Geomorphic Evaluation of the Oak Bend Revetment Site, Mississippi

by Joseph B. Dunbar, Paul E. Albertson, WES
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## Contents

Preface ........................................................................ vii  
Acknowledgment ............................................................ viii  
1—Introduction ................................................................. 1  
  Background ................................................................. 1  
  Purpose and Scope ...................................................... 1  
  Study Area ................................................................. 2  
  Plan of Study and Methods ........................................... 2  
2—Geology and Geomorphology ......................................... 6  
  Geologic Setting ......................................................... 6  
  Site Geology ............................................................. 6  
  Environments of Deposition .......................................... 13  
    Natural levee .......................................................... 13  
    Point bar .............................................................. 15  
    Backswamp ............................................................ 16  
    Colluvium ............................................................. 17  
    Tertiary sediments .................................................. 17  
3—Origin of the Mound Areas ........................................... 18  
  Types of Evidence ...................................................... 18  
  Geologic Evidence ..................................................... 18  
  Geomorphic Evidence ............................................... 19  
  Historic Evidence ..................................................... 21  
    Diamond Point Cutoff .............................................. 21  
    Dredging at Diamond Point ...................................... 25  
    1934 maintenance dredging ..................................... 27  
    Historic photography .............................................. 27  
    Historic hydrographic surveys ................................. 33  
    Topographic profiles .............................................. 41  
  Soil Conditions at Area 2 (Site 22WR647) ...................... 50  
    Backhoe trenches .................................................. 50  
    Dredge fill ........................................................... 55  
    Natural levee ....................................................... 55  
    Interpretation ....................................................... 56  
4—Oak Bend Landing Site ............................................. 57  
  Description ............................................................ 57
Past and Present Location ........................................ 57

5—Significance of Geomorphology to Cultural Resource Management .... 61
   Artifacts Found at Study Area .................................. 61
   Archaeological Context ........................................... 61
   Buried Sites ...................................................... 63

6—Conclusions ....................................................... 64

References ............................................................. 65

Appendix A: Archaeological and Geophysical Reconnaissance .......... A1
Appendix B: Diamond Point Boring Logs ........................... B1
Appendix C: USDA Descriptions (from U.S. Department of Agriculture 1964) .................................................. C1
Appendix D: Engineering Activities at Diamond Point
   (from Ferguson 1939) ............................................... D1

