Resting at the Rock: Analysis at Benedict’s Rock, Northern Colorado

Site Background
Benedict’s Rock (5BL232) is located adjacent to the Indian Peaks Wilderness area near the town of Ward, in Boulder County, Colorado, on the eastern slope of the Southern Rocky Mountains. It sits at an elevation of approximately 8600 feet above sea level and is located in a mountainous montane environment. The South St. Vrain river runs through the property, flowing eastward out of the mountains. The site lies on the property of Audrey and the late James Bennett, who passed away in the spring of this year. They have graciously allowed the Colorado State Field School to work and camp at this site for the past two summers. Specifically, the assemblage is a lithic scatter around a large boulder, situated in a terraced river valley near the periphery of the up-sloping forest edge. While most assemblages in the area represent remnants of temporal and spatial recirculation, this location appears to represent a single-component Late Paleoindian Scattersite. It likely signifies a short-term occupation or stopping off point. The flake distribution data may indicate this, based on the scatter patterns surrounding the rock.

Primary Methods and Goals of the 2010/2011 Field Camps
-Excavated 23 1x1 meter units in 50x50 cm quadrants to a depth of 5 cm at either end of the excavations, dry screened each quadrant level, recorded the data, finished soil testing at each quadrant level, and drew soil profiles per each unit. 
-Will look for patterns in the frequency distribution of flakes to try and determine if the scatter represents a single individual knapping episode.
-Also, erosional episodes surely occurred in this terraced valley, denuding an already shallow site further.

Questions
-Does the flake dispersion in any way represent a single individual knapping episode?
-Is there a functional association between site structure and the amount/type of debitage on the site?
-Does the location, and type of material indicate something specific?

What environmental/anthropogenic factors may have impacted this site?
-How might a valley location affect the presence of a site?

Discussion and Conclusions
This site is unusual in that its only feature is the lithic scatter surrounding the rock. It’s location is somewhat remote, lying in montane valley surrounded by mountainous terrain, but it is also found in a resource rich area. There is an abundant amount of game, both large and small in the area, diverse plant life and plenty of water. In addition, it is partially located in between the higher elevations and the plains, which would provide easy access to other types of diverse flora and fauna and allow for movement to those resources based on need and/or seasonality. The amount data that we collected is small when compared to other types of sites where there is a clear sense of what was going on, such as a hunting/kill camp or a typical subsistence camp where the assemblage is varied and deep.

The artifacts speak for themselves, as the majority are small petaloid type and bifacial thinning flakes that are used to triangulate to some having somewhat parallel flakes. They have tiny platforms, some are slightly curved with bulbous ends. The largest concentration is found in the 5-10mm size range, with the next largest densities between 10-15mm and 15-20mm respectively. According to Wheat (1970) this suggests the final stages of manufacture of projectile points and stemmed knives. Another attribute, or lack of, is the extremely small percentage of flakes without cortex. There were only 4 specimens that had any at all. This would imply that the toolkit only included already manufactured tools and preforms needing final reduction, or resharpening was done on existing tools already made. Usually this was done by pressure flaking, as many of these pieces indicate.

The majority of material found was chert, with a few pieces of quartzite included. The density chart at left clearly shows the concentration to the west and slightly north, as if someone was testing beside the rock. Given the location and size of the scatter at the site, it appears to be a short-term occupation episode or providing a game-scoping site. That is to say that the site was not used more than one time. It seems to fall into Hoffman and Ingbar’s (1988) category of a ‘limited activity station’. Although they used that term in reference to game movement monitoring, I don’t believe we can say with this is the case here, because as of yet there is no other evidence of a camp or kill site nearby.

Also, erosional episodes surely occurred in this terraced valley, denuding an already shallow site further. Deflation around the rock and the slope towards the north probably exposed this site in the first place. While the scatter and debitage does appear to indicate a single component site, it can’t be said with certainty that it was a single episode due to environmental factors and lack of other material artifacts.

Further Research Directions
Additional research that could be undertaken to locate similar types of sites and assemblages in the area to help narrow settlement/subsistence patterns, as well as to get at movement and environmental factors that drove such patterns. A closer look at the taphonomic processes that have taken place in the valley should also yield additional insights.

Acknowledgements
I would like to thank and acknowledge Dr. Jason LaBelle for his tireless support and encouragement both in the classroom and during the 2011 CSU Field School. Also, to all who were a part of the excavation and field school experience. I would also like to thank Rebecca Coatey and Vikkie Brown for their help with the photo lab. Katherine Horton for the background photo, the girls of Repeat Free for their technical advice and support, and9 Ashley Alvin, Tricia Cooper, and Sarah for their computer tips and advice.