

RESULTS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION AT THE CASTLE CANYON SITE, VAL VERDE COUNTY, TEXAS

by
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ABSTRACT

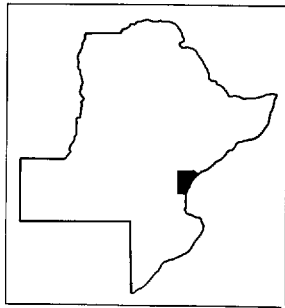
A series of rockshelters in a west Texas site in the Amistad Reservoir area was partially excavated and yielded a sequence of projectile points, other chipped and ground stone artifacts, bone and shell tools and ornaments, and one of the first clay figurines from the area. The stratified deposits were quite deep and produced a bountiful artifact sample, apparently covering the whole Archaic period and extending up, probably into historic times. From this sample the Archaic period was divided into four periods based on significant trends in the projectile point styles, which seem to be consistent not only for this west Texas area, but also central Texas and possibly far western Texas, northern Mexico, and southern New Mexico. Certainly the last of these periods represents a change in the population, with new tool types and a greater emphasis on bone and shell work. In addition to the excavated materials, the site contained many pictographs which show some stylistic trends in the area and may help to date other sites or isolated paintings. This report outlines the primary results gained from the study of the Castle Canyon site.

INTRODUCTION

During the summer of 1960, minor excavations were conducted at the Castle Canyon site (University of Texas county site number 41 VV 7) by the author, with the help of Edward Peterson. As the site was complex and yielded a very large number of artifacts, the analysis was destined to take some time. That analysis is now completed and has shown the importance of this site. This report, however, will present only the major conclusions and all detailed descriptions will appear separately.

Castle Canyon is located in southern Val Verde County, Texas, 14 miles northwest of Del Rio, in an area soon to be flooded by the Amistad International Reservoir (Fig. 1). The site is situated on the west side of Castle Canyon (Virginia Creek) about six miles above the Rio Grande from the mouth of the Devil's River. Three miles south of the site, Castle Canyon opens into the Devil's River, which is only one mile to the east of the site over a low hill, due to the parallel drainage of the two canyons. This location, with a creek fed by two permanent springs, offered an excellent condition for occupation and subsistence of early peoples. Animal and plant food is extremely abundant in the immediate area of the site, although food is more difficult to obtain in the rest of the area.

The site can be divided into two main areas: a bluff containing rockshelters, and an alluvial terrace covered by midden material and some concentrated accumulations of occupational debris. There are no midden circles or mescal pits at or near the site. This is interesting, as they commonly occur in such areas in the western and northern parts of the county and farther west.