SF 298

List of Figures

Figure 1a. General location map to study area (from U.S. Army
   Corps of Engineers 1990) ....................................... 3
Figure 1b. Location and topography of mound areas .................. 5
Figure 2a. Generalized geologic map of central part of Lower
   Mississippi River Valley, Louisiana and Mississippi
   (from Saucier 1974). Legend in Figure 2b ...................... 7
Figure 2b. Legend to geologic map in Figure 2a ..................... 8
Figure 3. Chronology of Mississippi River meander belts, see
   Figure 2a (from Saucier 1974) .................................. 9
Figure 4. Geologic map of study area (from Saucier 1967;
   northwest part of Yokena Quadrangle, Mississippi).
   Cross-sections A-A’ and B-B’ shown in Figures 5a and 5b .... 10
Figure 5a. Geologic cross-section A-A’ (from Saucier 1967),
   see Figure 4 for section location. Boring descriptions
   are included in Appendix B for section A-A’ only ............... 11
Figure 5b. Geologic cross-section B-B’ (from Saucier 1967),
   see Figure 4 for section location ................................. 12
Figure 6. Soils map of the mound areas (from U.S. Department
   of Agriculture 1964), see Appendix C for descriptions of
   individual soil types ............................................ 14
Figure 7. Geomorphic map of the mound area ...................... 20
| Figure 7. | Geomorphic map of the mound area | 20 |
| Figure 8a. | Historic Mississippi River migration before Diamond Point cutoff (Prior to 1930) | 22 |
| Figure 8b. | Historic Mississippi River migration after Diamond Point cutoff | 23 |
| Figure 8c. | Composite historic Mississippi River migration for period 1845 to 1988 | 24 |
| Figure 9a. | Portion of 1934 dredging chart showing location of the dredge materials. Note that Area 5 corresponds to the mound area. See Figure 9b for further explanation of Area 5 | 28 |
| Figure 9b. | Portion of same dredge chart (Figure 9a) identifying the dredge (Lake Fithian, see Figure 10) that widened the cutoff and the volume of dredge material removed from the cut | 29 |
| Figure 10. | Hydraulic dredge Lake Fithian which widened Diamond Point cutoff in 1934 | 30 |
| Figure 11. | Aerial photography of Diamond Point cutoff from 25 October 1935 | 31 |
| Figure 12. | Aerial photography of Diamond Point cutoff from 12 September 1939 | 32 |
| Figure 13a. | Hydrographic survey of 1913-15 (from U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 1915) | 34 |
| Figure 13b. | Hydrographic survey of 1932 (from U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 1932 and 1933) | 35 |
| Figure 13c. | Hydrographic survey of 1937-38 (from U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 1940) | 36 |
| Figure 13d. | Hydrographic survey of 1948-49 (from U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 1952) | 37 |
| Figure 13e. | Hydrographic survey of 1973-75 (from U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 1975) | 38 |
| Figure 13f. | Topographic map of 1973 (from U.S. Geological Survey 1973) | 39 |
| Figure 13g. | Hydrographic survey of 1988-89 (from U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 1990) | 40 |
| Figure 14a. | Enlarged northwest corner of 1932 hydrographic survey in Figure 13b showing topography and profile locations (see Figure 15a and 15b) | 42 |
| Figure 14b. | Enlarged northwest corner of 1937-38 hydrographic survey in Figure 13c showing topography and profile locations (see Figure 15a and 15b) | 43 |
Figure 14c. Enlarged northwest corner of 1948-49 hydrographic survey in Figure 13d showing topography and profile locations (see Figure 15a and 15b) .......................................................... 44

Figure 14d. Enlarged northwest corner of 1973-75 hydrographic survey in Figure 13e showing topography and profile locations (see Figure 15a and 15b) .......................................................... 45

Figure 14e. Enlarged northwest corner of 1973 topographic map in Figure 13f showing topography and profile locations (see Figure 15a and 15b) .......................................................... 46

Figure 14f. Enlarged northwest corner of 1988-89 hydrographic survey in Figure 13g showing topography and profile locations (see Figure 15a and 15b) .......................................................... 47

Figure 15a. Composite topographic profile of mound site, section A-A’ (see Figures 14a through 14e for profile location) .......... 48

Figure 15b. Composite topographic profile of mound site, section B-B’ (see Figures 14a through 14e for profile location) .......... 49

Figure 16. Location of backhoe trenches and borings ................................................. 51

Figure 17. West to east soil transect of backhoe Trench 1 ........................................... 52

Figure 18. Detailed soil profile of Trench 1 ................................................................. 53

Figure 19. Detailed soil profile of Trench 2 ................................................................. 54

Figure 20. Hydrographic survey from 1913-15 (from U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 1915) showing reported Universal Transverse Mercator (UTM) location of the Oak Bend Landing Site ......................................................... 58

Figure 21. Hydrographic survey from 1988-89 (from U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 1990) showing reported UTM location of the Oak Bend Landing Site. Note river migration that has occurred since 1913 ........................................ 60

Figure 22. Artifact distribution and shovel test locations from mound Area 2 (from Britt 1994) ......................................................... 62
Preface

The U.S. Army Engineer Waterways Experiment Station (WES) was authorized to conduct this investigation by the U.S. Army Engineer District, Vicksburg (CELMK), on DD Form 448, MIPR No. PD-Q-94-6022 for a geomorphic assessment of a site in the Oak Bend Revetment reach. The site is located on the Mississippi River at Diamond Point, approximately 11 miles south of Vicksburg, MS. Mr. Tad Britt, an archaeologist with CELMK-PD-Q, was the program manager for this study.

