (Tuskegee), Casista (Cusseta), Caveta (Coweta) and Chavejal (this town cannot be identified through later documentation. It may have occupied the present day site of Columbus, Georgia). DePena reports that of all of these towns, Appalachicola was the largest with a warrior population of 173. The next largest was Uche (Yuchi) with 106 fighting men (Boyd, p. 25).

Much later, Benjamin Hawkins explains the presence of the Yuchi in the Chattahoochee Valley through the following story: '...In 1729, a Cusseta chief named Capt. Ellick married three Yuchi women and persuaded some of the (Savannah) Yuchi Indians to move over among the Lower Creeks...' (Swanton, Indian Tribes of North America, p. 118)

As early as 1639, the Yuchi came to the attention of the Spanish in Florida. At the time, they were engaged in raiding Spanish and Indian settlements in northwestern Florida areas. Further, a settlement of Yuchi had been established on the shores of the Choctawatchee Bay in the early 17th Century. The latter was attacked in 1677 by a force made up of Spaniards and Appalachee Indians, this action almost terminating Yuchi power in that general area, however, they seemed to have remained on this site until 1761 when they moved among the Upper Creeks and settled near Tuckabatchee (Swanton, *ibid.* p. 118).

The Yuchi finally shared the fate of all of the southeastern Indians living in Georgia and Alabama, most of them having been re-located in Oklahoma by 1840 where they now reside.

Some of the Yuchi became noted for their participation in the Creek Wars. Timpoochee Bernard, a Yuchi, was stationed at Fort Mitchell where he served as an interpreter for the US Army. He was known to have

participated in a war against the Upper Creeks in 1814. (Brannon, Arrow Points, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1921, p. 3). A band of Yuchi joined the Seminole just before the outbreak of the Seminole War (Swanton, Abid, p. 119). Other Yuchi distinguished themselves during this period. Billy Bowlegs and Yuchi Billy being among the better known.

The Yuchi claimed to have originated in the "Lands of the south". More specifically, Yuchi migration legends hint at possible Central or South American origins. They say that their ancestors left their original homeland and crossed the waters (the Gulf of Mexico?) to some islands. From there they sailed again and landed on a peninsula which they say was Florida. They travelled northward to a more mountainous region where they settled and where later, they first encountered the Europeans. Of course the actual movements of these people were probably far more involved and complex than this. However, one must evaluate what little is available from such tradition sources.

The meaning of the word "Yuchi" is not clear. It may be the name given them by another people. The Yuchi called themselves "Tsoyaha" or, "people (children) of the sun". The term tsoyaha is elsewhere geographically represented as "chiaha", the name for several southeastern Indian (and possibly Yuchi) communities. At this juncture, it should be pointed out that deSoto stayed at a Chiaha town in the summer of 1541.

There were numerous names given to southeastern Indians in early historic times. The following might apply to the Yuchi. Some surely do:

Ani-Yusti	Cherokee name for Yuchi
Chisca	Spanish name for early historic period tribe who may have been Yuchi.
Hughchee	An early synonym

Round Town People	English colonist name
Rickohockans	Name of peoples who invaded Virginia in 17th Century and who were suspected to have been Yuchi.
Tahogalewi	Delaware name for the Yuchi
Tamahitans	Probable eastern Siouan name for Yuchi
Westo	Name for an Indian people who may have been Yuchi.

(Above list extracted from Swanton, Indian Tribes of North America, p. 117)

It is well known that the Yuchi speak a language unlike that known among any other North American Indian group. Further, the Yuchi language does not appear to be related to any other known. Although many of their customs seem to have been shared with their non-Yuchi speaking neighbors, the Yuchi maintain that radical differences exist in terms of the religious and ceremonial contexts. They are an extremely conservative people and appear to guard their folkways with care. One of the few non-Indian investigators who managed to receive valuable ethnological information from them is Mr. Joseph B. Mahan Jr. of Columbus, Ga. According to him, the elders among the Yuchi command considerable respect among Indians of other tribal affiliation. The Yuchi, according to his information, possessed the original "fire" or medicine which they shared with certain other southeastern groups. In connection with this, the Yuchi ceremonial leaders claim to be able to interpret the meanings of motifs and symbolisms which appear on shell gorgets, pottery and other artifacts which have been long associated with the

