

National Register Evaluation of the Dennig Cabins Site (23OR1426)

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This report describes the results of a National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) evaluation conducted by the Missouri Archaeological Society (MAS) and facilitated by the Center for Archaeological Research (CAR), Missouri State University. This survey was requested by the Eleven Point District of the Mark Twain National Forest (MTNF) in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (as amended). The evaluation was conducted as a training opportunity for Missouri Archaeological Society (MAS) volunteers at no cost to attendees.

Description

The survey area encompasses a flat terrace of the Greer Spring Branch of the Eleven Point River containing the Dennig Cabins site (23OR1426) (Figure 1). This area is known as Greer Crossing. The Dennig Cabins site has been surveyed multiple times and is noted to contain not only multiple historic structures, but also a precontact component. The survey area is about 6.26 acres (2.53 ha) protected by steep hillsides to the east and the Greer Springs Branch to the north and west. The site was first recorded in 2013 by Lester Lakey of the Eleven Point Ranger District and revisited in 2014. From 2018 to 2021 the site was revisited by MTNF archaeologists no less than 14 times to assess for eligibility (and subsequently nominate) the postcontact component for inclusion in the NRHP. Ultimately, this nomination was denied. Despite these numerous visits,

little subsurface excavation had been conducted. The current survey focused on the precontact component.

Environmental Context

The survey area is in the Eleven Point watershed of the East White River drainage basin (MoDNR 2010a, 2010b), specifically at a bend in the Greer Springs Branch of the Eleven Point River.

Greer Spring is located approximately 450 m to the southwest as the crow flies. It has the longest spring branch of all the first magnitude springs in the state. It flows for just over a mile as an independent branch before joining the Eleven Point. It is the second largest spring in the state and pumps an average of over 220 million gallons of water daily into the Eleven Point River, doubling the volume of the river where it meets. The spring flows from two different outlets, with spring water originating from underground streams and sinkholes in the region. The Greer Spring Branch begins at Greer Spring Cave, the second outlet is located approximately 250 feet downstream where the spring bubbles up from beneath the center of the branch.

The area is situated in the Salem Plateau section of the Ozark Plateaus Province of the Interior Highlands, within the Ozark Highland major land resource area (MLRA) (USDA 2022). The Eleven Point River is incised into the Salem Plateau, which has created narrow sinuous ridges, steep ridge slopes, and deep meandering valleys. The sur-

