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# Table of Contents

## Articles

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Archeological Materials from the Northern Shore of<br>Corpus Christi Bay, Texas<br>By James E. Corbin . . . . .  | 5   |
| Archeological Excavations at the Boy Scout Rockshelter<br>(41TV69), Travis County, Texas<br>By J. C. Pollard, John W. Greer, and H. F. Sturgis . . . . . | 31  |
| Test Excavations at the Youngsport Site: A Stratified<br>Terrace Site in Bell County, Texas<br>By Harry J. Shafer . . . . .                              | 57  |
| The Wolfshead Site: An Archaic—Neo-American Site in<br>San Augustine County, Texas<br>By Lathel F. Duffield . . . . .                                    | 83  |
| The Smithport Landing Site: An Alto Focus Component<br>in De Soto Parish, Louisiana<br>By Clarence H. Webb . . . . .                                     | 143 |
| A Guide to Pottery Sorting, and the Meaning of Pottery<br>Types and Attributes<br>By E. Mott Davis . . . . .   | 189 |
| A Guide to Archeological Reconnaissance<br>By LeRoy Johnson, Jr. . . . .   | 203 |

## Book Reviews

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Hall, Robert L., <i>The Archeology of Carcajou Point, with an<br/>Interpretation of the Development of Oneota Culture in<br/>Wisconsin</i><br>By T. N. Campbell . . . . . | 219 |
|---|-----|

# Archeological Materials From the Northern Shore of Corpus Christi Bay, Texas

JAMES E. CORBIN

## ABSTRACT

From 1957 to the present, the writer has made an archeological survey of the northern shore of Corpus Christi Bay, Texas. During this period, 16 campsites were located. With one possible exception, the McGloin Bluff Site, all are shell middens. Collecting from the surface of these midden areas produced well over 4,000 artifacts which are described in detail, and which are assignable to either the Rockport or Aransas Focus.

## INTRODUCTION

The central portion of the Texas Gulf Coast, that area between the Brazos River and Corpus Christi Bay, has yielded archeological materials that can be assigned to one of the four development stages set up for Texas as a whole (Suhm, Krieger, and Jelks, 1954). Thus far the earliest stage, the Paleo-American, is known only from surface finds of certain dart point types, including *Plainview* and *Clovis*. The later Archaic Stage is represented by the Aransas Focus, the majority of the material coming from two excavated sites on Copano Bay (Campbell, 1947; 1952) and from surface collections near Corpus Christi (Campbell, 1956). The Rockport Focus has been recognized for the Neo-American and Historic stages, mainly from archeological surveys (Martin, n.d.; 1929; 1931; Potter, 1930; Sayles, 1935); from excavated Aransas Focus sites that were overlain by small Rockport components (Campbell, 1956); from surface collections near Corpus Christi (Campbell, 1956); and from an excavated Rockport Site on Live Oak Point (Campbell, 1958). Obviously, there are not a wealth of data from the central coast; and more material and information are needed before it is possible to have a good understanding of the prehistory of the area.

The purpose of this paper is to describe and evaluate archeological materials I have collected from the surface of 16 sites found in an areal

reconnaissance of the extreme southern portion of this central coastal area. This survey, a sporadic operation from 1957 to the present, covered an area between the city of Portland and the eastern edge of the southern tip of Live Oak Peninsula.

The physiographic features of the region are much the same throughout: short beaches backed by bluffs ranging from 12 to 18 feet high. The bluffs are usually composed of a white clay which is frequently capped by a four to 18 inch deposit of black, sandy clay. On the southern edge of Live Oak Peninsula, however, the black clay is replaced by wind-blown sand. Here the vegetation is mainly grasses and oak trees, whereas elsewhere (from Kinney Bayou to Portland) it is grasses and mesquite trees.

