

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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DATE ENTERED

27

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

GATECLIFF ROCKSHELTER (26NY301)

AND/OR COMMON

GATECLIFF ROCKSHELTER (26NY301)

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

SE of Austin

CITY, TOWN

Austin

VICINITY OF

— NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
At Large

STATE

Nevada

CODE
32

COUNTY
Nye

CODE
23

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

United States Forest Service

STREET & NUMBER

111 North Virginia Street

CITY, TOWN

Reno

___ VICINITY OF

STATE

Nevada

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Nye County Assessor's Office

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Tonopah,

STATE

Nevada

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

NONE

DATE

___ FEDERAL ___ STATE ___ COUNTY ___ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Gatecliff Rockshelter was first discovered by Dr. David Hurst Thomas, American Museum of Natural History, during a systematic settlement survey of Monitor Valley, central Nevada. This survey was part of a larger research effort by Thomas to study prehistoric subsistence - settlement patterns in the Great Basin. Other elements of the study include the systematic survey of the Reese River Valley and ancient Lake Tonopah, both in central Nevada. In addition to locating and mapping surface archeological phenomena, the surveys were geared to finding buried sites. Such sites were vital for the testing of previously held assumptions about prehistoric ecological and subsistence patterns, and the chronological framework in the central Great Basin.

The Gatecliff Rockshelter is situated in and takes its name from the Silurian Age Gatecliff Formation. The shelter lies at approximately 7750 feet on the south facing slope of Mill Canyon in the Toquima Mountains of central Nevada. The site was discovered in 1970. The opening of the shelter was approximately 10 feet wide, 4 feet high, and 10 feet deep. Pictographs are present on the ceiling of the shelter but no artifacts or other cultural debris were found on the ground surface. Test pits were excavated to determine if the site had substantial and intact subsurface deposits. This testing revealed that Gatecliff did have subsurface deposits and that they were stratigraphically clear cut. This early and limited assessment showed the site to contain a series of intact prehistoric living surfaces which were separated by layers of sterile material. The number of living floors and the maximum depth of deposits at Gatecliff, however, was still in question.

In 1971, Thomas returned to the site and excavated a 7 meter long trench to a depth in excess of 3 meters. This work was conducted by a University of California - Davis crew. At the end of the field season, the basal level of cultural deposits had not been reached.

Work at the Gatecliff Rockshelter in 1973, was sponsored by the American Museum of Natural History and Educational Expeditions International. By the end of the 1973 field season, crews were working in sediments 4.8 meters below present ground surface. Radiocarbon dates derived from this level, date it at approximately 2500 B.C. This field effort also failed to reach the bottom of the cultural deposits. In August of 1973, the National Geographic Society filmed a half-hour feature entitled "Gatecliff: An American Indian Rockshelter".

The 1974 field season, again funded by the American Museum of Natural History and Educational Expeditions International, also failed to reach the bottom of the deposits.

Through the 1974 season the research strategy employed had emphasized a vertical approach to excavation activities. The major objective had been the description and assessment of chronological order in the recognized cultural deposits. By the end of the 1974 season, approximately 98 cubic meters of deposit had been excavated to meet this chronological objective.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 6000 B.C. - 1500 A.D. BUILDER/ARCHITECT Not Applicable

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

To date in the Great Basin there have been only a few truly spectacular sites that have become primary reference dimensions against which all else is appraised. Lovelock, Leonard, and Danger Caves are three such sites in the Northern Great Basin. To this list must now be added the Gatecliff Rockshelter. The significance of the data already excavated as well as that which remains in context at the site is truly phenomenal.

The deposits at Gatecliff are over 10 meters deep and document a human occupation spanning at least 8000 years. A total of 27 distinct strata have been recognized in the 10+ meter deposit including 11 separate living surfaces. Artifacts associated with each of these living floors are sealed between impervious layers of sterile silt and sand. This degree of clarity is rare in the Great Basin where most sites are surface scatters that can easily include materials ranging widely in age. In contrast to this, there is virtually no mixture of cultural deposits in the Gatecliff Rockshelter. Thomas (1977:37) estimates that 98% of the cultural items were recovered where they had been dropped. Study of the cultural remains from Gatecliff will result in a significant clarification of Great Basin cultural chronology.

