INTRODUCTION

Site E-75-8 is a deeply stratified site that includes Al Jerar Early Neolithic, Middle Neolithic and Late Neolithic occupations. The site is located on a preserved surface on the western side of the El Nabta Playa basin. Deflation of the area around this part of the basin includes erosion of approximately 1.5 to 2 meters of sediment removed to the south of the site. Erosion also has impacted the northern part of the site, deflating approximately 0.5 meters of sediment. This deflation, estimated from the deposits of the modern ground surface, form a gentle slope on the northern edge of the site. To the west of the area excavated during the 1998 and 1999 seasons, the Late Neolithic, and further to the west, the Middle Neolithic components have completely eroded away, exposing Al Jerar deposits at the far western edge of the site.

Previous excavations at site E-75-8 include a surface feature excavation in 1975 and trench, feature and stratigraphic excavations in 1977 and 1990 (see Close, Chapter 10, this volume). Excavations during the 1998 and 1999 field seasons include stratigraphic excavations of four Middle Neolithic components and stratigraphic and wide horizontal exploration of the Late Neolithic deposits. These excavations allow for detailed examination of the previously misunderstood Middle Neolithic and provide new evidence concerning the Late Neolithic occupation at Nabta Playa.

METHODOLOGY

A total of three excavation units were studied during the 1998 and 1999 field seasons at E-75-8. The first excavation unit includes Areas A and B (Figure 11.1). Areas A and B are located at the western end of the 1977 “South Trench” and extend north approximately 2.5 m. Work in Area A included stratigraphic excavation by natural layers based on the layers visible in the “South Trench” as described by Schild and Wendorf (Chapter 2 this volume, and Figure 2.27). Area A was excavated to supply a sample of artifacts in a stratified context to explore the change in artifacts and features through time.

Area B is a 1 x 1 m surface scrape, extending 1 meter from the west edge of Area A. Area B was excavated to remove loose sand in an area disturbed by heavy use during the excavation of Area A.

The second excavation area was a northern extension of the Vertical Metate Trench, originally excavated in 1975 (Figure 11.1; also see Close, Chapter 10 this volume). The excavation area aligns with the eastern edge of the Vertical Metate Trench and extends north 1 m and 3.5 m to the west of the original trench. The Vertical Metate Trench, North Extension was excavated to reconfirm the 1975 radiocarbon dating of this part of the site to 7120 bp ± 150 years (SMU-242) and to link the sedimentary and cultural deposits to those of Area A.

The third excavation unit includes Areas C, D, E and F (Figure 11.2). These areas were parallel to the 1977 South Trench, extending north from the trench 13 meters. Each of these areas was opened to expose horizontal Late Neolithic deposits and tie any features with known stratigraphic layers identified in the South Trench and Area A. Areas C, D, E, and F were chosen because they were areas undisturbed by early surface feature exploration during the 1975 and 1977 field seasons. Exploration of Areas C, D, E, and F included a stratigraphic control trench; surface sweeping and scraping to expose features; and two small exploration trenches to determine the stratigraphic relationship between features, to detect buried deposits, and to facilitate feature excavations.

All artifact analysis was conducted during the 1998 and 1999 field seasons while in the field. Analysis included: a detailed study of lithic debris, including debitage and cores following the system outlined in Close (1989), and tool classification based on Tixier’s typology; faunal analysis (see Gautier, Chapter 23, this volume); ceramic analysis (see Nelson, Chapter 20, this volume, and Volume II); and botanical analysis (see Wasylikowa et al. Chapter 22 this volume). Summaries of these findings are provided here.
The Late Neolithic component was exposed both in stratigraphic context in Layers 8 and 10 of Areas A and B and in large horizontal deposits in Areas C, D, E, and F. Areas C, D, E, and F can be correlated with Layer 10 of the stratigraphic trench, where a wide variety of Late Neolithic features were revealed, including ten hearths, two pits, one lithic cache, and one hut with associated features. These provide the most salient and solid evidence for the character of the Late Neolithic occupation at Site E-75-8.

The Features

Hearth 1 — Feature 1, Area A

Feature 1, Area A is a large roasting hearth embedded with firecracked rock. Its total extent could not be determined because it extended beyond the limits of the trench but it is at least 147 x 120 x 7 cm. The hearth was first visible in the profile of the South Trench and has a radiocarbon date of 6160 bp ± 110 years (DRI-3547). The feature is composed of hard packed, burnt sandy slit with charcoal inclusions and burnt bone throughout. Its composition is similar to the surface hearths at E-75-8. No plant remains were found in the sediment of the hearth, although several botanical samples were taken. Feature 1 appears to be a single deposition. The concentration of small fragments of bone throughout implies that it was used to roast meat. Artifacts embedded in the hearth include a denticulate of chert, a flint retouched blade, a flint core, a quartz core and a small clear quartz crystal.

Hearth 2 — Feature 1, Area B, Layer 8

Feature 1, Area B, Layer 8 is a small ephemeral hearth located in the compact sand of Layer 8 and yielded a radiocarbon date of 6030 bp ± 200 years (DRI-3547). It measures 24 cm in diameter and approximately 7 mm in depth. No artifacts were found in direct association.

Hearth 3 — Feature 1, Area C

Feature 1, Area C is a shallow basin-shaped, deflated hearth that was visible on the surface of Area C. It measures 50 x 54 x 21 cm. The internal stratigraphy of this feature includes a lower lens of burnt sand, with charcoal flecks dispersed throughout, and an upper lens of firecracked sandstone rocks. The firecracked rocks average 5 cm in diameter. Excavation of the north half of the feature revealed that Feature 2, Area C was superimposed over Feature 1. A chert core and an eroded Late Neolithic pottery sherd were the only artifacts associated with Feature 1, Area C.

Hearth 4 — Feature 2, Area C

Only the northern half of Feature 2, Area C was excavated. It is a shallow basin-shaped hearth that cuts into the pre-existing Feature 1. It measures 66 x 54 x 14 cm and, much like Feature 1, is composed of hard-packed burnt sand at its base, covered by firecracked sandstone.