### **McGLOIN BLUFF SITE (41-SP-11)**

McGloin Bluff is located on the southern tip of Live Oak Peninsula and faces south toward Corpus Christi Bay. The bluff runs east and west, and extends from just east of Harbor City to the base of Ingle-side Point. It is approximately 14 feet above sea level, and there is a short beach between the bluff and the waters of the bay. The eastern half of the bluff is covered with sand dunes that are 12 to 20 feet high. The main vegetation is grasses, with a few oak trees on the western section.

The site is approximately at the mid-point of the bluff; its western half is covered with dunes, but the eastern half is fairly exposed. There are two running springs located on the site. One is on the western extremity of the site and only started flowing freely after the recent (1961) hurricane Carla. A second and more reliable spring is located at the mid-point of the bluff, and the major portion of the site seems to be centered in this area. There used to be a third spring on the eastern edge of the site, but it apparently has not been flowing for the past 20 years.

I first visited the site early in 1957, after being told of an Indian "mound" in the area. What I found was a large site on a bluff which was dissected by a series of small gullies, the areas between the gullies giving the impression of mounds. No shell midden deposits can be seen anywhere in the vicinity; in fact, very little shell can be found on the site. At the time of the initial visit, potsherds and flint flakes were very numerous but now, after 150 collecting trips to the site, very few artifacts can be recovered. The collection was made entirely from the surface and to date consists of 66 stone and shell artifacts and 3,381 potsherds.

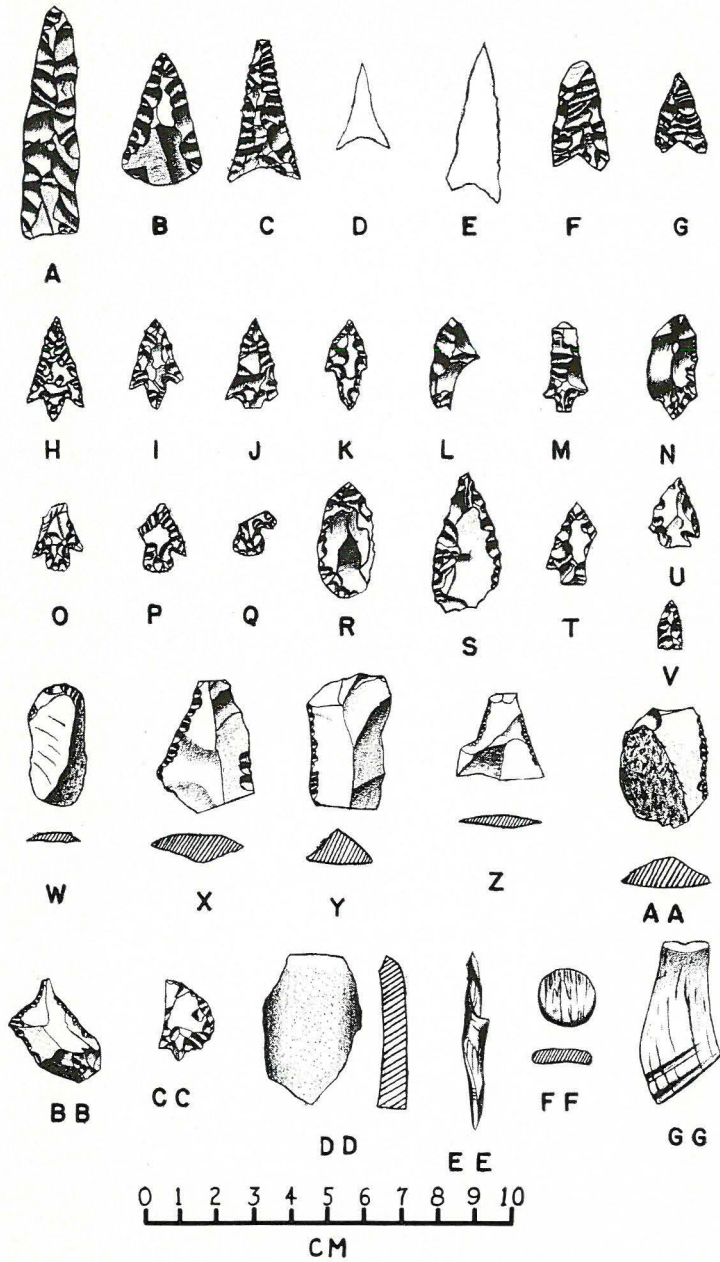


Fig. 1. Artifacts of stone and shell from the McGloin Bluff Site.

