

TEST EXCAVATION OF CAVE ROCK, NEVADA

J. E. Smith and A. B. Elsasser

During August 1957, excavations were carried out by the University of California Archaeological Survey (Berkeley) at site 26-Do-1 in Douglas County, Nevada. This site, a cave-shelter on the east shore of Lake Tahoe, contained a considerable deposit of bat or rat guano intermixed with rockfall and scattered evidences of human occupation. The latter was mainly in the form of charcoal and mammal bone fragments, along with a few artifacts. In the total inventory of artifacts known from Cave Rock are the specimens described here, and a single cobble chopper recovered at a depth of 12 inches and reported upon by Heizer and Elsasser (1953).

The 1957 work was carried out at the suggestion of Mr. J. W. Calhoun of the Nevada State Museum. It was hoped that a more complete sample than that obtained in 1953 could be taken from the deposit before the new docking and recreational facilities near Cave Rock were put to use. Although no actual damage from the construction work was contemplated, consideration of future vandalism connected with increased numbers of tourists or sportsmen in the vicinity encouraged the early completion of the archaeological project. Permission to excavate was kindly granted by the owner of the land, Mr. J. S. Crenshaw, U.S.N. (Ret.).

The cave is located about 300 feet above the lake, in a large erosion remnant known locally as Cave Rock. This "rock," an intrusive plug of hornblende andesite, has resisted the weathering processes which have reduced the surrounding native granite, and stands as a prominent feature near the shore between Glenbrook and Zephyr Cove.

Figure 1 shows the surface plan and a longitudinal section through the cave. A distinction is made in the surface plan between the cave part of the formation, which is that constricted part where there is predominantly deep shade, and the shelter, which is in open sunlight during a good part of the day and which shows little trace of human occupation. A dashed line marks the estimated depth and projected limits of an underlying layer of water-laid silt and gravel; this is a purely tentative estimate, however, as no hard rock bottom was reached through this layer.

The occupation deposit overlying the thick deposit of silts and gravels consists of intermixed burnt guano and ash with a thin surface layer of dust, guano, rats nests, and scattered trash and charcoal from recent camp fires. Throughout the entire part of the deposit which was excavated were heavy concentrations of rockfall from the cave roof and walls.

Excavation was carried out in three test pits, the sides of which formed a 5 foot square. Two of the pits were located along the long axis of the cave and within the cave proper, and the remaining pit was located outside, near

the drip line of the shelter. The two test pits within the cave were dug until the sterile silt layer was reached. This revealed a depth of occupation deposit in pits 1 and 3 of about 42 inches. Test pit 6, located near the drip line, showed only a thin layer of surface (occupation) material overlying the silt. However, this pit was excavated to a depth of 52 inches through silt and gravels in an effort to locate possible older occupation layers. At this 52 inch depth a concentration of broken rock forced abandonment of the pit.

Stratification of the occupation deposit as revealed in the north wall of test pit 1 is diagrammed in Figure 1B. It shows a deposit of what appears to be burnt guano varying in thickness from 12 to 36 inches immediately above the sterile silt. Above this a layer of intermixed ash and burnt guano varies from 3 to 21 inches in thickness. Finally the surface layer of dust, unburnt guano, ash, rat nests, and recent trash and charcoal extends to a depth of from 3 to 9 inches.

