



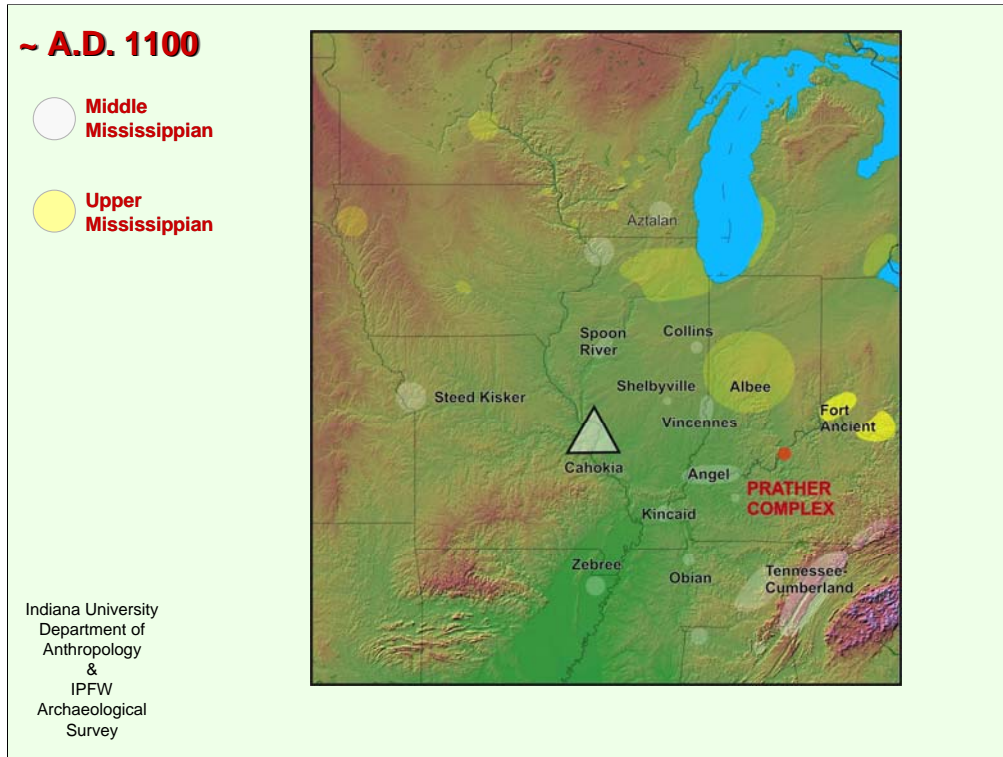
**PRAATHER SITE (12-CL-4),
CLARK COUNTY, INDIANA:
THE 2003 BASELINE
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY**

**Cheryl Ann Munson
(Indiana University)
Robert G. McCullough
(IPFW Archaeological
Survey)**



**Paper presented at the joint
Southeast Archaeological Conference/
Midwest Archaeological Conference
October 21, 2004
St. Louis, MO**

**Symposium: Emerging Mississippian
Perspectives at the Falls of the
Ohio River**

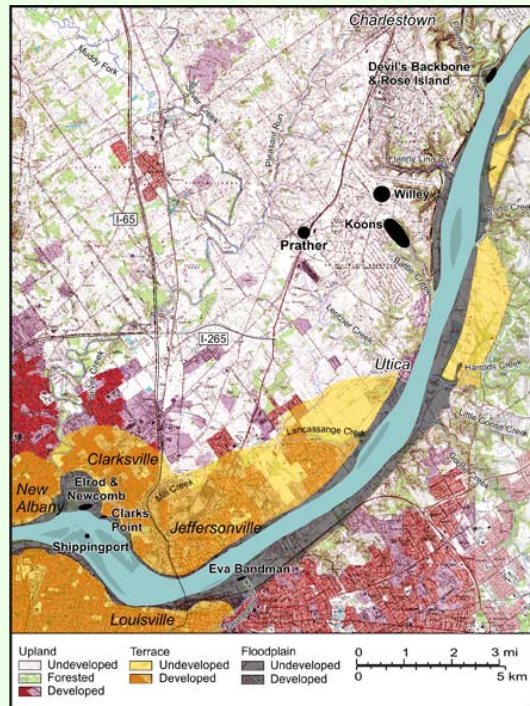


The Prather site in the central Ohio Valley is a little known Mississippian mound center situated at the northeastern frontier of Mississippian societies and the southwestern limit of Fort Ancient settlements.

**Mississippian
Prather
Complex
(Falls of
the Ohio)**

- Clark's Point
- Devil's Backbone
- Newcomb/Elrod/Hale
- Prather
- Willey
- Koons-Spangler
- Eva Bandman
- Shippingport

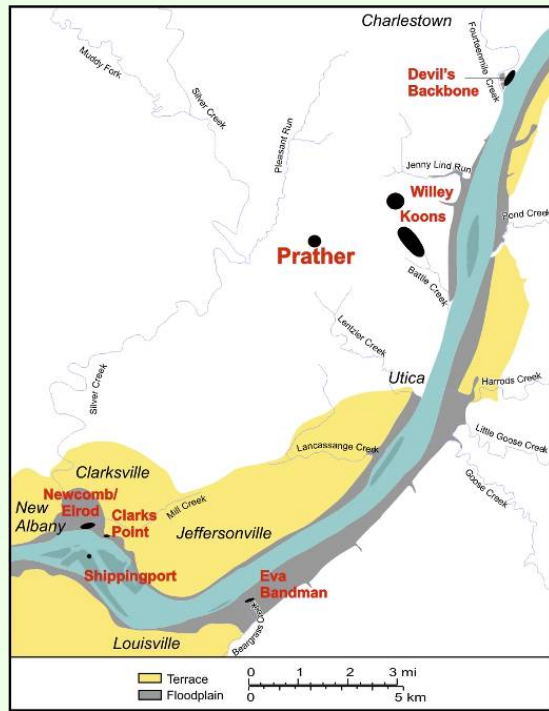
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It is located near Jeffersonville, Indiana, in the Falls of the Ohio region, and in Louisville's expanding greater metropolitan area.

**Mississippian
Prather
Complex
(Falls of the Ohio)**

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Although a Mississippian mound center, Prather is located in the uplands, nearly 5 km west of the Ohio River, on a loess-capped upland watered by permanent springs and shallow streams. Falls region Mississippian sites located northeast of Prather are also situated primarily in the uplands, but those to the southwest are in alluvial settings.

**Mississippian
Prather
Complex
(Falls of
the Ohio)**

James B. Griffin's Map

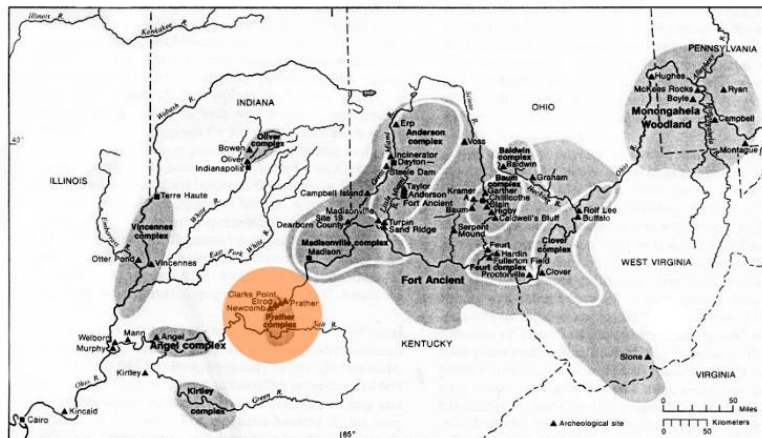


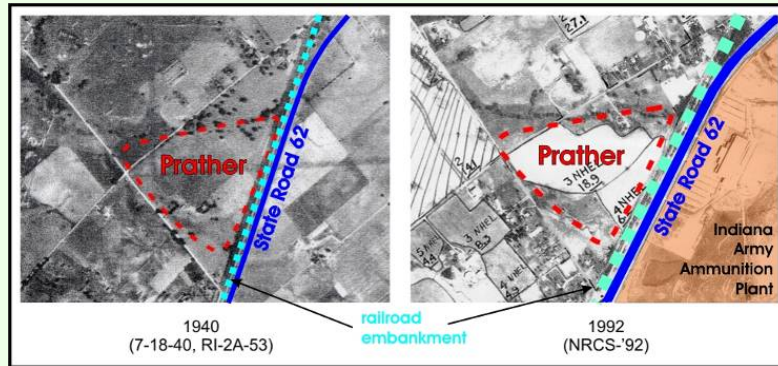
Fig. 1. Relationships of archaeological sites and complexes in the Ohio Valley.

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In the 1970s, James Griffin described several late prehistoric complexes and sites in the Ohio Valley. In the Falls region, he proposed the “Prather Complex,” based on the early excavations at Prather and several other Mississippian sites and a single radiocarbon date.

**Prather
Site
Air
Photos**

**Land Use
Changes**



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Land use in the site area has been primarily agricultural, although the southeastern margin of the Prather site is obscured by modern construction. Still, Prather is the best preserved of the relatively small number of known Mississippian sites in the region.

The recently accelerating pace of suburban housing construction led me and Bob McCullough to team together and begin a research project that would also foster preservation of this mound center.

