



## The Archeological Campaign of 1937: Whitten Site

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Article Summary: This is one of a series of 1937 archeological site reports that can be accessed individually. The series includes: [Ashland Site](#), [Pawnee Creek Site](#), [Cornish Site](#), [Fontenelle Forest Site](#), [North Plattsmouth Site](#), [Majors Site](#), [Williams Site](#), [Heywood Site](#), [Osborne Site](#), [Whitten Site](#), [Morehead Site](#), [Indian Cave](#), [McKissick Site](#), [Conclusion](#).

Cataloging Information:

Photographs / Images: Burial 1: (3 views), pots (2 views), shell beads and bone armlets, slab covered pit

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## WHITTEN SITE

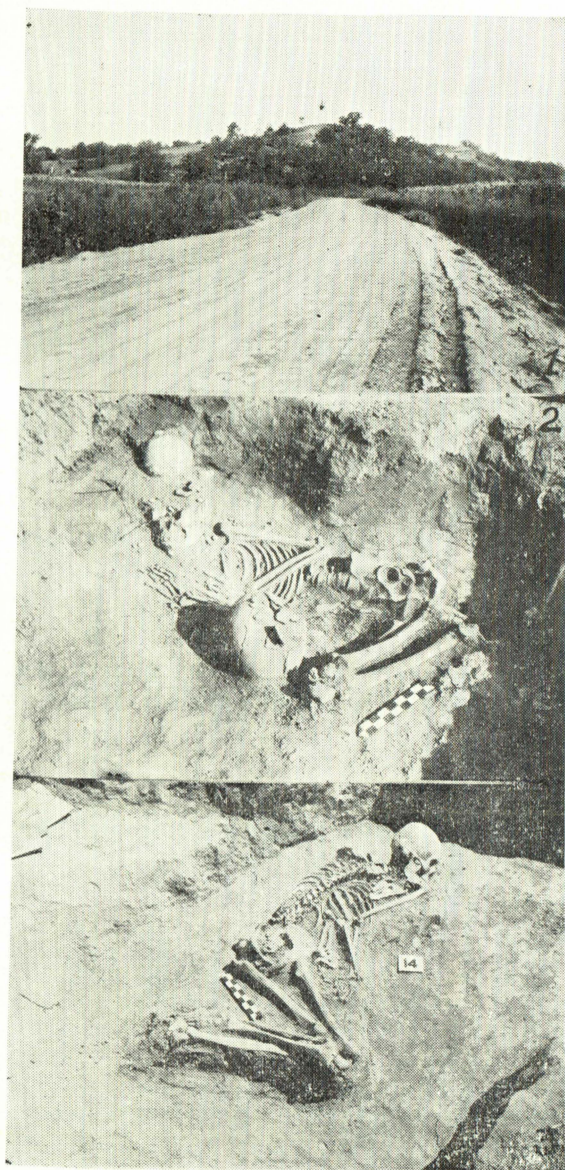
The original presence of three mounds surmounting the bluffs south of Brownville and the removal of skeletal material from them was reported to the Survey. A visit to the site revealed that cultivation had leveled any former elevations, but the presence of burials was ascertained. A 75 foot trench carried along the axis of the ridge, which bordered the broad Missouri River bottoms.

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50. Wedel, 1935, p. 204.

Cooper 1936, p. 58 and Plate XXVI.

51. Strong, 1935, p. 262.



# PLATE XXI

1. Burial 1, Whitten Site (arrow).
2. Whitten Site, Burial 1, Skeleton 7, with pot in situ.
3. Whitten Site, Burial 1, Skeleton 14.