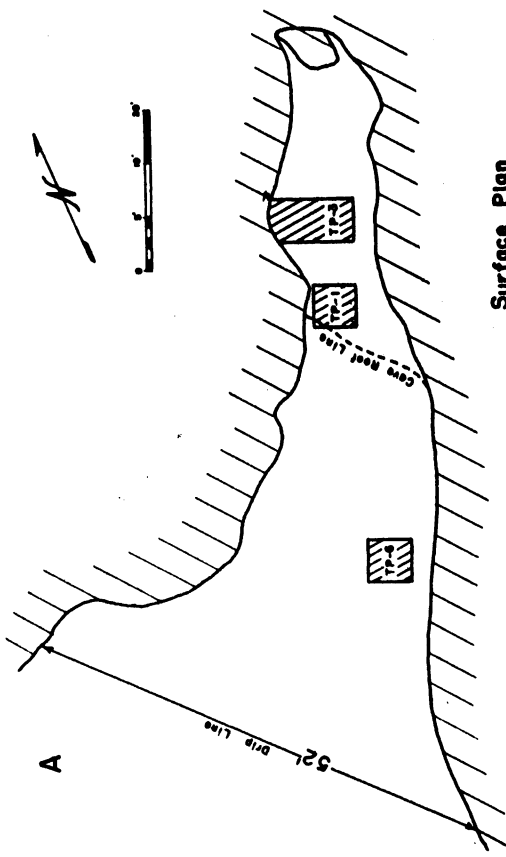
The artifact yield was extremely sparse in all three test pits. Test pit 6 yielded nothing at all; test pit 1 yielded one basalt projectile point (Fig. 1Cb) at a depth of 1-6 inches; and test pit 3 yielded two basalt projectile points (Figs. 1Ca, 1Cc) at a depth of 12-18 inches. Also found in test pit 3, at a depth of 12-18 inches, was a fragment of mammal bone with some incised markings on it (Figs. 1Cd, e: two sides of same specimen). No other artifacts were found despite the fact that test pit 3 was enlarged to the west wall of the cave, thus nearly doubling the original size of the excavation.

The three projectile points recovered are large and heavy and are made of dark gray basalt. They appear to fit into the point typology of the Martis Complex, as defined by Heizer and Elsasser (*ibid.*). Their classification, along with their weights and measurements, are given below:

	Type	Weight	Length	Width
Fig. 1Ca	3c	4.2 gms.	4.0 cm.	2.4 cm.
Fig. 1Cb	4a	11.6 gms.	5.9 cm.	2.3 cm.
Fig. 1Cc	4d.	10.0 gms.	7.0 cm.	2.0 cm.



The only other evidence of human occupancy of the cave was in the scattering of charcoal and bird and mammal bone fragments which occurred throughout the deposit. Analysis of the bone fragments showed a relatively uniform distribution of deer and rabbit, with some indications of rodent, small birds, porcupine, and one instance of bighorn sheep.

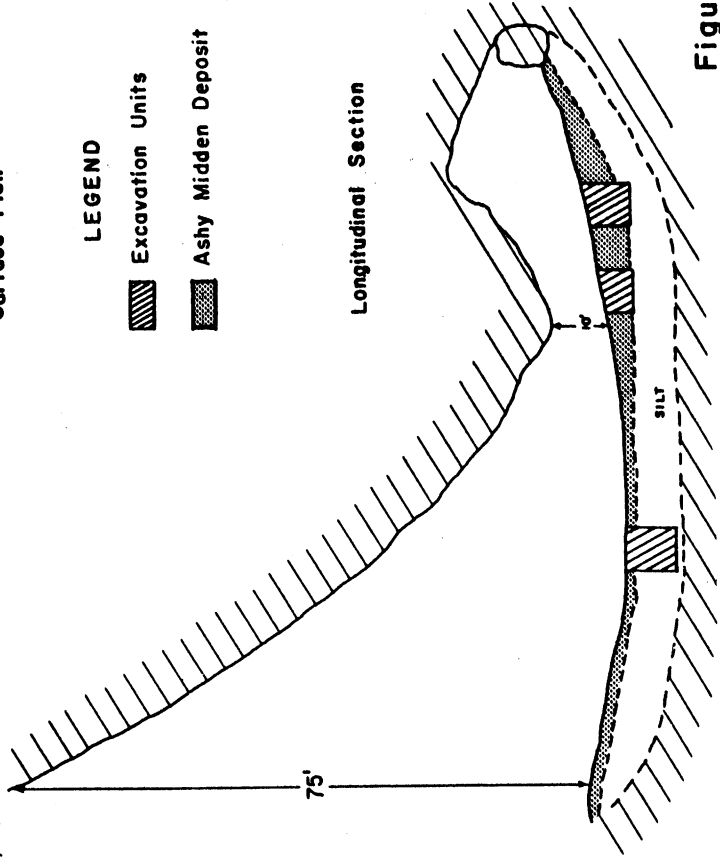
Summarizing the results of the excavation, it is seen that Cave Rock, in spite of its obvious advantages as a shelter, offers no evidence of historic or proto-historic occupation by Washo groups. The prehistoric evidence indicating people of the Martis Culture, who may have utilized the cave probably more than 1,000 years ago, is scant, suggesting a spot which might occasionally



