

The Horace Rivers Collection: Sixty Years of Avocational Archaeology in the Texas Panhandle

Scott D. Brosowske

William Horace Rivers was born on April 21, 1915 in Snyder, Texas. Five years later his family moved to the Canadian, Texas area in 1920. It was at this time he developed a strong interest in the native peoples of the Texas panhandle and began documenting archaeological sites of the area. Horace, as he was better known, passed away at the age of 88 in November, 2003. In over sixty years he documented 130 archaeological sites primarily in Hemphill, Roberts, Ochiltree, Lipscomb, and Wheeler Counties, but he also collected at Palo Duro Canyon, Arrowhead Peak near Vega, Saddleback Ruin near Boy's Ranch, and elsewhere (see Figure 1). Over his lifetime he amassed what is likely one of the largest artifact collections in the region.



Figure 1 Dart and Arrowpoints found by Horace Rivers at a Lipscomb County Site

Fortunately, sometime after he began collecting Horace began to carefully document the sites he had found and their associated artifacts. He assigned sites individual numbers and recorded site locations in a fairly detailed journal. Artifacts collected were labeled with appropriate site numbers. Horace was good friends with Jack Hughes and was his main informant for information about archaeological sites in the northeastern panhandle. As such, I suspect that it was at Jack's urging that Horace began keeping proper records.

Horace built a room in his basement to display a small portion of his collection, primarily complete projectile points, bifaces, scrapers, beads, drills, bone awls, bison tibia digging sticks and scapula knives, and portions of reconstructed ceramic vessels. Each year classes of school children would take field trips to Rivers' house to visit his "museum" and learn about native peoples of the Southern High Plains. Many of the people we have met remember Horace and these childhood field trips fondly.

Following his death, the Rivers family donated the majority of the artifacts that were on display at his house to the River Valley Pioneer Museum in Canadian, Texas in 2013. These will be incorporated into new displays as the museum is renovated. The remaining items in the Horace Rivers collection, approximately 95% of the entire collection, were not accepted by the museum due to a lack of available exhibition and storage space. These items were going to be thrown away. Thankfully, the Riv-



Figure 2 Horace Rivers at 41HH23 (adapted from Caudle 2009)

ers family donated these items to Courson Archaeological Research (CAR) for processing, analysis, and permanent curation.


When CAR obtained this collection none of these materials had been washed or sorted according to individual sites. This initial processing is taking considerable time since there is an estimated 80,000 artifacts in the collection. Age diagnostic artifacts, mainly dart and arrowpoints, are present for most of the sites. Of the 130 sites represented in the collection there are a minimum of 201 identifiable components (see Table 1).

Paleoindian	Middle Archaic	Late Archaic	Early Ceramic	Middle Ceramic	Historic Indian	Unknown Prehistoric
3	5	56	51	60	4	22

Table 1 Total Number of Archaeological Components for the Rivers Collection

From the collection it is readily apparent that Horace did quite a bit of excavation and screening at many of the Early and Middle Ceramic period sites that he had found. In addition to projectile points and tools, these assemblages contain sizeable quantities of faunal remains, debitage, fire altered rock, ceramics, and other miscellaneous items. It is obvious that he essentially collected all of the cultural materials recovered during these excavations. Included in the collection are fairly large numbers of faunal remains from the now destroyed Hoover site (41HH12), a Late Archaic period bison kill southeast of Canadian, Texas. There are also artifacts and soil samples from individual strata at the Horace Rivers site (41HH23), an Allen complex (8500 to 7500 BP) campsite north of Canadian that he had discovered (Figure 2).

As hinted at above, Horace often worked with professional archaeologists, freely sharing his knowledge of site locations and the artifacts he had found. He worked with Jack Hughes on his survey of the Red Deer watershed (Hughes 1978). He again worked with Jack, along with Billy Harrison, at Parcell Ranch, an unrecorded Middle Ceramic period (A.D. 1250-1500) cemetery northwest of Canadian. Later, he informed Billy Harrison of an unusual burial at 41HH31 along Red Deer Creek (see Owsley and Mann 1990). During the 1990's Horace provided information on numerous site locations to the Office of the State Archaeologist for their survey of the Canadian River Valley and helped with excavations at 41HH23.



Horace Rivers spent a lifetime studying the native peoples and archaeological sites of the Texas panhandle. Fortunately, after over 60 years of collecting in the region, the information about the sites he documented and the artifacts he found have been preserved. Through interpretive exhibits slated for the Canadian, Texas museum, portions of his collection will continue to educate people about the archaeology of the region. Lastly, these items, as well as the vast materials contained in the CAR collections, will be available for study by future generations of archaeologists.

References Cited

Caudle, Susan

2009 *Images of America: Hemphill County*. Arcadia Publishing, Charleston, South Carolina, Chicago, Illinois, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, San Francisco, California.

Hughes, Jack T.

1978 *Archeological Testing in the Red Deer Creek Watershed in Gray, Roberts, and Hemphill Counties, Texas*. Archeological Research Laboratory, Killgore Research Center, West Texas State University.

Owsley, Douglas W. and Robert W. Mann

1990 An American Indian Skeleton with Clubfoot from the Cabin Burial Site (A1184), Hemphill County, Texas. *Plains Anthropologist* Vol. 35, No. 128, pp. 93-101.