



Tom Patrick displays the cache of "turkey-tail" flint blades he discovered while plowing a soybean field on his father's Brown County farm.

## Plowing Yields Archeological Cache

Late spring plowing on a Brown County farm has uncovered a unique archeological find — the largest known cache of "turkey-tail" flint ceremonial blades known from Ohio.

Tom Patrick, son of farm owner Elwood Patrick, was plowing a soybean field on the family farm southwest of Sardinia when he discovered the site. "It sounded like plowing through a pile of broken glass," he recalls. He also noticed a dark organic stain in the soil at the time, but it was a day or two later when a neighbor first found 30 to 40 flint blades before the younger Patrick realized the significance of the find.

Any "turkey-tail" blade is a rarity in Ohio, since there are less than 500 known specimens in the entire state. Some of these are stray surface finds, but the bulk of the specimens have been found in burial mounds or isolated caches such as that on the Patrick farm.

Turkey-tail blades are named for their peculiar small notched base which looks something like the tail of a dressed turkey. The blade is a diagnostic "ceremonial" artifact of the Black Sand or Red Ochre culture centered in southern Illinois and southern Indiana. The culture dates to approximately B.C. 500-1500. Such blades are relatively common in Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois and Indiana, and have also been found in New York, Kentucky and Tennessee. Curiously, the largest known caches of such blades have been found in Ohio.

Archeologists theorize that the Black Sand or Red Ochre people of this region specialized in making turkey-tail points for "sociotechnic" reasons, rather than for utilitarian purposes. The small blade base would have been impractical to attach to a shaft or handle. Also, the blade caches have often been found in archeological contexts which suggest religious or burial ceremonies. The handsome flint blades appear to have been widely traded during late Archaic and early Woodland times.

The precise number of blades in the Patrick cache has not been determined. A total of 255 bases were collected by the family, and subsequent excavation of the site uncovered 55 more in the remnants of the cache. However, approximately 30 more were collected by a neighbor and sold before archeologists were able to examine the entire collection.



A portion of the Patrick cache of flint blades.

The excavated remainder of the cache was confined to a small area less than two feet in diameter, eight inches below the surface. Nearly all of the excavated blade fragments were in the plow zone and had been disturbed by plowing. All 310 blades examined had been ceremonially broken before being deposited, as is usual with this type of deposit. A collection of associated fragments of charcoal was made, but the disturbed nature of the deposit and the small amount of charcoal recovered, renders it unlikely that radiocarbon dating would provide an accurate date for the find. A more detailed report on the find is being prepared for publication.

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