*Projectile Points.* Flint projectile points are represented by 27 specimens, seven of which are unidentifiable distal fragments. Of the 20 identifiable points, two can be classed as dart points. One of these (Fig. 1, A) falls within the range of the *Darl* type and has a blade that is alternately beveled to the left. The stem, barely discernible because of extremely small shoulders, is basally thinned. The other point, classified as *Catán* (Fig. 1, B), has a convex base and alternately beveled blade edges. These two specimens are the only suggestions of an Aransas Focus occupation. However, both types are thought to have survived into later times and therefore may be associated with the better represented Rockport Focus.

The remaining 18 specimens are arrow points, and almost all of these fall within the range of types associated with the Rockport Focus. The *Perdiz* type, which includes seven points, predominates. Four of these (Fig. 1, H-J) have blades with straight lateral edges, and one (Fig. 1, K) has a blade with convex edges. The stem of the latter specimen is longer than the blade. A sixth *Perdiz* (Fig. 1, M) has a blade with concave edges. The seventh (Fig. 1, N) point may be classified as a *Cliff-ton*, a crude *Perdiz*, or an unfinished point of either type. Three of the *Perdiz* are made from thin flakes, with complete flaking on one side and only minor flaking on the other. *Eddy* points (or *eddy* variety of *Scal-lorn*) are represented by three fragmentary specimens (Fig. 1, O-Q), all of which show evidence of having had short blades, strong barbs and bulbous stems.

Two triangular specimens with gently concave bases are classified as *Starr*. One (Fig. 1, C) has nearly straight lateral edges, while the other (Fig. 1, D) has concave lateral edges with slight serrations on the proximal two-third of these edges. Two other triangular points from the site are identified as *Young*. These (Fig. 1, R, S) are made from thin, essentially unifacially worked flakes.

Six additional arrow points do not fit into any of the recognized types and will, consequently, be described individually. One (Fig. 1, T) has a rectangular stem and shoulders which extend at right angles from the stem. The edges of the blade are straight and slightly serrated. Another small, crude point (Fig. 1, U) has an expanding stem with a straight base and small barbs formed by corner notches. The edges of the blade are straight. A small (1.4 cm. long) triangular point (Fig. 1, V) has a straight lateral edge. One side has a slight shoulder about halfway down the edge. Three triangular points (Fig. 1, E-G) have very deeply concave bases; one of these (Fig. 1, G) has essentially straight lateral edges, and the others have slightly concave blade edges.

*Scrapers.* End scrapers are represented by one small (3.4 cm. long and 1.3 cm. wide) specimen worked on one end (Fig. 1, W). Side scrapers, by contrast, include four examples (Fig. 1, X-AA), one of which (Fig. 1, X) is roughly triangular in outline and has two worked edges, one being concave, the other convex. A second specimen (Fig. 1, Y) is rectangular in outline (4.5 cm. long and 2 cm. wide) and is worked along one straight lateral edge. A third side scraper (Fig. 1, Z) is made from a thin, roughly triangular flake and is lightly retouched on two edges. The fourth specimen (Fig. 1, AA) is also rectangular in shape and is retouched along one straight lateral edge.

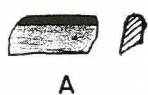
*Gravers.* One graver (Fig. 1, BB), made from a roughly triangular flake, was found at the site. It has two graver points, one of which is broken. One long worked lateral edge might have been used for scraping purposes.

*Miscellaneous Worked Stone.* Two pieces of worked flint cannot be identified. The first specimen (Fig. 1, CC) is roughly semicircular in outline, is worked on both faces, and has a small projection at one end. The second unidentified fragment (not shown) is D-shaped in outline, bifacially chipped, and has retouching along the convex edge.