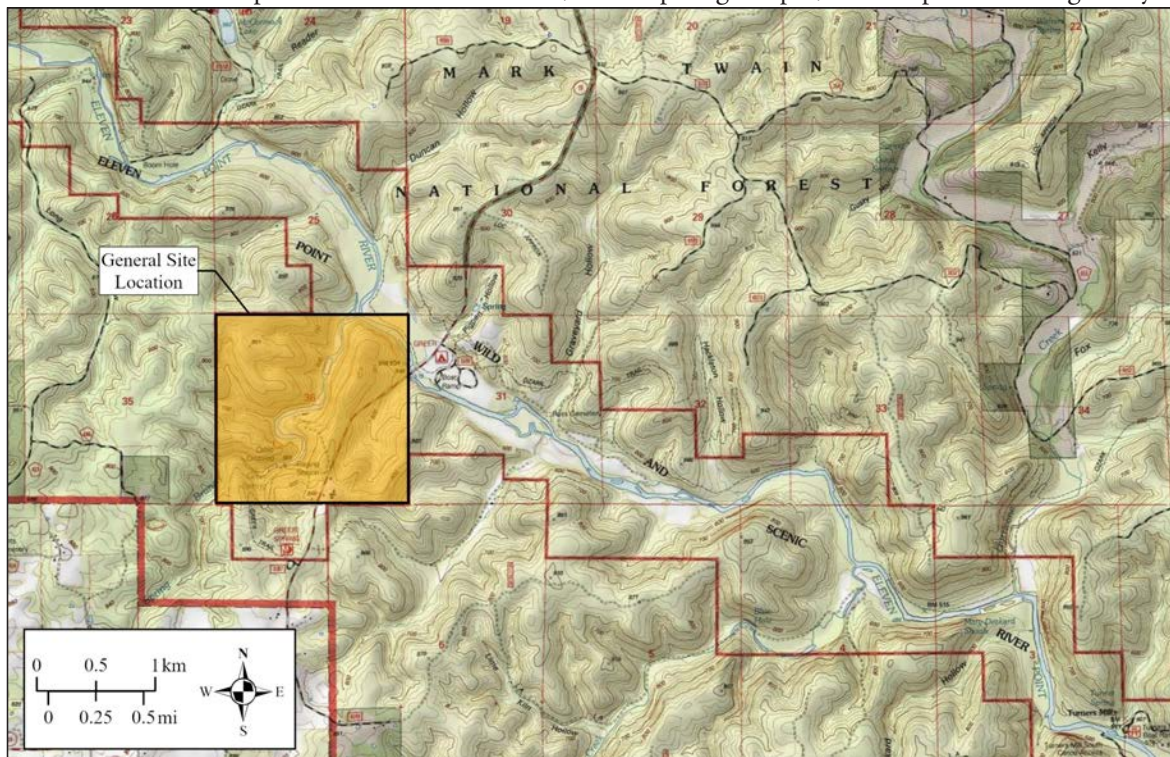


Figure 1. Excerpt from USGS map showing the general location of the survey.

vey area is underlain by dolostones of the Cambrian-age Eminence and Potosi formations, with overlying cherty residuum of Ordovician age (Stevens 1991). After uplift, the Ozarks region was dissected and dissolved by groundwater over the eons, forming steep-sided, meandering valleys with dendritic drainage patterns and karstic features. The larger streams in the Salem Plateau are dependent on springs to maintain their flow, whereas most of the smaller streams have little or no perennial water or surface flow because it has been pirated by subsurface solution channels. Karst landforms such as caves, springs, losing streams, and sink-holes are common in the Salem Plateau (Ray 2007).

Soils

Only two soil series are mapped for the survey area. The Taterhill series (Typic Paleudults) silt loam, 3 to 8 percent slopes in the northern and eastern portion of the survey area. This soil type covers the majority of the survey area (80.4%) from the Greer Spring Branch to the steep hillside.

The second soil type is the Midco series (Typic Udifluvents) very gravelly loam, 0 to 3 percent slopes. This area frequently floods and covers approximately 19.3% of the total survey area. It is located nearest to the Greer Spring Branch to the south and west.

Climate

The modern climate of the study area is characterized by warm, humid summers with considerable convective rainfall and highly variable winter weather with low to moderate amounts of rain and snow. The climatic pattern is dominated by warm and moist maritime tropical air from the Gulf of Mexico during late spring and summer and by cold, dry, continental polar air during the winter months.

Paleoclimatic studies have indicated variability and sometimes significant changes in the climatic patterns during the past 12,000 years throughout midcontinental North America. These climatic shifts have been supported by archaeological data from Rodgers Shelter and the Pomme de Terre River area (Wood and McMillan 1976) and from the Big Eddy site in the Sac River valley (Baker et al. 2005; Hajic et al. 1998, 2000) in southwest Missouri.

In brief, the data suggest a gradual warming period after the close of the last Wisconsinan glaciation approximately 12,000 RCYBP (radiocarbon years before present) to about 10,000 RCYBP. This climatic warming resulted in a succession of vegetative regimes. Late-glacial spruce forests had disappeared from the Ozarks ca. 12,000 RCYBP, being replaced by oak-hickory deciduous forests that persisted until ca. 8,000 RCYBP. Between 8,000 and 4,500 RCYBP, a warm, dry period called the Hypsithermal prevailed. During this period, deciduous forests receded, and prairie vegetation expanded in forest-prairie ecotonal areas. This dry period ended about 4,500 RCYBP when increased moisture spurred renewed development of deciduous forests, and the climate shifted to a regime similar to that of modern times (Baker et al. 2005; Hajic et al. 1998, 2000).