Each of the living surfaces at the Gatecliff Rockshelter have revealed several lines of evidence useful in the study of prehistoric subsistence patterns. The functional analysis of artifacts should provide information on the amount and types of material utilized. This can easily constitute secondary (if not primary) evidence relevant to the inference of whether certain food sources were exploited. Analysis of the excellent faunal collection from the site shall provide substantial data on the diet of its prehistoric inhabitants. Information on the species utilized and their relative importance to the overall subsistence effort is readily available. Related studies such as the attempt to determine seasonality of occupation and the analysis of butchering patterns are also possible given the data characteristics of Gatecliff. The study of seeds and pollen recovered at the site can provide information on yet another aspect of prehistoric man's subsistence activities in the Gatecliff area. The clarity of the living surfaces also allows for innovative studies of spatial analysis.

At present, the Gatecliff Rockshelter is perhaps more significant for the paleoenvironmental data it still contains rather than the relatively limited artifactual data still present. Paleoenvironmental data retrieved

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

1977 Thomas, David Hurst
The Paleoecology and Paleoethnography of Gatecliff shelter, Nevada. A proposal to the National Science Foundation.
 Manuscript in possession of author.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 358 acres
 QUADRANGLE NAME Wildcat Peak (15') Northumberland Pass (7.5')
 QUADRANGLE SCALE _____

UTM REFERENCES

A	1,1	5,1,9	6,1,0	4,3	1,8	1,7,0	B	1,1	5,1,9	6,1,0	4,3	1,6	3,6,0
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C	1,1	5,1,8	7,0,0	4,3	1,6	7,9,0	D	1,1	5,1,8	7,0,0	4,3	1,8	1,7,0
E							F						
G							H						

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION The northern boundary is defined by the unnamed prominence (9360+ feet) due north of the site. The southern boundary is the dirt road which runs up Mill Canyon. The east and west boundaries are drawn so as to incorporate the small canyons just to either side of shelter.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE
 Charles D. Zeier, Archeologist

ORGANIZATION
 Division of Historic Preservation and Archeology

STREET & NUMBER
 201 South Fall Street

CITY OR TOWN
 Carson City

DATE

TELEPHONE
 (702) 885-5138

STATE
 Nevada

89710

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL X STATE _____ LOCAL _____

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE *[Signature]*

TITLE *State Historic Preservation Officer* DATE *16 November 1978*

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER *[Signature]* DATE *4-27-79*

ATTEST: CHIEF OF REGISTRATION *[Signature]* DATE *4-20-79*

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As the stratigraphy at Gatecliff was exposed, it became clear that the site had significant potential for a more horizontal research strategy and approach. Beginning with the 1975 field season, crews began to peel stratigraphic layers back one at a time. The object became to produce detailed maps of living floors. This strategy was continued into the 1976 field season. By the end of the 1976 season, all excavation units had been taken down to bedrock. In total, some 650 cubic meters of culture bearing deposits have been excavated over the last six years. The majority of the cultural deposits have been removed.

The physical stratigraphy at the Gatecliff Rockshelter is "unquestionably the most sensitive, least disturbed archeological record available in the desert west" (Thomas 1977:1). Deposits at the site reflect four separate depositional processes:

- 1.) Rock rubble which has fallen directly from the shelter ceiling.
- 2.) A talus cone formed by rocks falling over the overhang above the floor of the shelter.
- 3.) Rock debris which has been carried into the shelter laterally from the debris fans on either side of the shelter opening.
- 4.) Well sorted, often graded, sandy alluvium deposited in the shelter by infrequent floods of Mill Creek.

Important to the present and future analysis of this depositional matrix is the inclusion within the nomination's boundary of parts of the talus slope above the shelter and the Mill Creek Canyon floor.

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and that still extant covers much of the Holocene Epoch. Analysis of microfaunal remains, pollen samples, and sediments will provide very important information on the nature of that epoch in central Nevada. At a more site specific level the Gatecliff Rockshelter provides a unique opportunity to study the interplay of slope and alluvial processes during the Holocene in a well dated context. At present, over 35 radiocarbon dates have been processed for the strata at Gatecliff providing excellent temporal control.

