The Pumpkin Site Update

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Publication Info

Published in PastWatch, Volume 5, Issue 1, 1996, pages 2-2.
http://www.cas.sc.edu/sciaa/
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Excavations at 38GR226 the “Pumpkin” site have been completed and analysis of the artifact data is underway. What can we expect to learn from this site? Preliminary examination of the artifacts and the map which was made of all the features indicate a repetition and reinforcement of what has been learned from previous excavations in North Carolina, Tennessee and Georgia. That is: that Conestee sites produce relatively little in terms of artifacts in relation to many other cultures. Stone tools are almost absent. Neither is there well-preserved bone or wood; no beads or other forms of body ornaments were recovered. No burials have been found at “Pumpkin”, also consistent with other Conestee sites. So what have we found to advance our knowledge of the Conestee people? The site itself is important. It places a sizable Conestee village farther south in Carolina than any previously recorded. A partial excavation—approximately 20%— has uncovered 504 features. These features resulted when prehistoric American Indians, thought to be Connestee, excavated post holes into the red clay subsoil for the construction of prehistoric houses and cooking hearths. They also dig large oval pits for a yet undetermined use. An elbow-type pipe was found that yielded a carbon-14 date of 440 AD and various Conestee pottery. All these things are attributes consistent with Conestee culture wherever found.

So what is missing that we can reasonably hope to add to this picture? How were the Conestee making a living? Were the Conestee people still maintaining a pure hunter/gatherer way of life or were they already experimenting with agriculture in the bottom lands of the nearby Saluda River? No where has this question been answered. Either other archaeologists have not acquired the material needed for such analysis or they lacked the funding to do it. Either way, at this time the first documentation of the growing of corn, squash and beans in this region is attributed to the Pisgah culture that immediately followed the Conestee. Speculation is that the Pisgah people were the first farmers, but that has neither been proved or disproved. The “Pumpkin” site has an excellent opportunity to do just that. We have obtained soil samples from each of the large pit features excavated. By submitting them to a process called “floatation” we can separate the minute seed and bone fragments—from the soil. These samples can then be analyzed by an expert to determine what was being utilized for food by the Conestee. This process—is the only way that we can recover data needed to determine how these people were utilizing the local environment for food. To prove, or disprove, that the Conestee were the first farmers in the lower Blue Ridge mountain area would be a tremendous discovery—the “Pumpkin” site offers that possibility.

The process of “floatation” and analysis will cost approximately $1,000 and will take several months to complete the process. Also I would like to obtain radiocarbon dates for several of the structural post molds to prove association with the Conestee or determine if they might possibly have been made by still earlier peoples. The possibility of them post dating Conestee is remote as we found no artifacts known to be from a later culture.

We have the possibility of adding a significant chapter to what is known about the Conestee. But to do so we need approximately $2,000 to cover the cost of floatation, analysis and several carbon-14 dates.