

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS AT 5LA2190: EVIDENCE FOR LATE ARCHAIC ARCHITECTURE IN SOUTHERN COLORADO

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During the summer of 1988, Metcalf Archaeological Consultants, Inc., conducted a survey for a proposed 18-mile gas pipeline west of Trinidad, Colorado (Fig. 1). This survey resulted in the identification of over 20 archaeological sites and numerous isolated finds. Extensive test excavations were carried out at Sites 5LA2190, located within the proposed right-of-way (Rood and Church 1989). This testing led to the important discovery of an architectural feature that dates to the Late Archaic period.

Site 5LA2190 consists of several previously recorded sites that were later combined into one large, complex site. These previously recorded sites are 5LA1077, 5LA1078, and 5LA1079, all recorded by Blair (1980). Gleichman (1983) later combined these sites with 5LA2190. This resource is a large multi-component site that includes an extensive scatter of surface artifacts and a series of check dams within an intermittent drainage.

Our surface investigations and testing were focused primarily on where the Colorado Interstate Gas Company (CIG) pipeline bisects the site. The entire site area was examined and found to be somewhat larger than initially recorded by Blair (1980). The proposed pipeline would cross through the upper reaches of the site through what the original recorders called Component 2; this area

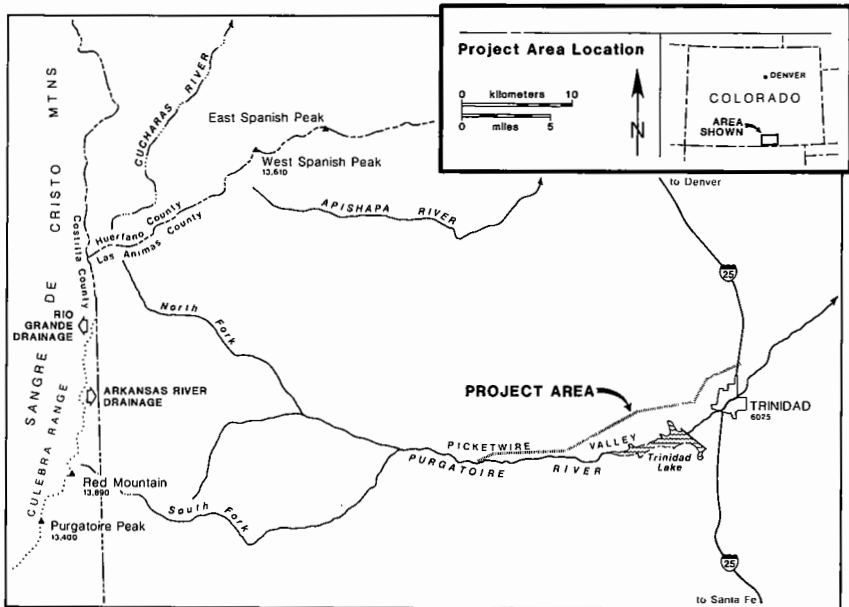


FIGURE 1. Project area location. Arrow shows the approximate location of 5LA2190.

contains a considerable amount of chipped stone and some ground stone exposed on the surface. None of the previously mentioned check dams would be affected by pipeline construction.

EXCAVATION RESULTS

Our excavations yielded a total of five archaeological features. Several components are represented by these features, but in this article we will focus on Features 1 and 2. Feature 3, shown in Figure 2, represents an earlier Archaic component not associated with Features 1 and 2. Feature 4 is considered to be a posthole that may be associated with Feature 2.

Feature 1 is a hearth associated with Feature 2. It is oval in plan view and basin-shaped in profile (Fig. 2). The contents of the hearth included a gray ashy fill and numerous fragments of burned sandstone. Several of these sandstone fragments represent wall-fall from Feature 2, which collapsed into the hearth. A bulk soil sample from the hearth was taken for radiocarbon dating. This sample, which produced .25 gm of charcoal, was given quadruple normal counting time to reduce statistical error. An uncorrected date of 3160 ± 160 B.P. (Beta-27980) was returned for this feature.

Feature 2 was determined to be the remains of a structure directly associated with Feature 1. It consists of an arc of dry-laid sandstone slabs placed (originally in a horizontal position) around the western perimeter of a shallow, oval-shaped depression (Figs. 2 and 3). Feature 2 measures 2 m north-south by 1.5 m east-west. This includes the sandstone on the western side of the basin. The basin itself is slightly smaller, measuring 1.8 m north-south by 1.35 m east-west. It is approximately 10 cm deep at the middle, with tapering edges.

