Preliminary Report on Human Remains from LA 388

Steven Lakatos and Nancy J. Akins
PRELIMINARY REPORT ON HUMAN REMAINS FROM LA 388

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ADMINISTRATIVE SUMMARY

In January 2003, the New Mexico State Highway and Transportation Department (NMSHTD) requested that the Museum of New Mexico's Office of Archaeological Studies (OAS) perform emergency data recovery investigations at archaeological site LA 388. The purpose of this effort was to remove a human burial encountered during trenching activities related to the relocation of underground utilities. The utility trench is located on state land within a portion of LA 388, a site previously investigated by data recovery excavations in 2000 as part of the Santa Fe to Pojoaque Corridor Project (Boyer et al. 2001). The OAS contacted the New Mexico State Police (NMSP) and New Mexico Office of Medical Examiners (OME) who concluded that the burial was not part of a crime scene. The State Historic Preservation Office was notified of our intent to activate state burial permit (ABE-564) in a letter dated January 30, 2003. Because the corridor excavations are ongoing and a final report will not be available for several years, this document is intended to serve as an interim report describing the findings. The information obtained during the excavation of the burial will be integrated into the final report on excavations of the entire Santa Fe to Pojoaque Corridor Project.
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INTRODUCTION

On the afternoon of January 30, 2003, the Office of Archaeological Studies (OAS) was alerted by New Mexico State Highway and Transportation Department and Qwest officials that a trenching crew relocating a fiber optic line encountered possible human remains at archaeological site LA 388 along U.S. 84/285. The trench is on state land within a portion LA 388, a site previously investigated by data recovery excavations directed by Steven A. Lakatos as part of the Santa Fe to Pojoaque Corridor Project in 2000 (Boyer et al. 2001) (Figs. 1, 2). Following confirmation by the OAS that the remains were in fact human, the New Mexico State Police (NMSP) and New Mexico Office of Medical Examiners (OME) were contacted. Officer Carl M. Maldonado and Ernesto Garcia of the NMSP and Joseph A. Archuleta of the OME examined the situation and concluded that the burial was not part of a crime scene. The State Historic Preservation Office was notified of our intent to activate state burial permit (ABE-564) in a letter dated January 30, 2003. Because the corridor excavations are ongoing and a final report will not be available for several years, this document is intended to serve as an interim report describing the findings. The information obtained during the excavation of the burial will be integrated into the LA 388 site description and final report on excavations of the entire Santa Fe to Pojoaque Corridor Project.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Testing and data recovery investigations were carried out at LA 388 between the fall of 1999 and fall of 2000 (Boyer and Lakatos 2000; Boyer et al. 2001). These investigations consisted of systematic hand excavations that identified a multicomponent Late Developmental period (A.D. 900 to 1100) habitation site with two Late Developmental period occupations and limited evidence of twentieth-century use. No human remains were encountered during the investigations at this time.

LA 388 had two distinct habitation areas: Area 1 and Area 2 (see Fig. 2). Area 1, the northern portion of the site, contained an amorphous surface structure (Structure 3), one subterranean pit structure (Structure 2), an extramural activity area, and a midden. Area 2, the southern portion of the site, contained one multiroom surface structure (Structure 1) and an extramural activity area. Stratigraphic relationships within Area 1 indicated two separate occupations during the Late Developmental period while Area 2 appears to be the result of a single occupation. Following hand excavations, 11 backhoe trenches, ranging from 8 to 15 m long, were excavated to confirm the absence of any additional intact deposits. The backhoe trenches were excavated east from areas known to have intact deposits. All trenches, with the exception of BHT-2, exposed culturally sterile sediments consistent with high energy alluvial activity such as arroyo sand and gravel 30 cm below modern ground surface (mgs).