**2003
Survey
Project
Support**

National Park Service, Historic Preservation Fund Grant Program

administered by

Indiana Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology

Landowner

Dr. T. Harold Martin

Organizations and Institutions

Ms. Anne Bader, Falls of the Ohio Archaeological Society

Ms. Jeanne Burke, Clark County Historian

Mr. Phil DiBlasi, Program of Archaeology, University of Louisville

Ms. Bett Etonohan, Falls of the Ohio State Park

Dr. Carl Kramer, Historian, IU Southeast

Mr. Gregory Sekula, Historic Landmarks Foundation

Mr. Robert Gallman, Clarks Grant Historical Society

Ms. Jane Sarles, Clarksville History Society

Elected Officials:

Rep. James L. Bottorff

Congressman Baron P. Hill

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Research team and consultants: geoarchaeology – Dr. C. Russell Stafford (Indiana State University); biological anthropology – Dr. Della Collins Cook (Indiana University); faunal remains – Mr. Rex Garniewicz (Indiana State Museum); botanical remains – Dr. Leslie Bush; previous excavations – Dr. Donald Janzen (retired)

Funds to support our project were provided by the Historic Preservation Fund grant program, which in Indiana is administered by the SHPO's office, the Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology.

**Mississippian
Prather
Complex
(Falls of
the Ohio)**

Eli Lilly, 1937
"Prehistoric
Antiquities
of Indiana,"
Mississippian
ceramics
In the Falls
region



CLARK COUNTY SHERDS

Guernsey's collections:
sherds from fabric
impressed pans

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Prior to our survey, there were two periods of investigation at Prather. In the early 1930s, E.Y. Guernsey was employed by Eli Lilly to carry out surveys and excavations at Clark County sites for the Indiana Historical Society. Guernsey noted variable mortuary practices, including stone box graves, and shell-tempered ceramics such as owl-like blank-face water bottles, fabric-impressed pans, and plain jars and bowls in the Falls region.

At the Prather site, Guernsey identified three mounds. Over the course of several days he excavated part of one of the smaller mounds and tested the largest mound. Guernsey later wrote a detailed report of his work which he sent to Eli Lilly, but this report has been lost for many years.

E. Y. Guernsey, Indiana Historical Society, 1934

Jar and long neck bottle, listed as donated by Guernsey to the Museum of Anthropology, University of Michigan (not located in collections)

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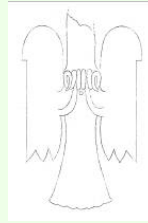
Circular shell gorget (not located in collections)

Copper-Covered Carved Wood Eagle (outline drawing)

Conch shell beads and fragment of "cup" or spoon

bone pin & awls

Jar donated to Guernsey by Dr. W.W. Work, Charlestown, IN (not from burial)



Lacking maps as well as a report, our knowledge of Guernsey's excavations comes from his correspondence with Eli Lilly, a single black and white photograph, and the extant collections. The collected artifacts are curated at the Glenn Black Laboratory of Archaeology, or noted as donated to the University of Michigan Museum of Anthropology. Unfortunately, not all of the artifacts can be located today.

Guernsey's most significant discoveries were several burials in both flexed and extended positions found beneath fired clay and carbonized wood indicative of burned structural remains. One extended burial was photographed: a male, accompanied by bone implements, a circular shell gorget and other ornaments, pottery vessels, and a copper-covered, carved wooden eagle. A discoidal was found with a flexed burial.

**E. Y. Guernsey, Indiana
Historical Society, 1934**



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Guernsey used a scaled, paper cut-out of the eagle for his photo. This now “historic” paper artifact has survived the last 70 years better than the carved wood figure.

**Early
Amateur
Excavations**



**Mississippi Plain Jar:
Donated to Falls of
the Ohio State Park,
by Mr. Ace Soliday**



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**Mississippi Plain Bowl:
Donor unknown; found
near spring.**



After Guernsey, there were several explorations by amateur archaeologists, but the location of their digging is not known.

First Modern Professional Excavations

By Dr. Donald Janzen, 1972 (archaeological field school, organized through Centre College, Kentucky):

- *Multiple test units, including one in the largest mound*
- *One radiocarbon date from a wall trench structure discovered in largest mound: A.D. 1045 +/-70, cal A.D. 1024-1217 (1 Σ)*
- *Excavated collections transferred to University of Louisville*



photo by 1971 field school student, William Huser



Archaeologist Dr. Donald Janzen carried out the next excavations at Prather. During a field school in 1971, he opened multiple units in three blocks. One block was in the single mound he reported in his survey form, the largest mound. There he found portions of a wall trench structure, which was radiocarbon dated A.D. 1045 +/-70, as well as additional features. Janzen's collections are today housed at the University of Louisville. Our brief inventory, courtesy of Professor Phil DiBlasi, indicates 16 boxes of material still in need of cataloging and analysis. The collection includes predominantly plain Mississippian pottery. Rare decorated types have incised lines and red filming. One black-on-buff, negative painted bottle fragment was observed.

**2003
Prather
Site
Survey**

Goals

- *Establish site grid and make detailed topographic map*
- *Assess site size and limits*
- *Document artifact types, densities, and distributions*
- *Evaluate intact cultural deposits and site preservation*
- *Foundation for future research*



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With so little solid information about Prather, our 2003 survey was structured:

- to establish a site grid and map the topography and above-ground natural, modern, and prehistoric features of the site area;
- to identify the range of artifact types and how these might reflect internal and external cultural relationships;
- to assess site size, soil and artifact distributions, and integrity to learn about community scale, configuration, and preservation; and
- to provide a foundation for further studies of the Mississippian occupation, including dating, material culture, economy, and settlement system.

Prather Site Survey Conditions



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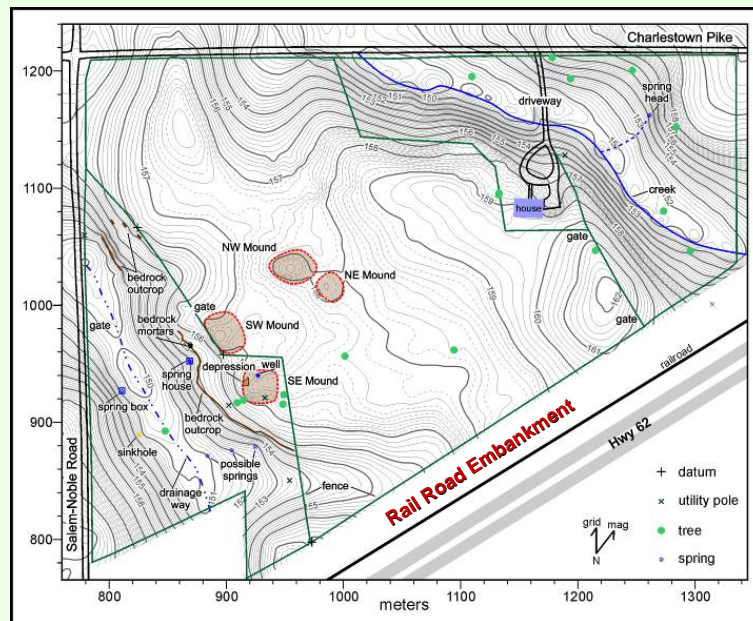


cars placed on "mounds" or
slight rises

Although Prather has been farmed since the early 1800s, the site has been in no-till agriculture since the mid-1970s, which stanchd the erosion of the mounds. (Cars in the hay field and pastures are located on slight elevations at each of the mounds.) Lacking exposed soils, we chose mechanical auger sampling as the primary survey method, instead of the usual shovel probes or 50-cm-test pits. Previous experience had indicated that auger sampling was more efficient and likely to cause less damage to fragile bone and ceramic materials. Field survey covered 9.5 ha or about 24 ac and was conducted in 2 stages over 5 weeks. Volunteers joining the survey team included avocational archaeologists, students, local historians, and professional colleagues. Laboratory work was subsequently carried out at Indiana University. The records and cataloged collections will be curated at IPFW. The report of investigations is available at the SHPO's office and from the authors on CD.

We will first review our survey procedures, and then present the results.

Topography and Surface Features



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Topographic mapping revealed the location of four mounds rather than the one to three mounds reported by previous investigators. The fourth, or Southeast Mound, is the former location of the Prather family home and outbuildings, which may have obscured this feature.

**Bedrock
Metates &
Mortars**



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West of the Southeast and Southwest Mounds is a prominent spring and a series of bedrock mortars and metates.

Mechanical Auger Sampling



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Auger sampling was carried out with a tractor-driven auger having a 12-inch bit. This approach proved to be very successful.

Preparation for Auger Work



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First, we set out sample locations at 20-meter intervals with the total station. The sample area around the flagged location was then mowed, so grass would not bind up the auger, and covered with a rubber mat to help keep the loosened soil from falling into the grass. Then the tractor moved the auger into position for drilling.

Drilling Auger Samples



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The drilling was guided to check depth, and all soil was removed from the auger.

Removing Augered Soil ("cleaning")



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After drilling, the loosened soil in the auger holes was cleaned out and the excavated soils stockpiled at the hole. Depending on depth, cleaning involved shovels, trenching tools, posthole augers, and bowls.

