

# Alabama Archaeological Society

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## BANNERSTONES - FURTHER DISCUSSION

The abstract, "Bannerstones: A Historic Overview", by Mary L. Kwas, *Journal of Alabama Archaeology*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 2, December 1982, was of special interest to me because I have such an artifact in my small collection, and because the actual use or purpose has been a question in my mind for a long time. Attached is a sketch and factual information concerning this artifact.

You will note my reference to the probable method of drilling these artifacts on this sketch sheet. No comments were made in the abstract about the method of drilling nor the range of diameters and average diameter of the bored hole, and if this figure is consistent with the diameters of reeds found along river banks in the locations where the artifacts were found. In my case, I easily found a reed which could have been used for the drilling. I leave it to a botanist to determine which reeds are most suitable for this use. There seems to be little doubt that a hollow reed was used with an abrasive. It is probable that a length of reed would wear rapidly, so it would be important that a ready uniform supply be available. As these artifacts are dated to the archaic cultures, it is doubtful that the bow-operated drill was known, so that power must have been supplied by the palms of the hands.

My thinking as to the use of this artifact as a decorative item on a staff of authority, is quite negative for the following reasons. Looking at such regalia, the baton of authority, the staff of the mace of authority, the polished wood staff or club of a Masai chief, all are relatively heavy, thick items, probably stemming from the time when the staff of authority was occasionally put to actual physical use. I believe that a bannerstone would add very little to a symbol of authority. In fact, it would be quite insignificant. The fact that these stones have reportedly been found in child and female burials also raises doubt about such use.

Now as to the simple use as a personal decoration. In the first place, the stone is drilled through the longest dimension and is not symmetrical when strung on a thong, nor is it particularly impressive. The gorget is a simple and a good example of an artifact for personal adornment, it is drilled through the thinnest dimension, and is made from a relatively soft workable material, and is, in fact, quite decorative.

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Let us consider alternative applications where this stone serves a practical purpose and yet can be individualistic. I refer to its use with, or on, a spear, the most necessary item of an archaic Indian's possessions.

If the artifact is used as a weight, slipped on a part of the atlatl, such use would require that that part be no larger than the bore of the stone, or the size of the reed, which would hardly provide a suitable grip for a man's hand, and additionally, would make the atlatl rather an unsubstantial object. In fact, it would be quite fragile, which makes such an application illogical.

To overcome this problem, the artifact could be lashed to the top edge of the atlatl, so that the bore is horizontal and lines up with the spear. This would be quite simple: a thong could be looped around the atlatl, both ends threaded through the bore of the stone, and then securely tied underneath the atlatl. This could be located at various points along the length of the atlatl, and sliding the weight back toward the hook would tend to elevate the point of the spear.

Let us consider another possible application, the use of the artifact on the basal end of the spear itself. The spear shaft could very easily be cut down to fit the diameter and length of the bore in the stone, which is then fitted on, and wedged in place similar to fastening the head on a hammer. It will be noted that my artifact would be well suited to this application; the top, in the illustration, is slightly concave and would become the basal end of the spear. This concavity would help hold the spear centered on the hook of the atlatl. Also note that one face of the artifact is ground flat, which would then be the underside, and so would lie flat on the atlatl, and minimize rolling of the spear. All of these factors increase the accurate placement and aiming of the spear. The installation of this artifact on the end of the spear would also prevent wear and splitting, all to improve the ballistics and true-ness of flight of the spear. I believe I have read some comments that artifacts of this type have been found split or broken. This could happen if the holding wedge was driven too tightly, or if the shaft swelled from wetting.

I suggest that my particular artifact does well fit these last conditions of application, and the design may be the result of a very long period of development. Admittedly, some of the designs illustrated in the abstract would not have all of the favorable characteristics of my particular artifact as outlined above. It can be assumed that because a spear is not nearly as expendable as an arrow due to its size and shorter range, it would have a comparatively longer life.

