The Allendale-Topper Site Conference and Beyond

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On January 25 and 26, 2002, the Allendale-Topper conference was held on the University of South Carolina campus. This conference was intended to bring together a variety of researchers who have been working on the Topper site to report on their findings to date. It was also an effort to update the many volunteers and supporters of the Allendale Paleoindian Expedition as to the state of our knowledge. It is estimated that over 300 members of the public have volunteered to help excavate the Allendale sites since 1995. By all indications, the conference accomplished its goals as nearly 150 people attended the conference on Saturday, and 140 came to the evening banquet.

On the Friday before the conference, an open house, artifact display was held at SCIAA. The education room was full of artifact cases illustrating the variety of prehistoric chipped stone tools found from pre-Clovis through the Woodland and Mississippian periods, an interval of time spanning over 15,000 years. The majority of these were from sites excavated on the Clariant property such as Big Pine Tree, Charles and Topper or found in Allendale County, SC. In addition, Joe and Lynn McAvoy brought casts of the pre-Clovis and Paleoindian artifacts from the Cactus Hill site in Virginia as well as several examples of bend-break flake tools from the famous Williamson Clovis site, also in Virginia. To help understand how prehistoric stone tools were made, Scott Jones and Steve Watts spent the afternoon in front of SCIAA making various lithic artifacts. In addition to the public, a large number of professional archaeologists were able to see much of the typical Allendale Paleoindian and Archaic artifacts, probably the greatest number ever shown in a single exhibit. Similarly a large display of the Topper pre-Clovis lithic material was presented showing the range of microlithic and cobble-sized tools.

Friday evening the attendees were treated to a delightful reception at the home of Betty Anne and Simmons Tate who live near campus. The Tates, members of SCIAA’s Archaeological Research Trust board (ART), opened their lovely home and welcomed folk with fine food and drink. This social occasion provided opportunity for Allendale expedition veterans to renew friendships and to speak with the various invited scientists who were making presentations the next day.

The conference was held all day on Saturday with a noontime break for lunch down at Yesterday’s in Five Oaks. It was an event to remember.
may have evolved from the Upper Palaeolithic Solutrean culture of France and Spain. While still controversial, their research has yielded some fascinating similarities in lithic technology and even art between the two. The site of Cactus Hill in Virginia with its pre-Clovis 15,000 yr. old artifacts was shown to be a possible Solutrean-related antecedent to Clovis culture on the eastern seaboard.

That evening the conferees attended a banquet and listened to a presentation by myself summarizing the current state of pre-Clovis and traditional Paleoindian research in the Southeast, not to mention the great typological variation represented in post-Clovis projectile points. The need to work with geologic and other scientists in unraveling the mysteries of the late Quaternary was emphasized where teams of investigators are formed to investigate sites like Topper.

A Center with a capability of working year round on these problems, searching for sites from Virginia to Miami, would be the ideal way to approach such fascinating but complex research. In order to qualify as a Center at the University of South Carolina, there must be a privately given endowment of one million dollars dedicated to the program. Components of the Center would consist of various laboratories, field exploration and student support funds, and a research professorship, each of which could be endowed for $250,000. Given the trend in decreasing state funding for higher education, an endowment will be absolutely necessary in order to provide the infrastructure necessary to maintain continuity for such a long-term program.

Points. Each speaker was allotted 30 minutes time but it was clear that the presenters could have used more. The scientists were asked to give public friendly presentations on their particular discipline prior to explaining their work with the Topper site. Unfortunately, even with 30 minute slots, there wasn't much time for questions from the audience. Nevertheless, despite the scientific complexities inherent in photomicroscopy of ancient stone tools, optically stimulated luminescence dating, radiocarbon chemistry, paleosols etc., people generally seemed stimulated with the various scientists' programs. After three seasons of geoarchaeological fieldwork at Topper, the pre-Clovis lithic assemblage is well documented to be associated with the Pleistocene age alluvial terrace of the Savannah River, at least 15,000 years old and probably older, and stratigraphically below a Clovis-related biface manufacturing zone dated between 13,000 and 14,000 years ago. The final presentation of the day was given by Dr. Dennis Stanford of the Smithsonian Institution. Dennis spent an exciting hour reviewing his and Bruce Bradley's research on the origins of Clovis as it the Southeastern U.S., and a vision for establishing a Center at USC for Paleoamerican studies. Sites considered to be pre-Clovis were introduced and the paleoenvironmental conditions in the South for the period of 18,000 to 13,000 years ago were reviewed. While certainly colder, the climate was also drier probably limiting surface water availability. Locating