Research Division

The Broad River Archaeological Field School: Season 2

By Andrew A. White

This spring saw the second season of field school excavations at site 38FA608 in Fairfield County, South Carolina (Figure 1). As in 2017 (White 2017a), the work was supported logistically by SCIAA and the Department of Anthropology at the University of South Carolina and utilized grant funds provided by the Archaeological Research Trust (ART). This year, significant assistance was also provided by the Cultural Heritage Trust Program of the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources. Videos and student blog posts and videos describing the 2017 and 2018 work are available on the Broad River Archaeological Field School website: http://broadriverarchaeologicalfieldschool.weebly.com/.

Previous fieldwork at 38FA608 was focused on understanding the stratigraphic sequence preserved in the sandy alluvial deposits of the site. Inspection of an irregular, machine-cut profile in 2015 and 2016 revealed that cultural deposits included ceramic-bearing strata near the surface, pit features originating at various depths, and a horizontal zone of quartz chipping debris buried about two meters (6.5 feet) beneath the surface (White 2015).

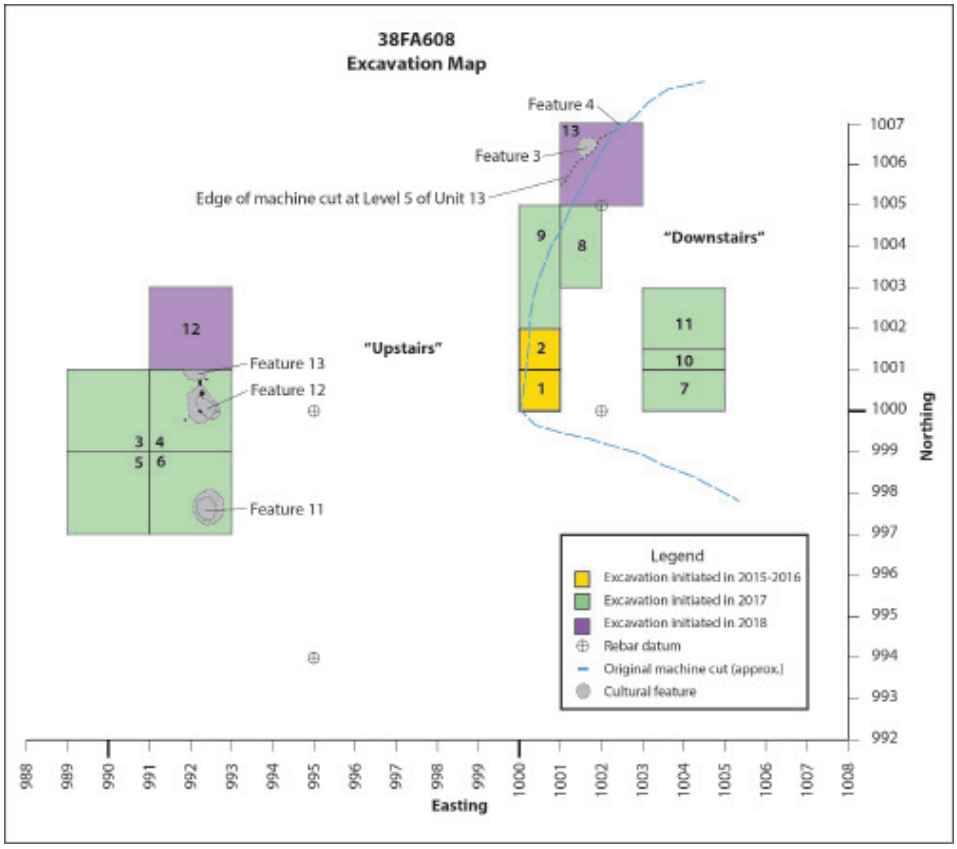

Figure 2: Plan map of excavations at 38FA608 showing locations of Terminal/Late Archaic features encountered in the block and exposed by the machine-cut profile. (Map by Andrew A. White)

Figure 1: Season 2 field school excavations in progress at 38FA608. Unit 13 is in the foreground; block excavations in the "upstairs" portion of the site are being conducted in the background. (Photo by Andrew A. White)

Hand excavation work in 2017 established both the Middle Archaic (ca. 4000 BC) age of the deeply-buried Zone 7 and the presence of significant, intact Late/Terminal Archaic (ca. 2000-1000 BC) deposits nearer the surface (White 2017a, 2017b).

