

An Archeological Reconnaissance Behind the Diablo Dam, Coahuila, Mexico

WALTER W. TAYLOR AND FRANCISCO GONZALEZ RUL

In the winter of 1958, as part of a coordinated effort by Mexican and United States agencies, the archeological reconnaissance to be reported here was conducted along the Rio Grande and its tributary canyons, in the State of Coahuila, Mexico. The area of investigation was that which will be flooded by the proposed Diablo International Dam, now re-named the Friendship International Dam, to be constructed immediately below the point at which the Devils River enters the Rio Grande (Fig. 1). The reservoir thus created is to have an extension of some 75 miles (125 km.) along the main river and a flood-pool elevation of 1140.4 feet (347 m.) above sea level. Our task was to assess the archeological resources of this area and to make recommendations for a program of salvage which would preserve the important cultural and historical heritage about to be physically destroyed by the rising waters. We were also directed to take note of remains which might lie above the flood-pool but which will be in danger of the vandalism inevitably to follow the opening of this heretofore virtually inaccessible and quite unexplored region.

Early in January, the authors of the present report were commissioned by the National Institute of Anthropology and History of Mexico: Taylor as Director charged with the planning and direction of the work and with coordinating investigations on our side with those on the United States side, and Rul as Inspector charged with the actual field operations and the later study and analysis of the collections. The following report, then, is a composite one: the empirical data and analysis coming largely from Rul and the synthesis from both of us.¹

¹ The substantive details of this report have been abstracted from the thesis submitted by co-author Rul in partial fulfillment of the requirements for his professional degree in archaeology from the Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia. We wish to thank the authorities of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia for permission to publish these data. For a brief, preliminary account of this work, see Taylor, 1958: 87-89.

DIABLO RESERVOIR IN COAHUILA

155

Fig. 1.

GENERAL AREA OF PROPOSED DIABLO RESERVOIR
COAHUILA, MEXICO -- TEXAS, U.S.A.

³ We wish to thank John Allen Graham and his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Graham, of Del Rio, Texas, for their many kindnesses and their considerable help in furthering our work. We also wish to thank Sr. don Valeriano Diego, and his sons, owner and heirs, respectively, of the Rancho Santa Rosa on which our work was largely concentrated, for their most generous hospitality during our stay on their lands. We also wish to thank Sr. don Juan Quiroz, owner of the Rancho La Chuparrosa, for his kind permission to work on his lands and to use the facilities of the ranch itself.

in the aboriginal occupation. For both the Mexican and United States sides, the Rio Grande itself is a constant, its waters being equally available or, perhaps better, unavailable because of the line of unscalable cliffs. Although exact statement is impossible, it is probable that there is equality also in the number of *tinajas*, natural potholes in the bed-rock, in which rainwater collects and endures sometimes from year to year. However, when it comes to "live" water, either in the form of perennial streams or springs, the difference is great and easily stated: there is no live water on the Mexican side. On the United States side, in contrast, there are two perennial tributaries (the Pecos and the Devils River), a considerable number of small springs along these two water courses, and two extremely large springs which provide great quantities of localized but never-failing water at Comstock and Del Rio, Texas.

Climatologically, the area is semiarid, having an annual rainfall averaging about 15 inches (405 mm.) which falls mostly in the summer. Apart from the flood plain of the Rio Grande, which supports a dense growth of cottonwood, willow, cane, and grass, the vegetation is sparse and has been designated by Bray (1905) as that of "the sotol country." Animal life, while probably never either varied or abundant, was evidently enough in the past to provide a modicum of food and basic materials to the aborigines. Of course, both flora and fauna have changed through the years, and paleobotanical and paleoclimatological studies have demonstrated that from the times of the earliest human occupation the climate and biota have deteriorated, making the present conditions probably the least hospitable of any (Johnson, 1960: 169-70; W. W. Taylor, 1956: 224).

However, it should be pointed out most emphatically that, for people accustomed to subsist largely upon coarse plant foods, the region, far from being an area of scarcity, is really one of considerable abundance. If we look upon the situation objectively, and not from our own ethno-dietary point of view, and if we remember that human tastes are matters of custom derived at least in part from necessity and availability, then we must admit that arid lands such as these are not wastes with respect to human subsistence. They often can be made to provide a living, such as it may seem to us, that is abundant and sometimes a lot easier to come by than that in the more humid regions where we might choose to live. In other words, if one has grown up eating desert food, the desert has a lot of it to offer. One is reminded of the old cowboy story about the hungry hired hand who said after his first meal at the ranch: "That sure was good food, m'am . . . what there was of it. I mean there was a lot of it, m'am . . . such as it was."