Recording Observations



Auger/Shovel-Probe Sample Record

Site: 018896 (17-03-08) 104

Primary excavation method (circle) auger soil auger shovel other

Surface elevation: _____ Level: _____ (indicate sample depths below surface)

Map grid (date): _____ Yes

Clear sample bag: _____ Date of

Sample processed: yes no Public or

Indicate when

Observations by Excavator and Screens (date)	Excavator	Screens	Lot Comments and your methods
1. Topsoil			
2. 1-2" subsoil			
3. 3-4" subsoil			
4. 5-6" subsoil			
5. 7-8" subsoil			
6. 9-10" subsoil			
7. 11-12" subsoil			
8. 13-14" subsoil			
9. 15-16" subsoil			
10. 17-18" subsoil			
11. 19-20" subsoil			
12. 21-22" subsoil			
13. 23-24" subsoil			
14. 25-26" subsoil			
15. 27-28" subsoil			
16. 29-30" subsoil			
17. 31-32" subsoil			
18. 33-34" subsoil			
19. 35-36" subsoil			
20. 37-38" subsoil			
21. 39-40" subsoil			
22. 41-42" subsoil			
23. 43-44" subsoil			
24. 45-46" subsoil			
25. 47-48" subsoil			
26. 49-50" subsoil			
27. 51-52" subsoil			
28. 53-54" subsoil			
29. 55-56" subsoil			
30. 57-58" subsoil			
31. 59-60" subsoil			
32. 61-62" subsoil			
33. 63-64" subsoil			
34. 65-66" subsoil			
35. 67-68" subsoil			
36. 69-70" subsoil			
37. 71-72" subsoil			
38. 73-74" subsoil			
39. 75-76" subsoil			
40. 77-78" subsoil			
41. 79-80" subsoil			
42. 81-82" subsoil			
43. 83-84" subsoil			
44. 85-86" subsoil			
45. 87-88" subsoil			
46. 89-90" subsoil			
47. 91-92" subsoil			
48. 93-94" subsoil			
49. 95-96" subsoil			
50. 97-98" subsoil			
51. 99-100" subsoil			



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Field workers recorded their observations, and then protected the excavated soil and the auger hole before profiling or screening

**Stockpiling
Samples &
Covering
Auger Holes**



**the famous black plastic
“Burrito-Wrap”**

**1, 2, 3, and flip
over the hole**

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by using a black plastic “burrito wrap” that we developed to both “envelope” the soil and cover the hole.

Recording Soil Profiles



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Once an auger hole was clean, the next step was documenting soils, artifacts, and stratigraphy observed in profile. Soil cores were used to check depths of cultural deposits that exceeded the drilling.

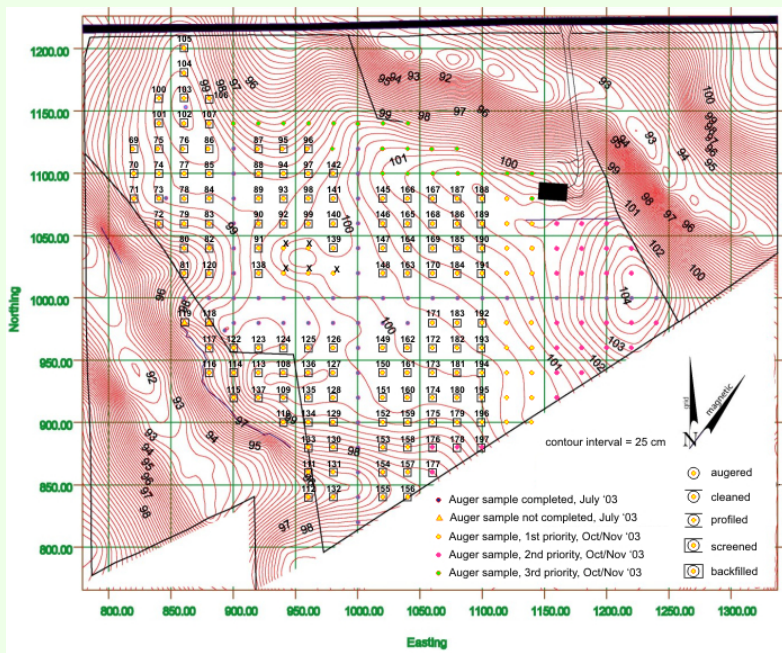
Screening



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After profiling an auger hole, screens were set up over the hole so we could recover artifacts and backfill the hole at the same time.

Auger Sampling Plan & Check List



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As the auger samples were drilled, cleaned, profiled, and screened, we logged our progress and planned the next sampling priorities.

**Mississippi
Plain
Vessel**



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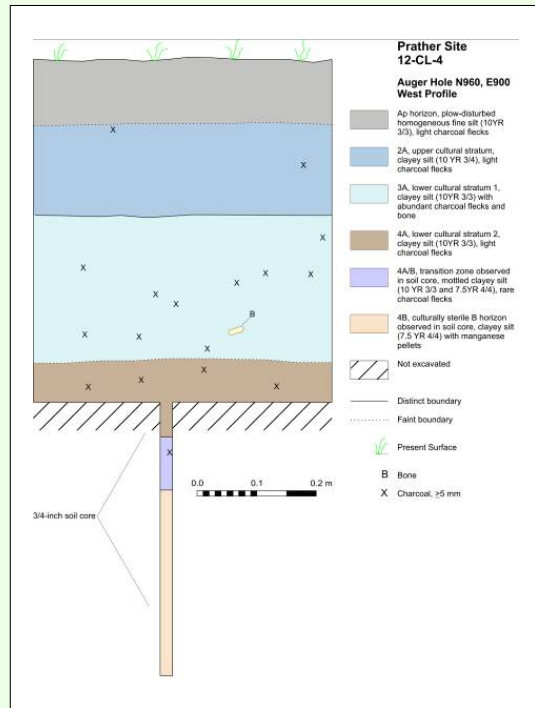


The most unexpected discovery was a complete Mississippi Plain jar whose rim was nicked by the tip of the auger.

Soil Profile, Southwest Mound (near south margin)



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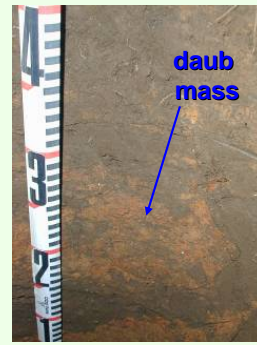


We avoided the obvious mounds in auger sampling, but checked two questionable elevations. Soil profiles confirmed that these slight topographic rises at the southwest and southeast are indeed mounds.

Soil Profiles In Auger Samples



deep
feature



daub
mass



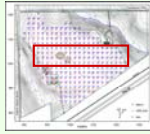
distinct
plow zone
above
thin
midden



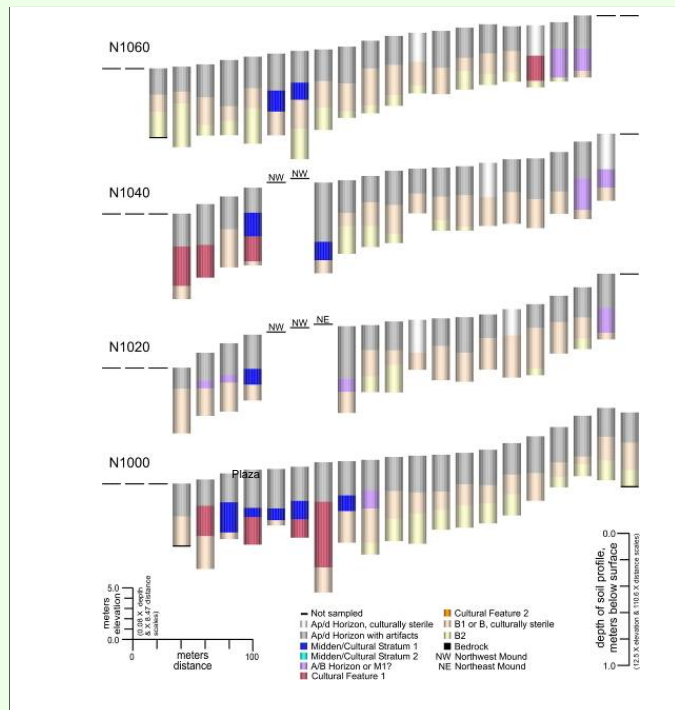
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Other samples near the mounds contained both midden and feature deposits.

Soil Profiles



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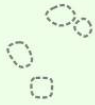


In the total of 246 auger samples, we identified 33 features and 31 midden strata underlying the plow zone. The documented soil profiles, middens, and features in the samples allowed us to compile multiple stratigraphic transects across the site. Comparison of stratigraphic transects helped elucidate site structure.

Lab Work



- wash and dry artifacts
- sort by size-grade (>1/4", >1/2", > 2cm)

