A Large Bifacial Blade of Fresh-water Chert from Harrison County, Ohio

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The large, rather crudely chipped bifacial blade illustrated in Figures 1 and 2 was found in the estate of the late R. Max Gard, Lisbon, Ohio, and has been donated to the Ohio Historical Society by his son and daughter, Theodore Gard and Marilyn Rawlinson.

Although temporally undiagnostic, the blade is of particular interest—not only because very few artifacts of any kind have been described from Harrison County but also because it is made of tan and gray fresh-water chert. Murphy (1976: 23-26) first described the occurrence of nodular fresh-water flint in the Monongahela Group (mid to upper Pennsylvania System) along Short Creek in southwestern Jefferson County and, across the Ohio River, in the area of Short Creek, near Wheeling, West Virginia. These occurrences are believed to be in the Fishpot Limestone member, not far above the Pittsburgh (No. 8) coal.

Eisert (1974) has also described fresh-water flint from the somewhat younger Uniontown limestone in Washington County, Pennsylvania), and similar cherts may occur at other horizons in the Monongahela and Dunkard Groups, though the geological literature makes no mention whatsoever of such cherts.

Recently, Murphy (1986) has discovered the presence of small amounts of nodular chert weathered out of the Washington Limestone in northern Belmont County (Pease Township). While this Washington chert is very distinctive lithologically, it was available only in very small amounts and no artifacts made from it are known. Its occurrence raises, however, the possibility that substantial amounts of utilizable flint and chert may occur in other fresh-water limestone units of southeastern Ohio.

There is no indication of where in Harrison County the blade was found, and no flint occurrences have yet been reported. On the other hand, Harrison County is, geologically, probably the most poorly known county in southeastern Ohio. Lamborn (1951: 133-142) describes several occurrences of fresh-water limestone in Harrison County, noting that the Pittsburgh, Redstone, and Fishpot limestones are sufficiently well-developed to have been quarried locally at one time or another. It is very possible that small amounts of chert occur in the Fishpot limestone member westward into Harrison County from the Short Creek area of southwestern Jefferson County.

It is also possible that the chert from which this blade was made did not come from Harrison County but from adjoining Jefferson County or elsewhere. Although the specimen appears to be of a distinctive lithology, the chert having a grainy, almost wood-like texture, a large amount of variation is to be expected in such rock units. Although much of the Fishpot and Uniontown flint described by Murphy (1976) and Eisert (1974) tends to be lustrous and translucent, flint from both horizons grades into dull, opaque chert.

The most probable source for this chert is deposits of nodular Fishpot chert either in eastern Harrison County or southwestern Jefferson County; but the possibility of an as yet unidentified source of fresh-water chert in Harrison County cannot be ruled out.

References

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Fig. 1. Bifacial blade of fresh-water chert. The demarcation between tan, cherty fresh-water limestone to the lower left and tan-gray chert to the upper right is clearly shown.

Fig. 2. Reverse side of blade. Demarcation between tan, cherty fresh-water limestone and tan-gray chert is clearly shown near the right end.