Sites

Our survey recorded 68 numbered sites and five general localities in which no habitations were found but from which artifacts were collected. These sites are grouped and quantified in Table 1.

TABLE 1

	Number	Percentage
Open sites (rock middens or "mezcaleros")	16	24
Rockshelters		
Large	4	6
Medium	12	18
Small	10	15
Small and without sign of human occupation	11	16
Unclassified	14	21
Pictograph site	1	
Totals	68	100

In regard to size, it should be stated that the designations "large," "medium," and "small" cannot be equated with the same designations in the report on the United States side (Graham and Davis, 1958: 39-74); our large and medium sites are not nearly as big as the ones so designated on the other side. For example, on the Mexican side the widths at the mouths of the "large" sites range from 81 to 113 feet, while on the other side they run from 170 to 500; depths range from 26 to 97 feet on the Mexican side, from 40 to 140 on the other. On the other hand, the small ones are of about equal size. Compared to the United States side, there is little vandalism evident in the sites, although there has been enough to destroy the value of several.

The distribution of utilized rockshelters shows marked localization, 68% clustering around the mouth of the Pecos River, that is, between Parida Canyon and the river-bend lying south-southwest and upstream of the town of Shumla, Texas. It is true that, because of the location of the flood-pool contour at this point, our intensive survey did not extend farther upstream. But aerial flights and local information told us that there were inconspicuously few sites above that point, and evidently no large ones. Of the twenty-two sites downstream from Parida Canyon, exactly one-half are open sites (rock middens), and only three of the other eleven (which are all small rockshelters) appear to have been occupied consistently enough to contain any appreciable depth of cultural deposit.

It is obvious that this distribution is due, in a large part, to the differential occurrence of rockshelters brought about by strictly geologi-

cal causes, specifically the greater dissection and the more massive character of the limestone in the upstream sector and the more open, rolling character of the downstream sector. However, these cannot be the only factors. For one thing, of the rockshelters available outside the mouth-of-the-Pecos area, a considerable number were not occupied. Furthermore, in the downstream sector, the open sites, although more abundant than in the Pecos River sector, are neither numerous enough nor large enough to indicate an occupation even approaching the intensity of that around the mouth of the Pecos. Finally, accessibility to the perennial waters of the Rio Grande cannot be considered a differentiating factor because, except for the relatively easy descent immediately opposite the mouth of the Pecos, the rest of the mouth-of-the-Pecos sector has no easier descents than the peripheral sectors; in fact, the reverse is probably true. It seems obvious to us, therefore, that the occupation of the Mexican side was conditioned by three factors: 1) availability of rockshelters, 2) relative accessibility to the United States side of the Rio Grande, and 3) the fact that the Pecos River drainage was the center of occupational gravity for the entire region.

Compared to that of the United States, the Mexican side has fewer rockshelters. This is undoubtedly a geologic matter and one for which, at the moment, we have not been able to find any satisfactory explanation. The culturally significant facts, however, are that not all the Mexican shelters were occupied and that the total amount of cultural refuse is very much less than on the United States side. To us, this indicates either a less intensive or a briefer occupation, or both. This problem of relative length of occupation is, of course, very difficult to attack at present because the chronological facts and the cultural relationships between the deposits on the two sides are unknown. Our guess at the moment is that the occupations of the two sides were roughly contemporaneous and of equal duration and that any difference in amount of cultural deposits is a matter of the numbers of people involved, i.e., the "intensity" of occupation.

While there are more shelters and more occupied shelters on the United States side, there appears to be a greater number of open sites on the Mexican side, if one takes into consideration the amount of terrain surveyed and the total number of sites encountered. If we weight the Mexican open-site frequency according to the proportion of all United States sites represented by all Mexican sites, we find that the weighted ratio is approximately 40/34 in favor of the Mexican side. In view of other information, this seems to be significant and to fit into the general pattern of occupation, as will be discussed below.

