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THE FOWLER-PARRISH SITE: A FOLSOM CAMPSITE IN EASTERN COLORADO

by

George A. Agogino and Al Parrish

ABSTRACT

The Fowler-Parrish site is unique in two ways: It is the most easterly known of Folsom sites in the northern High Plains, and a good percentage of Folsom points from this site exhibit unusual oblique flake retouch. The site is a kill station, where bison were killed about a now-dry playa. Occupation was extensive enough for the Folsom people to have made or repaired lithic artifacts, as evidenced by extensive flaking. The site has not been dated, but it is believed to be late Folsom in age.

The Paleo-Indian practice of fluting is a tradition developed in the Western hemisphere more than 11,000 years ago. During this period, most of the Clovis points and some of the Sandia projectiles were fluted. This fluting tradition lasted for roughly 1,000 years, reaching a climax with the Folsom culture. Complexes like Agate Basin, Dalton and Meserve are occasionally fluted, but generally were content with basal thinning (Agogino and Rovner 1964:239).

In addition to being the last complex to flute extensively, the Folsom culture was among the first to utilize pressure flaking. Earlier point cultures like Clovis and Sandia were apparently produced entirely by controlled percussion as was the initial stage of Folsom point manufacture, but the fine marginal retouch of "classic" Folsom points is definitely the result of pressure flaking. The new innovation of pressure flaking continued as the major flaking technique of the Paleo-Plano cultures (Wormington 1957).

The range of the Folsom point is most restricted, centering in the High Plains and within the first two hundred miles east of the front range of the Rocky Mountains from Montana to the Mexican border. Few Folsom points are found in northern Mexico, or in the area west of the Rocky Mountains, the Great Basin, Plateau and West Coast area. Unlike the Clovis culture,

the Folsom complex does not have close parallels in the east (Agogino 1964:3).

Even within the prime Folsom area, little is known regarding the total style range of the Folsom projectile. Our largest Folsom sites, Lindenmeier in Colorado, Hell Gap in Wyoming, and the Blackwater Draw sites and Rio Rancho in New Mexico have not been published in a comprehensive final report on the Folsom complex, and most of the artifact assemblages from these horizons have not been comprehensively studied.

The total range of Folsom points extends from crudely-made, small and casually-flaked specimens to finely fluted and flaked "classic" specimens. Most published examples tend to illustrate the "classic" rather than the "average" Folsom point. As a result, most scientists are not fully aware of the wide range and scope of the Folsom projectile style. The Fowler-Parrish site northeast of Orchard, Colorado has produced Folsom points with oblique marginal retouch, which has further extended the already large range of the Folsom point style.

In January, 1962, Neil Fowler, an Arapaho pipeline employee, found 14 Folsom points in an eroded area six miles northeast of Orchard, Colorado. All 14 points came from the most westerly and largest of four "blowouts" in this 200 acre eroded region. The assemblage seemed to be pure Folsom, with the single exception of the discovery of one archaic point found on the edge of the productive area. Al Parrish, a former anthropology student from the University of Colorado, was invited by Fowler to investigate the site potential.

A comprehensive examination of the site disclosed the presence of scattered bison bones throughout the productive blowout. A definite