This investigation was conducted and the report prepared by Messrs. Paul E. Albertson, Joseph B. Dunbar, and Michael R. Blaes during the period 1 December 1994 to 28 February 1995. Messrs. Albertson and Dunbar are with the Geological Environments Analysis Section (GEAS), Engineering Geology Branch (EGB), Earthquake Engineering and Geosciences Division (EEGD), Geotechnical Laboratory (GL), WES. Mr. Michael R. Blaes, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS, assisted with compiling of the historic data and the report illustrations. A general field reconnaissance of the study area was conducted by the authors and Mr. Britt (CELMK-PD-Q) on 1 December 1994 and trenching was conducted at mound site 2 by the authors, Mr. Britt, and Dr. Andrew G. Warne (CEWES-GG-YG) on 22 February 1995.

This investigation was performed under the direct supervision of Dr. William F. Marcuson III, Director, GL, and Dr. A. G. Franklin, Chief, EEGD.

Director of WES was Dr. Robert W. Whalin during the publication of this report. Commander was COL Bruce K. Howard, EN.

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Acknowledgment

The authors acknowledge Drs. Fred Briuer and Dwain Butler for their recommendation to conduct a geomorphic study following their site reconnaissance. The authors thank Dr. Mike Robinson, MRC, and Dr. Roger Saucier, Environmental Lab, WES (retired), for their assistance with this study. Dr. Robinson assisted with obtaining historic maps and charts form the MRC map files. Dr. Saucier provided invaluable assistance and many worthwhile discussions about the mounds at the Oak Bend revetment reach. Dr. Saucier also made available to the authors historic photographs from the Diamond Point cut-off which were important sources of data to this study. The authors especially thank Mr. Wesley Lominick, the land owner of the study area, for providing background data about the site and allowing the authors to review his collection of historic maps and photographs.
1 Introduction

Background

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Vicksburg District (CELMK), plans to stabilize a section of the east bank of the Mississippi River in the Oak Bend Revetment reach between river miles 424 and 426. A cultural resource investigation was conducted by CELMK to determine the impact of the proposed stabilization project to the cultural resources in the reach. The archaeological survey of the Oak Bend Revetment reach identified 3 prominent topographic mounds along the left bank of the Mississippi River near river mile 425 (Britt 1994). Scattered prehistoric ceramic and lithic artifacts were found surrounding the northern edge of one of the mounds. As part of the archaeological assessment, Briuer and Butler (1995) performed an archaeological and geophysical reconnaissance of the study area (see Appendix A). This initial survey led to a geomorphic investigation of the mound area.

Purpose and Scope

This report describes a geomorphic investigation of the Oak Bend Revetment reach to evaluate the origin and age of the mounds. The primary purpose of this study is to determine the origin and age of the mounds at the Oak Bend Revetment site. Major objectives of this study are to: (1) identify and map the geomorphic features within the project area, and (2) determine historic flood control and navigation activities that may have impacted the study site.

A secondary purpose for this study is to determine the location of a previously recorded archaeological site that was not found during the cultural resource survey of the project area. Site 22WR611, the Oak Bend Landing site, was reported by C. B. Moore in 1911 to be located along the east bank of the Mississippi River. However, an exact location for this site is not known (Britt 1994).

The scope of this study involves data collection, a summary literature review, geomorphic mapping, selected soil sampling, data reduction and analysis, and report preparation. A major focus of this investigation has been a review of past hydrographic surveys to evaluate historic river migration and
river engineering activities within the study area, and their affect on cultural resource sites.

Study Area

The study area is located on the left (east) bank of the Mississippi River at river mile 425, approximately 11 miles down stream from Vicksburg, Mississippi (see Figure 1a, from U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 1990). The study area is located in Warren County, Mississippi, and includes the Oak Bend revetment reach (i.e., approximately river mile 424 to 427). The mounds are located at the upstream end of Diamond Point cutoff (see Figure 1a, index sheet 76). Diamond Point cutoff is a man-made channel constructed during the early 1930's for flood control and to improve navigation on the Lower Mississippi Valley.