Another difference between the two sides is in the amount of pictorial art. In our work, we encountered only one pictograph site, although three habitation sites contained a few traces of paint on their walls. On the other hand, the United States side produced 49 sites with pictographs, 19 of which, if we interpret the report correctly, were strictly pictographic and non-occupation (Graham and Davis, 1958: 77-81). Furthermore, the typical "Pecos River style" of rock painting was not found by us on the Mexican side, although H. C. Taylor (1948: 79) reported some Pecos River style pictographs at sites to the west of the area of our investigation. The few discernible pictures we did find are monochrome (red) and very crude: one figure represents a man holding what is probably a bow and arrow, another may show a detached rack of deer antlers (trophy?).

Collections

During the course of our survey, 184 artifacts (see Table 2) were collected from the surfaces of the sites, the "localities," and the general countryside traversed. Observations on a number of other cultural traits were recorded. No excavation was done.

TABLE 2

<i>Chipped Stone Artifacts</i>		179
Choppers, large, monofacial, limestone		3
Choppers, small, bifacial, limestone, chert		3
"Hand axes" (?), small, bifacial, chert		6
Scrapers, elongated, retouched		28
Scrapers, rounded, retouched		58
Knives, flake, retouched		2
Knives, bifacial, large, triangular		3
Clear Fork gouges		3
Perforator		1
Total		107
<i>Projectile points</i>		
Almagre (?)	4	
Abasolo (?)	5	
Chamelel (?)	1	
Catan	4	
Darl (?)	1	
Desmuke (?)	1	
Ensor	2	
Fairland (?)	6	
Frio	3	
Gary	1	

Langtry	4
Lerna	1
Matamoros	2
Paisano	3
Palmillas (?)	8
Pandale (?)	4
Pandora (?)	5
Shumla	7
Tortugas	3
Yarbrough	1
Bassett (?)	1
Fresno	1
Livernore (?)	2
Perdiz (?)	2
Total	72

Ground and/or Polished Stone Artifacts

Limestone bars
 Amulet (?), highly polished black stone, bar form
 Manos (two of igneous rock non-native to area)
 Metates

Non-movable "Stone" Artifacts

Bedrock mortar holes (in 14 sites)
 Pictographs (in 4 sites)
 Grooves (often misnamed "sharpening grooves") (in 1 site)

Non-lithic Artifacts

Bone awl, proximal end cannon bone of deer (?)	1
Bone awl, distal end cannon bone of deer (?)	1
Bone awl, cannon bone deer (?), fragmentary point	1
Fiber matting, twilled 2/2, small fragment	1
Fire drill, hardwood, fragmentary	1
Total	5

Without going into more detail than the material warrants or space permits, there is little use in providing individual descriptions or proveniences for these specimens.⁴ Nor would there be value in quantifying such artifacts as the limestone bars, manos, or metates, because only a few were collected and no record was kept of the many others that were present, but left behind, on the surfaces of the sites. However, in regard to certain of these artifacts, it seems important to say a few words.

The classification of projectile points has been made according to the data contained in *An Introductory Handbook of Texas Archeology* (Suhm, Krieger, and Jelks, 1954). However, because Rul, who made

⁴ These data may be obtained from the Dirección de Monumentos Prehispanicos, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Córdoba 45, México 7, D. F., México.

the identifications, has not worked in Texas archaeology and had no comparative collections to aid him, both of us feel some doubt as to certain of these identifications. Where doubt exists, a query has been placed following the type name. Furthermore, it has been Taylor's contention for a long time that elaborate cross-cultural and chronological inferences drawn from the simple and generalized forms subsumed under types such as Almagre, Abasolo, Catan, Gary, Lerna, Matamoros, and Tortugas are very dubious in the absence of other supporting evidence. It seems safer to regard such types as being descriptive, rather than having cultural or temporal implications, until corroborative evidence is adduced, discussed, and accepted.

