

## Purpose at Welling: Additional Considerations Regarding Interpretation

Mark F. Seeman , Larry Morris, and Garry L. Summers

*Diez-Martin and colleagues (2021) experimentally reduce four bifaces and argue that the resultant flakes are smaller and less uniform than those found at the Welling site (33Co2). Welling is an early Paleoindian (Clovis) site excavated by Olaf Prufer over 50 years ago. Based on the experiment, the authors conclude that the site was a “collector-like” base camp and that our previous interpretation must be incorrect. Here, we argue that Diez-Martin and colleagues have mischaracterized our conclusion regarding the purpose of the site, and may have insufficiently addressed data that detract from their new interpretation.*

**Keywords:** Clovis, quarry, settlement, lithic supply

*Diez-Martin y colaboradores (2021) reducen experimentalmente cuatro puntos bifaciales y discuten que las lascas resultantes son más pequeñas y menos uniformes que las encontradas en el sitio de Welling (33Co2). Welling es un sitio Paleo-Indio (Clovis) excavado por Olaf Prufer hace más de 50 años. Con base en el experimento, los autores concluyen que el sitio era un campamento base tipo “coleccionista” y que nuestra interpretación anterior debe ser equivocada. Aquí discutimos que Diez-Martin y sus colegas han mal caracterizado nuestro resumen en respeto a la función del sitio, y pueden haber abordado de manera insuficiente los datos que restan valor de su nueva interpretación.*

**Palabras clave:** la cultura Clovis, yacimiento, tipos de asentamientos, suministro de material lítico

Diez-Martin and colleagues conclude that the Welling Site (33Co2) in Coshocton County, Ohio, was a “collector-like” base camp for Clovis colonists (Diez-Martin et al. 2021:186, quoting Binford 1980). In supporting their interpretation, Diez-Martin and colleagues (2021:186) set up a dichotomy between a “lithic workshop” where only projectile points are produced—an interpretation of the site they attribute to us—and their new reinterpretation. In their critique, the authors fail to mention that our summary conclusion regarding the site was that it represents a “quarry-related manufacturing camp” (Seeman et al. 1994:83), a designation that we believe captures the main purpose(s) of the site. Welling was excavated over 50 years

ago. There were at least 11 sociotemporal components spanning 7,000 years, there was mixing, there are no records, and it is not even clear if all of the fill was screened rather than simply troweled (Blank 1970). In such situations, multiple interpretations are possible. By way of defending our interpretation of quarry-related, manufacturing camp, it is useful to examine a few of the key assumptions and omissions of Diez-Martin and colleagues’ study, and by extension, their interpretation of Welling as a collector-like base.

“Collectors,” in the classic sense, were defined as hunter/gatherers following a settlement strategy that moves food to consumers, not consumers to food (Binford 1980). At base

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camps, collectors process food and build facilities for long-term storage. Collectors invest in such places and reoccupy them regularly. Collector residence is long term and, sometimes, multiseasonal. Processing and food storage produces a high-bulk accumulation (Binford 1980:7, 17), which we translate as an expectation of midden accumulation, considerable feature diversity, dwellings, and high archaeological visibility (see Habu 2002:58–59, 62). The Clovis component at the Welling site consists of only four small “hotspots,” or concentrations of chipped stone tools and flaking debris. Consequently, Diez-Martin and colleagues make their base-camp case more indirectly based on flake size, and secondarily, on microwear.

Diez-Martin and colleagues’ (2021:191) study shows only two results: flakes from the Welling site are significantly larger and significantly less variable than those produced in experimental biface reduction. From this they conclude—counterintuitively, in our view—that Clovis knappers at Welling were engaged in a *broader* range of activities than expected for lithic workshop production, and consequently, support for the “collector-like” base camp interpretation (Diez-Martin et al. 2021:191–192). To explain the differences, the authors suggest that smaller flakes at Welling may have been culturally removed from the sample and made into small, delicate tools (unproven) or used by children (because they have small hands), prospects which they themselves admit are “highly provisional” (Diez-Martin et al. 2021:193). Prospects that they do not consider but that would be more consistent with a narrower interpretation would be that their four experimental bifaces were simply too small when compared to larger samples of early-stage Clovis fluted points (see Seeman et al. 2019:386, 403) and/or that recovery techniques affected the archaeological size distribution. Regarding the former, it should be noted that the four Welling bifaces chosen as archetypes for reproduction are so fragmentary—two of them nothing more than tip fragments—that they could be fit to many size/shape configurations.

As secondary evidence for their interpretation, Diez-Martin and colleagues (2021:186–187) discuss a recent microwear study showing

that some Clovis diagnostics here were being used to scrape plants, butcher meat, saw wood, and so forth. They see these also as collector-like base-camp activities. The authors fail to consider, however, that ancillary activities often occur at a site only indirectly related to its main purpose (Binford 1978), and in addition, that microworn tools used elsewhere on the landscape may be shed at manufacturing camps where the replacement of entire toolkits has been planned in advance (Stafford 2021).

Although multiple lines of evidence are always useful, they are not necessarily of equal value. An experiment showing that Welling flakes are bigger than might be expected or that tools were used to butcher meat are not as important in determining purpose—in our view—as the site’s location or as the unfinished condition of the majority of fluted points found there. To take the latter first, it is important that only 24% ( $13/54 = 24\%$ ) of the fluted bifaces from Welling were finished products (Pruffer and Wright 1970:261), which Diez-Martin and his colleagues fail to discuss. Such figures would be unlikely if the manufacture of these tools was not a key site activity.

Why were Clovis foragers camped on a low terrace adjacent to the Walhonding River and making fluted points? Because it is here that they had direct access to Upper Mercer flint, one of the best materials in the Midwest for the production of large bifaces (Tankersley 1989). Exposures of Upper Mercer up to 4 m in thickness are concentrated on bluff slopes near the crests of upland ridges and at higher elevations than the site, and here there is considerable evidence for quarrying (Tankersley 1989:107). Although it is not possible to link the closest of these quarries directly to Welling per se, unfinished Clovis bifaces, massive Paleoindian bifacial cores, and discarded Clovis points adjacent to them provide reasonable evidence for the connection. Place is often the best predictor of site functionality, and it is high-quality flint that distinguishes this small section of the Walhonding Valley, particularly between the modern villages of Nellie and Warsaw. The use of Upper Mercer begins here with Clovis and continues for thousands of years, with massive amounts of tools and debitage distributed

along the river terraces. In sum, we believe “quarry-related, manufacturing camp” is still an acceptable designation for Welling, a term we believe better fits the evidence than “collector-like base camp,” as argued by Diez-Martin and colleagues (2021).

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