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Volunteer Opportunities Now Available for Working in the Topper Lab
By Albert C. Goodyear

For a number of years now, people have offered to come to the Institute to assist in the analysis of Topper artifacts. We are now in a position to offer lab work opportunities for two sessions in 2014. The first session will run from May 12-June 27, 2014. The second session will last from September 29-November 21, 2014. The lab is located in the Jones Physical Science Center across from the Law School on the USC campus. It is hoped that people will commit for at least a week, and they are welcome to stay longer if they desire. In order to operate the lab, there must be a lab director present full time. This year, I am pleased to announce that Joe Wilkinson will be managing the lab for both sessions. Funds must be available to keep the lab open. A tax-deductible donation of $275 is requested per person for each session. Checks should be made payable to USC Education Foundation and write Topper on the memo line. Please send checks in care of SCIAA-USC, 1321 Pendleton Street, Columbia, SC 29208. At this time, space is available each week for both sessions.

Lab work will start by organizing and classifying all of the various digs on the terrace portion of the site. Each two-meter unit will be analyzed by season from ground surface to preClovis where present. Volunteers will be taught how to recognize ceramic and lithic categories and prepare lab sheets for data entry into the computer.

Besides cataloging these collections, a number of research goals have been formulated with their respective analyses. First, is to reconstruct the occupational history of the site. The upper 30 centimeters contains minor Mississippian (1100-1400 AD) artifacts and a substantial Middle and Late Woodland occupation (2500 BP-1000 AD). Below that is a minor Late Archaic (4500-4000 BP) component with occasional heat-treated stemmed points (Figure 1) and steatite fragments. Fiber tempered pottery is seemingly absent. Prior to the Late Archaic, is an extraordinarily dense Allendale (AKA MALA) (4800-4500 BP) component, which is characterized by hundreds of broken and complete heat-treated bifaces and points (Figure 2). The Allendale people made heavy use of the terrestrial chert outcrops for their stone tool technology rivaling the use of the Clovis people several thousands years before. Topper and Big Pine Tree are currently the largest known Allendale sites in South Carolina. The preceding Middle Archaic period is only represented by occasional...
Morrow Mountain points. Dating from about 7500-6000 BP, there was an apparent abandonment of Topper as a quarry or habitation site, although numerous Morrow Mountains have been recovered from nearby Big Pine Tree and throughout Allendale County. Immediately below the Morrow Mountain zone begins an extensive Early Archaic side-notched (10,000-9500 BP) occupation, typified by the well-made Taylor points (Figure 3). The Taylor occupation zone has been recognized throughout the Topper site, and it will allow for tool kit reconstruction. Well made uniface scrapers and gravers are present suggesting habitation activities in addition to quarrying chert. Also a classic Early Archaic flaked adze has been found (Figure 4), as well as dimpled stones or bolas. The function of the bola stones is not known but they may have been net spreaders for catching birds and small game. Early Archaic people may have been manufacturing bolas at Topper utilizing the small quartz cobbles available there. The Early Archaic zone at Topper represents the first discernible occupation after Clovis. Only one Redstone and one Dalton point have been found there from 854 square meters of hand excavation, which is very scant compared to Clovis.

From the end of Clovis some 12,800 years ago up through Dalton (12,000-11,000 BP), there is little evidence Topper was occupied. Dalton is well represented at Big Pine Tree and over 100 have been found in the county. Compared to the later cultures at Topper, the Clovis occupation of the terrace and hillside is massive. Three of the four Clovis points (Figure 5) have been found on the terrace. Clovis level units on the terrace need to be carefully gone through for unifaces and blades and other small tools to compare to the hillside assemblages. Earlier (1985, 1986) excavations at Topper did not go below Clovis. Starting in 1998, the year of the pre-Clovis discovery, units were excavated into the Pleistocene Alluvial Sands down to the top of the Pleistocene Terrace. Several units in the Pleistocene Sands are yet to be analyzed and no doubt contain examples of bend breaks, flake tools, and possibly bladelets (Figure 6). Analysis of these Pleistocene age levels is critical to developing a comprehensive analysis of the pre-Clovis occupations at Topper. We are fortunate that Doug Sain is analyzing the pre-Clovis levels at Topper for his dissertation at the University of Tennessee. To date, he has analyzed all of the excavation levels in the Pleistocene Terrace and several units in the Pleistocene Sands.

Another research goal is to analyze the contact between the Clovis zone and the top of the Pleistocene Alluvial Sands. The previous OSL dates showed that the alluvium was covered by slope wash from the hillside around 14,000-15,000 years ago. It is not known by directly OSL dating this alluvium how old it is other than in is older than about 15,000 years. If there is a “late” pre-Clovis occupation of Topper like Meadowcroft Rockshelter and Cactus Hill (17,000-14,000 years ago), it might be lying at the interface of the colluvial slope wash and the Pleistocene Alluvial Sands. Small, well-made bladelets have been observed in this transitional zone, which could be
either Clovis or preClovis. Two unusual points (Figure 7) have been excavated in the alluvium toward the river, which appear to be more like the Cactus Hill points or perhaps the Haw River points; the latter being a morphological type suspected to be preClovis in age. They do not fit typologically with Clovis or Early Archaic points and preforms. We have started a survey of such points referred to as USL’s, Unidentified Small Lanceolates, to try to determine their time-space distribution.

A third goal is to document the presence of any bend break pieces in the Early Archaic and Clovis zones that lie above the Pleistocene Alluvial Sands. They have not been particularly noticed in previous examinations and accordingly have not been considered a source of artifacts bioturbated downward into the bend break rich Pleistocene sands. This observation needs to be systematically examined and quantified. Likewise, the incidence of river chert with its smoothed and stained cortex in the Early Archaic and Clovis zones needs to be further documented and compared with the evident lack of such chert in the preClovis levels. This is the strongest evidence yet for the artifactual integrity of the Pleistocene Sands as an assemblage that was not formed by artifacts moving down from above.

In April 2014, heavy-duty wooden shelves were constructed in SCIAA’s storage facility to accommodate the numerous bags and plastic tubs of Topper artifacts. This shelving is allowing us to organize the artifacts from the numerous excavations and will help facilitate systematic analyses. Containers of artifacts will be brought over to the Jones Lab and returned upon study or sent to permanent curation.

It is undoubtedly the case that there are more artifacts lying in the level bags from the Holocene and Pleistocene levels, which were missed during field mapping, especially small ones. Thorough lab analysis will add to the artifact inventory of this important site and complete its archaeological documentation. While some amazing discoveries have already been made at Topper, there are no doubt more to come via the lab. Volunteers, many of who helped excavate these artifacts, are welcome and even needed to complete the job. For those with no lab experience, procedures are in place to allow recognition of artifact classes. People with some patience and who are interested in puzzles are particularly welcome!

Those interested in participating in the lab should contact me at SCIAA at Goodyear@mailbox.sc.edu or (803) 576-6579. Maps and suggested motels will be sent by email. There are numerous motels within 20 minutes of the campus with a variety of restaurants. Daily parking is available on campus for $3.00 per day in the university’s Horizon Garage, only two blocks from the lab. Lunches can be brought to the lab and kept in a refrigerator. For those that wish to camp, a nice state park is only 12 miles away. The Sesquicentennial State Park has excellent camping facilities for tents and RV’s with complete amenities. Price is $22.46 per night. See www.southcarolinaparks.com.

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