The study area is contained on the northwest part of the Yokena, Mississippi, 1:24,000 U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) topographic quadrangle. A portion (2.5 by 2.5 minute) of the Yokena quadrangle map is presented in Figure 1b (from U.S. Geological Survey 1973) and shows the topography of the mound areas and the locations of the three mounds. Individual mounds are identified in Figure 1b as Areas 1 and 2. Area 1 is the largest of the 3 mounds. Two mounds are present at Area 2. Prehistoric artifacts were found surrounding the northern most mound at Area 2. A complete description of the artifacts and their cultural context is documented by Britt (1994).

Plan of Study and Methods

The major focus of this study involved geomorphic mapping, a field investigation of the study area, and a review of past hydrographic surveys and maps. Geomorphic mapping was limited to only the mound areas. Mapping is based in part on existing geologic data by Saucier (1967). The primary focus of the geomorphic mapping was to identify landforms that are present in the study area and to determine soil development among the different landforms and the mound complex. Historic surveys and maps were another important source of data for evaluating past engineering activities in the study area. Map data were obtained either from the WES or the Mississippi River Commission (MRC) map files.

A field investigation of the study area was made to verify previous geologic surveys and conduct geomorphic mapping to provide general information about soil conditions at the mound area. Two site visits were made to the study area. The first visit was a field reconnaissance on 1 December 1994 and included numerous shallow hand auger borings made in the vicinity of the mounds and surrounding area to obtain general soils data. The second visit to the study area was made on 22 February 1995 and consisted of digging backhoe trenches and drilling supplementary borings, drilled by a Giddings rig.
Figure 1a. General location map to study area (from U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 1990), see Figure 1b for detailed site map.

As part of both site visits, vertical profiles were cut in the river bank as necessary to determine the lithologic and pedogenic composition of the sediments underlying the river bank and the mound surface. Steep river banks and low water at the mound area (22WR647) afforded an excellent opportunity to view large vertical sections of the river bank in order to characterize the underlying soils and their composition.
Figure 1b. Location and topography of mound areas
2 Geology and Geomorphology

Geologic Setting

A generalized geologic map of the central Lower Mississippi Valley region in Louisiana and Mississippi is presented in Figure 2 and shows the distribution of the different Mississippi River meander belts (from Saucier 1974). As indicated by Figures 2 and 3 (from Saucier 1974), the Mississippi River has formed 5 major meander belts during the Holocene (i.e., past 10,000 years). A meander belt represents relic fluvial features associated with an abandoned Mississippi River course. A meander belt is characterized by broad natural levees, numerous abandoned channels or oxbow lakes, and associated fluvial deposits (i.e., mainly point bar and backswamp deposits).

The study area is part of the eastern valley margin and the most recent meander belt of the Mississippi River. This area is composed of fluvial sediments deposited during the past 2,500 years as identified by Figure 3.

Site Geology

Previous geologic mapping of the study area has been conducted by Saucier (1967) on a 15-minute (1:62,500 scale) format. Saucier (1967) identified point bar and backswamp sediments within the study area (Figure 4). Sediments comprising these environments are part of the youngest or present Mississippi River meander belt. Geologic cross-sections in Figures 5a and 5b identify a complex fluvial stratigraphy consisting of 50 to 100 ft (15 to 30 m) of Holocene Mississippi River sediments overlying Tertiary (65 to 2 million years) marine sediments. Beneath the mound areas, the geology consists of approximately 75 ft (23 m) of natural levee and backswamp sediments overlying Tertiary limestone (Figure 5a). Boring logs from cross-section A-A' (Figure 5a) are presented in Appendix B. Depositional environments present in the study area and shown in Figures 4, 5a, and 5b are described in more detail below.
Figure 2a. Generalized geologic map of central part of Lower Mississippi River Valley, Louisiana and Mississippi (from Saucier 1974). Legend in Figure 2b.
**Figure 2b. Legend to geologic map in Figure 2a**