41 VV 7 : CASTLE CANYON
FLOOR PLAN OF SHELTERS

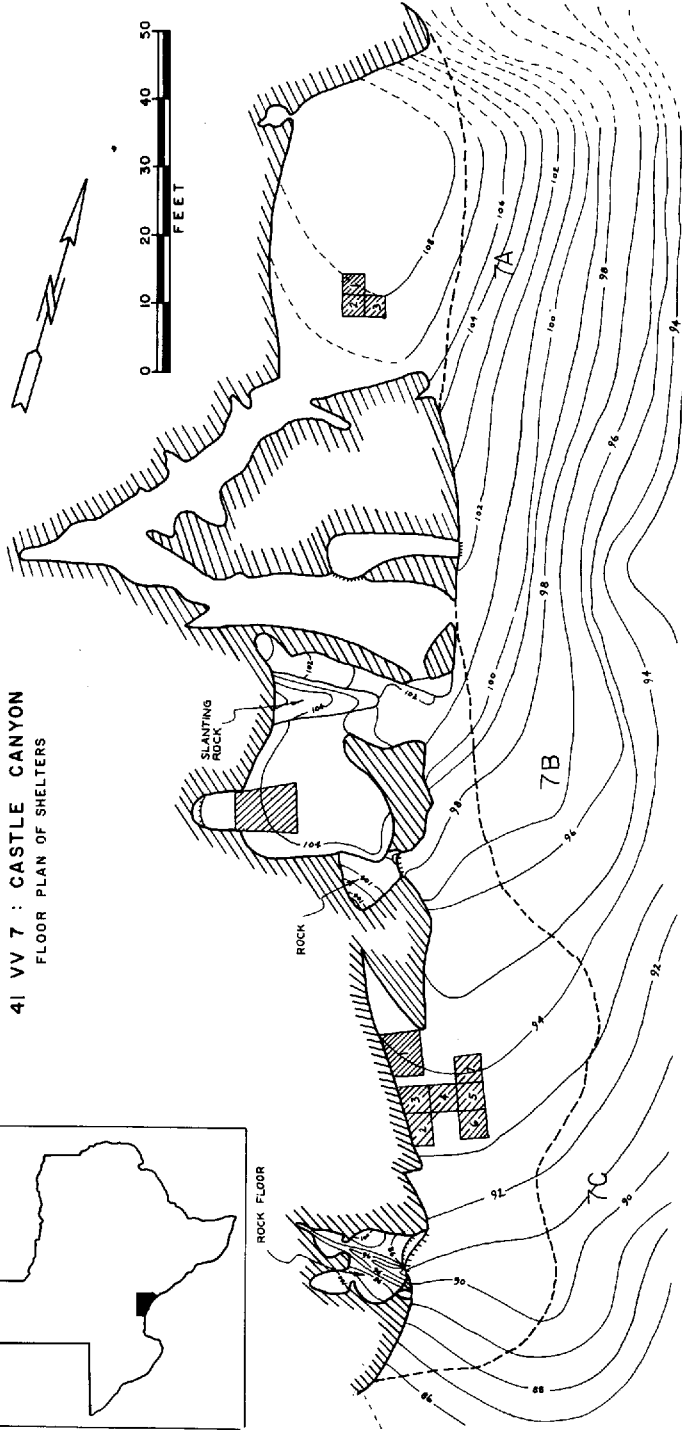


FIGURE 1. Map of bluff area at Castle Canyon Site showing units excavated and location of Val Verde County (inset).

The small bluff, approximately 230 feet long and 35 feet high, contains two shelters and a number of caves, presumably formed by solution. The largest of the shelters, at the north end of the bluff, is designated 7A. It is 50 feet long, 28 feet from front to rear, 7 feet high, and has a deposit depth of over 15 feet. At the south end of the bluff is shelter 7C, which is 60 feet long, 20 feet deep, has a ceiling height which ranges from 2 to 10 feet, and attains a deposit depth of slightly over 7.5 feet. Between these two shelters is a small room (7B) 20 feet in diameter and 12 feet high. Deposits average 3 feet deep. Other smaller rooms or cavities in the bluff are not numbered.

EXCAVATIONS

I visited the site initially in 1958 and returned in 1959 to put down one small test square into the rear deposits of shelter 7C. This test showed the great depth and richness of the deposit and suggested a rather detailed stratigraphic sequence of artifacts.

During three weeks in July, 1960, excavations were conducted in shelters 7A, 7B, and 7C. After a detailed contour map (Fig. 1) was made of the entire bluff area, excavation units were laid out for each shelter. These consisted of three 3-foot squares in 7A, a 6-foot wide trench in 7B, and seven 4-foot squares in 7C (only six were excavated). All squares were excavated in arbitrary 6-inch levels measured from the surface of the deposit in each shelter. This was adequate, as the deposit in each shelter was fairly level. Excavated fill was screened through $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch hardware cloth, and the following materials were collected: all flint, mussel shell, bone, artifacts, recent or historic materials, and a sample of snail shells. A count of smooth river stones brought into the shelter was made for random levels.

NATURAL STRATIGRAPHY

Although the zoning of all excavated areas was recorded, no data were found to be significant enough to be presented here. All artifact distributions seem to be completely independent of natural soil changes.