One worked fragment of hard, gray sandstone (Fig. 1, DD) appears to be an incurvate rim fragment from a tubular stone pipe. The exterior surface is very well ground, and the interior only a little less so. Reconstructed, the interior diameter is approximately 8 cm. The fragment is .7 cm. thick at the rim and .8 cm. thick at the opposite end of the fragment.

*Shell Artifacts.* Although shell of any kind is scarce at the site, 30 shell artifacts were found. Twenty of these are small whelk shell columella fragments ranging from 2.5 cm. to 7 cm. in length. The ends of one undamaged columella (Fig. 1, EE) have been ground to very sharp points. Another type of shell artifact is a small disc (Fig. 1, FF) which shows heavy grinding along the edges. This specimen is 1.7 cm. in diameter and approximately .5 cm. thick. A roughly trapezoidal shell fragment (Fig. 1, GG) with a steep bit on the smaller end appears to be a fragment from the body of a scallop shell. The remainder of the shell artifacts are small, unidentifiable fragments.

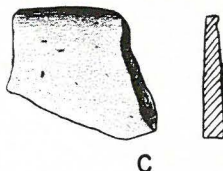
*Pottery.* The many collecting trips to the site have resulted in a collection of 3,381 potsherds, not including a large number of exceptionally small and badly eroded pieces. The sherds are classified according to the types defined in *An Introductory Handbook of Texas*



A



B



C



D



E



F



G



H



I



J



K



L



M



N



O



P



Q



R



S



T



U



V



W



X



Y



Z



AA



BB



CM

*Archeology* (Suhm, *et al.*, 1954: 382-385); with nearly all falling within the *Rockport* series.

1) *Rockport Plain*. Rim sherds from *Rockport Plain* vessels number 139. These include 63 flat-lipped rims (Fig. 2, U, V), 11 of which have asphaltum coatings on both surfaces.\* Only four have asphaltum on the exterior surfaces, and one has scoring on the exterior surface.

Sixty-five sherds are from vessels with rounded lips (Fig. 2, W-Y). Thirty-six of these have no asphaltum, but four have scoring on the interior surfaces. Asphaltum is found in 29 sherds, 17 having asphaltum on one side only. Of these 17, six have asphaltum on the exterior surfaces and five have asphaltum on the interior surfaces, with two of the former scored on the interior and one of the latter scored on the interior. One of these sherds is from a vessel whose internal diameter at the mouth was approximately 4 cm. It is not possible to determine which surface has been asphalt coated on six sherds.

Four additional sherds, three with asphaltum coatings, have beveled lips, but it is impossible to distinguish the interior from the exterior surfaces.

Two sherds have thickened lips (Fig. 2, Z). One of these has asphaltum and scoring on the exterior surface, the asphaltum extending about halfway across the lip. Vessels with V-notched lips are represented by five sherds.

2) *Rockport Black-on-gray*. Sherds of this type number 74, 32 of which are from vessel rims. Vessels which had rounded lips are represented by 24 sherds (Fig. 2, A, B). On all of these only the lip proper is painted. Four sherds are from vessels that had flattened lips (Fig. 2, C). On three of these just the flat part of the lip is painted. The lip of the fourth sherd (Fig. 2, D) is rolled to the interior and is lightly incised with parallel diagonal lines; it and the interior of the sherd are coated with asphaltum. On the exterior surface of the sherd a vertical, asphaltum painted line extends down from the rim.

One sherd (Fig. 2, E) is from a vessel with an outcurved rim. A wavy line of asphaltum runs vertically down from the rim. The interior surface of the sherd is coated with asphaltum and this extends up to the top of the lip.

\* Suhm, Krieger, and Jelks (1954: 384) designate any *Rockport* ware bearing asphaltum as *Rockport Black-on-gray*. Herein, however, this type is restricted to those sherds having obvious designs.

Three sherds indicate different types of lip notching. One of these (Fig. 2, F) has a V-notched flat lip painted with asphaltum. A second flat lip (Fig. 2, G) is notched with diagonal crenelations and also painted with asphaltum. The only other rim sherd (Fig. 2, H) has U-shaped notches and the same style of lip painting as described above.