Historical Ecology

Logging, cultivation, and fire management during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries altered the original pre-settlement plant communities across the Ozarks. The natural vegetation of the eastern Ozarks was primarily oak-pine forest with localized areas of native prairie grasses covering some broad level uplands. Except for state and federal lands managed for pine conservation, the oak-pine forest has largely been replaced by oak-hickory after the logging boom of the late 1800s (Cunningham 2007; Rafferty 1992). However, considerable local variation exists with regard to dominant overstory species (e.g., Steyermark 1959). This variation is caused by differences in such factors as aspect of slope, soils, elevation, and bedrock. Trees common to the Ozarks Highland MLRA include native oak, hickory, shortleaf pine, as well as invasive Eastern red cedar.

An extensive and varied fauna was available throughout the Ozarks. Included were mammalian species utilized for meats and furs such as elk, deer, bison, bear, panther, wolf, fox, bobcat, otter, beaver, muskrat, mink, raccoon, opossum, skunk, squirrel, rabbit, and other smaller species. Along with freshwater mussels, a variety of game and fish would have been available in area streams. Indigenous avifauna included quail, grouse, turkey, passenger pigeon, and mourning dove.

Greer Spring is one of the most significant natural features in Missouri. As well as its unique and significant geological and hydrological nature, it also has a diverse assemblage of native fish species and aquatic invertebrates, including some species of conservation concern such as the coldwater crayfish (*Faxonius eupunctus*) and the Ozark Hellbender (*Cryptobranchus alleganiensis bishopi*).

Cultural Context

Various aspects of the cultural sequence for Missouri can be found in publications by Chapman (1975, 1980), O'Brien and Wood (1998), and Wood et al. (1995), among others. The basic sequence consists of Paleoindian (ca. 13,500–11,500 cal. B.P.), Archaic (ca. 11,500–3000 cal. B.P.), Woodland (ca. 3000–1000 cal. B.P.), and Mississippian (cal. 1000–400 cal. B.P.), with each of these further subdivided into Early, Middle, and Late periods.

The Early and Middle Paleoindian periods are represented by relatively few sites. In comparison, the Late Paleoindian period is represented by a substantially greater number of sites, particularly Dalton sites. This reflects considerable population growth. Although there were significant fluctuations in population and adaptive responses to environmental changes (i.e., particularly to the mid-Holocene Hypsithermal Interval), the Early through Late Archaic sequence is marked generally by even more substantial population growth, increased localization of adaptations, and greater sedentism. During the Late Archaic period, husbanded crops were being domesticated in eastern North America (Chapman 1975). In Carter County, the Late Paleoindian through Archaic periods are well

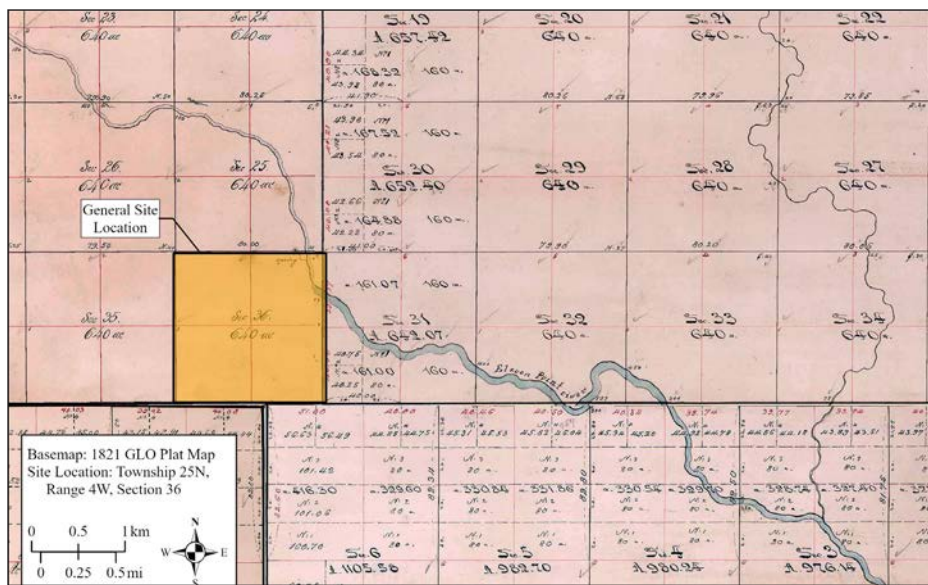


Figure 2. Survey area on 1821 GLO map.

represented at the deeply stratified, open-air Gnat Alley Woods site (23CT351) on a terrace of the Current River. Excavations conducted at the site by the University of Missouri between 1993 and 1995 yielded a substantial sample of lithic artifacts, including Dalton, Early Archaic (e.g., Rice and Hidden Valley), Middle Archaic (e.g., Jakie), and Late Archaic quartzite tools and debitage.