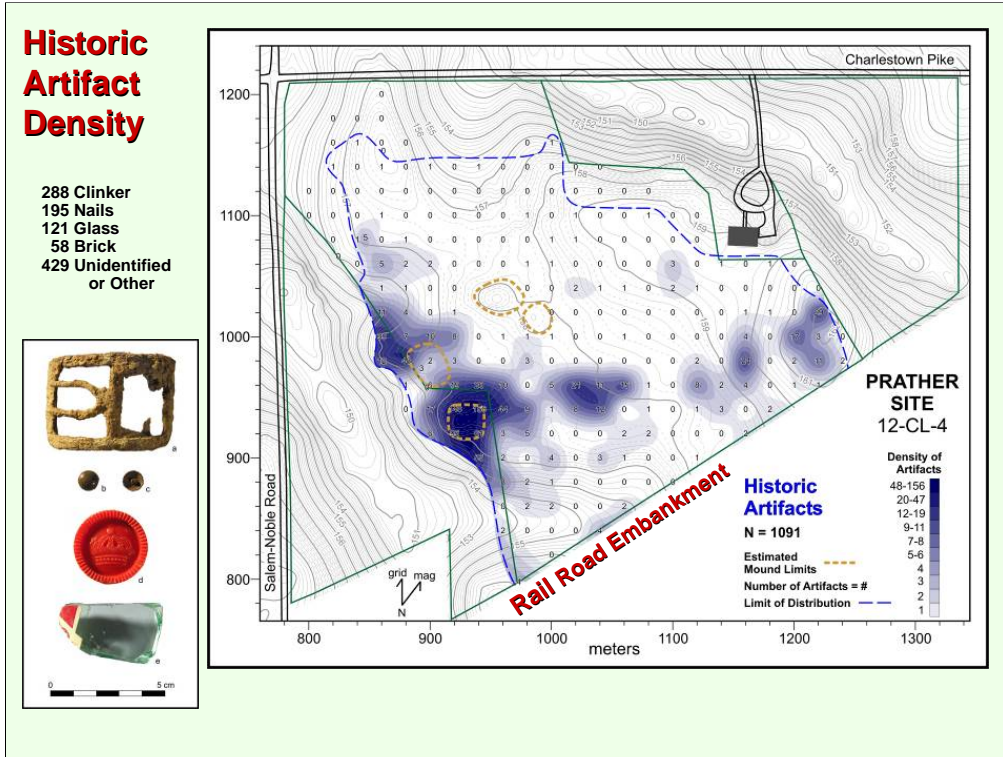


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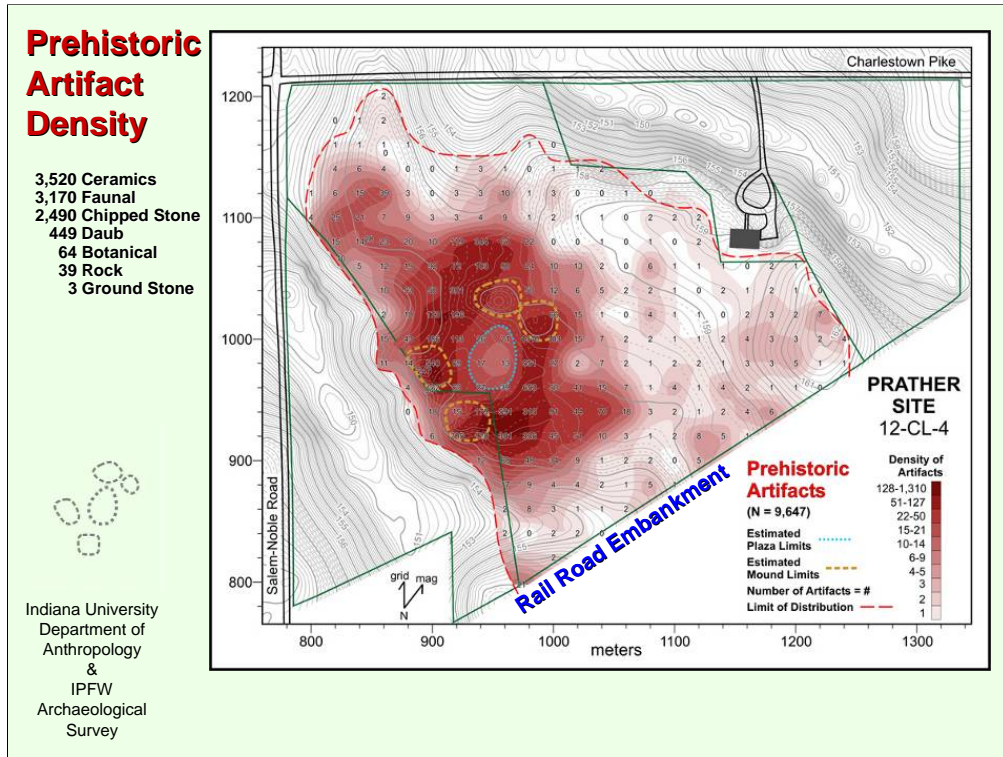
- identify to artifact category, raw material or temper, segment, stylistic characteristics
- sort & group (into cups with tags)
- IDs checked
- count
- weigh
- label & bag in plastic zip-locks for curation
- catalog data entered onto work sheets
- computer data entry
- data analysis



Following fieldwork, nearly 18,000 artifacts and samples were cleaned, processed, and cataloged. Analysis emphasized spatial distributions and density.



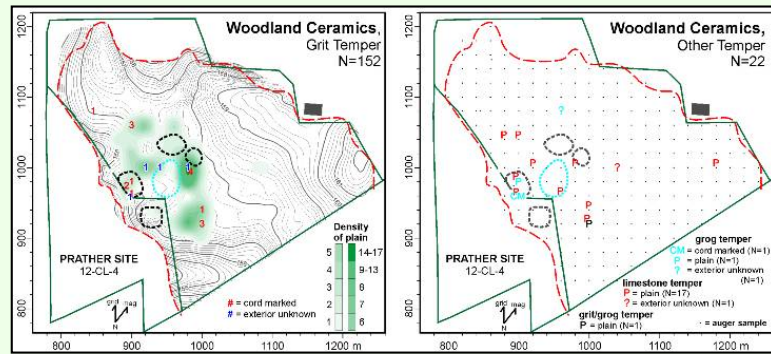
Historic artifacts, including clinker, nails, glass, brick, and other materials, have a density distribution that is concentrated at the Southeast Mound, where the Prather home was located.



Prehistoric artifacts, in contrast, form a concentration around the mounds, as well as a low-density central area between the mounds which suggests a plaza. This central area also lacked evidence of features and middens.

Ceramics number more than 3,500 and provide the most information about site structure.

Woodland Ceramics



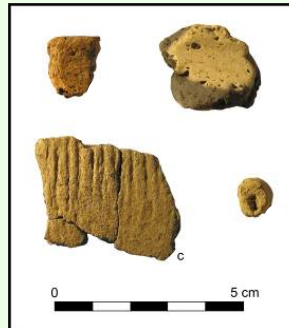
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Grit Temper (87.8%)
87.8% Plain
2.3% Cord Marked
10.0% Unknown

Limestone Temper (9.1%)
94.4% Plain
5.6% Unknown

Grog Temper (1.5%)
33.3% Cord Marked
33.3% Plain
33.3% Unknown

Mixed Temper (2.0%)
100% Plain



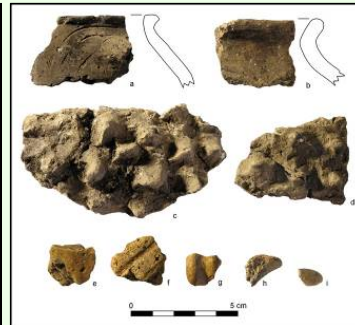
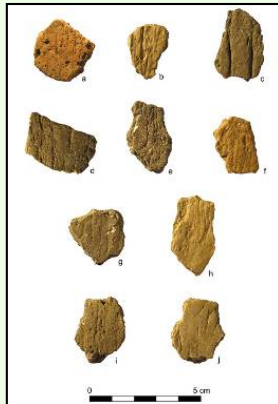
Woodland ceramics comprise less than 6%, compared to 93% Mississippian. Woodland sherds are mostly grit tempered and plain, but the diversity of temper and surface treatments and their spatial distributions suggest small intermittent occupations from Middle Woodland to the undefined Late Woodland.

Mississippian ceramics are predominately plain jars and bowls.

Mississippian Ceramics

Temper:

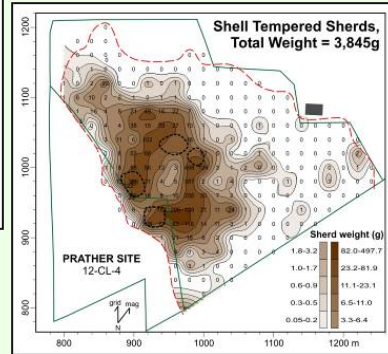
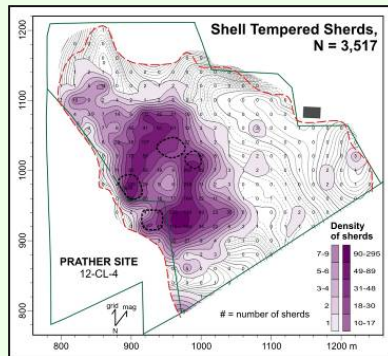
Shell only	64.6%
Shell + grit	35.2%
Shell + limestone	0.12%
Shell + grog	0.06%
Shell + mixed	0.03%



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Mississippi Plain is about 93%, and Bell Plain only 4% of the Mississippian assemblage. Cord marked types are not regionally defined, but this surface treatment is uncommon, about 2%. Decorated sherds exclude Fort Ancient motifs, such as guilloche designs, but include two incised, steep-shouldered jars with Ramey Incised-like motifs, as well as small numbers of the type Old Town Red and a pinched jar similar to the type: Fortune Noded.

Distribution of Mississippian Ceramics



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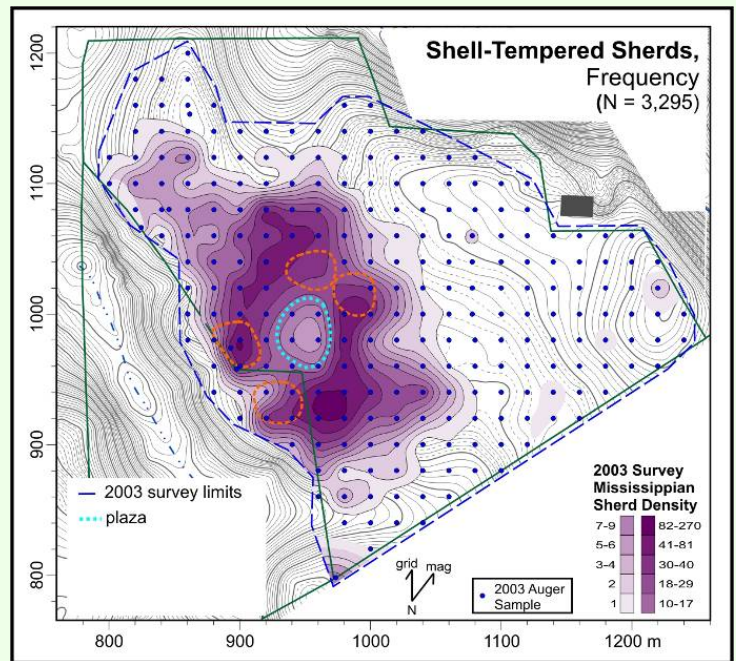
Count and weight density distributions of Mississippian ceramics show comparable patterns.