Asphaltum painted decorations appear on 42 body sherds. The motifs consist of various straight, wavy, dotted, and dashed lines on the exterior surfaces. Of these, 33 also have asphaltum coatings on the interior surfaces. Two of the latter have interior scoring associated with asphaltum coating, while another two have scoring, but no asphaltum, on the interior surface.

3) *Rockport Incised*. One sherd (Fig. 2, S) with two parallel incised lines can be classified as *Rockport Incised*.

4) *Rockport ware body sherds*. A total of 3,153 body sherds fall within the *Rockport* ware classification but cannot be identified with a specific type. Of these, 1,507 bear no asphaltum, but 125 do have scoring marks. Scoring is present on both sides of 32 sherds, and 93 sherds have scoring on one side only. Exterior scoring occurs on seven sherds, and 42 sherds have interior scoring. On the remaining 44 sherds it is not possible to tell on which surface the scoring occurs.

Sherds with asphaltum coating number 1,554. Of these 712 have asphaltum coating on the exterior surfaces and 601 have asphaltum on the interior surfaces. Asphaltum occurs on both surfaces of 241 sherds.

Scoring and asphaltum combinations are found on 90 sherds. Scoring occurs on both surfaces of 22 sherds, with six having asphaltum on the interior surfaces, seven having asphaltum on the exterior surfaces, and on seven sherds it is not possible to determine on which surface the asphaltum occurs. Of the sherds with both surfaces scored, two have both sides coated with asphaltum. One side only of 68 sherds has been scored.

Exterior scoring is present on ten sherds, with four having asphaltum on this surface and four having it on the interior. Asphaltum occurs on both surfaces of two of these sherds. Interior scoring is found on 21 sherds, ten having asphaltum on this surface and 11 having asphaltum on the exterior surface. It is not possible to tell on which surface the scoring is present on the remaining 37 sherds. Asphaltum occurs on the same surface as the scoring of 15 sherds, on the opposite surface on 16 sherds, and on both surfaces of six sherds.

Two sherds from the necks of bottles have punctations on the exterior surface. One of these (Fig. 2, R) has a single row of punctations

and asphaltum on the interior surface, and the other has a triple row of punctations.

5) *Incised-Punctated Sherd*. One *Rockport* ware rim sherd (Fig. 2, I) has a design consisting of alternating rows of incised lines and punctations, with the first incised line appearing just below the lip. This is followed by a row of punctations, an incised line, and another row of punctations. The punctations are rounded and seem to have been made with a bluntly pointed implement.

6) *Red slipped and red painted sherds*. A red slip appears on the exterior surface of one typical *Rockport* ware body sherd. Light scoring, clearly made before the vessel was slipped, occurs on the exterior surface. Another sherd with a white exterior has a thin film of red paint covering part of the surface.

7) *Worked sherds*. Two discs made from *Rockport* sherds (Fig. 2, T) show grinding on their edges and faces.

8) *Intrusive sherds*. Possible intrusive wares are represented by nine sherds. These are brown in color, and all are tempered with large white particles of unknown material. These may possibly be sherds from a vessel of *Leon Plain* (Suhm, *et al.*, 1954: Pl. 74, E), a type which is associated principally with the Central Texas Aspect. One of these is a rim sherd with a lip slightly rolled to the interior. Two other sherds have asphaltum coatings on the interior surfaces.

*European Objects*. European contact is indicated by a small blue glass bead. It is .3 cm. thick and .4 cm. in diameter. It is typical of 18th century European trade beads (Dee Ann Story, personal communication).

*Conclusions*. Analysis of the archeological materials from the McGloin Bluff Site indicates that only a *Rockport* Focus component is present. As noted previously, the two dart points need not be considered as evidence of an *Aransas* Focus occupation. The site seems to have been occupied mainly because of its fresh water and the food potential of the surrounding area. Of the few faunal remains found, fish bones predominate. (Until very recently, the shallow waters along this particular section of the coast were a favorite of trout, red and flounder fishermen.) The absence of oyster shells at the site probably indicates the absence of oyster reefs in the immediate area.