The 2017 excavations in the "upstairs" block was halted as the tops of several cultural features (i.e., non-portable remains of human activities, such as pits dug for processing or cooking food) were encountered originating within a buried scatter of stone debris that contained several Mack points (dating to ca. 1200 BC) and a single Savannah River point (dating to ca. 2000 BC). Because these kinds of features preserve a record of a very discrete set of activities, they can potentially provide information about what individuals and small groups of people did at this site and

Figure 3: Features 11 and 12 prior to excavation. (Photo by Andrew A. White)

how those activities changed through time. That kind of high resolution data about Late/Terminal Archaic societies is sorely lacking in the Carolina Piedmont, making the deposits at 38FA608 of significant importance to understanding both local and regional prehistory.

The 2018 excavations focused on the dual goals of (1) excavating intact Terminal/Late Archaic features and (2) straightening and stabilizing the exposed vertical wall. Work continued in Units 3 and 5 in the block and two new units were established to fully expose features in plan view so they could be documented and excavated. Unit 12 was placed on the north end of the block to expose the northern portion of Feature 13. Unit 13 was placed along the wall to expose Feature 3 and create a plumb vertical surface that could be stabilized and protected (Figure 2). While excavations in Unit 12 did not reach the depth of Feature 13 this season, Features 11 and 12 in the block were successfully re-exposed, documented in plan view, bisected, and removed (Figures 3 and 4). Feature 11 was a relatively deep, conical pit filled with charcoal-flecked sediment. It was defined in plan both by its color—slightly darker than the surrounding matrix—and by its light densities of lithic material relative to the sediment around it. It contained few artifacts. Flotation samples from the feature, however, contained abundant nutshell and other carbonized remains that have the potential to tell us about subsistence and seasonality.

Feature 12 was a shallow basin, distinguished from the surrounding matrix by its slightly darker color and by its high densities of fire-cracked rock. This feature appeared superficially similar to two shallow, rock-lined basins (Features 4 and 5) exposed in the machine-cut wall. It is possible that these features were pits associated with using indirect heating technology to boil water. Like samples from Feature 11, flotation samples from Feature 12 contained abundant carbonized plant remains.

The excavation of Unit 13 (Figure 5) added significantly to our understanding of the Archaic deposits at 38FA608. The unit was placed to salvage Feature 3, a pit feature exposed in the machine-cut wall. Excavation suggested Feature 3 was a conical pit somewhat similar to Feature 11 in terms of contents. Following the removal of Feature 3, however, continued excavations in Unit 13 produced several Savannah River points (Figure 6) in situ as well as an additional small feature (Feature 17) and several possible postmolds. These Late Archaic materials and deposits were at about the same depth as Features 4 and 5 (two shallow, rock-lined basins) in the wall.

Beneath the Late Archaic component(s) in Unit 13, the density of artifacts decreased significantly, and no additional intact features were encountered. A Guilford point (dating to ca. 4000 BC) was recovered from the depth of Zone 7, re-confirming the age of that zone. Importantly, a Morrow Mountain point (ca. 5500 BC) was recovered in situ beneath the Guilford component (see Figure 6). This first discovery of Morrow Mountain material in context at 38FA608 places that portion of the Middle Archaic occupation in its expected


Figure 4: Excavation of Feature 11 (right) and Feature 12 (left) in progress. (Photo by Andrew A. White)

Figure 5: Students profile Unit 13 while Christopher Moore and Mark Brooks remove a column of sediment samples for particle size analysis. (Photo by Andrew A. White)

stratigraphic position, makes the 5870 +/- 30 RCYBP radiocarbon date (White 2017b) from the deeply buried materials below problematic, and resurrects the possibility that there is Early Holocene archaeology in the "basement" of 38FA608.

