

3-1998

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Publication Info

Published in *Legacy*, Volume 3, Issue 1, 1998, pages 5-5.

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The Growing Evidence of a Late Paleoindian Dalton Occupation at the Big Pine Tree Site

By Albert Goodyear, Staff Archaeologist

In the past four seasons of excavation at the Big Pine Tree site, archaeological evidence has been slowly emerging for a substantial Dalton occupation. The evidence is in the form of the diagnostic Dalton point, a total of 10 of which have been found. The Dalton point is known for its steeple-shaped blade which becomes indented from repeated resharpenings from use as a knife.

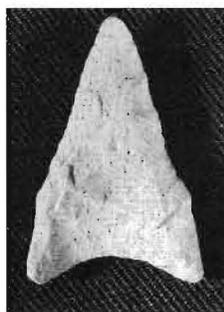
Dalton points are part of a broader prehistoric phenomenon known as the Dalton culture or horizon, which is recognized by the projectile point/knife and a series of typical Paleoindian flake tools which existed from about 10,500 to 10,000 radiocarbon years ago in most areas of the southeastern United States. Dalton culture is best known and described from studies done in northeast Arkansas at such classic sites as Brand and Sloan, the latter being a cemetery where hundreds of pristine stone tools were found with human burials. Because of the great similarity in the stone tools such as endscrapers, sidescrapers, prismatic blades, and graters with that of the preceding Clovis culture, not to mention the basally-thinned and fluted bases of the

points, many have classified Dalton as Late Paleoindian. Based on the few radiocarbon dates available for Dalton, plus the fact that Daltons are often found below Early Archaic side-notched points at several key sites in the South, a date range of 10,500 to 10,000 radiocarbon years is widely accepted for their age. In the few cases where animal bones have been found with Dalton artifacts, the species are invariably modern or Holocene indicating Dalton people lived after the time of the great ice age animals such as mammoth and mastodon.

At the Big Pine Tree site on Smiths Lake Creek in Allendale County, South Carolina, excavations both on land and underwater have produced a growing number of Dalton points. Four of these have been excavated in their original archaeological context in the land portion, and two have been found in the backhoe trench spoil. The remaining four have come from underwater data recovery. One of these was made from rhyolite which is native to the Piedmont, the rest being made from local coastal plain Allendale chert. Based on the varying condition of their blades, it seems that some of the points were made at Big

Pine Tree and broken or lost there, and some were used up and discarded. Stratigraphically, the four excavated Dalton points have come within the 100 to 115 cm zone of the site which also has produced a number of Taylor side-notched points. This zone is rich in stone tools such as blades and scrapers which are probably associated with both point types. The Savannah River may not have flooded enough after Dalton times to deposit enough sediment to stratigraphically separate Daltons from Taylor points. Below 115 cm is where most of the fluted blanks have been found, which are thought to be Clovis preforms.

The Allendale Paleoindian Expedition will return to the Big Pine Tree site in May of 1998 in the continuing search for the elusive remains of Dalton culture and their Clovis ancestors. As it stands now, Big Pine Tree may be the largest Dalton site recorded on the South Carolina coastal plain. Continued work there will hopefully reveal how big it is and why they revisited this location. If you would like to participate in this excavation, please sign up soon as only a few slots are left for this year's dig.



Dalton points at the Big Pine Tree site. (Photos by Daryl P. Miller)