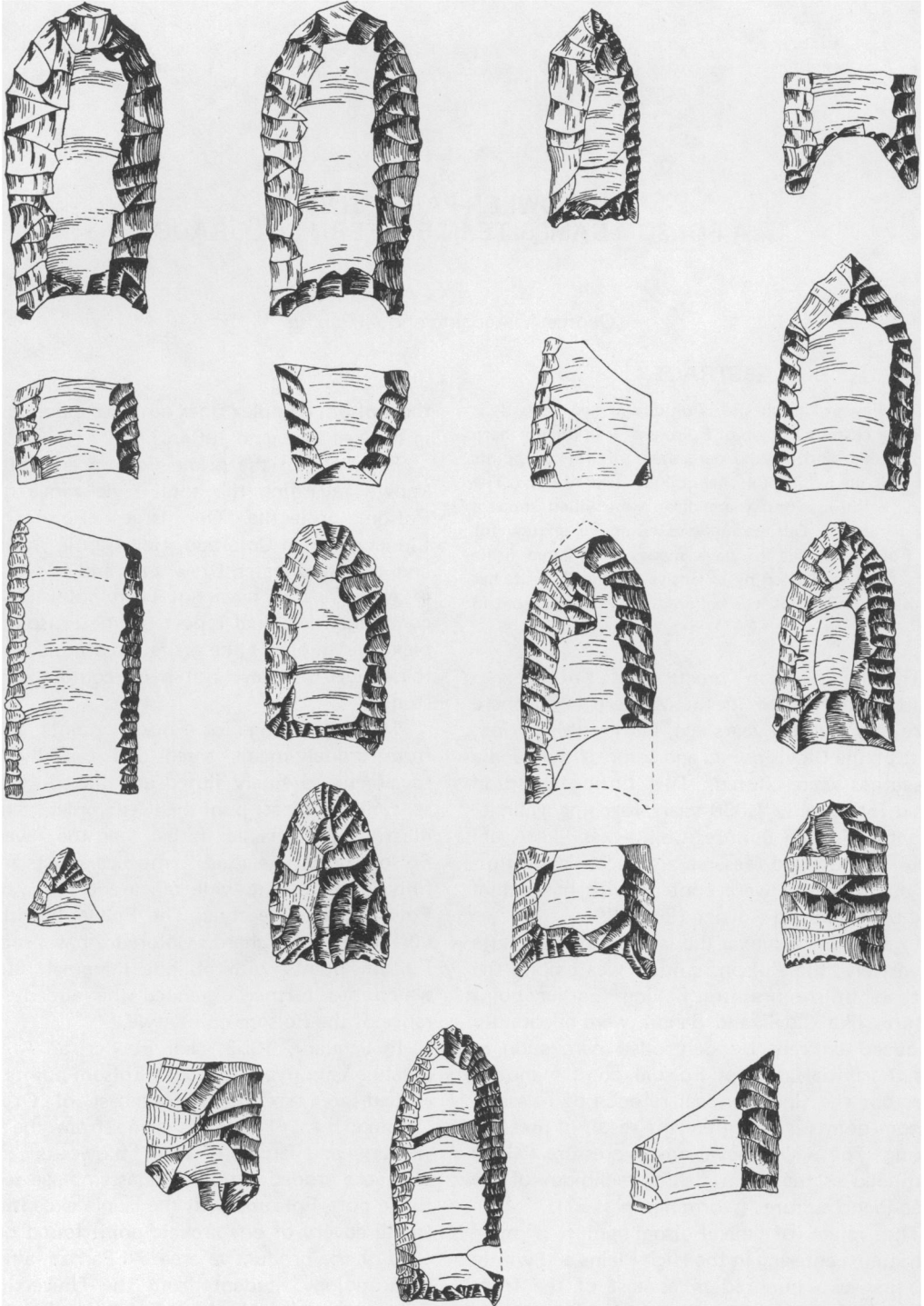


Figure 1. Folsom points from the Fowler-Parrish site, Eastern Colorado.

bone concentration was observed along the eastern edge of the eroded area, and seemingly in situ skeletal material apparently eroded from an erosional remnant. A surface discovery of a Folsom point was found among the eroding bison bones. The point was atypical, since it was fluted and had secondary oblique flaking on one face, while unfluted and collaterally-flaked on the reverse side. Since a total of 15 Folsom points had come from a consolidated area, amateur investigator Parrish and Fowler decided to solicit professional assistance.

H. M. Wormington, then of the Denver Museum of Natural History, was contacted. Wormington, while remaining throughout the project as coordinator and advisor, turned direct field responsibility to George Agogino, then engaged in a year's post-doctoral research at Harvard University. His crew was recruited from a segment of the Hell Gap excavation, where Agogino served as co-director. Henry Irwin assisted Agogino in the initial stages of the Orchard excavation. Work at the Fowler-Parrish site was largely confined to weekends so as not to interfere with the student's primary assignment at Hell Gap, Wyoming.

Twenty-four, five-foot square excavation pits were developed and excavated with generally disappointing results. The composite stratigraphy indicated a dark humus layer underlying contemporary blow sand. At the base of the humus level and the underlying lighter mixed humus-sand deposit was the first of two distinguishable bone levels. The second layer of bone was well within the mixed humus-sand deposit. Beneath the humus-sand level was a sandy marl deposit, possibly Pleistocene in age, that was sterile of bone or artifacts. Both bone levels seem to be exclusively bison, and suggestively, if not conclusively, extinct *Bison antiquus*. Scattered flakes, but not distinct artifacts, were found in both bone levels. Two additional Folsom points were discovered during the course of excavation, but neither object could be considered in situ since they were found eroding to the surface outside the excavation area. Test trenches were sunk at each point-discovery location but results were sterile and unproductive. At the contact between the top blow sand and the dark humus horizon, evidence of a weak archaic campsite was evident. Both flaked and ground artifacts were uncovered, including milling material.

The excavators concluded this eroded area was previously occupied by a weak-archaic camp-

site and earlier by one, and possibly two, strong-Folsom occupations. Apparently this was a kill station, but the Folsom hunters must have remained some time at the Pleistocene pond, as evidenced by extensive flaking, suggestive of replenishment of artifacts. The presence of in situ flakes, weather pitted and patinated, and the fragmented condition of all bone at the site suggests they were exposed to the surface at least once previous to formal excavation. By the time of scientific excavation, almost the entire productive site area had been destroyed by the erosion that had revealed the Folsom artifact concentration.

Because four of the 17 whole or fragmentary Folsom points found at the Fowler-Parrish site showed oblique flaking in secondary retouch, an attempt was made to investigate collections in the area to see if other Folsom points from the area exhibit this same phenomena. During the course of investigation, we found local collectors had occasionally recovered Folsom points from the Fowler-Parrish blowout. Verified points from this site increased to 25 with an additional 15 Folsom points listed as site possibilities. The confirmed artifacts came from well-catalogued collections that maintained records, and whose owners were sure of specific point locations. The "possibles" came from less organized collections, or from collectors who "thought" they obtained their artifacts from the Fowler-Parrish blowout.

A summary of our survey of Folsom points from northeast Colorado indicated that the oblique retouch phenomena at the Fowler-Parrish site is not unique, for approximately eight percent of all Folsom points found in collections in this area exhibit similar characteristics. Recently, the senior author looked at collections in southeast Colorado, the Oklahoma Panhandle, and in West Texas and found that, to a small extent, oblique flaked Folsom do occur in these areas as well. In all instances, the oblique retouch followed the traditional upper left to lower right pattern already developed in oblique flaked Plano points.

One speculates that these Folsom hunters on the extreme eastern edge of their territory might have come into contact with early oblique flaking Plano peoples and developed these innovations from them. The phenomena is rarely known to exist throughout most of the Folsom territory, and apparently occurs only as a peripheral territorial trait in the far eastern edge of the Folsom range.

In conclusion, the Fowler-Parrish site is a small, largely redeposited Folsom kill site in eastern Colorado, unique only in a high percentage of points with oblique marginal retouch, a characteristic that seems to be a minor component of Folsom point assemblages found in the eastern extreme of their traditional territory.

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