One of the more important findings made at the site is the red painted sherd. This sherd may answer a question that has been bothering

archeologists for sometime: Where is evidence of the red painted pottery that Gatschet (1891) describes for the historic Karankawa? Specifically, Gatschet writes (1891: 68):

Besides some rude attempts at wood carving a beginning of the plastic arts could be seen in the appliance of a paint, which was either red or black, and a clay producing a black color. With these they painted figures of animals and human faces upon their skins and upon pots and articles of wood. These paintings were far remote from any artistic finish and were but seldom seen.

It is my conjecture that this sherd is possibly part of that evidence.\*

Identification of the Rockport Focus material from the McGloin Bluff Site is based on a comparison with specimens described in published works on the few excavated Rockport components located in the southern section of Texas coast. These materials were also compared with published trait lists for the Rockport Focus. The main value of the materials from this site is that they increase the number of artifacts that are needed to study the archeology of the area, and they also substantiate what is already known about the Rockport Focus. There is also the possibility that these materials represent the remains of late prehistoric and/or early historic groups in the area. The trade bead certainly indicates contact with Europeans.

### INGLESIDE COVE SITE (41-SP-43)

Ingleside Cove is a small bay lying between Ingleside Point and the mainland. Just south of Kinney Bayou is the old fishing village of Ingleside, now shown on most maps as Ingleside on the Bay. The Ingleside Cove Site is located on the eastern shore of the cove approximately halfway between the settlement and the point. This site is a shell midden associated with the black sandy clay that comprises the top 12 to 18 inches of the low bluff around the cove. The shell midden occupies all but the top four to six inches of the black clay. The upper few inches contain, in the central section of the site, refuse material from a fairly recent historic occupation. The site is approximately 250 feet long and 25 to 30 feet wide at the present time. Before hurricane Carla the site was about 35 feet wider, and it was surely more extensive in the past.

I discovered the site on August 21, 1959, and collected the first archeological materials from the site at that time. I had very few arti-

\* Recently, a complete vessel which was decorated with red paint and asphaltum was found eroding from a site near Corpus Christi (T. N. Campbell and Dee Ann Story, personal communication).

Projectile points are represented by five specimens, all of which are identifiable as arrow points. Two of them are fragmentary: one is part of a stem and the other the tip of a blade. One of the three remaining specimens is a *Perdiz*. The tip of this point (Fig. 5, Z) is missing, but the blade appears to have had straight, lightly serrated edges and small barbs. Another arrow point (Fig. 5, AA) has a blade with convex, serrated edges and slight shoulders. A portion of the stem and the tip of the blade are missing. The remaining arrow point, or small knife (Fig. 5, BB), has an asymmetrical blade and only one shoulder.

Two drills, both slender bi-pointed specimens, were found at the site. One (Fig. 5, CC) is rod-shaped, with parallel edges and a lenticular cross section. The other (Fig. 5, DD) has a proximal end that tapers to form very slight shoulders and a possible stem. Both are similar to the drills found at the Indian Island and Webb Island sites (Campbell, 1956: Pl 1, J; Pl. 3, NN-PP) on the southern side of Corpus Christi Bay.

Rockport Focus pottery is represented by 45 sherds, three of which are rim fragments from vessels of *Rockport Plain*. The rim sherds have flat lips, while one of the body sherds has scoring marks on the interior surface, and another has scoring on the exterior surface. The latter sherds also shows evidence of having come from a vessel that was mended with asphaltum.

#### *Brown Site IX (41-SP-34)*

Approximately 50 yards east of Brown Site VIII, another small midden is eroding from the black deposit. Like the other Brown sites, burned bone, burned whelk shell, fire-hardened clay lumps, and other cultural debris are weathering out from the midden. One arrow point, one whelk columella drill, and 15 *Rockport* ware body sherds were collected from the site. The arrow point (Fig. 5, EE) is the basal half of a point with a rounded base, possibly of the *Young* type.