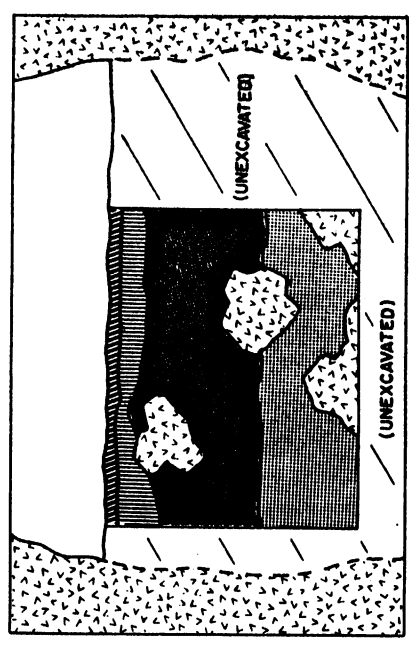
Surface Plan

LEGEND






-  Excavation Units
-  Ashy Midden Deposit



Longitudinal Section



Test Pit 1 - Profile of North Wall

-  Dust, guano
-  Burnt guano, ash
-  Burnt guano
-  Water-deposited silt
-  Bedrock and rockfall

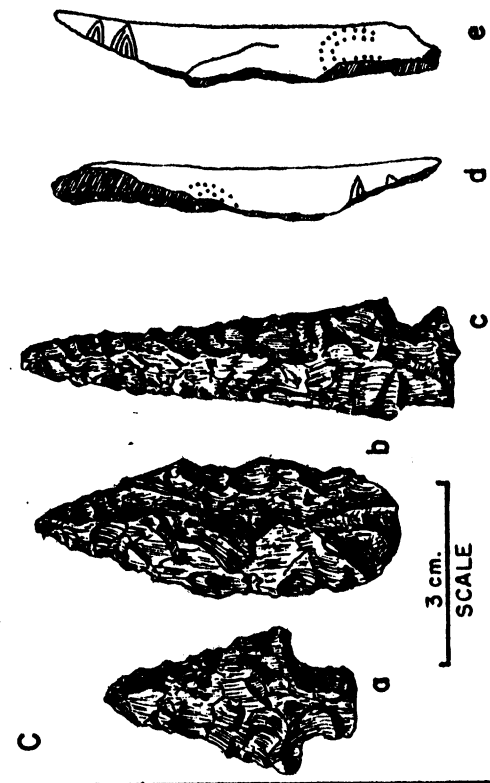


Figure 1

have been used by hunting parties rather than a camp site occupied, for example, throughout the summer. It has been established in the ethnographic literature that Cave Rock was avoided by the local Washo (Heizer and Elsasser, *ibid.*, p. 9), being thought of as the abode of a "wild man." The physical advantages of the cave-shelter as a campsite coupled with the relative dearth of artifacts recovered from the midden deposit, suggest that the peoples of the Martis Culture may also have considered the place as a danger spot, perhaps as a place that should not be visited except under unusual circumstances.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- HEIZER, R. F. and A. B. ELSASSER
1953 Some archaeological sites and cultures of the central Sierra Nevada. Univ. Calif. Archaeol. Survey Report 21.