

= Marmes Rockshelter =

The Marmes Rockshelter ( also known as ( 45 @-@ FR @-@ 50 ) ) is an archaeological site first excavated in 1962 , near the confluence of the Snake and Palouse Rivers , in Franklin County , southeastern Washington . This rockshelter is remarkable in the level of preservation of organic materials , the depth of stratified deposits , and the apparent age of the associated Native American human remains . The site was discovered on the property of Roland Marmes , and was the site of the oldest human remains in North America at that time . In 1966 , the site became , along with Chinook Point and the American and English Camps on San Juan Island , the first National Historic Landmarks listed in Washington . In 1969 , the site was submerged in water when a levee protecting it from waters rising behind the then newly constructed Lower Monumental Dam , which was 20 miles ( 32 km ) down the Snake River , failed to hold back water that leaked into the protected area through gravel under the soil , creating Lake Herbert G. West .

= = The excavation = =

The existence of the site was first brought to the attention of Professor Richard Daugherty in 1952 by a rancher named John McGregor . Excavations at the site were started by Daugherty and Roald Fryxell , a geologist , under the auspices of Washington State University ( WSU ) and the National Park Service in 1962 , and continued until 1964 . In 1965 , Fryxell returned to the site along with Professor Carl Gustafson and students from WSU , and had Roland Marmes dig a trench in front of the rockshelter with his bulldozer , which turned up human and elk bones . Radiocarbon dating indicated that the human remains were about 10 @,@ 000 years old . In 1968 , Fryxell returned , this time with several WSU professors ( including a visiting professor from Poland ) and members of the United States Geological Survey , and found more human and animal remains , along with bone tools . April 29 of that year , Washington Senator Warren Magnuson made a public announcement of the finds .

= = Inundation of the site = =

After a bill that would have provided funds to protect the site failed , then @-@ President Lyndon B. Johnson signed an Executive Order that authorized funding for the Army Corps of Engineers to build a levee around the site to protect it from the imminent flooding caused by construction of the Lower Monumental Dam . Late that year , Daugherty left the dig , leaving Fryxell to lead the project . Once the Lower Monumental Dam was closed in February 1969 , within three days , the site was completely underwater , due to the seepage of thick layers of gravel that had not been accounted for . However , as the site was being flooded , the excavation team laid down plastic sheeting topped with gravel in the hopes of being able to return to the dig in the future .

The location of the site is still known today , and has come under some threat of erosion from the wakes of motorized vehicles on the lake . The Army Corps of Engineers considers the site to be in stable condition with a " Satisfactory " threat rating since 2004 .

= = Findings at the site = =

The excavations at the site revealed evidence of human occupation from a period that lasted 8 @,@ 000 years , and that the area was home to humans as long ago as 11 @,@ 230 years ago . The people living at the site hunted game such as elk and deer using atlatls , and also hunted smaller mammals such as beavers , while they gathered mussels from the river . The excavation turned up graves , which included beads carved from shells and spear points . One grave , that of a child , held five matching knives made of stone . The excavation also turned up chalcedony and chert arrowheads . Those in the upper layers were made of agate , which is not found in the area . Stone tools were found as well , such as scrapers for use in tanning hides , and mortars and pestles . In layers dated to 7 @,@ 000 years ago , large amounts of shells belonging to a snail of the genus

Olivella were found , which would have been imported from the West Coast of the United States , 200 miles ( 322 km ) away . The majority of the shells had holes drilled through them , indicating that they had adorned necklaces .

In addition , one of the five known Jefferson Peace Medals was found associated with the most recent human remains at the site , evidently having been given to a local Native American leader ( presumably of the Nez Perce ) during the Lewis and Clark Expedition . This medal has since been returned to the Nez Perce and reburied , as per Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act regulations .

Analyzing the pollen sequences at the site showed a steppe ecosystem immediately following the retreat of glaciers 13 @, @ 000 years ago , which gave way to a mixed forest of pine and spruce , which led into the current sagebrush prairie ecosystem .

= = Implications of the findings = =

Unlike many archaeological finds , the human remains at the site were able to be dated with environmental , geological , and archaeological methods . Human remains at the site are the oldest that have been found in Washington , and at the time were the oldest set of remains found in North America . Later radiocarbon work has confirmed the original dating of this site , indicating that these human remains , albeit very fragmentary , are still some of the oldest ever excavated in the New World . This finding was useful in confirming the early chronology of the region and confirming the antiquity of the styles of associated bone tools .