

LITHIC LIBERATION AT LAGUNA 013104



FIGURE 1: A jovial Dan Woehr and his treasured Base Tang

Mike Walkden and I were on the scene at Laguna by daylight Saturday, and 2 or 3 other truckloads of diehards actually beat us there. Still, we exchanged pleasantries with TAAA founder Bob McWilliams, took care of the formalities, staked out a screen, then dropped into the campsite excavation before there was enough light to see what we were doing. With shovels, trowels, and lap sized homemade screens we assaulted the walls of the hole for an hour with high hopes. In the process I snagged a rough scraper and a nice drill base. Mike struck out and before we knew it, we heard Bob fire up the backhoe.

We shared a screen with an older gentleman named Bruce who despite his age was able to keep up with the young bucks at every stage in moving dirt, flipping the screen, etc. I hope I have as much energy as Bruce when I'm retired. I enjoyed conversing with him as he had interest and experience in collecting fossils as well. He gave me good, specific info on collecting shark and mammoth teeth in South Florida, and I've been hoping to make a fossil trip there before long. As the day got underway, I had no trouble with motivation since I found the first point of the day within 15 seconds of digging into our first load of dirt. It was a perfect, squat little Conejo.

I have found bone fragments before while sifting, but usually they are pretty well broken down. Small yellow bones began turning up on my screen and one other, and they were better preserved than I am used to seeing. They were mixed in with midden rock, so it is conceivable that they comprised a meal for an archaic Indian family. Or perhaps some critter in later years died in its burrow which happened to be tunneled into the campsite. At any rate, I compared skull fragments to an armadillo skull I have at home, and found them to be a match. The pattern of perforated pinholes in little rectangular pieces of bone are to the

best of my knowledge armadillo shell scutes. Meal or just a latter denizen of the same field, the bones are shown in Figure 2.



FIGURE 2: Armadillo Bones

I was HOT in the morning. The a.m. proved to be a game of quantity more than quality, and while I snagged a couple more perfect points, I amassed quite a pile of broken points, bases, and complete manos and other limestone grinding tools. On some loads I got 4 nice broken pieces, and at this stage in my pursuit of artifacts, this is high living. The other guys were finding some pieces as well, with the occasional intact point, but for whatever reason, most of the material went in front of me. Mike hit a bit of a slump, and this was in sharp contrast to our previous dig, where he dominated the table with 9 perfect pieces by day's end.



FIGURE 3: Miscellaneous Points – Pedernales center, Conejo lower left of center, Drill base lower right of center

By mid morning we were well aware of the successes around us as well. I don't know how the guy does it, but Leighton Weir is an artifact hunting prodigy. I've seen him consistently turn up museum quality artifacts in great numbers while others look on. Saturday was no different as he scored a perfect serrated needle tip Perdiz, a perfect Marshall, and a killer Kerrville Fist Axe to name a few. He doesn't work especially fast or slow. I'm going to keep an eye on this guy as he is good.



FIGURE 4: Leighton Weir's Points

One gentleman elected to hand dig all day, and his efforts were well rewarded with a huge, impeccable Kerrville Fist Axe from the midden rock and a long, slender, white paleo point from the old yellow dirt 6 feet down.



FIGURE 5: Hand digger's take, sorry I missed his name

Mike and I hand dug through lunch, shoveling dirt from the trench walls onto our screens, then shaking the dirt through and looking for goodies. I found one big

preform and little else. Bob took a short lunch and had the backhoe going again after a half hour.

Back at my post at the screen, things slowed down a bit. I was still finding some broken points, but we often went through 2 or 3 loads of dirt with nothing to show. At 20-30 minutes per load, this can easily be an hour long dry spell. Fortunately my prior finds floated me through this dry period, but Mike was ready for some action.



FIGURE 6: Miscellaneous Broken Tips and Blades



FIGURE 7: Miscellaneous Broken Bases

At one point I was blabbing to the other guys on some nonsensical subject while paying little attention as I sifted, then happened to look down and let out a shriek...staring right back at me was a PERFECT 4 ½ inch Base Tang knife on the bare screen! If Bob had been quicker with the digital video, he would have seen me dancing like James Brown next to the screen. Hoisting my prize up high, the whole operation literally shut down for a few minutes as all 10 people came over to see the blade. This is my best artifact ever, and it would sell for as much as \$1000 to the right buyer. I don't know whose face is on a \$1000 bill, but as far as I'm concerned, it would be the meticulous artisan who crafted this blade 2500-4000 years ago. I'll never sell this find as it will go into Weston's heirlooms someday. Let's have another look at that Base Tang.



FIGURE 8: Base Tang

Within 2 minutes Leighton Weir found his awesome Marshall, and Brad from Austin laid hands on a killer white blade about 5 inches long while hand digging. Bob suddenly had 3 awesome artifacts in his hands for photographing. Ladies and gentlemen, you'd be hard pressed to find time afield more exciting than this.



FIGURE 9: 3 good pieces found within 5 minutes

Mike then broke his dry spell with an 6000+ year old Baker point and a few miscellaneous broken halves. With things winding down, I found a couple more resharpened points while Bruce warmed up and found 3 nearly complete points within 10 minutes.



FIGURE 10: Mike Walkden with a couple good points

Bob had hustled all day bringing us dirt from various spots around the campsite, then looked for a "thumbs up" or "thumbs down" from us in effort to keep us in

good dirt. He puts considerable effort into making each day a success for each of us. With the day winding down, he had us wash up our points for a photo session, then gave us 2 more bonus loads of dirt as the sun dropped. Mike still managed to convince him that one last load was in order, and Bob graciously complied. That final load brought me one last point, a 3 inch Pedernales (?) missing one barb. In the waning daylight, Mike, Bruce and I quickly surface hunted the field, and I got a round scraper with 2 voids in the tan flint.



FIGURE 11: Miscellaneous Scrapers and Preforms

I came home with more than I cared to photograph. Many of the rough scrapers and preforms as well as manos and other limestone grinding tools didn't make the cut this time. Not a bad day in the field, and as I found out, wives don't mind your day away from home when you return with thousand dollar points!