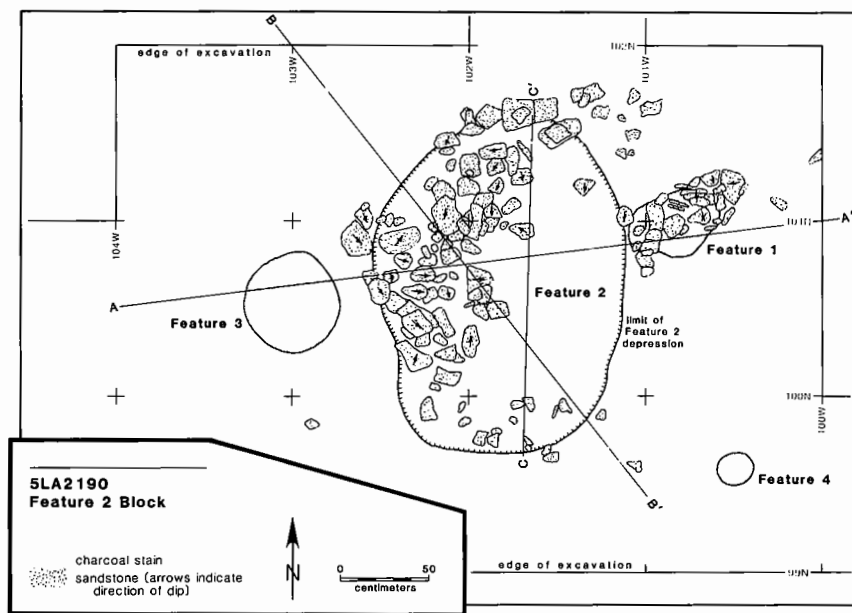


FIGURE 2. Plan map of Features 1, 2, 3, and 4 at 5LA2190. See Figure 4 for profiles.

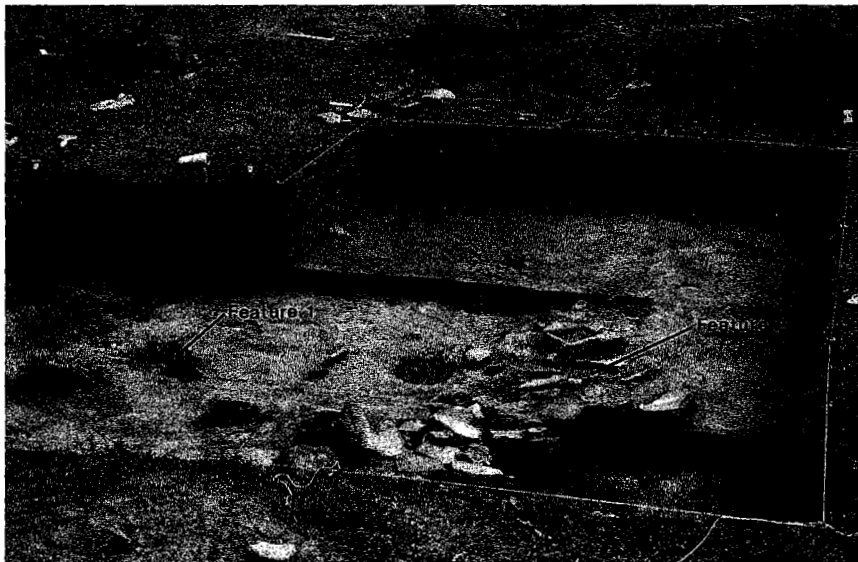


FIGURE 3. View south across excavation block showing Features 1 and 2.

Sandstone slabs are concentrated along the western and northern edges of the basin. These slabs vary in size between 10 and 30 cm, and none appear to have been shaped. The slabs lie at slight angles dipping to the east, or to the interior of the basin, indicating the direction toward which they collapsed. Some light charcoal flecking was noted amongst the rocks, but none of the rocks appeared to be burned.

Soil within the basin is slightly darker than the surrounding soil. Most of the fill from this feature was screened through a 1/8-inch window screen; no charcoal was recovered from within the basin, however. Noted along the southern end of the basin and just outside the basin were three areas of light-colored clay. These clay chunks were unburned, irregular in shape, and restricted to the southern end of the basin. They are interpreted to represent slumped roof or wall material used in conjunction with the sandstone. Similar pockets of clay were noted within the fill of the Yarmony pithouse and thought to represent pockets of unburned roof material (Metcalf and Black 1988). Feature 2 is deepest on the southern end of the basin, with the southern edge of the basin forming a sharp rise above the surface of the feature. Feature 2 is clearly associated with Feature 1: In plan view, the two merge together on the eastern margin of Feature 2. In cross-section (Fig. 4), both features are shown in relation to a small lip dividing the hearth from the basin. Additionally, some sandstone from Feature 2 had collapsed into the interior of Feature 2.