Distribution of Mississippian Ceramics

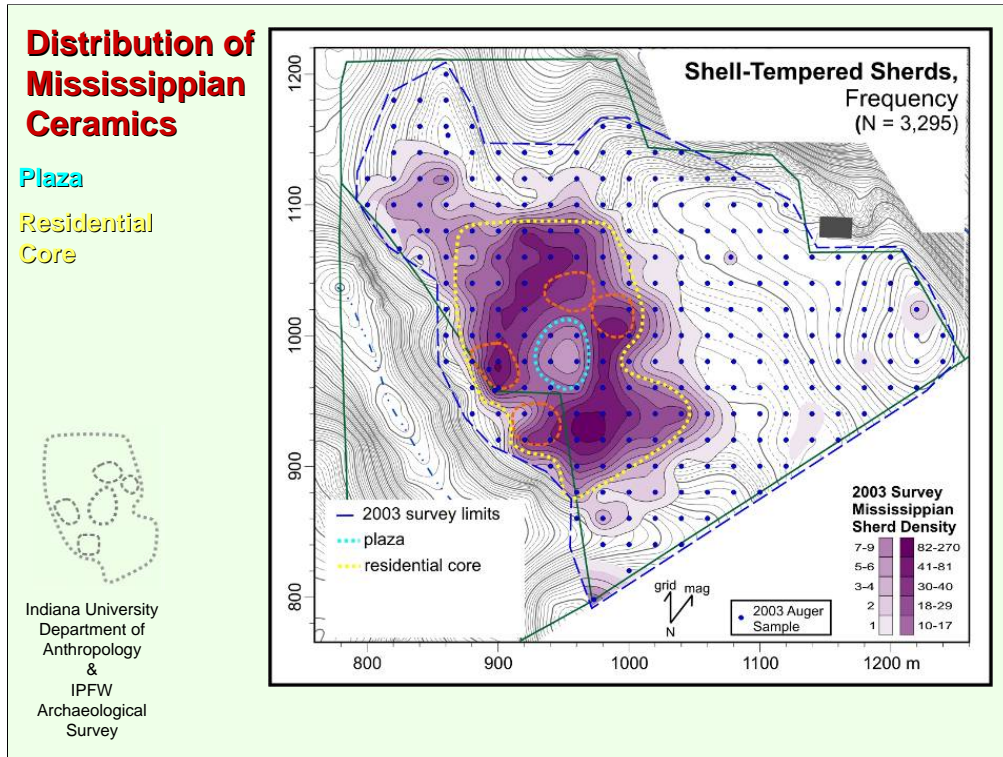
Plaza



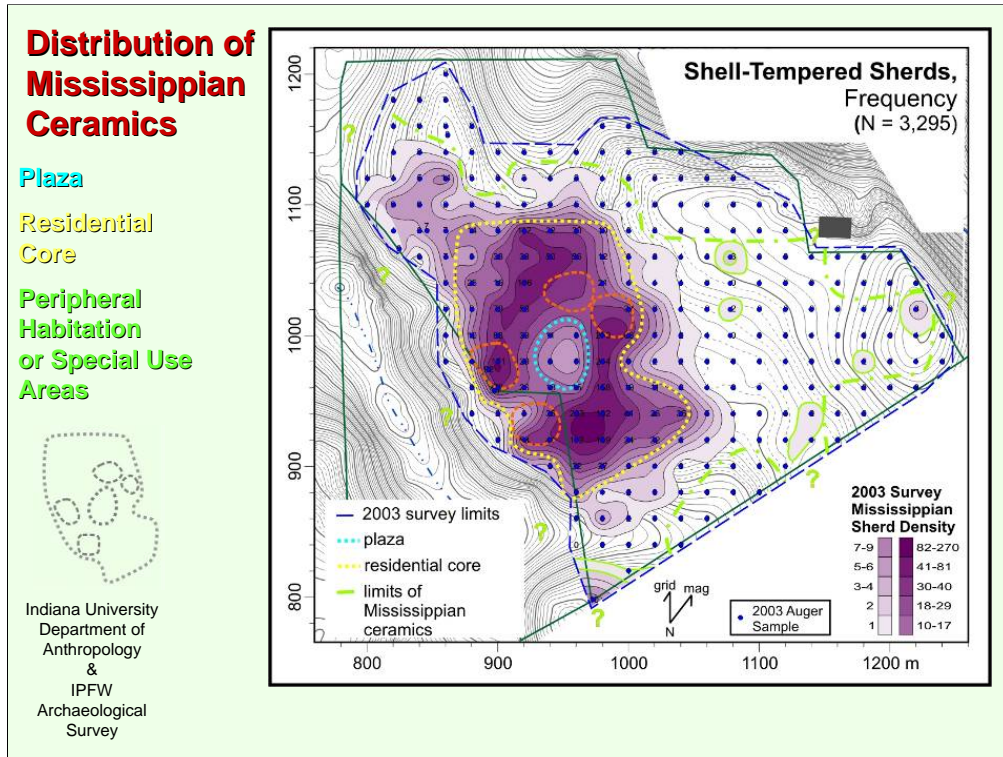
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The low density of Mississippian sherds in the central area between the mounds provides the clearest suggestion of a plaza..



The fall-off in ceramics immediately beyond the mounds suggests a boundary for the main area of domestic use, or the residential core. The sharpness of the boundary is a possible indication that the residential core was surrounded by a palisade or some type of physical barrier.

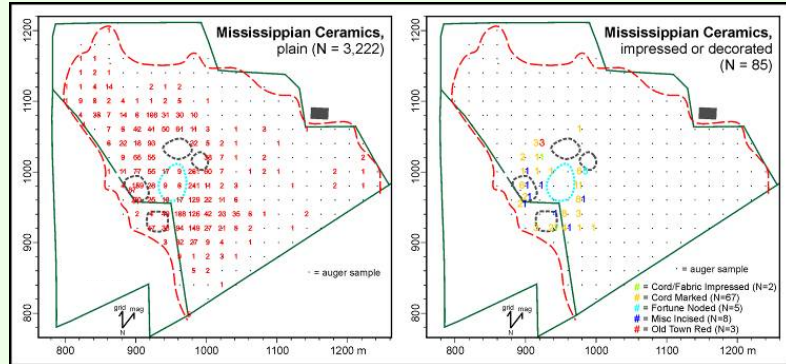


Outside the core are several low-density scatters of domestic refuse that might represent peripheral, specialized activity areas or perhaps scattered early Mississippian habitations.

Distribution of Mississippian Ceramics by Exterior Surface



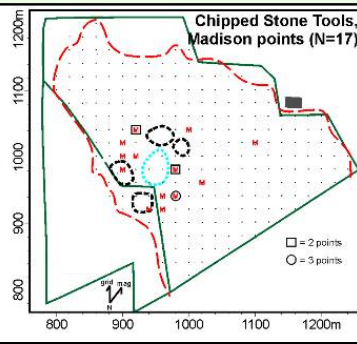
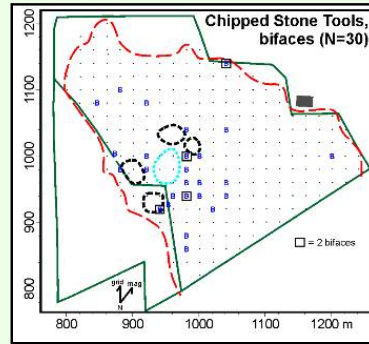
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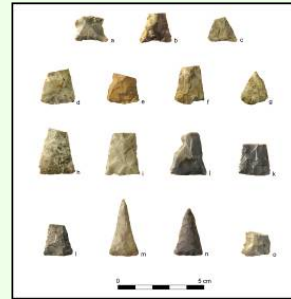
Comparable distributions occur for:

- plain and decorated Mississippian ceramics;

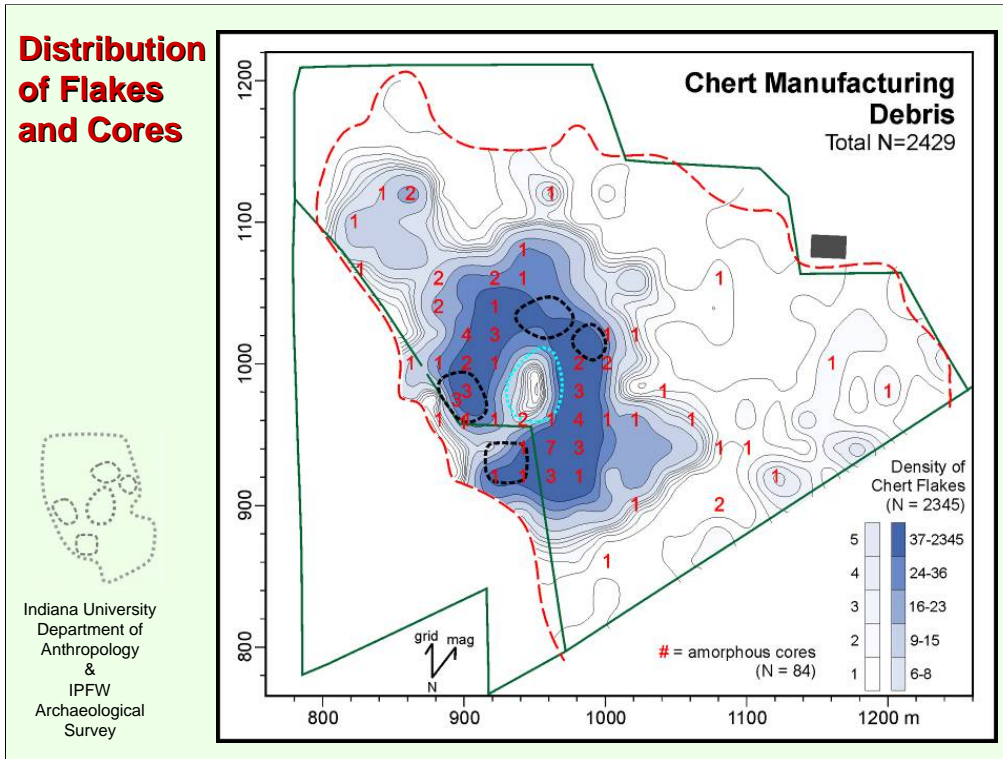
Distribution of Lithic Artifacts



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- trianguloid bifaces and Madison points;

