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The Calf Creek Horizon: A Mid-Holocene Hunter-Gatherer Adaptation in the Central and Southern Plains of North America


Reviewed by Metin I. Eren, Department of Anthropology, Kent State University, Kent, OH

The first time a reader picks up Lohse et alia’s *The Calf Creek Horizon (CCH)*, s/he will be awestruck. Only a few times in my career have I come across a tome with as much care and production value as *CCH*. This 600+ page monster possesses hundreds of full color, glossy figures, images, and maps; thick, heavy pages; oodles of data tables and appendices; and 22 chapters detailing many aspects of the mid-Holocene’s Calf Creek archaeological culture on the North American Central and Southern Plains. Indeed, even small details—like black backgrounds for lithic artifacts—must have come at no small printing cost, but substantially enhance the reader experience. The blood, sweat, and tears the editors must have put into this tome is palpable, and that they pulled it off is a career-level achievement.

The focus, and strength, of *CCH* is data presentation and description. *CCH* is divided into three sections, “Environmental and Temporal Contexts,” “Technical Perspectives,” and “Regional Records.” Lithics, faunal remains, phytoliths, site stratigraphy, site location, isotopes, radiocarbon dates, and more are all made available to the reader. And that avocational archaeologists, collectors, and citizen scientists played no small part in this endeavor should be celebrated. Between the chapter titles and the comprehensive index any data a reader is looking for are easily accessed. Also sprinkled throughout many chapters are nuggets of history regarding important sites, excavations, and people who have contributed ideas toward understanding the Calf Creek culture.

I was not always convinced by particular arguments throughout the volume. For example, the notion that Calf Creek was some sort of “cultural revitalization movement” did not make a lot of sense to me, nor was it well supported. Nor was I convinced that a “short chronology” of the Calf Creek culture is necessarily correct or should be adopted by researchers. And, despite the large quantity of lithic data, proportionally there was little in the way of true lithic analysis (sensu Clarke 1968; Lycett and Chauhan 2010). But save for a few chapters, I do not get the sense that any of the editors or authors were wed to any pet hypothesis because, to reiterate, the purpose of this volume is the details, description, and data, not analysis or synthesis. Indeed, the editors put an exclamation point on this emphasis by excluding a final “summary” or “discussant” chapter. Upon reflection, I think such an exclusion works quite well, and is an approach other editors might consider adopting.
Book Review

*CCH* is a volume that hunter-gatherer archaeologists around the world should have on their bookshelf. I would not be the least surprised if a florescence of Calf Creek studies occurs over the next several years—Lohse et alia have provided the spark, the data, and the questions to be tested. For their monumental accomplishment, the *CCH* editors and contributors are to be congratulated.

References