Southern "Cult". Of course such revelations on the part of the Yuchi suggest a certain degree of ethnocentrism and certainly will require some form of convincing demonstration before a scientific acceptance of such claims can be expected. If the Yuchi claims are valid, then one can assume that the Southern Cult still persists in one ceremonial form or another. Cult artifacts might possibly have been in use during late historic times. The aged Negro ex-slave Orv Phillips, who claimed to be 116 years old in 1921, was able to describe Indian activities in the Chattahoochee Valley during the 1830s. He spoke, among other things, of seeing Indians wearing beads about the size of your hand -meaning, possibly, shell gorgets. He also mentioned having seen shell ear pins of the knobbed variety being worn. Both of these artifacts have been regarded by many archeologists as Southern Cult-connected in most of the southeast (Brannon, Vol. 3, No. 5 dated Nov. 5, 1921, Alabama Anthropological Society, Montgomery).

With the foregoing account as a background, I intend to describe briefly, the preliminary archeological investigations which have taken place since the spring of 1958 at the RU 63 site, Fort Benning Reservation, Russell County, Alabama.

PRELIMINARY EXPLORATION

1 - RU - 63

Initially, our tests uncovered both historical period material as well as pottery of an earlier and presumably prehistoric component which was tentatively identified as belonging to the Bull Creek (Loma) Focus, the latter appearing in the lower one third of most of our test sections. This factor prompted the search for an area containing both components in sufficient representation to warrant a stratification test. During this operation, Burial #1 was uncovered. This was an infant interment of an individual about one year old. It was extended on its back under approximately 20" of loose sand and village refuse. Burial goods consisted of very small seed beads of white, brown and black porcelain. Also black and brown beads larger and egg-shaped. These were distributed over the thorax area together with an unengraved shell gorget of the two drill-hole type. Over each foot were small pottery vessels. One of these was a bowl about 8" in diameter, three inches deep and grit tempered. The other was a small, constricted neck, everted rim grit tempered pot. Both were plain vessels. Under the open bowl were found two brass "hawk's" bells. Another vessel was found at the right elbow. This was a grit tempered cup, also plain, ~~and, grit tempered.~~ The latter appeared to have been made as a funeral offering since it was only half-fired. The burial was heading west and facing east. Judging from the nature of the burial furniture, the child appeared to have been a female.

Later, while searching for an area for stratification test purposes, a large box shaped refuse pit was uncovered. This contained numerous European trade objects, animal bone, Indian pottery and shell. A few small peach pits were also in the pit fill. The pit opened at 1' 6", was 4'5" long, 3'7" wide and 4'7" deep. The sides were clay lined as was the bottom. Testing further in the same vicinity, a second burial was uncovered. This was an adult female, tightly flexed, lying on the right side heading northwest and facing south. Grave goods consisted of two pottery vessels located under the knees, a few scraps of unfired pottery clay behind the head and a small triangular projectile point over the left hip. One of the vessels was a truncated pot of unknown dimensions which had been made into a small bowl. This had been fine cord stamped over the entire outer surface. The second vessel was a small deeply incised bowl, straight-sided with a flat bottom and four cornered base - giving the vessel a basket like appearance. This was shell tempered whereas the other vessel was tempered with grit (see illustration).

Subsequent explorations on the site were suspended until the late summer of 1959 mainly due to the need for attention in other areas. Also, access road to the site had become impassable due to heavy rainfall throughout much of the summer. Although areas to the south of the site proper were being used for demolitions testing by the Continental Army Command, members of the testing board were most cooperative in permitting us to enter the site whenever the range was not in use.

During the months of November-December 1959, several tests were made to determine the extent of the site. On the north-western perimeter of the occupational area proper, one of the tests uncovered Burial No. 3. This was the interment of a young female (adult) heading southwest and facing east. The burial was extended on the back. Contents of the burial fill indicated that a very large shell tempered fine corded pottery vessel had been placed over the burial but sometime in the past a plough had smashed it. Several large rim and body sherds were recovered in the fill area, however, enough was recovered to make a partial description of the vessel possible. This had been a large constricted neck, everted rim pot with rim fillets just below the lip. Between this and the shoulder was a plain pebble rubbed zone. The rest of the pot from shoulder to base had been cord wrapped paddle stamped with very fine cord. Other burial furniture consisted of a large number of white opaque and blue glass seed beads, some large ovate opaque glass beads. In the fill was found a core of a conch shell which had been ground smooth at each end and had an incised band about the middle. One round headed shell ear pin was found over the left shoulder. Between the skull and pelvic region were found four brass buttons. These had been engraved with a curious sun-burst design. Two iron belt buckles above the pelvic area completed the inventory.