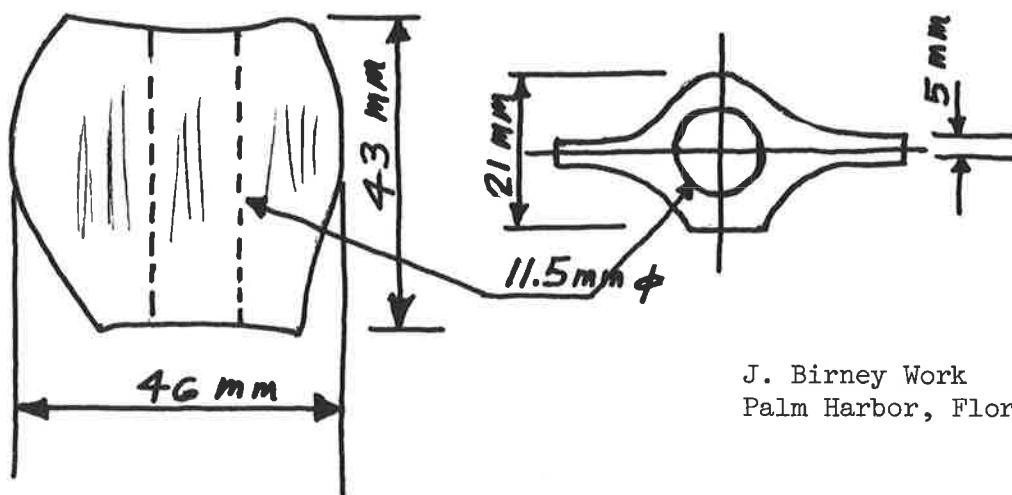
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Notes from the artifact collection of J. Birney Work:

Winged shape atlatl weight or bannerstone of a green fluted material. Wings are 5 mm thick at edges. Diametral ends are slightly concave. Drilled uniformly with 11.5 mm hole. Bore of machine quality for roundness and straightness. Bore quite smooth, and all surfaces are well finished and smoothly ground. Bore about the same diameter as dried riverbank reeds.

Item 21-54      43 mm long      46 mm wide      21 mm thick  
Site 21 - Cain Landing, downstream. Morgan County, Ala. Topo Map: Mason  
Ridge, Quad. 68SE - Sec. 2 - T6S R3W - TVA Chart 404. Date: 3/17/59.

Description: South bank of Tennessee River. Access via road from Cain  
Landing. Pre-TVA and present river bank and Level 550.5'. Culture: Archaic.



J. Birney Work  
Palm Harbor, Florida

#### UA ARCHAEOLOGISTS ASKING FOR RESIDENTS' HELP IN STUDY OF EIGHT-COUNTY AREA

Scientists are asking for help from residents of eight Alabama counties in one of the largest archaeological searches ever conducted in the state.

Archaeologists from the University of Alabama are in charge of the project, which will focus mainly on areas surrounding streams that drain into the Coosa and Tallapoosa Rivers. The program was made possible by a \$25,000 grant from the Alabama Historical Commission to UA's Office of Archaeological Research and the Museum and Arts Center of Sylacauga.

The survey team is asking residents of the area to supply any information they might have, such as the locations of possible sites and artifacts that have been found there, said Carey Oakley, director of the UA office.

The eight counties involved in the site search, survey and mapping program are Chilton, Coosa, Tallapoosa, Shelby, Talladega, Clay, Calhoun and St. Clair. The staff will contact local governments, archaeological and historical societies, and local artifact collectors for information on possible sites.

"The people who have lived here, worked here and plow the fields here probably know the area best", Oakley said. "This will only work as long as people will tell us about what they find."

James V. Knight, Jr., UA staff archaeologist and principal investigator for the survey, said turning to the public for help in such a project is unusual but necessary because the staff has only a short time to complete the work.

"Archaeologists are usually pretty secretive about these things", Knight said.

