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from two Fishheating Creek Sites

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AN ANALYSIS OF BELLE GLADE PLAIN SHERDS FROM

TWO FISHEATING CREEK SITES

Rita Krestensen Porter

Differentiation in pottery types is one of the chief methods used today by the archeologist to determine the time sequence of a site but its use must be limited, generally, to those sites exhibiting a diversity of decorated and plain ceramics. Occasionally a site is excavated which yields little or no decorated pottery although its plain pottery probably represents many years of occupation and perhaps several culture periods. To determine a time sequence on the basis of this plain ware requires another approach to the problem of pottery variability. With this in mind a study was made of two related sites in the Glades area of southern Florida having sequences of predominantly plain wares.¹

These two sites are found on the banks of Fisheating Creek on high, dry hammock land surrounded by marshes at the northwestern tip of the Everglades, a short distance from the point where the creek empties into Lake Okeechobee. Test excavations of a limited nature were conducted at the sites on a week-end in May, 1950. Since a comprehensive discussion of the sites and the excavation procedure has already been written (Goggin, 1952), they shall be described only briefly and with emphasis on information relevant to this study.

The more profitable site, in terms of material collected, is the Platt Site (G1 14), a large sand midden with abundant and widely distributed surface material. The only test pit for this site, a five by five foot square, yielded a great quantity of specimens when it was excavated in arbitrary six inch levels, each carefully screened. Sterile soil was reached around eighty-four inches, while cultural material was not found below the 66"-72" level.

The other site under consideration is the Fisheating Creek Midden (G1 13A) which lies on the southern bank of the creek in an elevated hammock. Among a series of small midden mounds there is one which rises above the rest and is somewhat in the middle of the area. This prominence reaches an elevation of around ten feet above the creek surface. It was therefore selected as the point for a test excavation. A five by ten foot trench divided into two five foot squares was excavated to a depth of 42" when lack of time demanded cessation of work on the half that was farthest from the creek. Digging of the other section continued to 66" before sterile soil was encountered.

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The ceramic material from both sites shows a preponderance of potsherds of the type known as Belle Glade Plain. This pottery is intermediate between the St. Johns (Biscayne) and Glades series in temper and hardness. It is of medium to coarse quality, coiled, compact, sand-tempered, and while the paste is hard and brittle the sherds approach the chalky appearance of St. Johns (Biscayne) ware (Goggin and Sommer, 1949:46). There is a complete lack of decoration, although the exterior is often roughly faceted through the use of a smoothing implement. The inner and outer surfaces range in color from gray to pinkish cream with a light gray to black core and the hardness ranges from 2.5 to 3.5 (Moh's scale). Thickness of the body is generally between 4 and 8 mm. while the rims are sometimes thicker. It is characteristic of most of the sites in the Okeechobee area and is reported to extend from Upper Matecumbe Key north to the Indian River Area (Rouse, 1951:222; Ferguson, 1951:30-2).

A major problem of this pottery is its inadequacy as a time marker because it probably occurs in all three of the major Glades periods in great abundance. Usually it is more common in Glades II and III than in the earlier period but the time boundaries of a site cannot be set on this basis. In order to possibly utilize Belle Glade Plain for chronological purposes, therefore, it was determined to disregard surface modifications and to concentrate on the form.

PROCEDURE

Pottery is well adapted to the diversities of artistic expression and experimentation which do not always involve some design or texture but may instead result in a variety of vessel forms. It seems reasonable that, just as a certain type of surface decoration was in vogue in an area at a given time, a distinct rim treatment might also have been characteristic of that period. If these fluctuations in rim style occur regularly and correlate with known decoration changes or other time markers from period to period, one might assume the rim type is of some value in delimiting the time span of a site. This method might not be as satisfactory as others due to its greater dependence on personal interpretation and classification with a resulting susceptibility to differences of opinion, but in cases where there seems to be no other alternative it might prove invaluable.

The primary steps in the procedure of investigation of the two sites described previously were to separate the rim sherds from the Belle Glade Plain body sherds, clean them in a ten-percent hydrochloric acid solution to remove calcium carbonate deposits, and to mark each sherd with its site number and level. The profile of each rim from the surface collection at the Platt Site was then drawn on separate cards. Since the surface collection contained the greater number of sherds (196) and since it was possible that some of the styles persisted from lower levels to the surface, it was assumed that the categories derived from shuffling and dividing the cards into groups would comprise a significant sample of types occurring in the site. After discerning the differentiating characteristics of each group and standardizing two series and fourteen types, the remaining