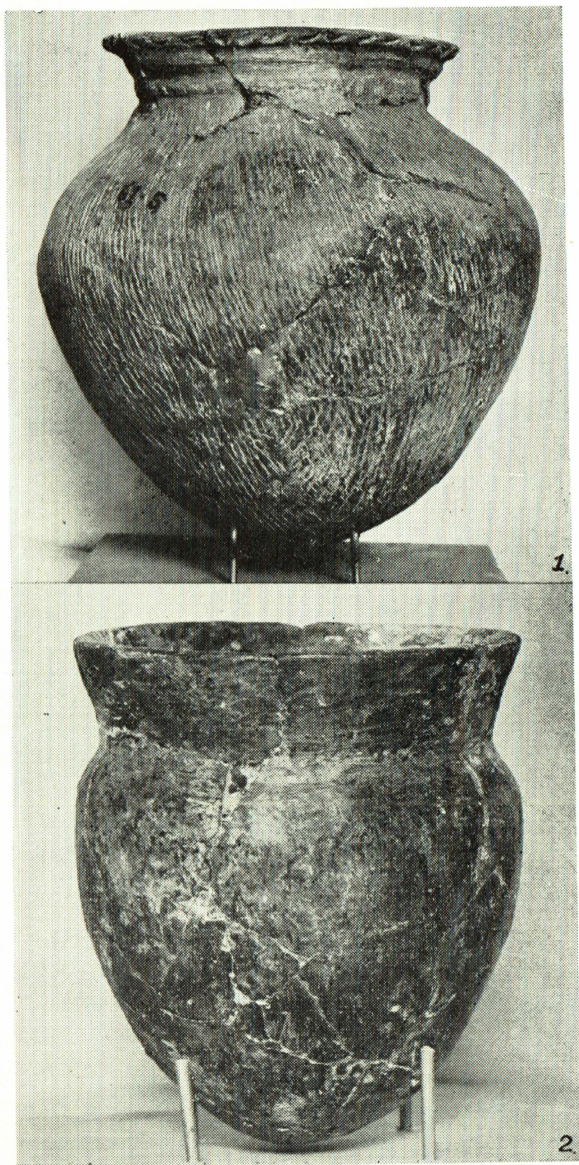
showed the presence of human remains concentrated in two areas. The nature of the soil, extremely clean even where necessarily disturbed by human activity, rendered it generally impossible to determine the boundaries of disturbed areas. We were startled in several instances to encounter complete skeletons in soil which we had confidently labeled as undisturbed loess, and in a test 6½ feet deep beneath the general burial level one-half of a human mandible was found in apparently clean soil at a depth of 44 inches.

Near the south end of the trench five primary burials occupied an area 6½ feet long by 4½ feet wide. At a depth of 16 inches beneath the surface lay the skeleton of an adolescent, No. 7, fully flexed on the right side, with its head to the east. Associated with it were several cultural objects. Near the knees stood a grit-tempered cord-marked pot, 8¼ inches in greatest diameter and 8½ inches high with a sub-conical base, high shoulder, constricted neck and a pronouncedly flaring rim which is encircled by three broad trailed lines, and bears, adjacent to the lip, a series of short diagonal punctations (Plates XXI, 2; XXII, 1). Ornaments consisted of four bone armlets around the right radius and ulna near the wrist and a large number of shell beads near the head (Plate XXIII, 1). The former are long narrow thin objects, perforated at each end and curved to a bow shape, and the beads are of the variety from the burials at the Heywood Site described above, in which the perforation was made by grinding down one side of the shell. All the beads recovered from the site were of this type.

On the same level and immediately west of this skeleton were the bones of an infant fully flexed on the right side with the head to the south. In the region of the skull there were a number of beads like those just described.

Upon the removal of skeleton 7, three more flexed burials, of which two were adults and one an infant,





# PLATE XXII

1. Pot found with Skeleton 7, Burial 1, Whitten Site. Restored. Height  $8\frac{1}{2}$  inches; greatest diameter,  $8\frac{1}{4}$  inches.
2. Pot found with Skeletons 8 and 16, Burial 1, Whitten Site. Restored. Height,  $4\frac{5}{8}$  inches; greatest diameter,  $3\frac{7}{8}$  inches.

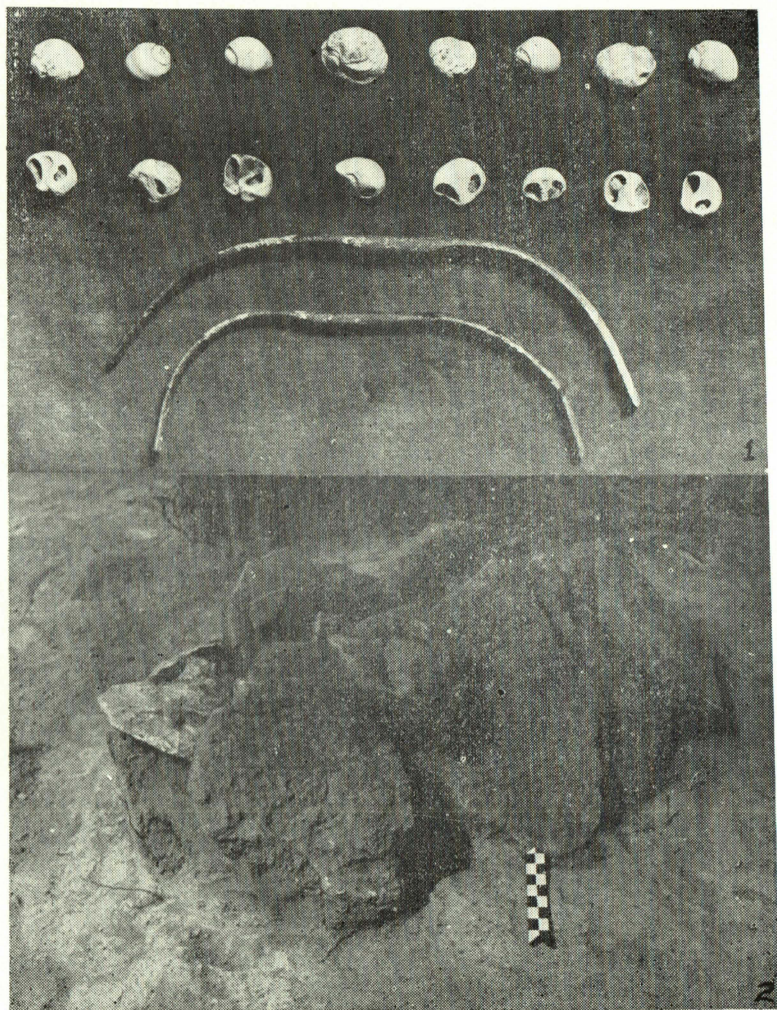
were exposed lying immediately beneath. The heads of the two adults lay in close proximity—one, a male, to the north of the fully flexed body; the other, a female (Plate XXI, 3), the legs of which were semi-flexed and the arms extended and slightly flexed, to the east. An infant lay on its left side just in front of the latter. Shell beads were numerous near the skulls of the female and the infant, and about the lower right arm of the latter were six armlets like those found with Skeleton No. 7.