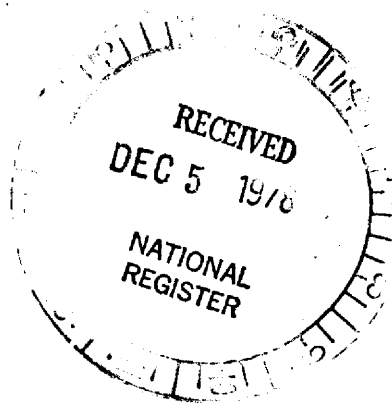
The usefulness of this qualitatively superb data is not site specific, but rather has meaning at the regional level. Therefore, the usefulness of Gatecliff's paleoenvironmental data potential to future studies dealing with Great Basin culture history and culture process is substantial.

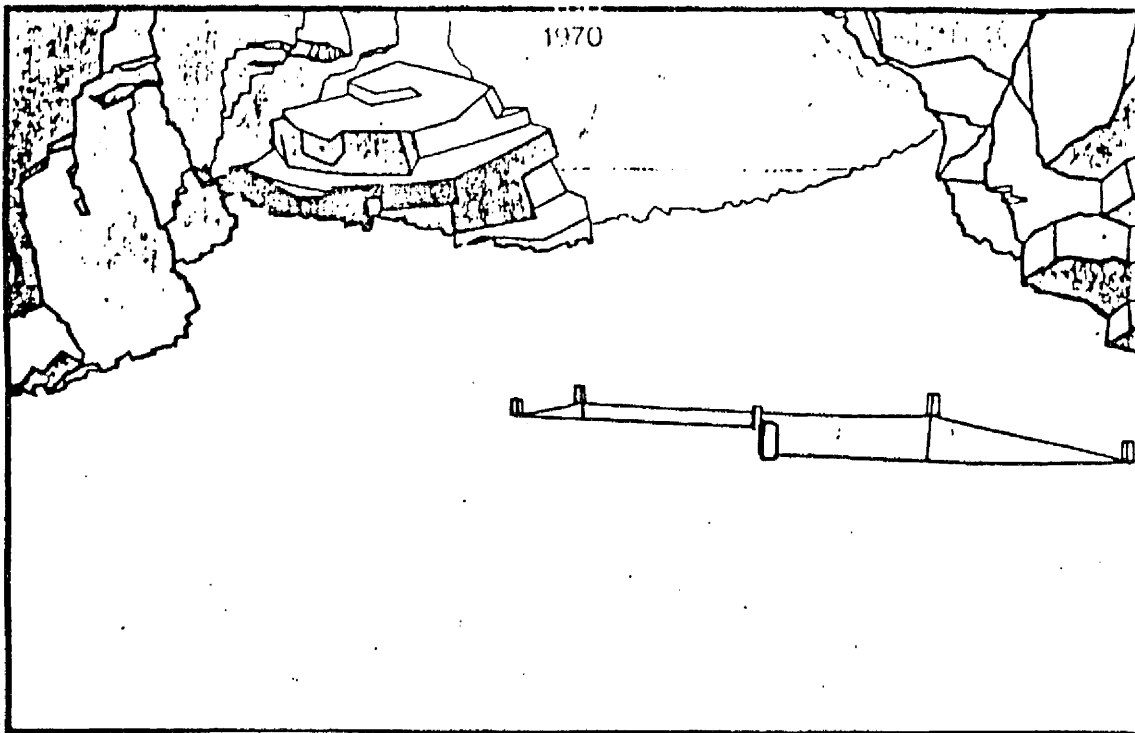
Aside from the depositional and subsistence oriented artifactual data, the Gatecliff Rockshelter has provided three classes of data relatively unique in the Great Basin. The first is palynological data which should contribute substantially to the study of the ecology and past environmental changes in central Nevada.

Second, faunal remains are in a remarkable state of preservation at Gatecliff. Some 50 to 60,000 identifiable elements were recovered in the six years of excavation at the site.

Third, over 450 incised limestone slates were found in excavations at Gatecliff. This represents the largest collection of such slates at any site in the Great Basin. The collection is 10 times the size of the next largest collection.

NOTE: Attached are three figures from Thomas' (1977) research proposal to the National Science Foundation. Figures one and two depict the general appearance of the Gatecliff Rockshelter at different stages in its excavation. Figure three illustrates the magnitude of the natural and cultural deposits at the site. As noted, the 1976 and 1978 excavations are not depicted in the figure.





a. Initial test excavations at Gatecliff. This view looks from the rear of the cave out into Mill Canyon.