The population of the region likely grew throughout Woodland times and pottery became more abundant, especially during the Middle Woodland (Chapman 1980). Therefore, in the absence of extensive radiocarbon dates, Woodland components are often identified by pottery rather than projectile point types. Early Woodland components in particular have not been widely recognized, possibly because of the lack of pottery or as a result of the failure to separate Late Archaic diagnostic point types from Early Woodland types (Brown 1986; Chapman 1980). Middle Woodland point types are also poorly separated from Early Woodland types. Evidence for Late Woodland sites is more widespread, with considerable numbers of sites in stream valleys. Such sites are characterized primarily by cordmarked pottery and Scallorn arrowpoints, as well as dart points/knives and a host of other stone tool types.

The Mississippian period is represented in southeast Missouri by the rise of fortified civic-ceremonial centers with satellite villages throughout the lower Mississippi River valley (Chapman 1980). Early Mississippian sites appear to have been more dispersed and less hierarchical. There are relatively few sites that could be classified as relatively large nodal communities prior to ca. A.D. 1000. Well organized chiefdom-level villages are not readily apparent until the Middle Mississippian. By the beginning of the Late Mississippian period, villages were abundant and widely distributed in southeast Missouri (Conner 1995). These villages relied on the intensive cultivation of a variety of plant foods, as well as riverine resources and hunting to a lesser extent. Mississippian complexes recognized in the Current River drainage

basin include Owls Bend and Varney, generally distinguished by distinct vessel forms (Wettstaed 2000).

Most of southeast Missouri along with northern Arkansas comprised Osage (*Wabzhabze*) lands (Price et al. 1978:74). Permanent villages were in Vernon County in western Missouri, and the Osage maintained a large seasonal range they occupied with hunting camps for extended periods of the year. The Osage also maintained a number of extensive trails throughout the region, which they utilized to access hunting grounds, natural resources, and trade networks. The Osage continued to hunt and camp throughout their territories during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As the wave of European-American settlement

pushed west during the period of ca. 1750–1825, groups such as the Shawnee, Delaware, and Cherokee were temporarily relocated to parts of southeast Missouri that were traditionally Osage territory. This area was part of a much larger territory that the Osage were forced to sign over to the American government in the Osage Treaty of 1808, the first of many treaties that would ultimately lead to their confinement on reservation lands in Oklahoma (Wolferman 1997).

The earliest historic European-American settlement in southeast Missouri occurred mainly along the Mississippi River, particularly in the vicinities of Ste. Genevieve, New Madrid, and Little Prairie. By the early nineteenth century, the Malden Plain, Crowley's Ridge, and some interior river valleys of the Ozarks such as the St. Francis, Black, and Castor valleys were being settled. Carter County, with its seat at Van Buren was established in 1859.

By the late nineteenth century, the rural landscape of southeast Missouri, including Carter County, was largely saturated with small farms and lumbering operations. Clear-cut timber harvest of shortleaf pine forests primarily for railroad ties between 1880 and 1910 resulted in the rapid boom and bust of lumber mill towns (Rafferty 1992). The largest was the Missouri Lumber and Mining Company based out of Grandin, approximately 15 mi (24 km) southeast of Van Buren. At its peak the Missouri Lumber and Mining Company was cutting 70 acres per day (Cunningham 2007). Reforestation largely began with the establishment of the Clark National Forest, now part of the MTNF, in the 1930s (Cunningham 2007).

Exploration in the Eleven Point valley by French and Spanish hunters and trappers can be inferred from local tradition, but little archaeological evidence of it has been found. The Spanish have been credited with exploring deposits in the area of Eminence, Missouri, for example (Garrison et al. 1976:19), while other claims have placed a

French trading post at Buckskull on the Current River in the eighteenth century (Price 1976:34).