Although complete quantitative data have not been published in the report on the United States side, it seems to us, from our own data and from personal communication with members of the other team, that many fewer (both proportionately and absolutely) of the small, late projectile points commonly attributed to use on arrows were found on the Mexican side. Of the larger "dart" points about whose identification we are reasonably certain, the number of types is evenly divided in the Mexican collection between those which are early (Frio, Langtry, Shumla) and those which are probably somewhat more recent (Ensor, Paisano, Yarbrough). These types are characteristic of the Pecos River Focus,⁵ with the exception of Paisano and Yarbrough whose centers of distribution are in the Big Bend and East Texas respectively—although Yarbrough is also found in late Edwards Plateau sites. Paisano is characteristic of the Chisos Focus which is said to overlap, but be generally later than, the Pecos River Focus (Kelley, Campbell, Lehmer, 1940: 162; Suhm, Krieger, Jelks, 1954: 57). Both Ensor and Frio are common in sites of the Edwards Plateau Aspect, while Langtry and Shumla are present but rare there. In other words, with the exception of Yarbrough, all of the solidly identified points are native to both the Edwards Plateau and the Trans-Pecos regions. This fact throws some doubt upon the validity of any distant relationships which might be claimed for some of the less certain types. On the other hand, both Shumla and Langtry points are said to have been found in the area around the Falcon Dam, where some of the less certainly identified types have also been identified (Aveleyra, 1951:

⁵ There is not the space here, nor is it appropriate in this survey report, to discuss the many points raised by Epstein (1960: 136-144, *inter alia*) in regard to the validity of the Pecos River Focus and the Chisos Focus concepts. We believe that he has made some cogent points but, since any meaningful discussion of these points would involve a much wider perspective and many more data than are directly pertinent to our present report, we feel that such discussion should await a more complete and broader publication than is our purpose here.

48-50). In addition, McNeish (1958: 193) has suggested a cultural and chronological connection between his Tamaulipas material and that of the Pecos River Focus based on like projectile point similarities. There may be something in all of this, but at the present we feel it better to be skeptical until more, and more certain and supported evidence is to hand.

Examples of the type called "limestone bar" were remarkably common in the sites of our survey, particularly those along the Rio Grande. These are arroyo-worn bars and small, thin, flat, oblong plates with well rounded and smoothed edges. They show no signs of having been worked into shape. Certain of them do, however, show signs of having been utilized: fine scratches, rubbed spots, high polish in restricted areas. The flat ones are very similar in form to the painted pebbles of the Pecos River Focus, and it is entirely possible that some of our examples at one time bore painted markings. At present, however, none of our specimens retains any paint. Whatever their use and function, their presence in the sites is not natural: they were selected for shape and brought there by human action. Finally, it should be noted that identical stones have been found in other sites in Coahuila and in the United States (Pearce and Jackson, 1933: 83; Taylor, personal records of Coahuila sites; Epstein, 1960: 99-100).

The absence from both the Mexican and United States sites of the notched snub-nosed end scrapers made on a small flake is noteworthy. Two unnotched specimens of this type (?) were found on the United States side (Graham and Davis, 1958: 21) but none at all on the Mexican. While this particular quantitative representation is quite certainly a matter of chance, nevertheless, when other distributional data are taken into account, it appears that the region of our survey may be the peripheral edge of a distribution which centers in Mexico further to the south. Personal communication (Beatriz Braniff, 1961) indicates that there is a heavy concentration of these notched end scrapers in the State of San Luis Potosi. Aveleyra (1956: 75, 84, 172) found 11 in sites of the Laguna District, southwestern Coahuila, and W. W. Taylor's excavations (personal notes) at Cuatro Ciénegas, central Coahuila, produced two sites. In other words, there is the suggestion of a negative gradient for these artifacts from south to north through the arid country of east-central Mexico.

Summary and Conclusions

There can be no doubt that the aboriginal culture in the area of our survey was closely related, possibly identical, with that on the United

States side. An analysis of present information about the latter region certainly indicates that the center of population was in the vicinity of the mouth of the Pecos River (see maps in: Graham and Davis, 1958). The same can be said of the Mexican side. At the same time, there can be no doubt about the existence, particularly during the days of the Pecos River Focus, of a marked differential in the intensity of occupation on the two sides of the Rio Grande. This may have been, at least in part, a reflection of differing natural resources, particularly living water. But that could not have been the whole story. The Mexican area was not occupied as intensively as it could have been, and the center of population there seems to have been more strongly influenced by accessibility to/from the other side of the Rio Grande than by any other factor or set of factors.