Under the grant, corporate donations and matching funds the museum provides, the program will continue for one year with three or four months spent on actually analyzing the material in a laboratory, he said.

Oakley said scientists have not done much research in the eight-county area, but they believe life existed in the Coosa and Tallapoosa River Valleys as long as 10,000 or 15,000 years ago. With the public's help, his team could find artifacts dating to the beginning of time, he said.

"I wouldn't be surprised if we found the whole range from then on through today", Knight said. "I hope this will, from a professional archaeologist's standpoint, put this area back on the map. This is one of the (historical) blank spots of Alabama".

(Article by Viola Gienger in Birmingham Post-Herald, Tuesday, August 16, 1983)

The Editors

#### A. A. S. ANNUAL MEETING

The Alabama Archaeological Society's annual meeting, on Saturday, November 19 at the Anniston Museum of Natural History, will focus on Indians of the southeast, especially Alabama and Georgia. (See the August issue of STONES & BONES for more program information.)

During the afternoon there will be a sneak preview of the TV documentary "Lost in Time: Early Alabama Indians". This film was prepared by Auburn TV under a grant from the Committee for the Humanities in Alabama. Following the one-hour film, there will be a panel discussion led by Joseph Vogel, Director of the Alabama Museum of Natural History.

Jim Lee  
Huntsville

## CHAPTER NEWS

### Huntsville Chapter

Mrs. Georgia Dunn of the Huntsville Chapter presented the August program, a discussion entitled "Early Man and His Projectile Points". Mrs. Dunn is a founding member of the Alabama Archaeological Society and has been very active over the years in Society activities. She is the present Librarian of the Huntsville Chapter.

Mrs. Dunn brought a number of artifacts from her collection (which has been written up in magazines, newspapers and books on collecting and collectors). With the use of charts and slides, she presented a most interesting talk on several different types of artifacts.

The Point-of-the-Month discussion focused on Bart Henson's slides of the Jack Cambron/Ralph Allen artifact collection. (This is the collection which was on display at the Society summer activity at Fort Toulouse.)

### Tuscaloosa Chapter

The Tuscaloosa Chapter met at the town library on Monday, August 1, 1983. The guest speaker was Mr. Richard Walling from the Alabama Archaeological Research Lab in Moundville, Alabama. Mr. Walling brought with him several pieces of pottery from the west-central Alabama and east-central Mississippi area. He also gave a very interesting speech on each artifact he brought with him.

The next chapter meeting will be held at Smith Museum at The University of Alabama. Mr. John Hall will be in charge of showing the different things they have to offer there. The meeting will be held on the second Monday because of the Labor Day holiday on the first Monday.

## HEAT TREATING CHERTS

Just a couple of weeks ago Tony Farrell and I - both members of the Tuscaloosa Chapter of the Archaeological Society - were experimenting with different types of temper materials such as sand, grit, grog and shell mixed with a few different types of local Tuscaloosa County clays. After our firing process, I wondered if I could heat treat the local stubborn Tuscaloosa yellow chert in the same manner. So the following day I took a piece of untempered mixed clay and inserted into it a piece of yellow chert. I used the same process that we used on firing our pottery pieces. I rolled the piece of clay into a ball about the same size as a softball. Then I let it dry for about a week to a week and a half. Secondly, I started a hot bed of coals and then placed the ball onto them. Then I added wood on top of the ball and coals; I let the fire go for about three to four hours. After the fire died out, I let the clay ball cool off on its own in the ashes. The next day I removed the clay ball and broke it open with a claw hammer. The piece of chert had definitely been heat treated to a dull red color. If I had had more wood to burn, it would have turned even to a brighter red.

I don't know if the local aboriginal Indians in this area ever used this method, but it sure works. And I've never heard of anyone else using this method.