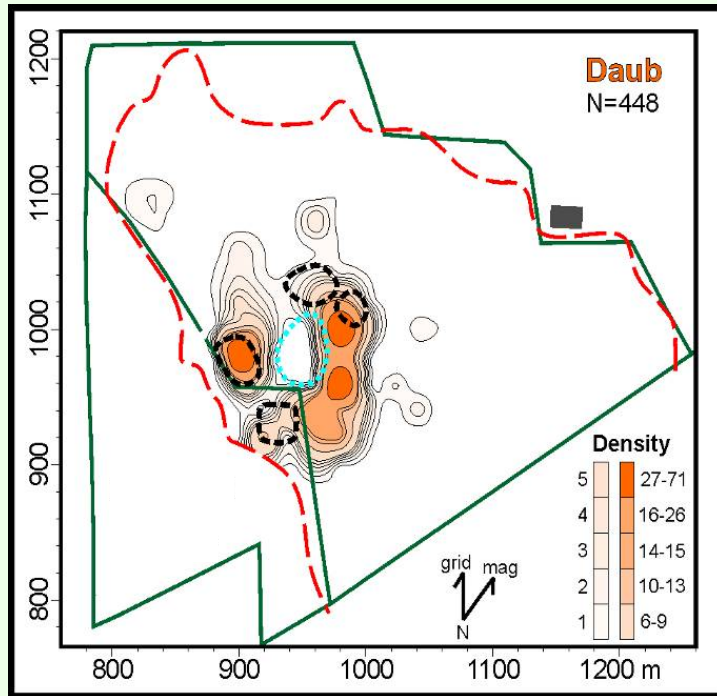


- chert flakes and cores;

Distribution of Daub



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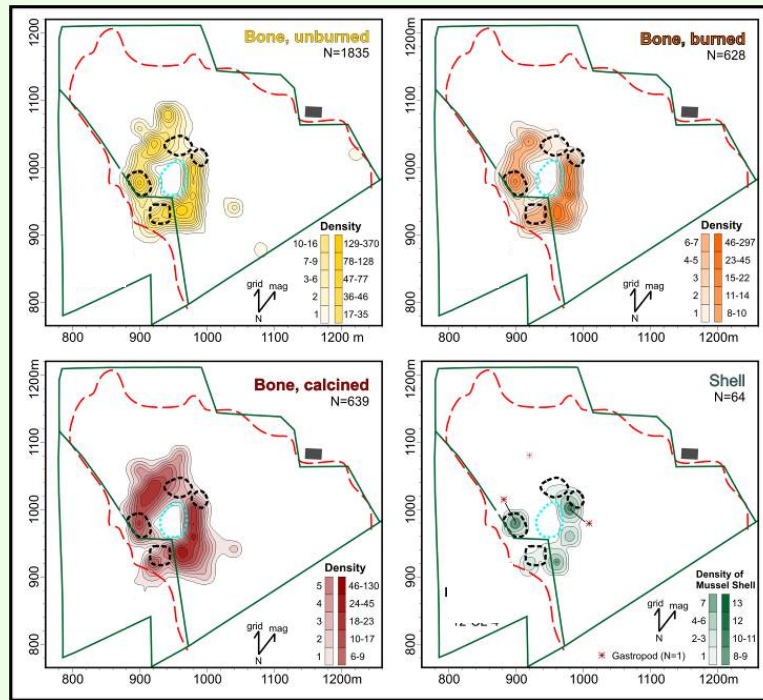


- daub;