ARTIFACTS

In the original analysis, the 1623 artifacts were divided into classes, types, and varieties. However, these detailed descriptions will not be presented here because of their technicality and the great length. The materials present in this inventory include many tools made of stone, bone, and shell. Perishable materials, such as plant parts, were not found, due to the dampness of the deposits. One clay figurine, very similar to Basketmaker figurines of northeastern Arizona, was also recovered.

A total of 441 dart and spear points and 69 arrowpoints were found at the site. The names of all but four types are from Suhm, *et al.* (1954). *Conejo*, *Figueroa*, and *Zorra* were described initially by Johnson (1964). *Arledge* is a descriptive type first defined in this paper. The 11 *Arledge* points are basally notched with long, pointed barbs which usually flare outward. Other characteristics show this point to be similar to both the *Langtry* and *Shumla* types, and its vertical distribution falls accordingly.

As projectile point forms presently serve as the most sensitive time indicators, we were very glad to find clear vertical separation of types. By combining the sequences from all three excavation areas, we were able to construct much

of the projectile point sequence for the area. Later excavation by Johnson (1964) at the Devil's Mouth site supported much of our work. For comparative purposes, we were able to use data from Centipede and Damp caves in Val Verde County (Epstein 1963), other unreported sites from western Texas (University of Texas collections), and sites in Comal County in central Texas (Johnson, *et al.*, 1962). At Castle Canyon the earliest deposits were in 7A and the latest in 7C, with 7B falling within the upper period of 7C. A slight amount of overlap in 7A and 7C made correlation possible.

At least four major time periods are represented in the Archaic stage of Val Verde County. These divisions were supported conclusively by our work at Castle Canyon. For convenience these periods have been named by their index points, the most common or distinctive forms for each period. These periods have been designated from oldest to youngest, *Pandale-Nolan*, *Langtry-Shumla*, *Montell-Marshall*, and *Ensor-Frio*. Earlier forms, such as the double-pointed *Lerma* and some early barbed forms (see Johnson 1964: 33), are not included in the present scheme because of their uncertain placement. They are definitely earlier than the earliest period discussed here and were found deep in the deposits of shelter 7A.

The *Pandale-Nolan* period is marked by the occurrence of projectile points with stems beveled on the right edge (Fig. 2) (orientation is always with the stem down). At Castle Canyon, *Nolan* points were present directly beneath early *Langtry* forms, and the *Pandale* type was not represented. Others (Johnson 1964: 40) have pointed out the similarity in flaking between the *Pandale* points and the points of the latter part of the Paleo-Indian Stage, suggesting

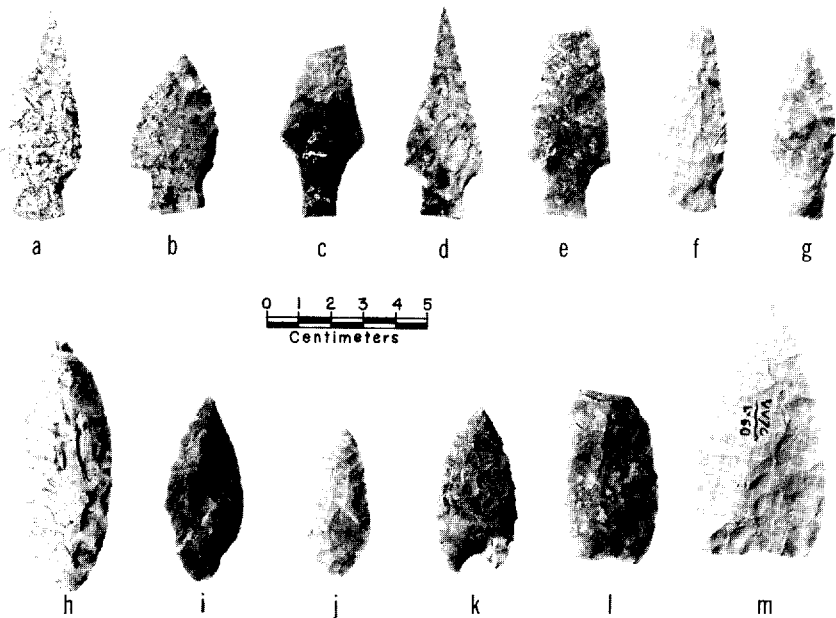


FIGURE 2. Projectile points. Upper row, Pandale-Nolan period: a-e, Nolan; f, Travis; g, Zorra or Pandale-like. Bottom row, unstemmed dart points: h-i, Lerma, j, Desmuke; k-m, Kinney. Length of m, 7.8 cm.