My friend and I have experimented with flint knapping and heat treating for the last two years or more, and in this time period we have read and been told by archaeologists different methods of heat treating. Most of these methods are too time consuming, and you risk possible injury to yourself from over-heated popping, flying fragments of chert, even though the chert blanks may be buried one to two inches in sand. And after the fire has cooled down on those methods, you will usually end up with blanks that you cannot use. They will either be broken when you dig them up or not heat treated enough to be able to work with them.

My method is still in the experimental stages, so I advise all flint knappers and heat treaters to be careful around any fire while trying to heat treat cherts.

John Wm. (Bill) Adkison  
Tuscaloosa

#### A ONCE-IN-10-LIFETIMES DISCOVERY

She stood 5 feet, 3 inches - rather tall for a lady of her epoch. She had a delicate face, a full set of teeth. At one time in her life, she broke her collarbone, so that when she raised her left hand, she felt pain. She was probably no more than 30 years old when she died. Friends or family gave her a decent burial in a shallow grave on a ridge by a placid creek near the present-day town of Leander, Texas, which in her lifetime was populated by few other people.

Frank Weir's archaeological team found her under 10 feet of Texas clay, and they have her now in their lab in Austin. By studying her skeleton, thought to be the oldest intact intentional burial found on this continent, Frank Weir and his colleagues are learning about a tribe of people who were merely objects of foggy speculation until now. Current Carbon 14 testing says she lived 10,000 to 13,000 years ago.

Wayne Young, chief of the team that discovered the skeleton, tested the site in 1981. "We thought we'd be out of there in three months", he says. "Two years later, we're still digging."

The first promising sign was a point from the Angostura period (points are used to date the strata of earth generally, then Carbon 14 tests confirm suspicions on found organic matter). Workers kept digging, finding points from the dawn-age Clovis and Plainview periods. "As long as we're still finding cultural materials, we dig", Weir explains. "At this site, we got below the Plainview strata and still found hearths".

On December 29, 1982, archaeologist Mike Davis' trowel sliced through two human finger bones at the side of a trench. Within an hour, he and Young had uncovered a portion of skull. Young called Weir. "Frank", he said, "has anyone ever found a Plainview burial?" "No", Weir said. "Do we have one?" "Yes." Actually, she's much older.

Weir rushed to the site, and Texas' most exciting excavation was under way. Brushing the soil away with paintbrushes, dental picks, and bamboo splints, the scientists slowly uncovered the intact, loosely-curved skeleton. Removing her from the grave took eight days, because the bones were so fragile. A bit of charcoal from the grave was sent to Arizona for testing, which later established the lady's age.

The fate of the skeleton rests with the Texas Historical Commission, which administers the Antiquities Code. "We're awfully glad she's here, and in good hands", says the archaeologist. "We want to know how she lived, and as much as we can about who she was".

(From an article by Mark Childress in Southern Living - July 1983)

The Editors

#### PUBLICATION AVAILABLE

The University of New Mexico Press is pleased to announce the publication of AMERICA'S ANCIENT TREASURES, an enlarged and revised edition of Rand McNally's 1974 traveler's guide to archaeological sites and museums throughout the U. S. and Canada. The authors, Franklin Folsom and Mary Elting Folsom, have spent 35 years researching and writing about America's past, and their books have won numerous awards. Rachel Folsom, an artist and science writer, who is also their daughter, is the illustrator for AMERICA'S ANCIENT TREASURES.

The first edition included nearly 200 sites; this new edition profiles nearly 400 archaeological areas that are open to the public, as well as museums and other collections that contain prehistoric relics and artifacts. It has also been redesigned for easier use as a reference and vacation planner. With over 300 photographs and line drawings complementing the text, it is the most comprehensive and useful guide available on the rich and varied archaeological heritage of North America.

The book is available in cloth and paper, \$35 and \$14.95, respectively, at bookstores, or directly from The University of New Mexico Press; Albuquerque, New Mexico 87131, Tel. 505/277-2346.

The Editors

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