Data recovery investigations documented that an unknown portion of LA 388 had been affected by road construction, erosion control, and underground utility installation. Mechanical disturbance is presumed to be related to the diversion of the large arroyo now east of LA 388. During the course of this activity it appears that cultural material from LA 388 was redeposited along the eastern portion of the site. The pronounced topographic modification related to this activity (see Fig. 2) suggested that the integrity of cultural material in this portion of the site was compromised, and therefore data recovery excavations were not pursued in this area.
Area 3, defined to include the burial and immediate vicinity, was located just beyond the east end of BHT-7 (see Fig. 2). Excavations were conducted between January 30, 2003, and February 10, 2003, by the OAS. Jeffrey Boyer and James Moore of the OAS were the first to examine the fiber-optic trench and reported that bone was visible at a depth of about 30 cm below the modern ground surface. Nancy Akins, H. Wolcott Toll, and Steven Lakatos of the OAS began the excavations by reestablishing the grid used during previous data recovery investigations. Horizontal and vertical control was reestablished from Datum G. An area 3 m east-west by 2 m north-south (464N/542E; SW corner) was established over the burial (Feature 45), and vertical control was maintained from Datum X (465N/545E). An initial profile was drafted documenting the deposits exposed in the Qwest utility trench (Fig. 3). This activity confirmed the observations made by of J. Boyer and J. Moore.

Figure 2. LA 388: excavation plan view.

EXCAVATION PROCEDURES FOR AREA 3
Fill was initially removed from a 2-by-2-m area (464N/542E; southwest corner) and screened using ¼-inch mesh (see Fig. 5). Following removal of the upper fill, which appeared to be redeposited, excavations continued in 1-by-1-m units to try and identify a burial pit. None was apparent. Lower fill (Fig. 4) was removed from these units in 10-cm levels and screened using ¼-inch mesh. This fill appears to be similar to Stratum 2 (midden deposits) identified during initial data recovery. In addition, a substantial quantity of trench fill (about a 2-m length of the pile) was screened to recover any human bone and artifacts that may have been dislodged during the Qwest utility trench excavation.

The burial (Feature 45) was apparent in Units 464N/542E and 464N/543E at 11.40 below main datum (bmd) as a dispersed combination of articulated and disarticulated bones along with some artifacts (Fig. 5). Many of the artifacts and bones were encased in a firmly adhering soil that made recognition difficult and complicated the removal of skeletal elements. In addition, bone was occasionally recovered from small channel-like deposits of coarse sand and gravel immediately adjacent to and perhaps above the known bone (see Fig. 3). Based on the scattered nature of this feature and varied depositional contexts, excavations were expanded to include 1-by-1-m units south and east to expose any remaining skeletal elements and further define the feature context. Upper fill from these additional units was removed as a single layer down to the gray matrix (Stratum 2). Due to the redeposited nature of this material, highlighted by finding an aluminum pie plate at 11.42 bmd, upper fill was not screened.

Removal of the overburden revealed a compact, slightly sloping surface at the top of Stratum 2. This surface displayed shallow furrows resembling blade scars. The compact and dissected nature of Stratum 2 may be the result of mechanical modification related to the previously described erosion control activities (Fig. 6). This layer was removed and screened using ¼-inch mesh to expose additional elements associated with Feature 45. Following removal of the upper fill layer, the first in a series of three scale plan maps and photographs were produced to document the relationship of skeletal elements prior to their removal. These images and maps were used to produce a composite map of Feature 45 (Fig. 7). In addition to displacements attributed to the secondary placement of the individual in this area, much of the burial shows compaction and lateral movement.
Although a single cranial element was recovered in excavating the easternmost grid, no cranial parts were associated with the mass of bones considered Feature 45. Once all of the bone was removed, a 0.5-m-wide trench, along the 464N line, was excavated in the area most likely to have contained the cranium, if it had lain in anatomical relation to but slightly beneath the rest of the bones. Although removal of soil in this area produced but a single cranial piece, this was enough to merit excavating two 1-by-1-m units south of the 664N line. Again, the upper fill was not screened. Excavation of the lower fill produced additional cranial pieces spread over an 110 cm north-south and 60 cm east-west area and within a centimeter or two of the floor. These pieces were point plotted. One vault fragment located at the base of the balk on the 463N line may indicate isolated material extends farther to the south (Fig. 8).