### SUMMARY AND GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

The materials collected in this survey have been described and evaluated. Since extensive excavations are not likely to be carried out in this area in the near future, I feel that this material has value in adding to our basic knowledges of the cultural complexes involved in the prehistory of the central Gulf Coast. From observations made while living in the area, I am of the opinion that unless extensive excavations are carried out within the next five to six years, a very large amount

of valuable archeological material is going to be lost to the rapid development that is taking place on the Texas Gulf Coast. It does not seem wise to rely solely on the work done in the past as, to my knowledge, only seven sites have been excavated in this area. Of these, five have been described in published archeological reports.

Three of the four culture stages recognized in Texas are identifiable in the material from this survey. The Aransas Focus of the Archaic Stage is fairly well represented by three sites (Windy Hill, Kinney Bayou II, and Ramirez), and the Neo-American Stage is well represented by the large amount of material (*Rockport Plain* and *Rockport Black-on-gray* sherds; projectile point types *Perdiz*, *Fresno*, *Young*, and *Starr*) assignable to the Rockport Focus. Materials that can be attributed to the Historic Stage are almost non-existent, although one site, McGloin Bluff, did yield a glass trade bead.

The materials attributed to the Aransas Focus substantiate what is already known about the complex. It appears that the three sites containing only Aransas Focus artifacts are on the fringe of the distribution of certain projectile point styles. Here the orientation for styles is directed for the most part towards central Texas. The collections from Webb Island (Campbell, 1956), on the opposite side of Corpus Christi Bay from my survey, contain a greater number of dart points more commonly found associated with Falcon and Mier Focus material to the south.

The rest of the sites involved in the survey can, for the most part, be attributed to the Rockport Focus. The large sample of material collected verifies the association of traits with the southern coastal area (*Starr* and *Fresno* points, tiny end scrapers, bi-pointed flint drills, and shell discs) and central Texas (*Perdiz*, *Scallorn*, and *Young* points). Additional cultural ties are suggested by the occurrence of the three arrow points (Fig. 1, E-G) with the deeply indented bases. These also occur in the Brownsville area, but as of yet have not been associated with any particular focus. The large sample of Rockport potsherds substantiates what we already know, as well as adding to our knowledge. Incised pottery is very rare, indicating that this area is on the periphery of the distribution of that decorative technique. The red painted sherd is some evidence of the pottery reported by Gatschet, and a new decorative technique is hinted at by the presence of the asphalt inlaid sherd.

Observations made during the survey may help shed light on two problems—the origin of the asphaltum used in the decorating of Rockport Focus pottery and the origin of the fire-hardened clay lumps—

which have been of concern to coastal archeologists. It seems probable that the asphaltum was picked up by prehistoric peoples in its natural state on the local Gulf shores. Today natural asphaltum can still be collected on the beaches, sometimes in very large quantities. Authorities working with the problem of keeping the Padre Island beaches free of asphaltum believe that it floats across the Gulf from tar pits and seeps on the coast of the Yucatan Peninsula. The asphaltum arrives on the Texas beaches in a soft enough state to have been applied immediately to the pottery; or it could have been collected, allowed to harden, and then remelted when later use was necessary. The problem may be resolved by collecting sufficient samples from the beaches and comparing them chemically with samples taken from archeological sites. It seems quite possible that the source discussed above will prove to be the same one the prehistoric peoples of the area used.

As for the second problem, all the evidence points to open fires built on the surface as the major explanation for the fire-hardened clay lumps. Several times I have found these lumps eroded from black, ashy areas along with charcoal, burned bone, and burned shell. Recently, I observed a modern camp fire being destroyed by erosion, and clay lumps identical to those collected in archeological sites were eroding out from this hearth. The lumps were darker in color and harder near the center of the hearth, getting lighter and softer towards the perimeter of the burned area. The color of the lumps seems to be determined by the amount of oxygen that can reach the clay while the fire is burning.

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