that possibly *Pandale* points are the earliest beveled-stem points. One additional item which supports this theory is that *Pandale* points have lanceolate blades, which are also common to early point styles, while *Nolan* points have the triangular-shaped blade so common in the later Archaic forms. The *Pandale* points have the stem beveled on the right and the blade twisted to the left, but *Nolan* points retain only the beveled stem. *Val Verde* points (Schuetz 1956: 137) have many attributes common to *Langtry* and therefore probably occur late within this period. Johnson's (1964: 96) suggested time range for *Pandale* points is about 4000 to 3000 B.C.

The *Langtry-Shumla* period (Fig. 3), from data gained at Castle Canyon, may be divided into two parts. The earliest is designated by the occurrence of finely flaked, contracting-stem points with angular to square shoulders (*Langtry*). Only one type of *Langtry* points are beveled (long stems), and these are nearly consistently along the left stem edge, as opposed to the beveling on the right stem edge of the expanding-stem points of the preceding period. [Note: An analysis of beveled-stem dart points in the University of Texas collections from the Fate Bell Rockshelter in Val Verde County shows that 85 percent of the beveled contracting-stem *Langtry* points are beveled on the left stem edge, and 92 percent of the beveling expanding-stem *Pandale* and *Nolan* points are beveled on the right.] *Shumla* points, with basal notches forming long barbs to square shoulders and slightly contracting to slightly expanding stems, appear soon after *Langtry*, although there is some overlap at this site. Interestingly, the points in the overlap area have characteristics of both major types and have been designated *Arledge* points. Until now both the *Langtry* and *Shumla* points had been found together, suggesting that they were contemporaneous. This is

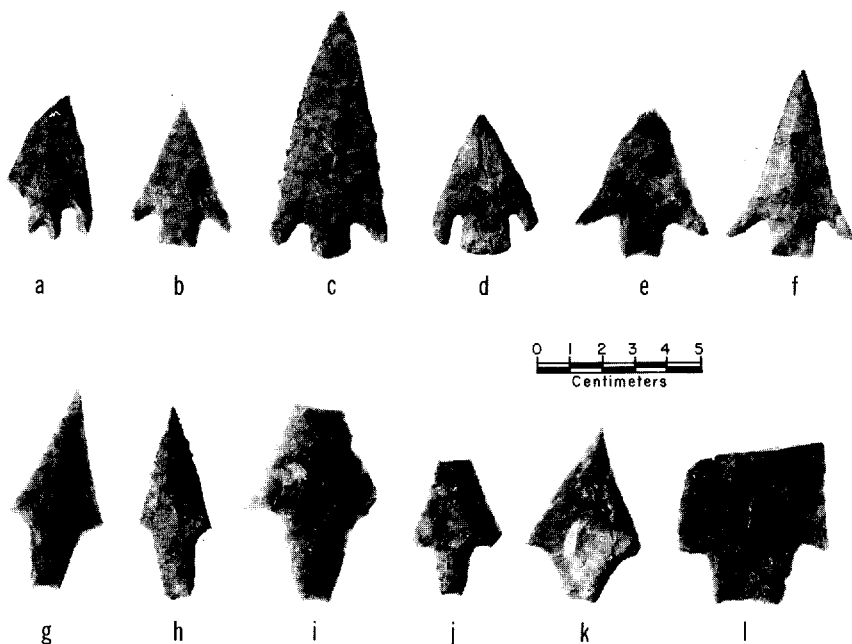


FIGURE 3. Projectile points, Langtry-Shumla period. a-d, Shumla; e-f, Arledge; g-l, Langtry. Length of f, 5.6 cm.

the basis for Kelley's Pecos River Focus (Kelley, *et al.*, 1940). Although I have followed this grouping, the introduction of basal notching and barbed, expanding-stem points suggests that *Shumla* points might more properly be placed within the next period (where they also occur). Johnson's (1964: 96) suggested time range for *Langtry* and *Shumla* points is about 3000 to 2300 B.C.