Along with these additional cranial fragments, excavation of these units identified the most convincing evidence for a cultural surface (probably a structure floor). This presumed cultural surface displayed a fine layer of gray fill, sorted fine sand, and horizontal artifacts consistent with other cultural surfaces identified at this site (Boyer et al. 2001). Structure limits were extrapolated using the relationship of the presumed cultural surface to profiles and fill changes along with the feature or structure boundaries identified in Unit 465N/544E and 464N/542E. Excavations exposed over 4 sq m of cultural surface within the extrapolated boundaries. Although these units are centrally located within the inferred structure, the only suggestion of a feature was an anomaly containing rocks. Based on the lack of internal features, Area 3 may be the location of a structure rather than a pit structure, since pit structures identified at this site had numerous internal features including a central hearth (Boyer et al. 2001).

During the course of the excavations two additional features (Feature 46 and Feature 47) were identified. Both features were stratigraphically above Feature 45 (Fig. 5; also see Fig. 6). Due to

Figure 4. LA 388, Area 3, profile of 464N/542-543.5E, see Figure 5 for location.
Figure 5. LA 388, Area 3, plan view, upper fill (10.90-11.40 bmd).

Figure 6. LA 388, Area 3, profile of 463N/542-544.2E, see Figure 5 for location.
Figure 7. LA 388, plan view of Feature 45.
the disturbed nature of the deposits and poor condition of the features, secure limits were illusive. Furthermore, inferred feature limits were interrupted by lenses of coarse sand and gravel, similar to that found throughout the excavation area. Feature 46 and Feature 47 contained discontinuous charcoal concentrations, and Feature 47 was associated with thermally altered rock, either sooted or fire cracked. Neither had evidence of thermally altered soil (oxidized soil). These features were mapped and photographed with a single flotation sample collected from Feature 46. The presence of thermal features in association with human burials is analogous to the findings at LA 391 located approximately 50 m to the west. Concluding that further impact to the remains from trenching was unlikely and that we had performed as much recovery as the situation warranted, investigations in Area 3 were terminated.
Material Recovered

A total of 509 artifacts were recovered from the emergency burial recovery excavations at LA 388, Area 3 (Table 1). Artifacts in direct association with the burial (Feature 45) consist of a partial ceramic vessel and a ground stone artifact (see Fig. 7). Diagnostic ceramics (e.g., Red Mesa Black-on-white and Kwahe'e Black-on-white) recovered from surrounding deposits are consistent with the overall site assemblage indicating occupation between A.D. 900 and 1100.

The partial ceramic vessel (PP 197) consists of a small unpolished gray jar that has been modified into a bowl (Fig. 9). The temper is a local granitic sand. The vessel shows the same compaction breaks as the skeletal elements. The ground stone artifact (Fig. 10) is a sandstone abrader with sharpening marks (PP 186). A rhyolite architectural slab (PP 199, Fig. 11) (see Figs. 7, 8) was found offset and above the burial. If it was associated with the interment, subsequent disturbance moved it 35 cm to the southeast of the main bone mass.

Human Analysis Methods

The human bones were cleaned to the extent necessary to make the required observations and were identified by side and element. All possible measurements were taken, and each bone was examined for evidence of a variety of features and conditions. Recording and definitions follow the procedures set out in Standards for Data Collection from Human Skeletal Remains (Buikstra and Ubelaker 1994), a comprehensive system that seeks to record the maximum amount of comparable information on the same attributes using the same set of standards. Photographs were taken to document evidence of disease process and trauma as well as providing a record of the remains recovered. Copies of the pertinent forms are on file at OAS and will be deposited at Archeological Records Management Section (ARMS) of the Historic Preservation Division (HPD) once the Pojoaque Corridor Project is completed.

Human Analysis Results

The analysis indicates that two or possibly three individuals are represented by the human remains excavated at LA 388. Information concerning the burials follows.
Figure 9. Partial ceramic vessel.

Figure 10. Sandstone abrader.
Burial Position

The main burial (Individual 1) was a secondary interment. The cranium and most of the cervical vertebrae were not recovered, the upper torso was chest down with upper arms to the sides and lower arms shifted out of articulation (see Fig. 7). Just above or at the fifth lumbar vertebra, the torso was rotated 180 degrees so that the pelvis and upper legs were positioned on the back. The Qwest backhoe disturbed much of the pelvis and right leg. The left femur was damaged but enough was in place to determine it was lying with the posterior surface down. The left lower leg was absent. The right femur shaft and much of the right fibula were found in the backhoe backdirt. The general orientation of the vertebral column was east-west with the cranial end to the west. Legs would have been extended and spread apart. A portion of a gray utility vessel was crushed and lay under and around the left lower arm. A sandstone abrader was just above the arm and vertebra. These may represent funerary objects that were moved along with the parts of the burial. The sill slab and cobbles southeast of the bone mass may have once covered the body but may have been stratigraphically high enough to have been moved by subsequent mechanical activities.

