Can We Predict Prehistoric Caddo Villages and Hamlets Sites Locations Based on Landform Characteristics?

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Landform characteristics

In comparing known mound sites with known or suspected villages, several characteristics can be seen in the landscape of most of the Caddo river drainages (Figures 1 and 2).

- The site usually consisted of an upland promontory or hill.
- The highland protrudes into a network of wide marshy creeks.
- The large creek’s floodplains along with eroded uplands form a limited or constricted connection to the surrounding upland.
- In general, the bigger the promontory upland, and more mounds are present, the larger the surrounding creek valleys are and more constricted the upland connection becomes (Figure 3).

Why is this?

- One possible reason for this selection of this type of landscape is for protection or defensive measures, as it creates a number of obstacles for raiders to overcome and would slow their speed of travel.
- A Caddo village or hamlet could have a number of valuable resources in it, but the one resource that would be crucial to protect would be the village food stores, which provided subsistence and a basis for trade.
- An invasion from the lowlands would have been difficult due to the number of Caddo farms along the approach to the upland promontories that could have served as lookouts and could raise the alarm if someone was approaching (Figure 8).
- While villages are ethnographically and archeologically known not to always have mounds, there are few examples to use as data. Village sites like 41RK214 and suspected 41AN201 may have been obscured over time.
- Keep in mind that not all villages on a protected promontory will have mounds, as it appears the villages came first, at least when the mound is covering a pre-existing burned structure. If the village did not experience the triggering event to construct the mound before the village was abandoned, the village will not have a mound or it may have been obscured over time.
- Many good examples of these types of sites of either single or multiple mounds can be found on the Cypress Creek, Sabine River, and the Neches/Angeline drainages. In contrast, such settings are hard to find along the Red River and most portions of the Sulphur River drainages due to low relief. Therefore, there are few examples on the Red River and Sulphur River drainages.

What research shows

- Note on the 1691 Teran map of a Caddo village (Figure 4) that if a group of invaders entered the village by the upland entrance they would confront a wall of brush that would make them have to decide to go either to the right or left and make a blind turn into a wide open plaza that is surrounded on all sides by brush and trees. The village is protected by multiple walls of vegetation making each Caddo homestead barricaded and no roads or alleys to use in the raid.
- Mounds themselves appear not to be well protected, but the villages do, as they are either in a higher location when the mound is on the floodplain, or the upland entrance leads to the mound and associated plazas, with the village behind them.
- The Caddo favored peninsula like land forms that were very narrow and had large creek valleys surrounding them and merging together at the lower end of the landform. In many cases the mound’s and presumably the village are near the upland connection or entrance leaving the rest of the peninsula strip controlled and protected by the main village (Figure 7).
- Not surprisingly, two track and county roads depicted on topographic maps can trace possible prehistoric upland paths to these upland promontories with Mounds and villages.
- A number of surveyed mound sites have multiple Caddo farmsteads along the approach to the upland promontories that could have served as lookouts and could raise the alarm if someone was approaching (Figure 8).
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