

## THE PREHISTORIC VILLAGES AND CAMP SITES OF THE PEORIA LAKE AREA

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### ABSTRACT

That section of the Illinois River extending between Peoria and Chillicothe, due to its tendency to spread out over the river valley, is commonly designated as Peoria Lake. While this paper deals primarily with this area, a few sites both north and south of it are included.

The fact that this area was once inhabited by prehistoric peoples is indicated to the stranger by the presence of mounds here and there, both on the bluffs overlooking the valley, and on the valley floor itself, the larger ones being found on the valley floor.

But one must traverse the shore lines, and tramp over the many fertile fields, and ascend the streams that flow into the river for further concrete evidence of the early occupancy of a race that has long since disappeared.

For a number of years members of the Archeology Section of the Peoria Academy of Science and others, have been active in making a survey of this area, and have located and mapped these sites of occupation.

The survey made to date includes many field trips to the various sites when they were free of crops and vegetation and could be worked to advantage. Surface material of every kind in evidence was collected and carefully examined and catalogued.

With the exception of the work at Kingston Lake and at Mossville, little excavation work has been done. Trenching was done in testing for a house site, and tests for the original village floor were made at the Rench and Hildemeyer sites.

No mounds have been opened by the group. One mound, the Luthy Mound, at the north edge of East Peoria was leveled by highway operations. It contained a number of burials, but no artifacts were found.

Our purpose in making this survey was threefold:—(1) To locate all camp and village sites; (2) To ascertain, insofar as possible, the cultural classification of the aborigines; (3) To record for posterity

the information obtained.

Of the sites included in this survey seven, Numbers 8, 10, 3, 22, 4, 15, and 24 are village sites, while four, Numbers 26, 5, 18, and 23 are campsites. See Fig. 1.

The Rench site is the most extensive in the lake area, and gives evidence of long occupation and a large population.

The Bloomenshine site is a dual campsite, one on the apron of the bluff, and the other eighty rods north of it in the valley of Ten Mile Creek. The former appears to be Woodland, and the latter Mississippi culture pattern.

Five conical mounds are located on the bluff overlooking the Rench site, and thirteen mounds, nine conical and four linear, the largest being approximately twelve feet in height and sixty feet in length, are on the bluff overlooking the Steuben site.

Site Number 25 is an aboriginal shell heap which appears as an exposure in the east side of a roadside cut on the highway between Lacon and Spring Bay, and one mile south of the Woodford-Marshall County line.

The Hildemeyer site bids fair to be one of the most valuable in this area for future archeological investigation, but unfortunately the present owner forbids any one trespassing on the land.

In the western part of the Gerdes site are eight house pits. Seven of these are about fifteen feet square, the other being eighteen by twenty feet. Trenching was done in one of these pits and the original floor was found at a depth of one foot at the center and three feet at the ridge surrounding the pit. These are the only known house pits in this area. It is hoped that a complete excavation may be made of one of the pits during the coming summer.

The probable cultural classification of the sites based upon surface findings are as follows:—Woodland Pattern—8, 10, 3, 22, 5, and 23; Mississippi Pattern—4, 15, 5, and 18. Site Number 26 is unclassified. Site Number 24 shows evi-



soil and easily worked. The bluffs afforded protection against the winter gales, and springs were found in many places affording an abundant water supply.

Some material foreign to this area was found. At the Ivy Club and Steuben site, and on Dickison Run Creek bordering on the Rensch site several blades of blue-gray southern flint were found. At Mossville and at the Rensch sites two specimens of Number 3 Type Pottery was found. (See Cole & Deuel:—Rediscovering Illinois.) This pottery is foreign to this area and is found only in sites of Hopewellian manifestation in the lake region. Members of the Academy have located a site on Mauvaise Terre Creek in

Scott County where 52% of the pottery is of this type.

The presence of foreign material here seems to indicate that it was brought in through channels of trade or was carried in by visiting or migrating peoples.

One of the obstacles to a more thorough study has been the fact that most of the members of the group are regularly employed and were able to pursue the study only occasionally. A second obstacle has been the antagonism, in a few instances, of land owners. The survey is far from complete, but the work that has been done has proven interesting and, we feel, quite worthwhile, and it is hoped that further study may reveal more information of much value.

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