Without excavation, of course, the character of the Mexican occupation cannot be known precisely. But for one thing, the scarcity of pictographs, suggesting relatively less leisure and a more purposeful way of life and/or possibly less concern with religious matters, may indicate that the people occupied the Mexican side for some special purpose of an occasional and temporary nature. This purposive pattern of occupation may have been due to pressures having cultural, rather than natural, causes. Water certainly could not have been a determining factor, although it most probably was a contributing one. Periodic scarcity of foodstuffs, either plant or animal, or seasonal forays for special foods would be more likely, but our present information, from either side, is not capable of supporting inferences on this subject.

Two hypotheses, among not a few possible ones, present themselves as leads for future testing. The first is that the occupation of the Mexican side was just an expectable and somewhat less intensive but permanent expansion stemming from pressures in a homeland where food resources were finite and seasonal and where population was increasing. In this event, we would expect to find the cultural inventories of each side virtually identical—and this would include quantitative and proportional attributes as well as trait lists and type specifications. The second hypothesis is that the Mexican side was used for intermittent and purposive occupation by people with more permanent homes elsewhere. In this event, there should be differences in cultural inventories, the interpretation of which might expectably lead us to an understanding of the purpose(s) of these temporary visitations.

Thus it becomes very apparent that any reasonably full understanding of the historical facts and cultural implications of human life

in the area bordering the Rio Grande in Texas and Coahuila is dependent upon investigations on both sides of the river, not merely on one side. To study one and not the other would produce an only partial, and therefore warped, picture, if we are interested in more than taxonomic conclusions. The fact that the cultural remains on the two sides are alike does not mean that one is a mere repetition of the other. Each carries significance for the other, and each is therefore incomplete without the other. It is true that the cultural expressions are "similar," but we want to know *how similar and in what ways*. And, if possible, we want to know *why*.

References Cited

- Aveleyra Arroyo de Anda, Luis
1951. Reconocimiento Arqueológico en la Zona de la Presa Internacional Falcón, Tamaulipas y Texas. *Revista Mexicana de Estudios Antropológicos*, Tomo 12, pp. 31-59.
- Aveleyra Arroyo de Anda, Luis, Manuel Maldonado-Koerdell, y Pablo Martinez del Rio
1956. Cueva de la Candelaria. Volumen I. Memorias del Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia.
- Bray, W. L.
1905. Vegetation of the Sotol Country in Texas. The University of Texas Bulletin, No. 60, Science Series No. 6.
- Epstein, Jeremiah F.
1960. Centipede and Damp Caves: Excavations in Val Verde County, Texas, 1958. Mimeographed report submitted to the National Park Service by the Texas Archeological Salvage Project, The University of Texas.
- Graham, John Allen, and William A. Davis
1958. Appraisal of the Archeological Resources of Diablo Reservoir, Val Verde County, Texas. Mimeographed report prepared by: Archeological Salvage Program Field Office, National Park Service, Austin, Texas.
- Johnson, LeRoy, Jr.
1960. Preliminary Pollen Analysis of Damp and Centipede Rock Shelters. In: Epstein, 1960, pp. 167-171.
- Kelley, J. C., T. N. Campbell, and D. J. Lehmer
1940. The Association of Archaeological Materials with Geological Deposits in the Big Bend Region of Texas. *West Texas Historical and Scientific Society Publication No. 10*.
- MacNeish, R. S.
1958. Preliminary Archaeological Investigations in the Sierra de Tamaulipas, Mexico. *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 48, Pt. 6.
- Pearce, J. E., and A. T. Jackson
1933. A Prehistoric Rock Shelter in Val Verde County, Texas. The University of Texas Bulletin, No. 3327.

- Suhm, D. A., A. D. Krieger, and E. B. Jelks
1954. An Introductory Handbook of Texas Archeology. Bulletin of the Texas Archeological Society, Vol. 25.
- Taylor, H. C.
1948. An Archaeological Reconnaissance in Northern Coahuila. Bulletin of the Texas Archeological and Paleontological Society, Vol. 19, pp. 74-87.
- Taylor, W. W.
1956. Some Implications of the Carbon-14 Dates from a Cave in Coahuila Mexico. Bulletin of the Texas Archeological Society, Vol. 27, pp. 215-234.
1958. Archeological Survey of the Mexican Part of Diablo Reservoir. In: Graham and Davis, 1958, pp. 87-89.
- Southern Illinois University
Carbondale, Illinois