The *Montell-Marshall* period is designated by basally-notched points with prominent barbs and generally slightly expanding stems (Fig. 4). These include such other types as *Castroville*, *Conejo*, *Lange*, *Marcos*, *Martindale*, *Shumla*, and *Williams*. These types probably date from about 1000 B.C. to A.D. 1 (Johnson 1964: 96). A feature assignable to this period was found deep in shelter 7C. In addition to the characteristic *Montell* and *Marshall* points, this feature yielded many bison bone fragments and an abundance of other artifactual material. This material includes *Williams* and *Shumla* projectile points, round-based knives, side scrapers (both unifacial and bifacial), cores, billet flakes from thin bifaces, utilized flakes, burins, a metate, a hard hematite pebble, and two bone beads. Because of their occurrence within this single feature, these tools or traits may all be assigned with certainty to the *Montell-Marshall* period.

The *Ensor-Frio* period, the last of the Archaic divisions is designated by side-notched and a few corner-notched projectile points: *Ensor*, *Frio*, *Edgewood* (?), *Fairland*, and *Figueroa* (Fig. 5). Many of these points, although commonly thought to have been used on spears or "darts," could easily have been used on arrows. This period possibly begins as early as 1000 B.C. and might continue at least as late as A.D. 1000 (Johnson 1964: 96).

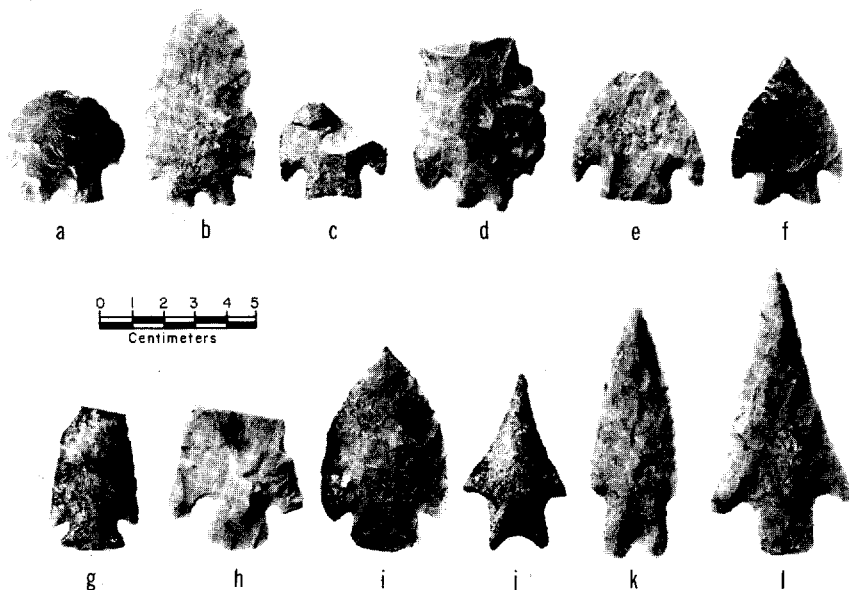


FIGURE 4. Projectile points, Montell-Marshall period: a-b, Montell; c-e, Marshall; f, Conejo; g, Marcos; h-i, Williams. Others: j-k, Pedernales; l, Pogo. Length of 1, 9.1 cm.