At least one other individual is indicated by a single tooth and maxilla fragment from a much older person and by a duplicate right metatarsal 4. Both of these, as well as a right proximal rib fragment and numerous cranial fragments, were found in the grids south of Individual 1 and are from at least one additional individual (Individual 2). Finally, a right distal rib found screening the backhoe backdirt is almost certainly not Individual 1 but is from an individual at least as young and suggests the remains from a third individual.
**Disturbance**

In addition to the secondary burial of at least two individuals, several episodes of disturbance followed. Colluvial action, settling and ground pressure, and rodent activity moved and disturbed some of bones. Pockets of sand and gravel suggest the interment was shallow enough for small gullies to form and fill before the entire structure depression was filled and leveled by eolian and alluvial action. Centuries later, construction and maintenance related to the highway and relocation of the arroyo impacted the burial. Blading to level the area removed an unknown amount of fill and probably truncated the cultural deposits (Stratum 2). This and a shallow borrow ditch above the burial disturbed and scattered some parts, and probably caused a great deal of the minor shifting and breakage observed. Finally, the Qwest backhoe removed a portion of the left femur, almost all of the right femur, much of the pelvis, and a variety of parts that were previously disturbed.

**Sex**

**Individual 1:** male? None of the more reliable parts used to determine sex were preserved for this individual. Comparing the few measurements possible with burials from LA 391 just across U.S. 84/285 finds this individual more consistent with the males in some measurements and females in others (Table 2). However, the maximum diameter of the femur head (one of the more reliable measurements for indicating sex) is larger than the LA 391 males suggesting a male. Sex could not be confidently determined for the other individual(s) represented. The mastoid process of the cranial case seems quite small, but the fragment is also small, making any estimation of sex based on size speculative at best.

**Age**

**Individual 1:** young adult (20-25 years). Again, the more reliable parts for estimating age were not present for this individual. A small piece of the auricular surface of the innominate shows no transverse organization—ruling out a very young adult (less than about 20 years). None of the sacral bodies are fused, although some may have started to fuse. Fusion for the lower segments is generally complete before age 25 (Buikstra and Ubelaker 1994:43), again suggesting a younger adult. The joint surfaces present (fragmentary vertebral bodies, hand and foot bones) have essentially no indication of arthritis, again indicating a young adult.

**Individual 2:** older adult (45+). This estimate is based on a single tooth. It is probably a left maxillary central incisor (based on comparisons with LA 391, Burial 3 dentition) that is so worn that only a very small (pin-head size) piece of enamel remains. Such extreme wear suggests an older individual. A fragment of maxilla is also consistent with an older individual as it appears that the back molars were lost and resorbed.

**Individual 3(?)**: A single distal rib shaft found screening the backhoe backdirt appears to be from a young adult or, possibly a full-grown child. It is in better condition than many of the parts recovered, is smooth, and the distal end has the deep cupped look of an individual younger than Individual 2. It is a right rib, Individual 1 has most right ribs and the fragment does not seem to go with any of those missing the distal end.
**Condition**

Condition ranges from poor (disintegrating) to fair. Many bones are weathered and root etched. Most are fragile and easily damaged. Excavation, which entailed carving the bones out of a hard soil matrix, damaged many of the bones because they were so soft and fragile. The vertebra were so broken and fragile that they were removed in matrix.

**Representation**

**Individual 1:** missing parts include most or all of the cranium, all but two cervical vertebrae arch fragments, parts of many thoracic vertebrae, one lumbar vertebra (probably number 4), parts of the pelvis, especially the left innominate, the proximal right femur, both tibiae, the left fibula, and many hand and foot bones.

