Update on the Big Pine Tree Site and the 1996 Allendale Paleoindian Expedition

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We had no sooner unpacked all the digging equipment and bags of artifacts from the 1995 excavation season of this past May, when it was decided to go back to Big Pine Tree and conduct underwater archaeology. This decision was not as precipitous as it sounds. In 1985, the Institute conducted limited underwater recovery of artifacts off the edge of the site as part of a larger effort to collect Paleoindian and other material from the bottom of Smith's Lake Creek. Big Pine Tree and another Paleoindian site just downstream, the Charles Site (38AL135), were the scenes of underwater dredging 10 years ago in an effort to collect a large sample of Paleoindian lithic technology. Approximately 10% of the richest part of the site has washed into the creek due to cutbank erosion from the raising and lowering of the Savannah River since the construction of Clarks Hill Reservoir above Augusta. It was decided that the quickest way to recover a larger sample of diagnostic Paleoindian tools was to employ dredging.

The first week of August was spent systematically dredging an area 10 meters wide and approximately 50 meters long. Hundreds of broken bifaces were recovered, most attributable to the Middle Archaic occupation, as well as approximately 125 classifiable projectile points. Within this sample were nearly 20 more fluted preforms like those found in the land excavations plus three Dalton points. One finished fluted point made of quartz crystal was found representing the only whole fluted point found. Based on the large sample of both land excavated and underwater dredged lanceolate preforms, it seems apparent that finished fluted points were rarely present or discarded at the site. Given that Big Pine Tree is a quarry, this should not be surprising.

This underwater project was made possible by a grant to the Archaeological Research Trust by Mr. Roland Young, Chairman of the ART which enabled our staff to spend a week in the field. Without the participation of the SCIAA Underwater Division no underwater work would have been possible. Christopher Amer, Deputy State Archaeologist for Underwater was very cooperative in loaning his staff of Lynn Harris, Joe Beatty and Carl Naylor to conduct underwater recovery. The project was supplemented greatly by several volunteers without whom much less would have been accomplished. ART Board member and SCIAA trained hobby diver Lezlie Barker worked for three days including running the dredge. Lezlie was assisted by daughter Mills and niece Brandi. Volunteers Michael Hudson and Frank Lee, who also assisted in the May excavations, spent nearly the whole time on the project and performed underwater dredging. Archaeology graduate students Tom McIntosh (University of South Florida) and Myles Bland (USC) spent the entire week there and were of great assistance. Numerous folk helped in cleaning out the screens and bagging artifacts. These include Nena and Marion Rice, Tom McIntosh, John White, Myles Bland, Daryl and Jonathan Miller, Kevin Eberhard, Doug Vickery, John Whatley, Joey Smith, David Anderson, Chris Hensly and Mike Russo. Lab work for the underwater recovery and for cataloging the 1995 excavations is being done by Kara Bridgman, a soon to graduate senior in anthropology at USC. Kara is also the winner of a Rotary scholarship to go to school and travel in Europe in 1996 and plans to visit many archaeological sites and museums. Van Steen, undergraduate in anthropology at USC has also been volunteering in the lithics lab to help catalog the Big Pine Tree materials. Clariant who is the owner of the site and our gracious host is to be thanked for allowing us to be there and to use their recreation center as a place to camp and cook. Mr. Mike Anderson, personnel manager for Clariant as usual was very helpful during our stay and accommodating our many guests and volunteers.

Some additional funds have been donated to the project by some very kind friends. Dr. Ernest Helms of Kingsport, Tennessee has generously

(Continued on Page 11)
Allendale Research (Cont.)

donated sufficient funds to obtain four AMS radiocarbon dates on the Paleoindian levels. Jennifer Mills and John White have also made donations toward the radiocarbon dating of the fascinating Middle Archaic MALA midden. And, the Archaeological Research Trust recently gave a $1,000 grant to help support the lab studies.

One exciting new discovery which became evident this summer is the presence of microblades and their cores (see photo). Prismatic blades and cores of normal size (ca. 10 cm in length) have been known for the site, but several small bladelets and at least three microcores have now been found from the land excavations and lately underwater. These little blades are 6 cm in length or less and are reminiscent of microblade industries from the Arctic region. Furthermore, some of the microcores and blades show evidence of intentional thermal alteration of the chert, probably to aid in the precise pressing off of tiny blades. Intentional thermal alteration of the Paleoindian bifaces and other tools however is not present, a pattern consistent with North American Paleoindian assemblages. The microblades are definitely associated with the lower fluted biface occupation on the terrace as well as the Taylor Side-Notched occupation.

The Big Pine Tree site and our other studies in the vicinity of Smith’s Lake Creek are beginning to receive publication and publicity. There will be an article on Big Pine Tree written for the public in the December issue of the Mammoth Trumpet, the newsletter of the Center for the Study of the First Americans located at Oregon State University. Big Pine Tree and the Charles Site were reviewed in a paper presented at the XIV International Quaternary Association (INQUA) Congress in Berlin, Germany in August on the Pleistocene-Holocene transition co-presented by Chris Ellis, Al Goodyear, and Dan Morse. And in November, Goodyear and Dr. John E. Foss, the project soil scientist, gave a presentation on the geoarchaeology of Big Pine Tree at the Southeastern Archaeological Conference in Knoxville, Tennessee. Finally, we have our first masters thesis completed on an aspect of Big Pine Tree, a work entitled “Late Archaic Plant Use at the Big Pine Tree Site (38AL143), Allendale County, South Carolina” by Myles Bland. Myles analyzed charred plant remains from three Late Archaic (3800 - 3400 B.P.) hearths showing evidence of hickory, walnut and acorn nut usage. Other graduate students are being sought out who might also work on aspects of Big Pine Tree and related sites.

Have you ever wanted to join the big picture of archaeology but do not wish to spend a week at the Big Pine Tree Site? Allendale Paleoindian Expedition, please contact Dr. Albert Goodyear or Nena Powell Rice at SCIAA, 1321 Pendleton Street, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC 29208 (803) 777-8170. There are only 20 slots available, five people a week for four weeks. The first week begins Tuesday, May 7, 1996 and is over Saturday afternoon of each week. Participants will help out in all aspects of the excavation and laboratory analysis. Evening lectures on the archaeology of the Savannah River Valley and South Carolina will be provided by staff archaeologists and other visiting scientists. Some tours to nearby sites are also being planned. Free camping is available at the Clariant recreation shelter, including hot showers and a full kitchen. Each person must supply their own tent and bedding. Lunch and supper will be provided as part of the registration fee and a cook will prepare the evening meal. Motels are available within 25 minutes of the site for those that do not wish to camp.

If you are interested in participating in the 1996 ART supported Allendale Paleoindian Expedition, please contact Dr. Albert Goodyear or Nena Powell Rice at SCIAA, 1321 Pendleton Street, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC 29208 (803) 777-8170. There are only 20 slots available, five people a week for four weeks. The first week begins Wednesday, May 7, 1996 and is over Saturday afternoon May 11th. The last week begins May 28th and is over Saturday afternoon June 1st. Application materials will be sent upon request. All applications must include a $35 non-refundable application fee. The balance is due on or before March 1, 1996. Visitors are always welcome free on Saturdays.

If you are interested in supporting the Allendale Paleoindian Project, but do not wish to spend a week there excavating; please consider donating a registration fee to enable a student to attend. Your gift to the Archaeological Research Trust (ART) Allendale project is tax deductible.

Microcore and Microblades From the Big Pine Tree Site, Allendale County, South Carolina
Photo by Daryl Miller