

# The Archaic Period In Pennsylvania: Hunter-gatherers Of The Early And Middle Holocene

## A PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE LATE PLEISTOCENE AND EARLY HOLOCENE ARCHAEOLOGY OF ROCK CREEK MORTAR SHELTER, UPPER CUMBERLAND PLATEAU, TENNESSEE

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*Rock Creek Mortar Shelter (40PT209), in Pickett State Forest on the Upper Cumberland Plateau of Tennessee, possesses an intermittent 11,500 year occupation history. This history may be consistent with previous ideas of first colonization of upland rock shelter zones at the end of the Younger Dryas with significant climatic amelioration. However, culturally sterile deposits have yet to be encountered and the site may be older still. This work focuses on the late Pleistocene and early Holocene components, paying particular attention to unifacial, blade, and blade-like tool production and technology, use-wear analysis, and depositional history. Variability in blade production during the late Pleistocene deposits suggests residentially mobile family groups, and could also represent the colonizers' struggles with adapting a blade tool technology to the locally abundant small, rounded Monteagle chert cobbles.*

Three field seasons have been completed at Rock Creek Mortar Shelter (40PT209) in Pickett State Forest on the Upper Cumberland Plateau (UCP). The archaeological deposits are comparatively deep and may extend back into the Paleoindian period. Radiocarbon dates suggest this to have occurred perhaps as early as 12,500 years ago but certainly by 11,500 years ago. The shelter lies at what Lane and Anderson (2001) refer to as a migration terminus – the end of early migration routes. The early occupational history of the shelter is thus far consistent with Walthall's (1998) ideas of first colonization of upland rock shelter zones at the end of the Younger Dryas with significant climatic amelioration. The site was intermittently occupied over the course of the next 11,500 years until about AD 1000.

The Upper Cumberland Plateau was likely a very different environment 12,500 years ago at the end of the Pleistocene during the Younger Dryas. Still, some early pioneers ventured their way up on the plateau, perhaps up the Wolf and/or

Big South Fork river valleys that represent the ends of early migration routes as noted by Lane and Anderson (2001). As the climate ameliorated beginning about 11,600 years ago, hardwood forest communities migrated to higher elevations. People began to exploit nut mast resources and associated game animals. A seasonal round, or way of doing, was established. This way of doing things in the uplands set the tone for the next several millennia.

Site 40PT209 is important because it represents the first recorded in 20 years of work on the UCP with late Pleistocene and early Holocene deposits that appear intact and in relative stratigraphic position. The previous work includes intensive surveys of the East Fork Obey gorge (Franklin 2002, 2006), Pogue Creek Canyon State Natural Area (Langston 2013; Langston and Franklin 2011), and significant portions of Pickett State Forest (Langston et al. 2012). Culturally sterile layers have not been encountered at Rock Creek Mortar Shelter, thus it is possible that more ancient archaeological

59

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Holocene Conditions. Archaic Period Sites in the Cypress Creek Project Area. The Middle Archaic. Pennsylvania State University (PSU) initiated the first phase of the Cypress Creek Archaeological in the American Midsouth from the Early to the Middle Archaic periods. as Middle Holocene warming prompted hunter-gatherers to adopt a.

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