Immediately east of this group of burials were the skeletons of two children lying side by side, one of which was fully flexed on the left side with the head to the southwest. The complete position of the other, whose head was to the northeast, is uncertain, but it was probably extended on the back. Shell beads were numerous in the soil about the skulls.

Several adult bones were found scattered in the soil above the last two skeletons, and over a rather large area to the south bones of individuals of various ages occurred haphazardly from near the surface to a depth of 36 inches.

In the north end of the trench was another area throughout which bone fragments were found to a depth of 26 inches. At a depth of 15 inches lay parts of two individuals extended on their backs. One consisted of the pelvis, a few lumbar vertebrae and the leg bones, all in articulation, while only a complete leg and a lower leg remained of the other. A skull lay near the pelvis of one and skull fragments and other bones lay 4 feet to the northwest. To the west at a depth of 26 inches were found articulated parts of two extended skeletons, an adult and an infant. Near the head of the infant and the right wrist of the adult stood a small grit-tempered pot with a sub-conical base, a slightly constricted neck and a wide mouth (Plate XXII, 2). The paste, tempered with crushed granite, is rather flaky and the surface is smooth and in places somewhat polished. Its total height is  $4\frac{5}{8}$





# PLATE XXIII

1. Shell beads and bone armlets, Burial 1, Whitten Site.
2. Slab covered pit, Whitten Site.

inches and both the greatest diameter of the body and the mouth diameter are  $3\frac{7}{8}$  inches.

Between the two burial areas was an oval pit 4 feet long and  $2\frac{1}{2}$  feet wide, which had been covered with rough unshaped limestone slabs (Plate XXIII, 2). Probably originally supported by timbers, the slabs had settled at one side to the floor of the pit, which was at a depth of 16 inches beneath the surface. At the time of excavation no trace of bone nor any cultural materials were present in the pit, so whether or not it originally contained a burial is not known.

The situation here is difficult to interpret. Scattered bones occur over too large an area to be readily accounted for on the basis of posthumous disturbance, and on the other hand the disposition of partially articulated skeletons seems peculiar. Nevertheless, the most reasonable explanation of the presence of only partially articulated individuals and of scattered bones is probably that of secondary interment.

Several artifacts of various materials were found in the soil of the areas excavated. These included a small number of pottery sherds, an end scraper, a few retouched flakes, several fragments of sandstone abraders, a fragment of a large flat antler object with several perforations, and a large number of shell beads. The pottery is invariably grit-tempered, usually cord-marked, and varies from flaky to granular. The rims are flaring and with one exception are decorated on the exterior surface with either horizontal or diagonal incised lines; they are impressed at the juncture of the exterior surface and the lip.

The pottery recovered from these burials is not assignable to any complex thus far defined in this region, and most of the other artifacts are of such widespread distribution as to be worthless in determining cultural relationships. The peculiar shell beads and the armlets are exceptions, it is true, but their affiliations are as yet



practically unknown. While beads of this type have been found in Upper Republican burials, they occurred very rarely among large quantities of shell beads of an entirely distinct type, and are probably indicative of an influence from some other culture. As for armlets of this particular form, we are unaware of their occurrence elsewhere in sites thus far investigated. No village site was found in the immediate vicinity, although more careful search might reveal one. At the present time all that can be said is that here were buried the dead of some group whose identity we do not yet know.

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