**Individual 2:** Presuming that the cranial pieces and other bone found in the south grids with the tooth belong to this individual, the only parts are a very fragmentary cranium, one proximal rib fragment, a right metatarsal, and possibly the right navicular from this area.

**Dental**

**Inventory:** Left maxillary central incisor only.

**Hypoplasias:** No enamel to observe.

**Comments:** This tooth is worn down to the root with only a fleck of enamel remaining on the labial mesial corner. Wear is in a flat plane but beveled so that the wear is greater toward the lingual aspect, at about a 45 degree angle.

**Measurements**

Some humerus, ulna, and femur (see Table 2) measurements were possible. Most are on incomplete or reconstructed elements so that midshaft was estimated from comparison with complete bones from other burials.

**Nonmetric Observations**

None possible.

**Taphonomic Observations**

Some bone exhibits checking and root etching, and many were broken by soil pressure. None of the breaks look perimortem, that is, they are not crisp but are more like what is expected from soil pressure breaking bones and leaving irregular, almost dissolved-looking breaks. Nor is there evidence of carnivore gnawing on the missing ends of long bones.

**Congenital Abnormalities**

No abnormalities were observed, but many parts are missing or are too damaged to be accurately assessed.
Table 2. Individual 1 Postcranial Measurements (mm) Compared to Adults from LA 391 (left unless right is indicated by R)

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<th>391 B.3</th>
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* estimated, element damaged or center estimated based on comparison with an individual about the same size

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<td>Humerus:</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Medial-lateral diameter midshaft</td>
<td>21.4*</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midshaft circumference</td>
<td>71*</td>
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Bone Loss

**Individual 2(?):** a series of small lesions occur in three clusters on the interior surface of the greater wing of the sphenoid. All are well rounded.

Bone Formation

**Individual 1:** The left humerus has small enthesophytes (marginal osteophytes that probably result from repeated use or over use) on the lower anterior edge of the deltoid process.

Trauma

**Individual 1:** A possible indication of trauma is found on the left radius. It is an unusual irregular-shaped depression found on left radius just below the level of the radial tuberosity but on the lateral side. The bone is dense and it could be the result of some form of trauma such as an incomplete fracture that occurred at an early age and is completely healed but left a slight depression.

Porotic Hyperostosis

**Individual 2(?):** occipital and right parietal case fragments have porosities adjacent to the sutures. These are all remodeled indicating a past rather than an ongoing condition.

Vertebral Pathology

**Individual 1:** none observed, but vertebra are fragmented and many are in soil matrix.

Arthritis

**Individual 1:** none that would qualify as even barely discernable. The few vertebral bodies where the articular surfaces could be observed do not have osteophytes or elevation of the ring. Hand and foot bones have none or virtually none.

Burial Interpretation

The most parsimonious explanation for the remains reported here is one of secondary burial. The fragmented cranium from one individual could have been fairly decomposed and fragmented when encountered and the pieces of damaged cranium spread on the floor of the structure. The torso and lower body were from an individual who was less decomposed when encountered. Some parts were held together by soft tissue but not enough to prevent some separation as this individual was laid on a thin layer of fill just above the floor of the structure. The partial vessel and abrader were stratigraphically associated with this individual and may be related funerary objects. The sill slab and other rocks found southeast of the bones may have been used to cover the body or may be from structural collapse. No potential grave goods were associated with the Individual 2 cranial fragments. The rib that could be from a third individual was found screening backhoe backdirt and could have come from anywhere in the vicinity.
Recommendations

The data recovery program at LA 388 determined that the area along the eastern edge of the site was disturbed by blading. The Qwest find makes it clear that areas of intact deposits still remain in this portion of the site, and those intact deposits possibly include human burials. This should be considered in planning future utility relocation and right-of-way maintenance activities.

The most likely descendants of these Late Developmental period groups in the corridor area are members of the Tewa Pueblos. LA 388 is located just north of the Tesuque Pueblo boundary, and Pojoaque and Nambe Pueblos are nearby. These groups should be consulted concerning the final disposition of the human bones and associated burial goods. Once the SHPO and Office of Indian Affairs have determined the appropriate disposition, a plan and location for reburial or for curation will be prepared and implemented.
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