It is clear, however, that isolated Anglo-American cabins began to appear in Oregon and Shannon counties by 1810. Revolutionary war veteran Charles Hatcher, for one, moved into Oregon County in 1809 and started the nucleus of the small settlement which became Thomasville. His home was located three miles west of the present site of Thomasville. By 1817-1818, he had successfully enticed additional families to settle the area, quickly making Thomasville an important trading post, as well as the first town in Oregon County, Missouri.

After three decades, Oregon County was created from a section of Ripley County in 1845. Subsequently, Oregon County was then reduced with the formation of Howell County from a portion of Oregon County in 1857. Finally, in 1859, the county seat was moved from Thomasville to the new town of Alton, which is centrally located in Oregon County.

Oral history and some recorded descriptions provide a glimpse of the lifestyles and attitudes of the first settlers of the pre-Civil War settlements along the Eleven Point. Though these accounts can differ in regard to the dates, names of individuals, or exact locations of settlements, all give a similar description of the wilderness along the Eleven Point River and champion the hardy individuals who established their homes in the valley. The origin of the name of the Eleven Point River itself is not fully clear but has various legends. One such account credits a hunting incident as the root of the name:

The spikes in horns of deer invariably are an even number. One day when one of the Huddleston boys killed a buck with eleven prongs or points on his horns, as the deer swam the river above Thomasville, the settlers immediately named the stream Eleven Points, by which it is known today (Anonymous n.d.:6)

In another account by (Allen n.d.:3), early surveyors were the impetus for the name as they described the meandering river:

Eleven Points River got its name from the Government surveyors who surveyed the river. It's so crooked that in running a mile or two the points of the compass had to be changed 11 times—hence Eleven Points River

Robert Ramsay (1973:46) also records a third tradition, which attributes the naming to early French Explorers:

Eleven Points: In Mississippi River French, *pointe* meant a wooded point of land – a contribution of the voyageur who measured distance on a river by the bends of the stream, as indicated by the points or arms protruding.

Notably, these differing descriptions all focus on the river itself and the ruggedness of the terrain. Clearly, they are the defining features of the area. Indeed, these same celebrations of the ruggedness of the terrain, the people, and the river are likewise highlighted in the traditions concerning Greer Mill, Father Hogan's settlement in the Irish Wilderness, and the descriptions of Civil War activities in Oregon County.

Slavery did exist in Oregon County, but it was not particularly widespread. The 1850 census lists a total of 1,432 people,

with a total of 18 enslaved individuals. In 1863, the City of Alton was used by the 3rd Missouri State Militia Cavalry. Late in the year, Major James Wilson records that Alton was burned in October, 1863, while his troops were away (U.S. War Dept.: 1880–1902), with some suggesting that the town was purposely fired upon by Union Troops at the time.

Though troop movements and skirmishes may have taken place in Oregon County, the damage caused by them pales in comparison to the actions of the bushwackers, deserters, and criminals who capitalized off of the lawless conditions during and immediately after the Civil War. In response to the chaos, in 1868, the Oregon County Court petitioned for the formation of the Oregon County Scouts. This proposed group was created to bring horse thieves, murderers, and “suspicious persons that may be prowling through the County” to the State or County court for trial (Simpson 1960).

Life in Oregon County remained difficult following the Civil War. During the reconstruction and the 1880s, life was described as harsh, and only the hardy survived (Wihebrink n.d.:41). This was in large part due to the terrain. The isolation and limited natural resources in the Eleven Point region limited those who lived there from utilizing more advanced forms of agriculture and commerce as was found in other portions of the state. Because of this, conditions in the area ensured the continuation of the general lifestyle of the pre-Civil War inhabitants long after the war: self-sufficient farms, simple log structures, and minimal involvement in the State's economy. Eventually, one critical natural resource was marked for exploitation during the 1890s: shortleaf pine. The subsequent clearcutting of the forests in Oregon and Shannon counties produced an abundance of new jobs and attracted additional people. By the late 1920s, the hills had been largely cleared and the mills were dismantled, the tram lines abandoned, the workers laid off, and the short-lived local prosperity quickly ended.

The effects of the deforestation were far reaching. Experiments with sheep and cattle failed in the areas where the timber had been cut (Wihebrink n.d.:47). In the end, the resulting soil erosion, coupled with primitive agricultural techniques, influenced some individuals to move away from the river and into the small towns located in Oregon, Shannon, and Carter counties. Eventually, large portions of land along the Eleven Point were purchased and placed under the control of the National Park Service.