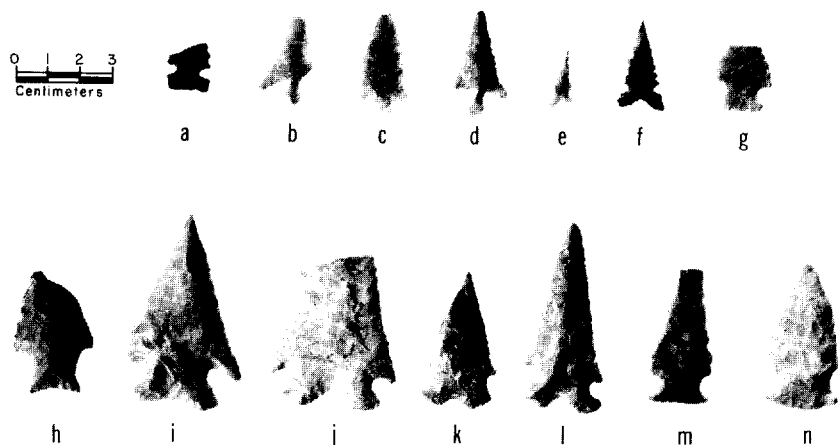


FIGURE 5. Arrowpoints. Upper row (Neo-Indian): a, Harrell; b, Bulbar-stemmed; c, Rectangular-stemmed; d, perdiz-like; e-f, Toyah; g, Scollorn. Bottom row, Ensor-Frio period: h, Fairland; i-l, Frio; m-n, Ensor. Length of n, 4.3 cm.

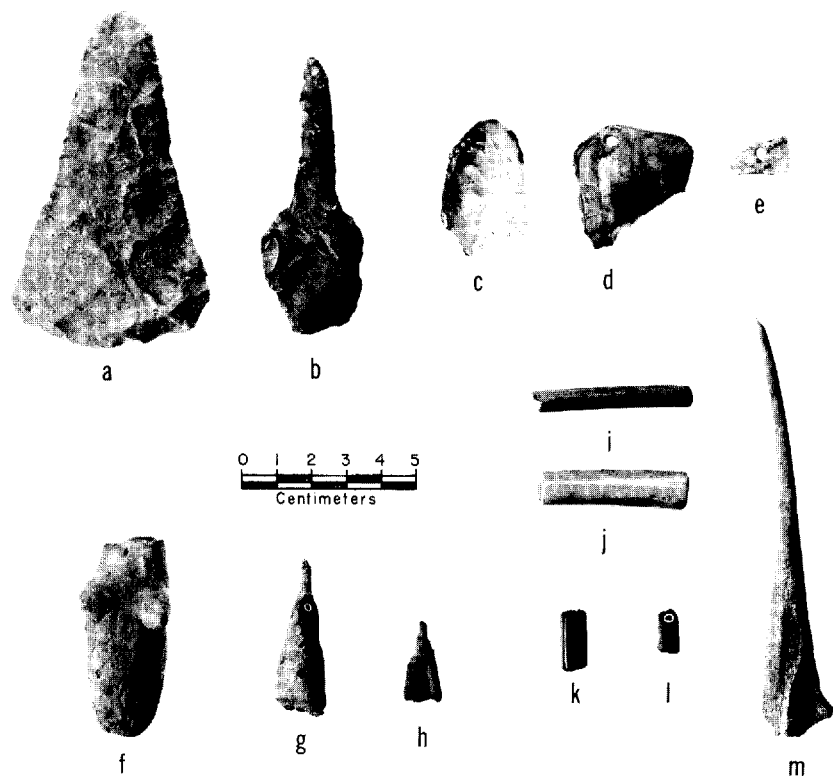


FIGURE 6. Miscellaneous artifacts. a, fist axe; b, flint drill; c, perforated mussel shell; d, mussel shell pendant; e, mussel shell bead; f, clay figurine; g-h, steeple-like bone artifacts; i-l, bone beads; m, bone awl. Length of m, 11.9 cm.