In the several tests made throughout the site, our attention was continually drawn to the large amount of shell tempered pottery present. The large number of fresh water mussel shells in the village refuse suggested these as being the prime source of tempering material. A number of shell fragments pertaining to

marine shells also occurred. Projectile points of chert, while not numerous, were consistent in appearance. These are tapered shoulder straight base triangles averaging about 1" in length. Most are made of a light tan semi-translucent to opaque chert known as "honey colored flint" locally. The source of this material may be in the coastal plain limestone outcrop belt about sixty miles south of the Columbus-Phenix City area.

Since pottery is most abundant on all parts of the site, efforts to detect stylistic changes in design motifs is being made since such changes might reflect cultural re-orientation brought about during the European intrusion period. Moreover, data supplied by such a ceramic survey might satisfy the writer's suspicion that the Ocmulgee Fields pottery types can be chronologically assigned in this area. At the time of this writing, the exploration of a large house or public building at RU-63 may contribute much toward the solution to this problem. To date, nearly twenty square feet of earth has been removed from the floor proper. A description of this exploration follows.

House "A"

In May, 1959, a trench, 1' wide and a shovel blade's length deep was run parallel to the main base line from a point 10' SE of 450E stake and in a northwesterly direction.. The purpose of this was to detect features in the village area or to pick up post molds. After proceeding 15 feet, a thick mass of burnt wall daub was found. At the initial point of exposure, a small cache or pit of carbonized corn cobs was uncovered. Further tests in the area indicated the presence of a fallen house wall (daub) underlying from 6" to

9" of refuse and forest humus. The wall daub layer averaged 3" in thickness. Despite this unmistakable evidence of a structure of some sort, no post mold pattern could be found surrounding the floor area, the latter being defined as a hard, somewhat undulating stratum underlying the scattered daub layer. During the excavation of the section, a second concentration of charred corn cobs was found in a shallow pit intruding about 6" into the floor. This depression measured 16" by 20". Nearby lay fragments of a large incised bowl which appeared to have been smashed by the falling mass of wall daub (fig. 2).

It was necessary to isolate control pedestals during the floor clearing since certain portions of the floor were not too clearly defined and could be located only in terms of average depth.

The customary procedure of excavating by arbitrary depth levels was abandoned in favor of segregating specimens from levels as dictated by the conditions imposed by the ruin. All material above the daub layer was separated from the material from the floor level beneath it. A third category will relate to that material excavated under the floor. These levels will be regarded as pre-house, house occupancy, and post house levels. Material from features will be appropriately segregated in relation to the level to which they pertain.

The foregoing procedure is yielding some interesting results thus far. European contact material - bottle glass, pipe fragments, brass objects and gun flints all have come from the post-house level thus far with very few exceptions. One or two bottle glass sherds were recovered from the house floor. Practically no brushed pottery

which could be classified as typical Chattahoochee Brushed ware came from the house floor level. The latter constitutes nearly 50% of identifiable pottery types from the upper zone, however. Most of the brushed ware from the floor level was shell tempered and therefore atypical of classical Chattahoochee Brushed.

Barring a few untyped sherds of the grit tempered variety, identifiable sherds from the house floor are mostly of the Dallas Plain and Incised or Walnut Roughened type. Not over ten sherds of the Kasita Red Filmed type were found in the entire section. These all were found in the post-house or upper zone.

Conclusion

It is clearly too soon to draw any conclusions on the strength of the aforescribed observations. However, some of the questions raised by the work thus far and which might be answered by future efforts at RU-63 could be:

1. Is there adequate evidence available to reduce the Ocmulgee Fields horizon to two focii on the basis of pottery styles?
2. Can such pottery style changes be established as reliable time markers within a 20 year tolerance - plus or minus?
3. Did the Southern Cult persist into late historic times and was its ceremonial context preserved and carried into Oklahoma in 1836?

It seems certain that RU-63 is the historic settlement of the Yuchi of the late 18th Century historical references. It would also seem probable, on the basis of pottery cross references, that this Yuchi Town was established not later than the middle of the 17th Century and existed as a contemporary of such nearby communities as Coweta Tallahassee, Muskegee and Appalachicola.