Surveyor's notes of 1821 describe the Greer Crossing area as hilly and stony with abundant pine and oak (Missouri Geological Survey 1821). The notes also mention that the soil was unfit for cultivation. Greer Crossing was named after Samuel W. Greer, one of Oregon County's prominent citizens. Originally from Carolina, Greer relocated to and developed the land around Greer Spring in 1845. There, he built Greer Mill and boarding cabin (23OR55) and the Greer Home (23OR54); (see Cooley and Fuller 1977:95–101). Greer became a captain in the Confederate army and later served two stints as a state representative (1879–1881 and 1891–1893).

As relayed by Douthit (1978), local resident Mrs. Geneva Cline recalled the history of the Greer Crossing through

three generations of her family. She noted that in the early 1880s, the Greer Crossing area was settled by Rufus Alcorn, whose family was originally from Kentucky and Tennessee. While waiting for his main home (23OR58) to be built, he lived in a log cabin nearby. The eventual hilltop homestead included a farmhouse, a smokehouse, a partial log barn, a corncrib, a chicken house, an icehouse, a workshop, an orchard, a vineyard, a garden, and a privy. He raised white-faced cattle, hogs, and chickens, as well as farmed the terrace floodplain. The secondary homestead site (23OR57) was settled by Rufus Alcorn's son in the early 1900s. This property included a farmhouse, springhouse, corncrib, blacksmith shop with brick forge, and an activity area used for making molasses. In the early 1900s, the land was sold to "Doc" Allen who lived at 23OR58 until he sold the land to the Forest Service.

Literature Review and Archival Research

An online review of Missouri SHPO records determined that 20 previously recorded sites were recorded within one mile of the survey area, including the Dennig Cabins site revisited in the present survey. Of the previously recorded sites, 11 have precontact components, most with unspecified temporal affiliation. However, based upon those sites with temporally diagnostic artifacts, occupations ranged from the Late Archaic to the Mississippian periods. Fifteen have historic components, most dating to the twentieth century.

In 2013, the Dennig Cabins site (23OR1426) was described only in the context of the historic components, including four cabin structures, a wooden dock over the Greer Spring Branch, an outhouse, and a storage cabin. At least 14 subsequent visits to the site between 2018 and 2021 resulted in the subsequent recordation of a precontact component as well including non-temporally diagnostic lithics.

A total of 21 previous archaeological investigations have been reported within the one-mile search radius. Of these, multiple surveys focused on the Dennig Cabins site area, or nearby Greer Mill. As such, the area has received a fair

amount of archaeological attention over the years. Most of these surveys were related to campsite, trail, or recreation area improvements, and were performed by Eleven Point Ranger District archaeologists with the MTNF.

Except for the Eleven Point River, no features are depicted in the vicinity on the 1821 GLO plat (Figure 2). The area of Greer Spring was not homesteaded for another 30 years. The 1930 plat map (Hixson 1930) shows the survey area in an open area with no structures, yet does confirm the ownership of the property by the Dennig Family.

Field Activity

The Missouri Archaeological Society Field program was led by Dustin Thompson, Daniel Pierce, and Alan O'Connor from the Center for Archaeological Research at Missouri State University from June 10–14, 2024. Students in the program included: Chris Gidley, Juniper Gidley, Doug Gifford, David Gifford, Sean Fry, Loudon Ferguson, Josh Stevens, Clayton Calvin, and Debbie Mantonya (Figure 3).

The current survey was tasked with systematically evaluating the site further, focusing on the precontact component through 15 50-x-50-cm test units. Test locales were selected through stratified random sampling. All test unit locations were pre-plotted prior to fieldwork using ArcPro software, and subsequently staked out in the field using a submeter-accurate Arrow 100 GNSS receiver and the ESRI Field Maps app. Each test unit was excavated in 10-cm levels with the intent to reach culturally sterile subsoil. Generally, this occurred at approximately 40 cm bs. Removed fill was screened through .25-in mesh and the walls and floor of each test pit were cleaned and inspected for evidence of cultural horizons or features. Soil characteristics were recorded and representative photographs were taken for all test units. All collected artifacts were cleaned and are curated at the Center for Archaeological Research.