The overall nature and configuration of Feature 2 strongly suggests its use as a temporary structure. The dry-laid sandstone wall was horizontally laid and there was no evidence of vertical slabs as noted in some later Apishapa phase structures (Zier et al. 1988). The wall arched around a hearth (Feature 1) and was built around a shallow oval depression. The most substantial part

of the wall was along the western side of the arc. Feature 1 itself was situated on the eastern margin of the depression and there is evidence suggesting a portion of the Feature 2 wall extended around Feature 1. Sandstone slabs had collapsed into the ashy basin of Feature 1 some time after abandonment. Most of the sandstone constituting the Feature 2 wall was at angles dipping toward the center of the shallow depression. Many slabs were horizontally stacked, yet tilted, indicating the direction the wall collapsed.

No post molds were found within or around Feature 2. We expected to find posts, especially after we dismantled the feature, but none were found. Only Feature 4, a post mold situated outside the perimeter of stone and over 1 m southeast of the depression, was found. Feature 4 was discovered at the same stratigraphic depth as Features 1 and 2 and is possibly associated as part of the structure. Without any evidence of posts around or within the perimeter of Feature 2, it is difficult to make statements about the presence of a superstructure. There is no evidence suggesting that Feature 2 burned, so if there were a series of posts around the perimeter, they would not likely be preserved. The pockets of unburned clay noted along the southern perimeter of the depression suggest that clay may have been used as another means of wall or roof construction.

Present evidence suggests that Feature 2 was a low sandstone wall built around a shallow, oblong depression. The amount of sandstone making up the arc suggests that the wall was not extremely high, perhaps only a maximum of 50 cm tall at the western end. Some type of post configuration would seem to be needed to construct even a windbreak of minimal utilization.

Profiles or cross sections of the Feature 2 basin show its shallowness and

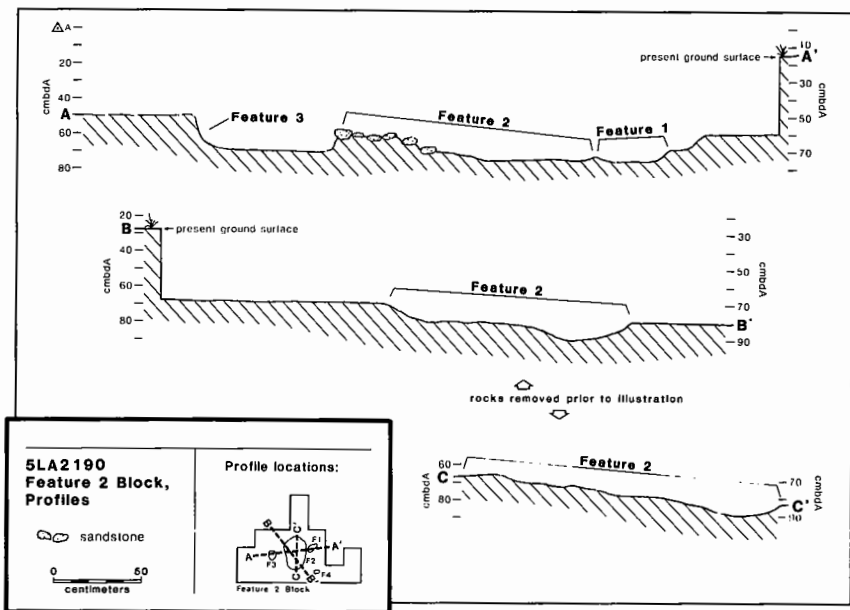


FIGURE 4. Profiles of Features 1, 2, and 3 at 5LA2190.

somewhat irregular floor. An east-west line across the feature indicates a fairly flat floor continuing to Feature 1. Cross sections drawn across the long axis of the basin show that the basin is deeper along its southern end. No break was observed around the perimeter of the basin suggesting any type of doorway or entry ramp such as that noted at McEndree Ranch (Shields 1980).

Very few artifacts were directly associated with Features 1 or 2. The lithics recovered from the feature are thinning flakes, primarily of silicified shale. No diagnostic artifacts were found in association with Feature 2.

During its excavation, Feature 2 was considered to be either an Apishapa phase structure or a Sopris phase feature (Dick 1954; Hand et al. 1977; Ireland 1970, 1971; Ireland and Wood 1973; Wood and Bair 1980). However, the date from Feature 1, which is associated with the Feature 2 date of 3160 ± 160 B.P., clearly indicates a late Middle Archaic age or an early Late Archaic age for both features. The complete lack of ceramics from the feature supports this early date.