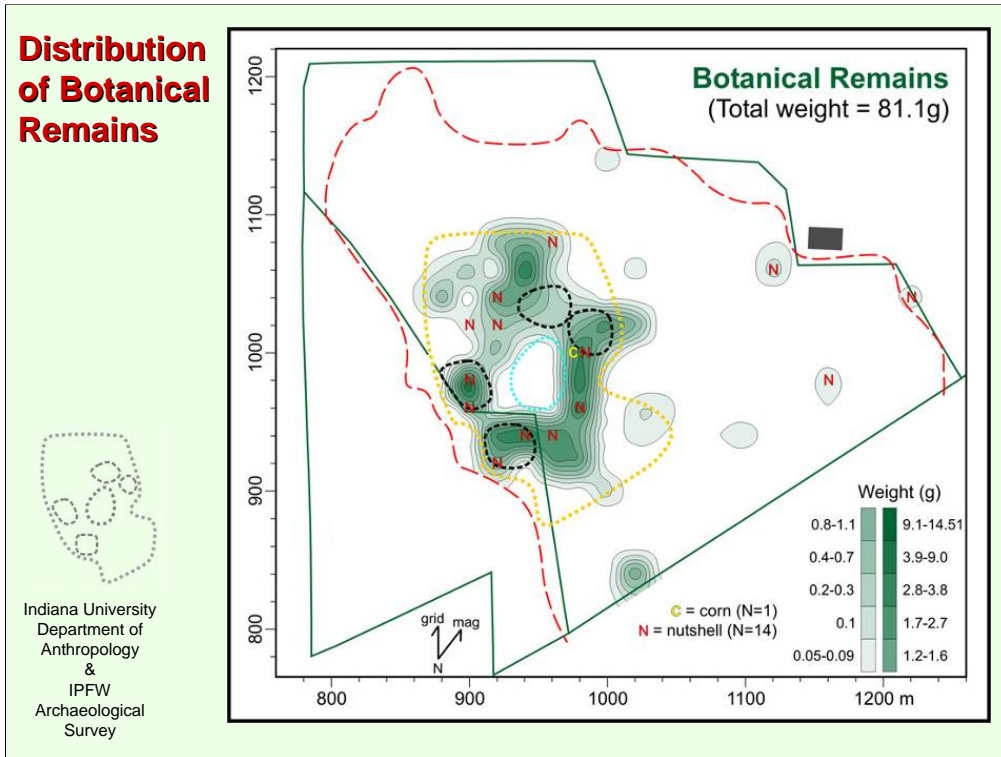
Distribution of Faunal Remains



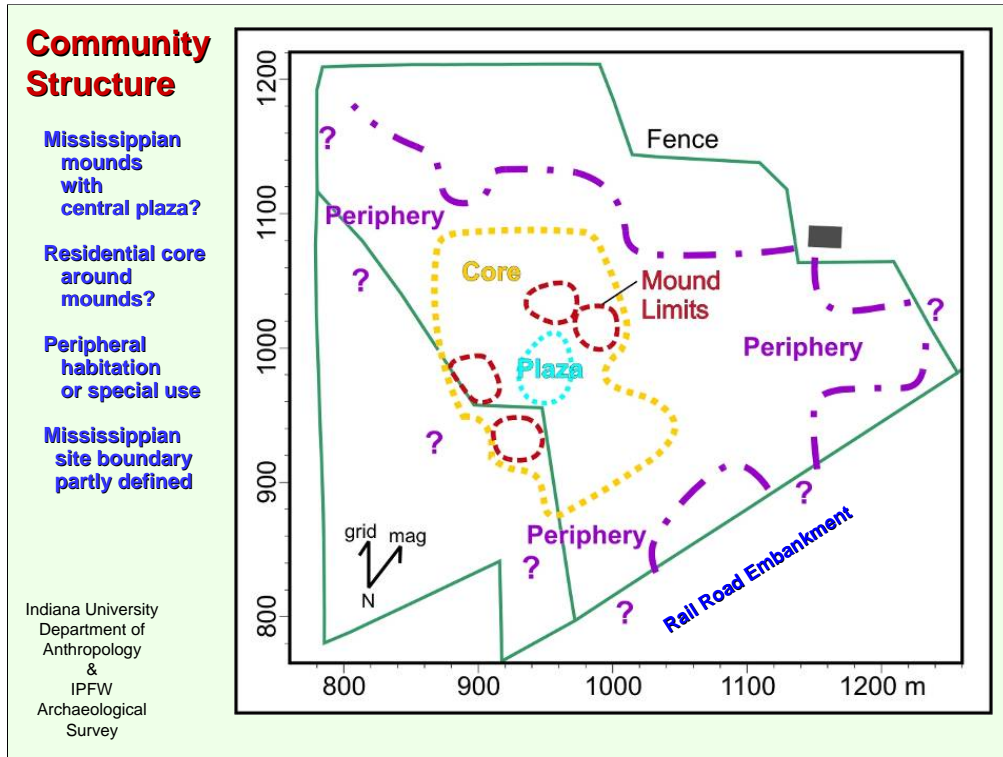
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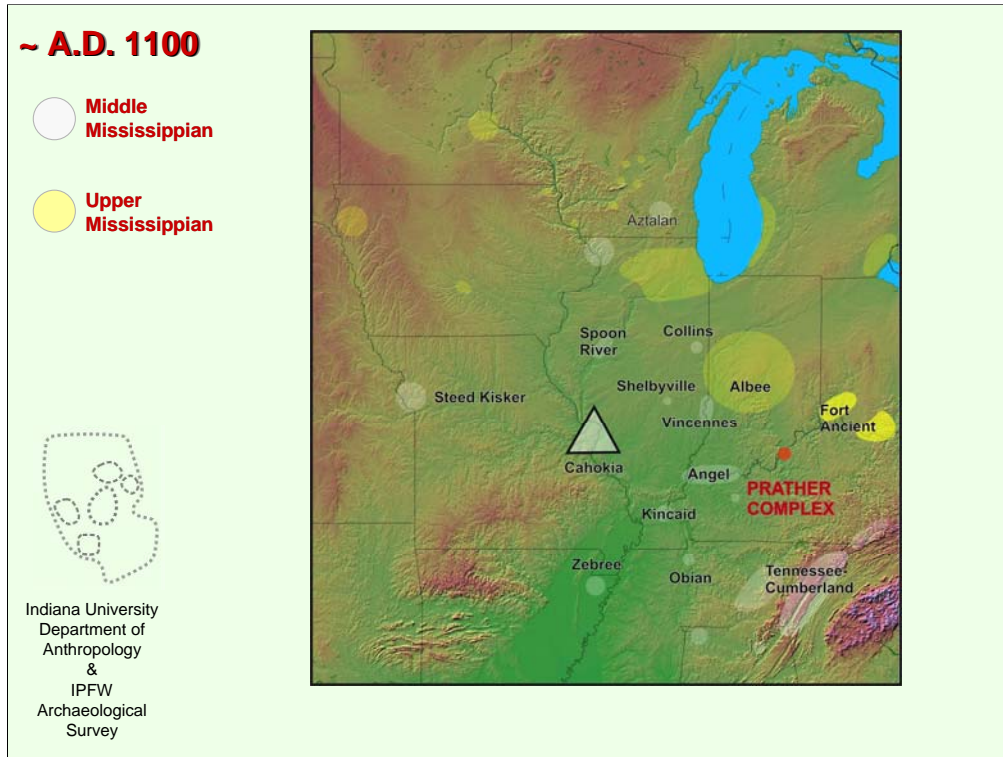
- bone and shell (note that the fauna at this upland village includes both terrestrial and aquatic species); and



- botanical remains, where the screened samples are dominated by wood but include nutshell and one piece of corn.



The probable mound-plaza community structure at Prather and the presence of Ramey motifs might indicate that the Prather site, and ultimately the larger Prather Complex, represents an early expansion of Mississippian peoples into the central Ohio Valley.



To the northwest and west of Prather, small-scale population movements emanated from the Mississippian center at Cahokia. These movements appeared in a number of distant regions of the midcontinental U.S.,

Ramey Incised and Ramey-like Ceramic Distributions (from Robert L. Hall)



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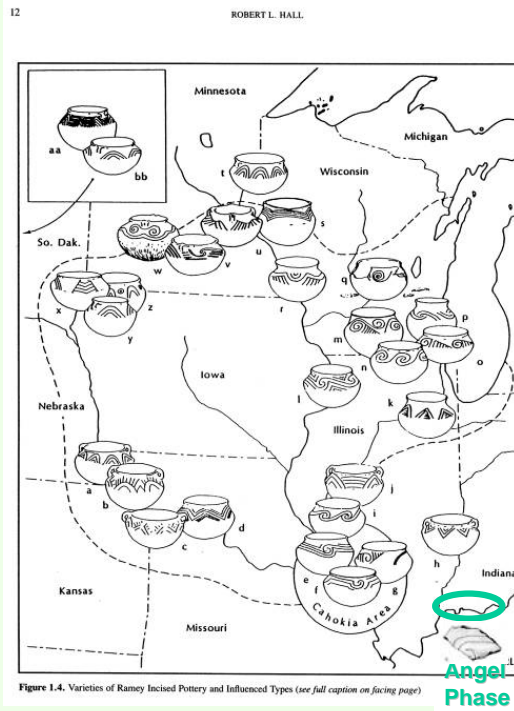


Figure 1.4. Varieties of Ramey Incised Pottery and Influenced Types (see full caption on facing page)

Prather Complex



Angel Phase

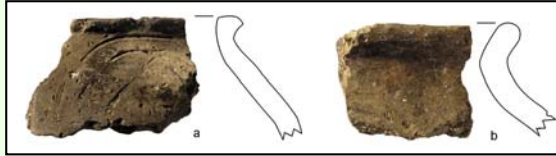
and led rapidly to the Mississippianization of local Woodland populations who then developed local centers during A.D. 1050-1150. This also may have been the case in the Ohio Valley of southwestern Indiana, west of Prather, where around A.D. 1050 there is evidence of interaction between the Late Woodland Yankeetown population and Cahokia, followed by the development of the Mississippian center at Angel by ca. A.D. 1100.

**Ramey
Incised-
and
Powell
Plain-like
Ceramics**

Prather:
Guernsey's
Collection



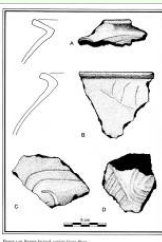
Prather:
2003
Survey
Collection



Newcomb:
Guernsey's
Collection

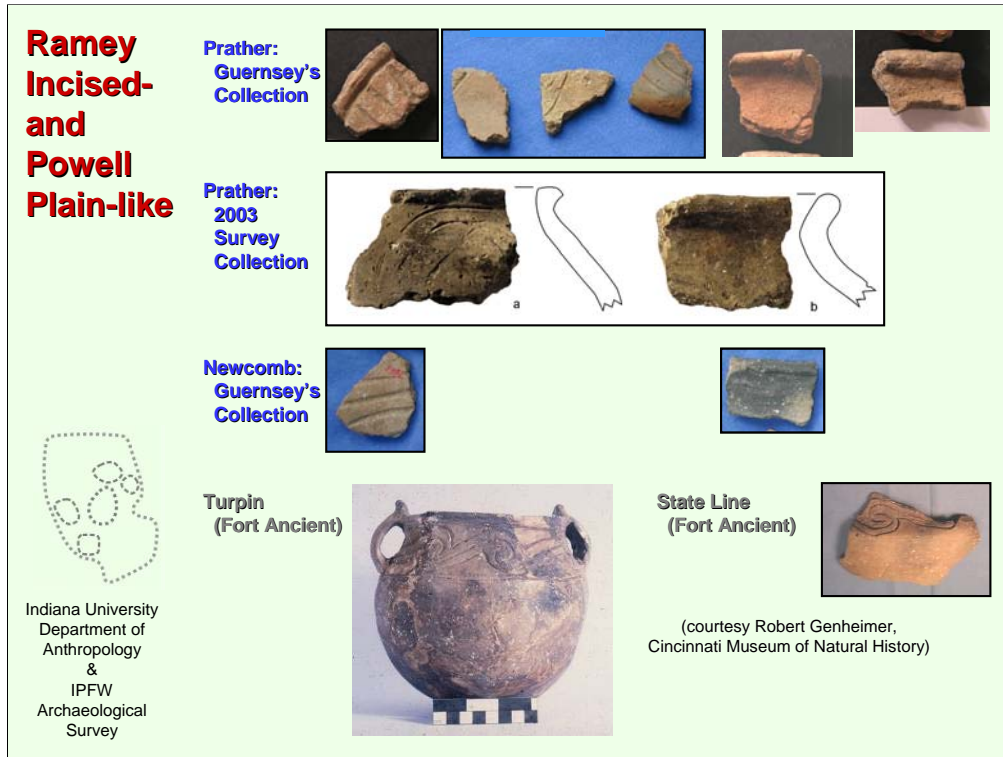


Angel Site:
Sherri
Hilgeman's
Study



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Ramey-like ceramics at the Angel site are a further indication of some type of interaction with Cahokia.



Ramey-like ceramics at Angel are a further indication of some type of interaction with Cahokia.

Northeast of Prather, some degree of Mississippian interaction is evident at early Fort Ancient occupations in southwestern Ohio. There, the Turpin and State Line sites have produced limited examples of pottery with Ramey Incised-like designs, but these are too few to represent an intrusion of Cahokians or other Mississippian peoples. Also, the Mississippian mound-plaza community structure is notably absent.

