

August 18, 1971

Dr. Junius B. Bird  
Department of Anthropology  
The American Museum of Natural History  
Central Park West at 79th Street  
New York, New York 10024

Dear Dr. Bird

Dr. Wallace Snyder, president of the Florida State University Isthmian Anthropology Society (FSUIAS) in Panama has just written and suggested that perhaps you would appreciate hearing directly of my interest in the archaeological materials from the Madden Lake area. He and others in Panama have told me of your visit there and of your interest in that material.

Initially I became acquainted with Dr. Snyder, Dr. Loftin, and the FSUIAS in making arrangements for a workshop on lithic technology in which they are interested (this is now tentatively scheduled for winter, 1972). Then in early June I stopped there for several days on the way here to Peru and really became intrigued with the material, particularly from a lithic technology perspective. At the same time I visited the Madden Lake area, including the large double rock shelter and several smaller caves nearby. I hope to stop again on my return trip about the middle of September for some further study of the area and material.

My interest in that collection is for two reasons. First, as I mentioned, it is extremely interesting from a perspective of lithic technology, which is my own area of primary concern in archaeology. It is, even as a surface collection, to my knowledge unique as a New World lithic assemblage. In general it appears very like European Upper Paleolithic, with a high percentage of blades (and very good blades), a high percentage of steep marginal retouch, low percentage of facial retouch, and then the fluted points just don't seem to fit that picture. I'm sure these are among the reasons for your own interest in this material.

Second, I'm looking for data for a portion of my Ph.d. project at Ohio State. My dissertation will be on lithic technology, and this material might be useful as a part of the data I need. Briefly, I've outlined the project and will present it in the fall to my committee, as follows. The project is essentially the establishment of experimental "profiles" for several basic lithic technologies, and a comparison with these profiles of one or more excavated collections of lithic material. These profiles of basic technology could be of considerable value as analytic and perhaps as predictive instruments. The profiles will be established by computer analysis and processing of data obtained from flakes

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and artifacts from controlled experimental situations: several workmen producing artifacts in several raw material categories by several basic technologies (i.e., hard hammerstone percussion production of a flint biface, antler or bone percussion production of an obsidian biface, antler pressure production of a basalt point, etc.). The attribute lists for both flakes and artifacts need only those revisions which must be made with their actual application -- at least I think they're at that stage.

Comparisons with these profiles should be (1) a well-dated sequence of material with good non-lithic supplementary data. This would be a check on the validity and reasonableness of the profiles and their usefulness as analytic tools for prehistory. The Ayacucho series here in Peru will, I think, provide this comparison. (2) A rather experimental set of data with fewer -- or no -- non-lithic controls could be compared with the profiles as an initial example of their usefulness as a supplementary predictive tool in situations where preservation is limited to lithics. Confirmation or denial of this predictive usefulness would come with later excavation and analysis on a major scale and with the application of the profiles in a wide range of archaeological situations.

All this begins to sound like a restatement of one of the prime tasks of archaeology, long recognized and pursued in many ways; the discovery in the lithic remains of prehistoric people of cultural regularity and change. But the problem now is much smaller -- to see if I can make it work at all; to see if there really are advantages in establishing from actual and controlled production of lithic materials a series of statistically definable profiles of technologies for analysis and comparison; and even more specifically, would the Madden Lake material be the kind of data that I need? IF there is an adequately large number of flakes in the assemblage I think that it might well be useful -- and very interesting -- data (Flakes are, it seems to me, even more important in discovering and defining basic lithic technology than are artifacts.). At the moment, however, I really doubt that the collection contains an adequately large sample of such flakes, and it remains to be seen whether further surface collecting or excavation would produce that flake sample.

What I would like to do is to stop for a couple of weeks in Panama in September, look again at the collected material, explore the possibility of finding a flake sample by further surface collecting, and also explore the possibility of ~~adding~~ adding a vertical dimension to the Madden Lake materials along with the flake sample. So I am suggesting to the FSUIAS (a carbon copy of that letter is enclosed) that they and I conduct a small test excavation or two in the Madden Lake area during that time. This would be done as a project of the FSUIAS and under their current research arrangements with the Canal Zone and Panamanian officials. All materials and a complete set of drawings, maps, profiles, and excavation notes would, of course, be retained by the FSUIAS.

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I would like to put two or three one-meter square test pits in at least one of the smaller caves, perhaps the one just to the north-east (I think) of the lake-side entrance of the double shelter, and one other; either the double shelter itself or another of the caves in the immediate area. I believe that, with the help of a few of the FSUIAS members, this could be done in a week or two, and there would be at least a little vertical information for the Madden Lake area. And I would also know if and from where a flake sample might come.

In view of your prior interest in the area, particularly the double shelter, I would not like to do this without your knowledge and at least conditional approval. Certainly I would not test the double shelter without your specific approval. I would also welcome any suggestions or cautions that you might like to make, either to myself or to Dr. Snyder and the FSUIAS. Please feel free to contact any of the references that I've given to them, or the Anthropology Department at Ohio State (Dr. T. R. Williams in chairman) or Don Crabtree at Idaho State or Dr. Bernard Wailes at Penn.

If, after some test excavation, things appear generally positive, then a further consideration by all concerned about acquisition and use of materials would be in order. I shall be at the address below until about the 10th of September. Or you could send any comments or suggestions to me in care of Dr. Snyder if there isn't time to get correspondence to me by the 10th (It seems to take about a week from the east coast to Ayacucho).

Thank you very much.

*Carl Phagan*

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carbon copy to Dr. Snyder, FSUIAS