If the Southern Cult is manifest in RU-63, too little evidence has been uncovered thus far to support such an association. The possibility does exist, however, since the ceramic pattern at RU-63 seems to parallel that known to be associated with Cult impregnated sites. We shall be in a better position to answer this question with a more thorough exploration of the burial complex there.

Trade artifacts found thus far point up early English contact since emphasis is more on gun flints, sheet brass and thick (rum?) bottle glass than china and more delicate glassware. The tiny glass seed beads may indicate Spanish sources. A confirmation would be helpful in determining chronological assignment to the early phase of settlement of the Yuchi component.

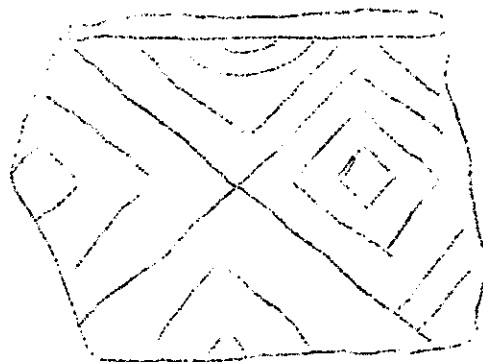
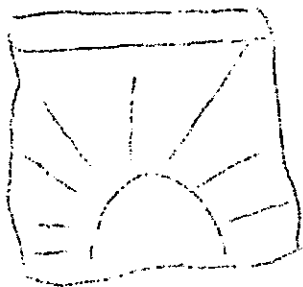
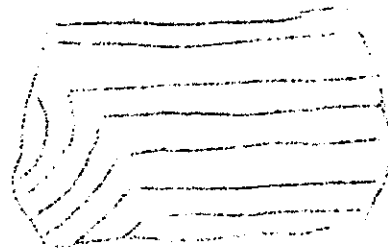
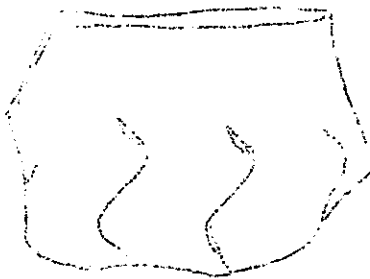
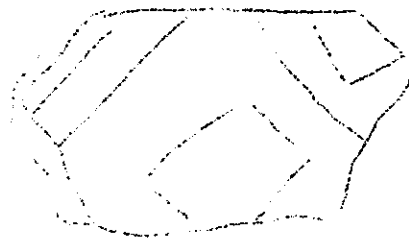
Tests yielded evidence of a pre-Yuchi or pre-Ocmulgee Fields component. This appears to be final Bull Creek Focus Lamar. More work is needed to confirm this, however.

