

A PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE ELLIS COUNTY SKULL

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The Ellis County Skull was found by Richard Henderson and Earl Gourley in 1937 lying on Permian clay in sand and gravel about 25 feet beneath the surface. The location was on the south bank of Commission Creek, near Bishop, in Ellis County, Oklahoma, where an excavation had been made recently in building a road.

The skull was almost complete when found, only a little restoration being necessary in order to make it complete. Sufficient amounts of most of the bones were present to make the correct restoration quite positive.

The skull differs from the average skull of modern man in having (1) an exceptionally low forehead, (2) massive supraorbital ridges, (3) the zygomatic arches heavy, but not outside the range for modern man, (4) a small cranial capacity, (5) a sagittal crest, and (6) a heavy occipital bone. The lower skull, however, comes well within the range for that of modern man, having, (1) a well-developed chin, (2) a small maxilla and dental arcade, (3) small teeth, (4) little prognathism, (5) small molar bones, (6) the rami of the mandible narrow, (7) an elongated process, and (8) well-developed spines on the inner surface of the chin—the entire mandible being indistinguishable from modern types.

The skull was sent to the American Museum of Natural History at the request of Dr. Howard W. Blakeslee, Science Editor of the Associated Press, where it was examined carefully by Dr. H. I. Shapiro and Professor Weidenreich, distinguished authorities on fossil man. Dr. Shapiro's conclusions were as follows:

"The skull is, however, exceptional in the extremely flat brow and in the lowness of the cranial vault, indeed, the outline tracing of the skull when super-imposed on that of the Peking man indicates that the Ellis County Skull is little if any higher than the Chinese fossil in absolute height. Moreover, the brow ridges are exceptionally heavy but not outside the range of recent man. The combinations, therefore, of browlessness, low vault and heavy structure in the zygomatic arches and the occipital bone do tend to endow the skull with a superficially primitive appearance which, in my opinion is misleading. But as soon as the jaw and face are examined it becomes plain that this pseudo-primitive appearance is confined to the vault formation. Frankly, I cannot offer any demonstrable hypothesis to explain the peculiar character of the skull. It may represent a local variant of an extreme order or it may be simply a morphologically degenerate type. You are quite right, that had the skull cap alone been found, it would have suggested a greater morphological antiquity.

"Of course my conclusion that this skull is not phylogenetically primitive does not preclude its relative antiquity in America. Geologically the evidence now admits of approximately 25,000 years or over of human occupation in the New World."

Figure 1 shows a side view of the Ellis County Skull and figure 2 is a front view of it. Figure 3 shows the road excavation where the skull was found. Note the Permian clay in the foreground.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3