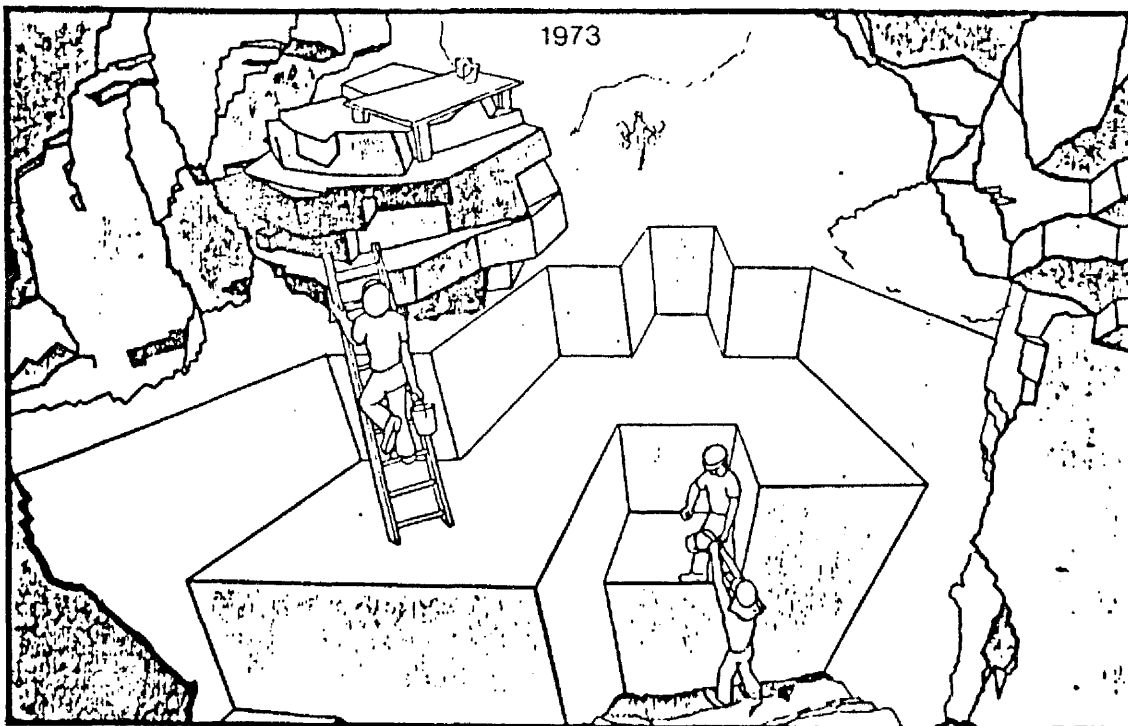
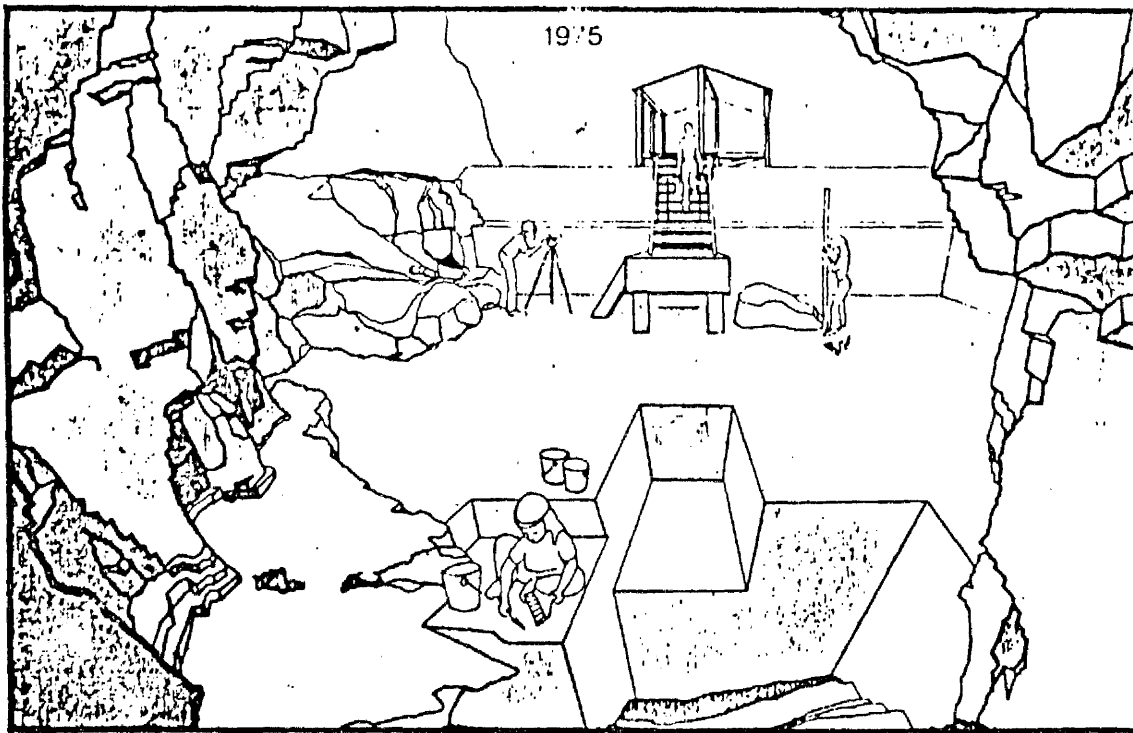