The introduction of the bow and arrow, with the smaller, thin arrowpoints of many varied types (Fig. 5), marks the beginning of the Neo-Indian stage and the end of the Archaic stage with its heavier projectile points. Although many types of arrowpoints were found at the Castle Canyon site, there was no stratigraphic separation of styles. There was, however, an increased number of bone tools in the levels containing arrowpoints, suggesting the increased popularity of bone work in later times. Scratched pebbles, probably used as hammerstones during the working of flint, and burlins, a chisel-edged flint tool, were also more common in the upper levels.

It seems that some note is necessary concerning the geographical limits of the proposed nomenclature of time periods. In Brewster County of western Texas we find the Chisos Focus would definitely correspond to the *Ensor-Frio* period at Castle Canyon with the side-notched projectile points. The Pecos River Focus, with mainly contracting-stem points, is the same as my *Langtry-Shumla* period. The other periods, however, were not sufficiently well-known at the time Kelley wrote.

The approximate projectile point sequence for central Texas has been known since the earliest archaeological work in the area. Recent work (Johnson, *et al.*, 1962) has verified that the sequence in that area is quite similar to the western Texas region. As such is the case, the adoption of the proposed terminology by periods is applicable to central, as well as to western Texas. In central Texas the *Pandale-Nolan* period is most commonly represented by *Nolan* and *Travis* points, although *Pandale* points do occur rarely (site 41 HY 29, Weir, Personal Communication). The *Langtry-Shumla* period (if applicable) should be split for central Texas, as it is represented by *Pedernales* points, a type having some of the characteristics of *Langtry*. The *Montell-Marshall* and the *Ensor-Frio* periods correspond almost exactly for the two areas.

PICTOGRAPHS

Other studies at the Castle Canyon site included such topics as the Indian pictographs. These occurred in 7A, 7C, and in one of the upper passages between the two shelters. These paintings consisted of such elements as human figures (some obviously non-Indian), arrowpoints, a javelina (?), horses and riders, a mission, and dotted and parallel lines. The painting was done in black, dark red, light red, and orange.

During analysis and comparisons, it was noted that animals, especially late or historic figures such as horses and cows, generally face to the viewer's left. This is common with both pictographs and petroglyphs from all of western Texas and the Panhandle region. Another interesting trait is the constant occurrence of groups of five figures, such as deer, men, or boxes. At Castle Canyon the number five was represented by human figures and projectile points. The number five is also carried over onto the grooves on the curved rabbit sticks found in some of the dry caves of the region, although there may be no relation between the paintings and the grooves. Handprints are found at other sites in the area. A third interesting feature is that most of the human figures have hour-glass torsos, a trait common in the art of far western Texas and the Southwest. The long, triangular figures so prevalent in early pictographs of Val Verde County are entirely lacking. Most of the human figures at Castle Canyon are also somewhat more realistic than in other sites, and are generally associated with another object, e.g. a horse or stick. Stick figures with hollow torsos also occur and may be historic, as compared with other known sites in the area.

In general, the pictographs at Castle Canyon appear to be proto-historic or historic. Certainly many are, such as the mission and the horses and riders. It seems significant that most of the paintings were done in light red or orange, with some black. The dark red, dominant in the earlier pictographic styles is extremely scarce. The late occurrence of the light red and orange seems to be quite common for this region.

FINAL STATEMENT

In conclusion it might be said that the Castle Canyon site was occupied during much of the period from before 4000 B.C. until late historic times. Even in later dates, the cavalry used the site as a landmark and a camp. The continual, long occupation accounted for the accumulation of very deep deposits, which held an excellent stratigraphic record. From the data gained at this site, the Archaic stage was divided into four periods based on projectile point styles. This nomenclature is not limited only to Val Verde County, but may be used as far west as Brewster County and well into central Texas following the Balcones fault an unknown distance north and east. The pictographs at the site all seem to fall within late times, perhaps all from within the historic period. The characteristics of these paintings may help interpret and date other and perhaps isolated finds. In general, the Castle Canyon site contributes a great deal of information concerning the aboriginal occupation of Val Verde County from early Archaic to Historic times.

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