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Fig. 1

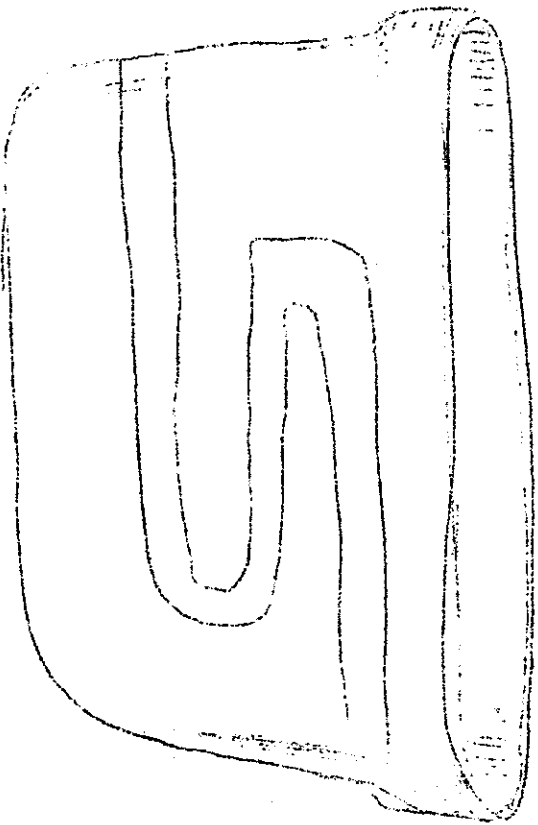
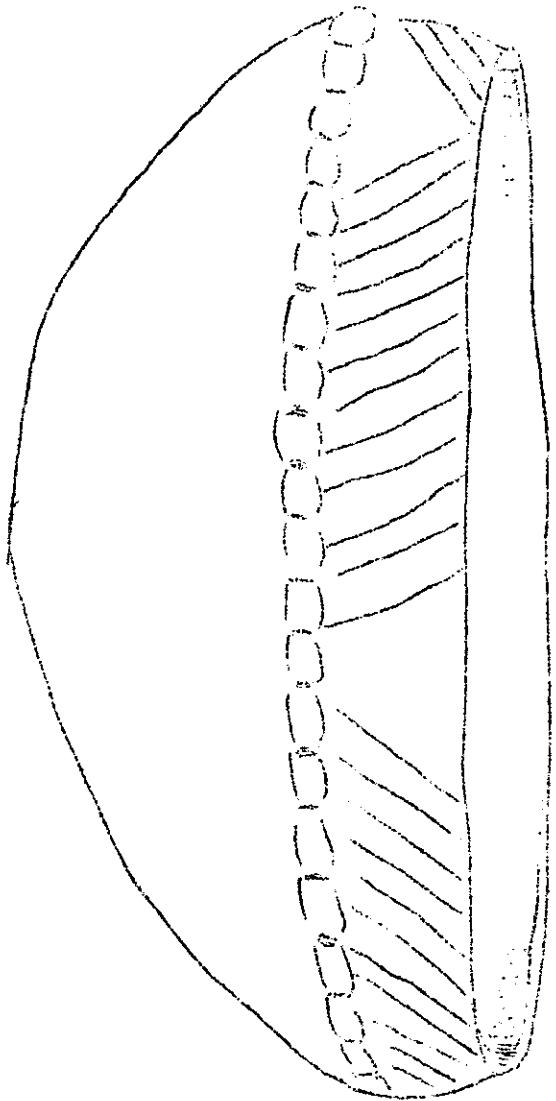
1-RU-63 Typical Incised pottery motifs.

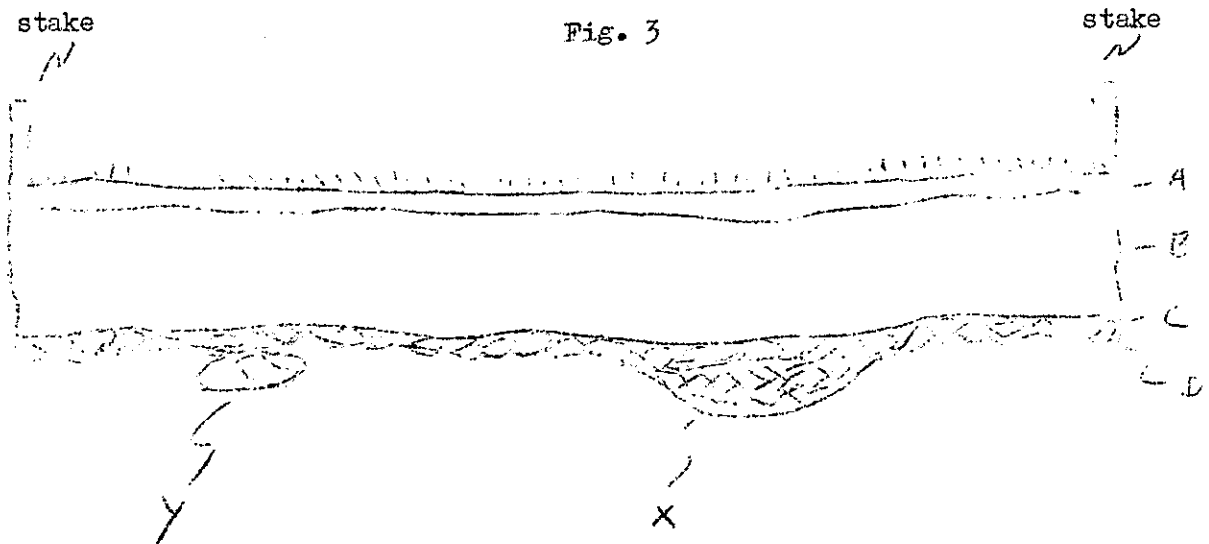


From House "A"
Floor
1-RU-63

Fig. 2

From Burial #2
1 RU 63





1-RU-63

Profile of House "A" floor area

A - Humus - 3"

B - Refuse, post ruin level 6" to 9"

C - Fallen daub wall - 2" - 3"

D - Floor surface

X - Charred corn pit

Y - Smashed pottery vessel