The Soil Surveys (1999, 2024), did not reveal any particular potential for deeply buried deposits within the survey area deeper than the depths excavated.



Figure 3. Staff and students in the program at Greer Spring Branch.

Results

All test units were positive for cultural material. All but one was excavated to at least Level 4, with five excavated to Level 5, and one to Level 7. Test G-02 located at the base of the slope, had only a single flake in Level 2–3 and was abandoned. Only five test units reached cultural sterile horizons. This was due to the extremely gravelly nature of the soils and limited time for excavations. However, Unit C-03 near the site center was excavated to 70 cm bs to determine the depth of the cultural deposits. Level 5 of this



Figure 4. Smith PP/K recovered from Level 2 of TU J-01.

unit was sterile and only a single flake was recovered from each of the subsequent levels. There was a steep decline in the number of recovered artifacts across all test units when excavated beyond Level 4.

A total of 274 precontact artifacts was recovered. Three diagnostic precontact artifacts consist of a Smith Point (Figure 4) and two pieces of plain, shell-tempered pottery. Other precontact tools include one PP/K fragment and one nutting stone fragment. Collected debitage consists of two core fragments, two primary flakes, 14 secondary flakes, 72 tertiary flakes, 49 biface thinning flakes, 103 flake fragments, and 27 pieces of shatter.

The diagnostic artifacts suggest that the precontact components of 23ORI426 represent the Late Archaic and Mississippian periods. Smith points are common throughout the Ozarks and are the most prevalent point type of the Late Archaic (Ray 2016). The two pieces shell-tempered pottery are indicative of Emergent Mississippian–Late Mississippian periods (O'Brien and Wood 1998). Unfortunately, due to the small sherd size, a more precise typing of the pottery, which may have narrowed down the time period, was not possible. However, the presence of these ceramics and the nutting stone also suggest prolonged habitation at the site, increasing the potential for the presence of features. Also, the proximity of Greer Spring, likely an important natural feature to precontact peoples, makes this an ideal area for prolonged occupation.

Postcontact artifacts consist of a wire nail, a bullet casing, and a clay pigeon fragment found in Level 1 in two test units. The bullet and clay pigeon are indicative of recreational activities while in private hands. Standing architecture represents the bulk of the postcontact component. These buildings were described in detail by Lakey (2013). All buildings are still extant on the site; however, their condition has deteriorated over the past 10 years. In addition to the standing buildings, there are two stone walls from the stream bank to

a small island in the stream channel, one at each end of the island. There appear to be gaps in the walls for sluice gates that are no longer present. The function of these features is unknown, but may be related to mill activities in the vicinity.

Summary and Recommendations

The 2024 Public Archaeology Workshop was conducted in partnership with the MoSHPO and the MTNF to evaluate the Dennig Cabins site.

The precontact components of the site consist of Late Archaic and Mississippian occupations represented by a Smith PP/K and two pieces of shell-tempered pottery. There are two Late Archaic sites and four Mississippian sites listing within one mile of 23ORI426. Although some site forms are unclear about the precise reason these components were attributed, there are likely sites within the Eleven Point River valley to which the Dennig Cabins site may be related. Although the highest concentration of artifacts (64%) was within the plowzone (0–20 cm bs), there were 93 (36%) artifacts in the intact sub-plowzone deposits extending to 70 cm bs in one test unit, indicating continued use of the site over a long period of time. The presence of ceramics and the nutting stone as well as the proximity to Greer Spring (likely an important natural feature to precontact peoples) also suggest prolonged habitation at the site increasing the potential for the presence of features. For these reasons, the precontact component Dennig Cabins site is recommended as eligible for listing on the NRHP. If any future MTNF activities are planned within the site boundary, further testing should be conducted to better assess the presence of precontact features that could be disturbed.

This material was produced with assistance from the Historic Preservation Fund, administered by the National Park Service, Department of the Interior, of the U.S. Government and Missouri Department of Natural Resources, State Historic Preservation Office. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of the Interior or the Department of Natural Resources, State Historic Preservation Office, nor does the mention of trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation.

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