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Recognizing the Redstone Fluted Point in the South Carolina Paleoindian Point Database

Albert C. Goodyear

Recent evaluation by the author of the South Carolina Paleoindian point database indicates the substantial presence of a suspected middle-Paleoindian point historically known as Redstone (Cambron and Hulse 1964; Mason 1962:239; Perino 1968; Williams and Stoltman 1965)¹. Because of recent discoveries in South Carolina of large fluted points typical of the Redstone, it became clear that the Redstone had a straight to trianguloid blade configuration from the earliest stage of its use life (Figure 1A–D). Lanceolates with extremely long prominent flutes heretofore had been classified as Clovis (Charles and Michie 1992; Goodyear et al. 1990; Michie 1977). Accordingly, a review of all fluted points yielded a total of 48 Redstones that had previously been misclassified as Clovis.

Redstones were recognized and named starting in the 1960s by an avocationalist in the Southeast (Mahan 1964). They were named Redstone after the Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Alabama, near the portion of the Tennessee River Valley where they were originally recognized (Perino 1968:74). However, little attention has been paid by professionals to their cultural and chronological meaning owing to lack of excavated and dated contexts. The type descriptions emphasized the trianguloid blade, deep basal concavities, long multiple flutes, and acute tips (Mahan 1964:A-75; Perino 1968:74). Because of their prominent flutes, they were thought to be possibly related to Clovis or Cumberland. To date, they remain undated.

Based on the fluting technique, Redstones can be related to a post-Clovis, instrument-assisted method where a punch or pressure flaker was placed in the basal concavity to precisely remove the characteristic long flutes. Guide or release flakes similar to those seen on Folsom, Gainey, and Shoop points can be detected on many points. On some the flute can be traced back to the present basal concavity. Like Folsom, Gainey, and Debert points, it is likely that a nipple fluting platform was repeatedly set in the concavity during fluting, resulting in relatively deep basal concavities (Figure 1). Direct percussion fluting would have been impossible without destroying the ears. In contrast, Clovis points would have been fluted by direct percussion, probably from a beveled platform (Goodyear and Steffy 2003). It is known that Clovis points were fluted in multiple stages, often resulting in what Morrow (1995) has referred to as “composite” fluting. Such flutes do not normally originate at

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¹The primary attribute/measurement data for the 219 points discussed in this article are available directly from the author or may be accessed on the Web site for the Paleoindian Database of the Americas: <http://pidba.tennessee.edu/southcarolina.htm> (Anderson et al. 2005).