Figure 1 b. Final excavations for vertical, stratigraphic purposes. All pollen and radiocarbon samples taken from these profiles.



a. Beginning horizontal excavation strategy at Gatecliff; this reconstruction shows excavation of the 11 living floor, which dates approximately 1500 B.C. Note removal of large rooffall.

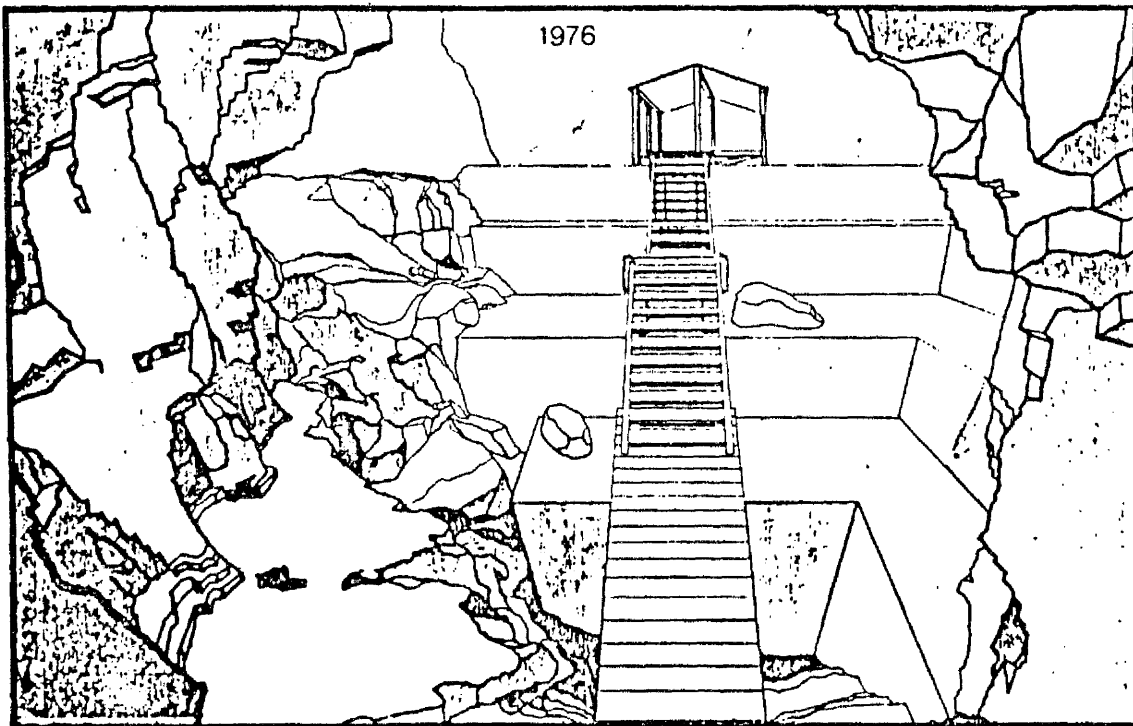


Figure 2 b. Gatecliff Shelter at completion of excavation. All major excavation units have reached bedrock.