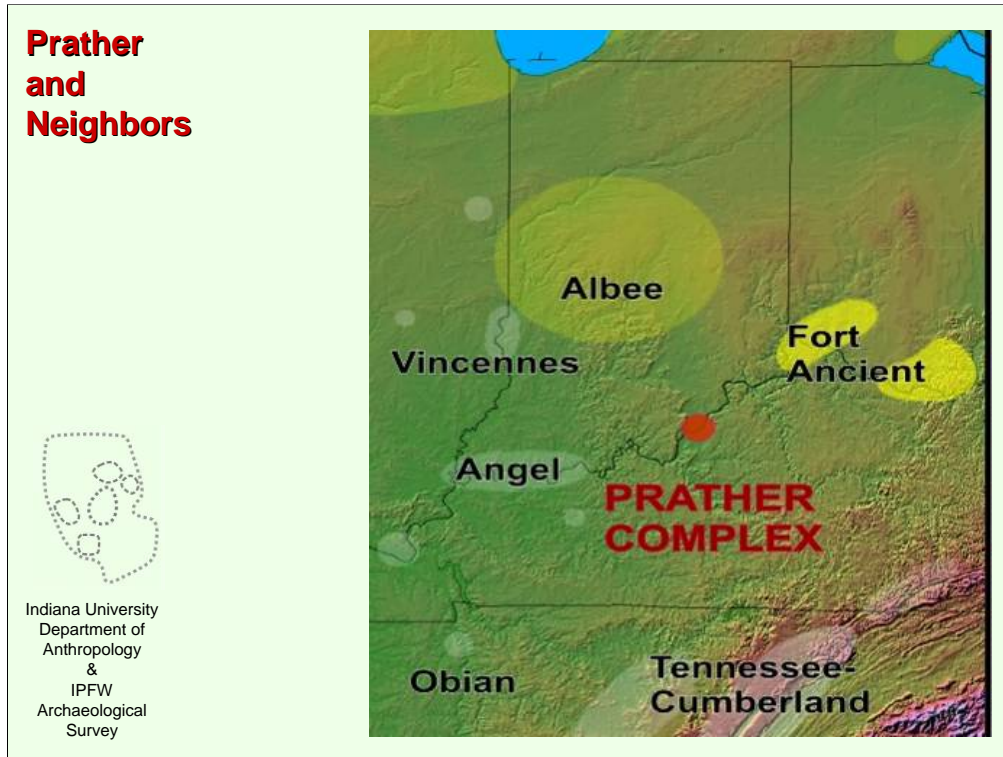
**Falls
Region
Late
Woodland**

Not yet defined....



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One problem for future research is the undefined/unrecognized Late Woodland population in the Falls region. Presently there are no known Late Woodland sites of large or even moderate size, which contrasts sharply with the Yankeetown phase downstream and portions of the Newtown phase upstream.

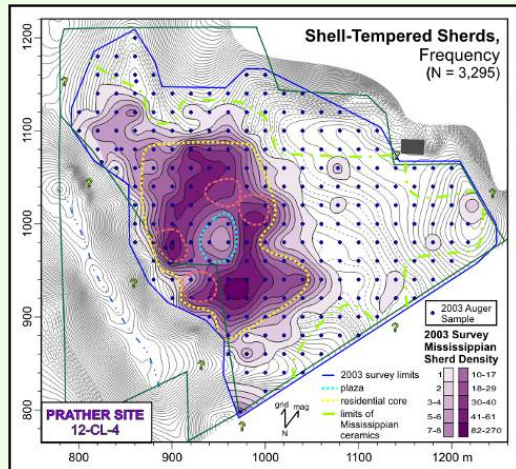


It is worth noting that the Prather mound center, and the Falls Mississippian sites, are set apart from neighboring late prehistoric populations by territorial divisions. To the southwest and below the Falls, the easternmost Angel phase sites are about 85 km distant. To the northeast, there is another “no-persons-land” that stretches over 95 km along the Ohio, separating Falls Mississippian from Fort Ancient populations. These buffer zones may not be entirely social or political, however, since they coincide with the marked narrowing of the alluvial valley both upstream and downstream from the Falls region.

**Prather
Site:
Future
Research**



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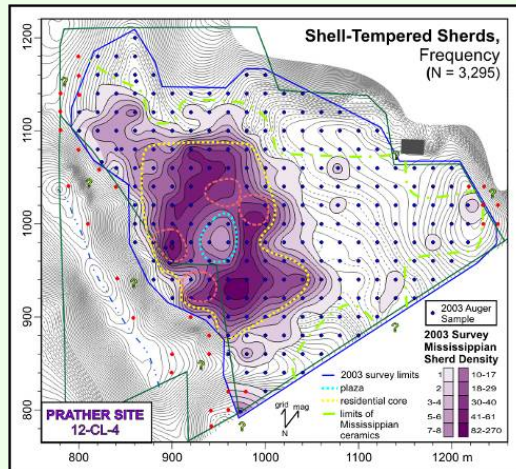
*Proposed for 2005:
Geophysical,
Geoarchaeological,
and Auger Survey*

The results of the 2003 survey have provided an exceptional baseline for future research at the Prather site. In 2005 we hope to:

**Prather Site:
Future
Research**



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**Proposed for 2005:
Geophysical,
Geoarchaeological,
and Auger Survey**

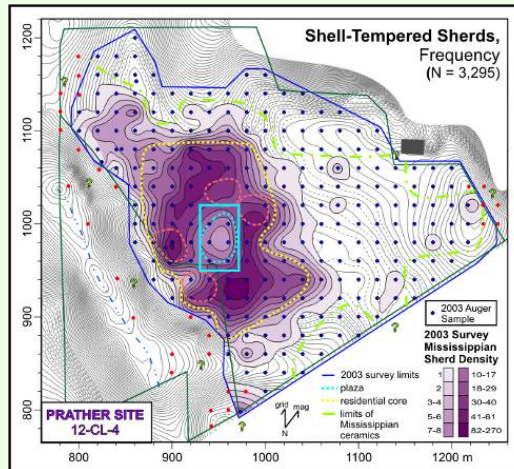
Auger samples (0.3-m diameter) along unknown west and east boundaries

- expand the auger survey on the east and west to document boundaries;

**Prather Site:
Future
Research**



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**Proposed for 2005:
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Geoarchaeological,
and Auger Survey**

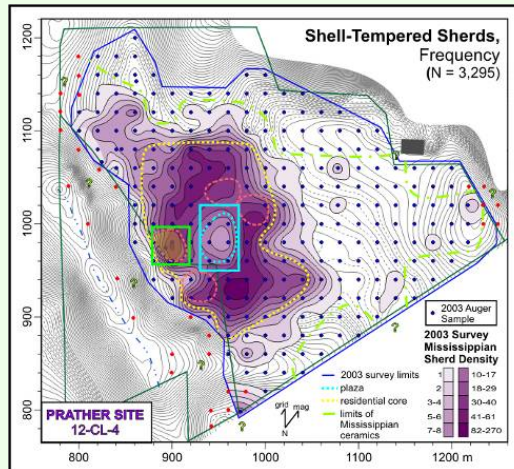
- Auger samples (0.3-m diameter) along unknown west and east boundaries
- Standard Volume Samples (0.25 m²) at 10-m intervals in possible plaza

- excavate close-interval, standard volume samples in the plaza to obtain sufficient artifact samples for comparison with the residential core area;

**Prather Site:
Future
Research**



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**Proposed for 2005:
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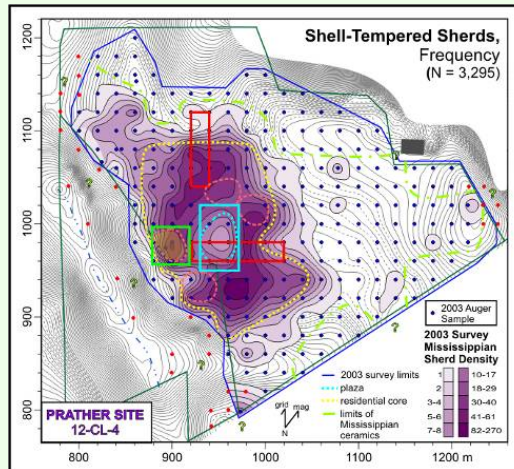
- Auger samples (0.3-m diameter) along unknown west and east boundaries
- Standard Volume Samples (0.25 m³) at 10-m intervals in possible plaza
- Area of geophysical survey and geoarchaeological study at Southwest Mound, including solid-earth soil cores (Giddings ng)

- collaborate with our colleague Dr. C. Russell Stafford of Indiana State University to investigate one mound, using geophysical survey and 2-inch solid earth cores, in order to identify construction stages and to recover radiocarbon dating samples;

**Prather Site:
Future
Research**



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**Proposed for 2005:
Geophysical,
Geoarchaeological,
and Auger Survey**

- Auger samples (0.3-m diameter) along unknown west and east boundaries
- Standard Volume Samples (0.25 m³) at 10-m intervals in possible plaza
- Area of geophysical survey and geoarchaeological study at Southwest Mound, including solid-earth soil cores (Giddings ng)
- Areas of geophysical survey and ground-truthing excavation samples

- carry out additional geophysical survey in transects across portions of the residential core area, to identify probable features such as houses and a possible palisade line; and excavate test units in areas of selected geophysical anomalies to provide ground-truthing and datable assemblages.

**Prather
Site:
Future
Research**



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Bob and I plan to continue to put our heads together to research this important site. Given the range of variation we've seen in Falls region Mississippian ceramics and radiocarbon dates, we think Prather will be key to our understanding of regional Mississippian cultural development.

**Prather
2003:**

**Aerial
View of
20-meter
Survey
Sample**



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Archaeological
Survey



In conclusion, while the Prather mound center is on the northeastern Mississippian fringe, we have found no indication from artifact types and distributions, nor from community structure, that the culture was a blend of Mississippian and Fort Ancient. Nor is the “backwoods Mississippian” label correct. The Prather site inhabitants clearly were not eking out a meager existence in the hills, and were not blocked from access to fish and other aquatic resources. They also were not cut off from interaction with distant Mississippians, from whom they may well have obtained the copper-covered eagle, shell ornaments, and some of the rare decorated pottery.

The people at Prather and related sites undoubtedly developed social, political, and economic adaptations that reflect their position on the Mississippian frontier. It is the chance to learn about the various adaptations at these sites, and how these adaptations differ from those made by contemporary groups, that makes the Falls region an exciting locality for Mississippian research.