DISCUSSION

Evidence for Archaic age structures has increased dramatically over the last decade of archaeological work in the mountain states. Archaic age structural features have been identified throughout the West (see Horn et al. [1987] and Metcalf and Black [1988] for a review). Most of these structures are saucer-shaped depressions that may or may not be associated with postholes or hearths. In Colorado, Middle Archaic saucer-shaped structures have been identified at the Indian Creek site (Horn et al. 1987). Other Archaic structures are known in the Granby area, in the Curecanti-Gunnison region, and elsewhere in western Colorado (Black 1983; Cassells 1983; Mueller and Stiger 1981; Wheeler and Martin 1982). Substantial Early Archaic architecture has been identified at the Yarmony site near State Bridge, Colorado (Metcalf and Black 1988).

In New Mexico, recent excavations at LA49498, known as the *Kin'aatsa* site, produced Late Archaic structural evidence consisting of shallow, saucer-shaped depressions and other associated features (Jonathon Horn, personal communication 1989). This site is in northwestern New Mexico and shares similarities to the western Colorado Archaic structures. Small dish-houses or house pits have been identified across southwestern Wyoming. These features are usually larger than Feature 2 at 5LA2190, circular in shape, and lack the sandstone perimeter (Harrell 1987; McKibbin et al. 1989).

In its floor plan, Feature 2 at 5LA2190 is similar to the saucer-shaped features at Indian Creek and elsewhere. The major difference is the partial stone enclosure around the shallow depression. None of the other saucer-like houses identified exhibit this trait.

An overview of prehistoric structural evidence for southeastern Colorado is presented by Kalasz (1988) and Zier et al. (1988). The evidence for Archaic age structural evidence is slim. A probable Archaic structure was found at the McEndree Ranch site in northwestern Baca County, Colorado (Shields 1980). Dates from hearths slightly above the structure produced dates of 2170 ± 55 and 2350 ± 65 B.P. (Shields 1980). Assuming these hearths were associated with the structure, we can place the site in the Late Archaic period. This feature at McEndree Ranch was not completely excavated and a ramp entryway

was the only fully excavated feature. The structure may have been semi-subterranean (Eighmy 1984; Kalasz 1988).

Structures of Woodland age are somewhat more common but, again, the evidence is scanty. Rectangular-to-square dry-laid masonry structures were found at Lindsay Ranch (Nelson 1971) and an oval rock wall foundation was noted at the Kinney Spring site (Butler 1988:460). Architectural evidence is also noted from Bayou Gulch (Butler 1986) and possible pithouses may be present at the Belwood site in the southeastern Colorado foothills (Hunt 1975; Butler 1988). The Belwood site is assigned to the Graneros focus and produced a date of 1500 ± 55 B.P. (Hunt 1975; Kalasz 1988:44). This feature from the Belwood site has dry-laid stone masonry that extends two-thirds of the way around the perimeter of the structure (Hunt 1975:93; Kalasz 1988). Another probable Woodland age architectural feature was found at Metate Cave on the Chaquaqua Plateau (Campbell 1969:187-188). This feature is semicircular in shape, is comprised of dry-laid, uncoursed horizontal slabs, and is built around natural talus and fall as wall segments. It produced a radiocarbon date of 1680 ± 95 B.P., which places the feature within the Late Archaic-Woodland transition period.

Numerous examples of Late Prehistoric architecture associated with the Apishapa phase are known from southeastern Colorado (Kalasz 1988; Zier et al. 1988). Apishapa phase structures can be circular, or partial circles, and it is assumed they had a superstructure made of brush and/or hides. Wooden poles and daub are also components of Apishapa structures at Avery Ranch (Zier et al. 1988). In addition, Apishapa phase materials are commonly placed in defensive locations.

Feature 2 at 5LA2190 and the associated hearth represent the earliest dated structural evidence for southeastern Colorado. Campbell (1969:370) feels that dry-laid masonry architecture was initiated in southeastern Colorado during the initial Woodland period. The evidence from Feature 2 at 5LA2190 indicates the utilization of dry-laid masonry in a fashion very similar to that begun at least 1,500 years earlier, during the late Middle Archaic period in southern Colorado.

The presence of Features 1 and 2 at 5LA2190 suggests that low-walled, circular or semicircular, horizontal, dry-laid sandstone features were used as temporary structures in this area at least 1,500 years prior to the Woodland stage, where these types of features are first recognized (Campbell 1969:370). Campbell (1969:360-400) sees an evolutionary trend from simple isolated stone enclosures in the Woodland period to more complex stone construction techniques in the Late Prehistoric period. With the evidence from 5LA2190, this trend likely began much earlier, at least during the Early to Late Archaic transition.

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