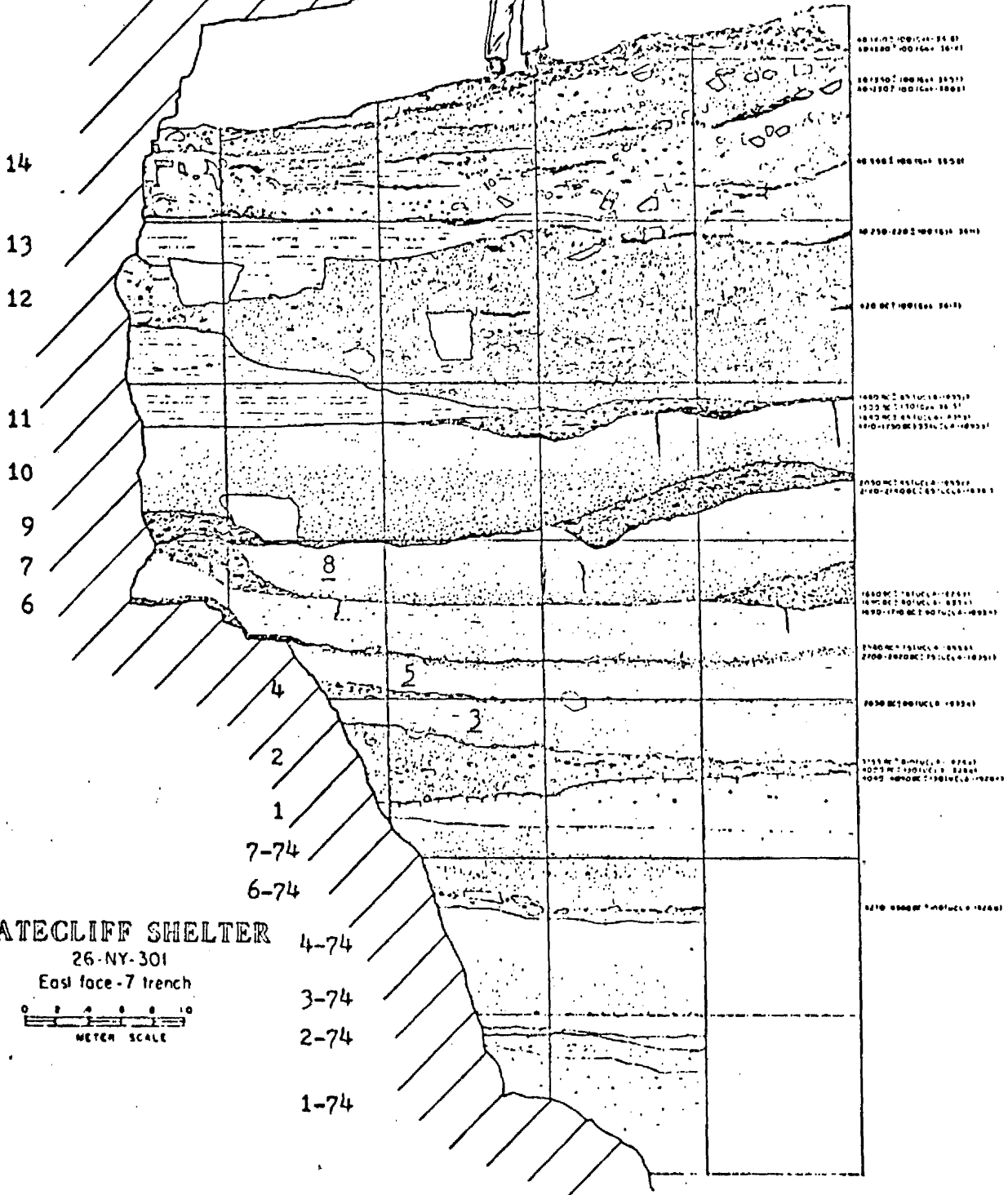


Figure 3. Master stratigraphy of Gatecliff Shelter (1976 excavation not included); see Appendix B for description of each geomorphological unit