In total, five features dating to the Late/Terminal Archaic periods were completely or partially excavated during the 2018 season. The mixture of features—conical, midden-filled pits in combination with shallow, rock-lined basins—is similar to that seen in Late Archaic sites such as Mill Branch in Warren County, Georgia (Ledbetter 1995). It is possible that analysis of the excavation results from both Unit 13 and the block will allow the Terminal Archaic (Mack) and Late Archaic (Savannah River) components at the site to be at least somewhat separated stratigraphically. All of the excavated features produced carbonized materials suitable for radiocarbon dating.

Along with the presence of significant amounts of burned clay debris, the identification of possible postmolds suggests that the site may preserve evidence of Terminal/Late Archaic domestic structures such as houses, windbreaks, or other forms of shelter. Laboratory analysis and future fieldwork will explore that exciting possibility in addition to trying to understand the nature and chronology of the earlier deposits at the site.

I appreciate the hospitality and support of the landowner and his family, as well as generosity of ART and its board. I would also like to acknowledge the hard work of the field school students and thank DuVal Lawrence, Robert Gibbes, Will Britz, and Sean Taylor for their efforts in making this a successful endeavor.

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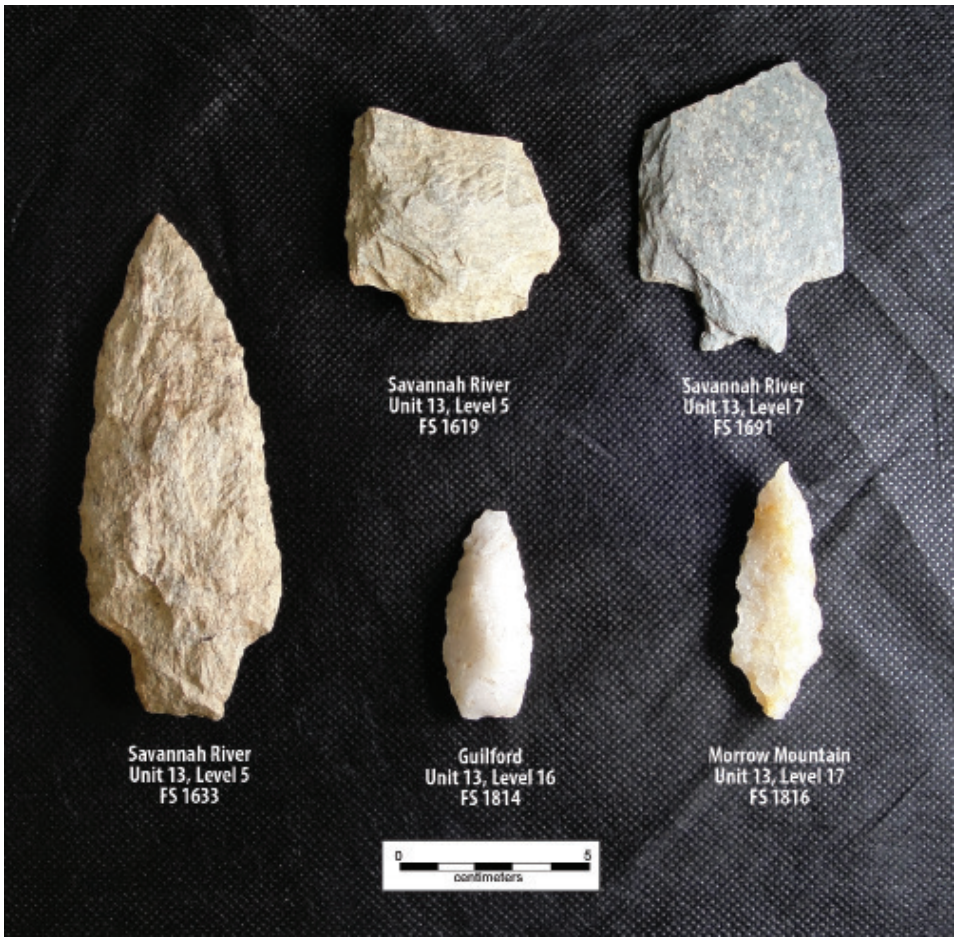

Figure 6: Late Archaic and Middle Archaic projectile points recovered from stratigraphic contexts in Unit 13. (Photo by Andrew A. White)