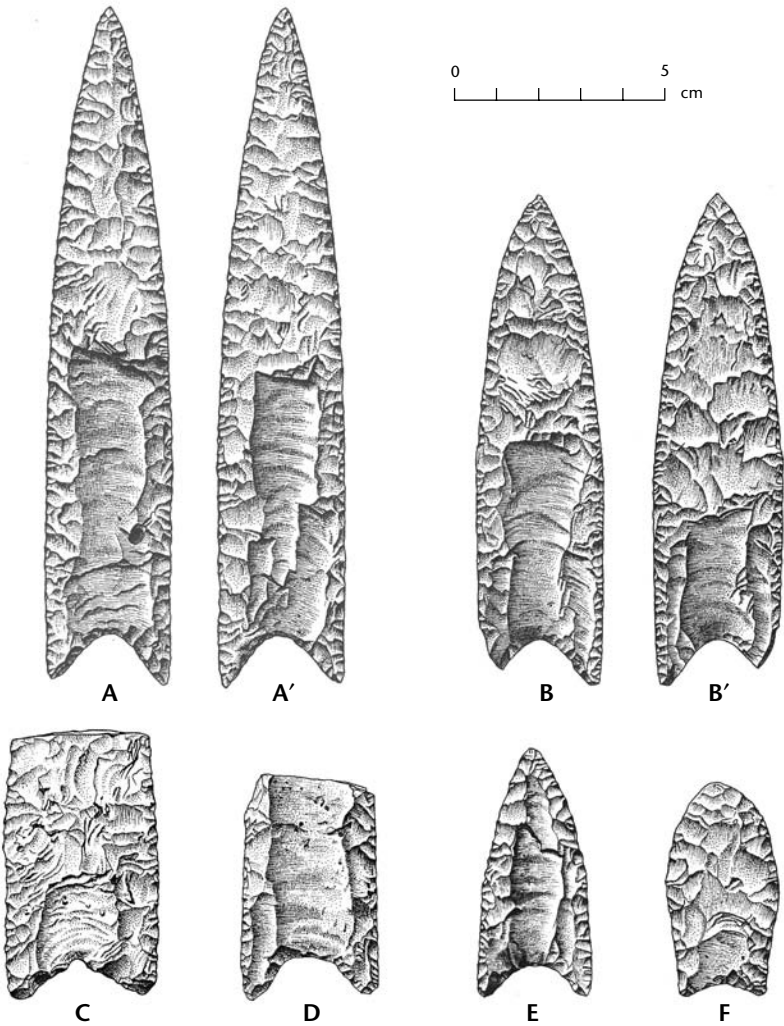


Figure 1. Redstone fluted points from South Carolina, **A** (SC 365), **C** (SC 271), **D** (SC 214), **E** (SC 157); **B** (SGA 2), Burke Co., Georgia; **F**, Clovis (SC 357).

the present margin of the basal concavity (Figure 1F). Redstones differ from Clovis not only in fluting technique but probably in projectile function. Clovis point blades are usually excurvate, wider than their hafts, and resharpened to a nearly rounded tip (Figure 1F). Redstones have narrower, elongated trianguloid blades with sharp tips. Clovis points would appear to be designed for piercing-cutting, Redstones for piercing-penetrating. It is likely that the proboscideans were gone by Redstone times, leaving elk and bison as the largest fauna in the South.

Reclassifying the South Carolina database resulted in approximately four Clovis points for every one Redstone. Using Clovis and Redstone fluted points made from coastal plain Allendale-type chert and high-quality metavolcanics, a total of 179 Clovis were found versus 40 Redstones (4.5:1). Within the Allendale chert cases, 115 were Clovis versus 24 Redstone (4.8:1). Within metavolcanics, it was 64 Clovis versus 16 Redstones (4:1). Assuming Redstones date from 10,800 to 10,500 RCYBP, and Clovis dates from 11,300 to 10,900 RCYBP, a precipitous decline in post-Clovis fluted points is indicated. No other Paleoindian points are known for this area of the Southeast to fill in this time period. Daltons presumably began around 10,500 RCYBP (Goodyear 1982). For the Allendale County region of South Carolina, there are an estimated 20 Dalton points for every Redstone. This apparent decline in projectile points also occurs during the Younger Dryas, a time thought to be colder and dryer than Clovis times. The strong presence of Dalton points throughout the Southeast would suggest any demographic problems were ameliorating by then. As a cross-check on the South Carolina database, the North Carolina Paleoindian point survey was also reclassified as a result of searching for Redstones. It resulted in a Clovis-to-Redstone ratio of 3:1 (Daniel and Goodyear 2006). This pattern of a high Clovis-to-Redstone ratio apparently is not restricted to the Carolinas. In his survey of the Nottaway River drainage in southeast Virginia, McAvoy (1992) found a dramatic post-Clovis drop in what he calls deep concave-based fluted points and sites. He postulates a major population reduction in this region after Clovis times. For the entire Virginia database Johnson (1996:205) notes that the proportion of concave base to presumably Clovis points is 11 percent. More attention should be paid to a possible post-Clovis, pre-Dalton decline in Paleoindian points in the Southeast to determine the archaeological reality of this suggested pattern. Firestone et al. (2005) have postulated that an extraterrestrial comet-like impact event occurred over North America at about 12,900 CALYBP, causing the onset of the Younger Dryas and extinction of dozens of large ice age faunal species. If this is the case, it is possible that the human population decline suggested by the drop in post-Clovis projectile points over much of the Southeast may be related to such a catastrophic event.

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