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Archaeology in the Upstate of South Carolina

By Tommy Charles

Over the past winter, a coalition of persons joined to formulate a plan to enhance public awareness and interest in the history and prehistory of South Carolina's Upstate region. Broadly, our objectives are to find, evaluate, and conduct research at archaeological sites having potential to better define the regions' cultural history. Toward that end, much of the spring and early summer was spent conducting test excavations at several prehistoric archaeological sites in Spartanburg, Greenville, and Pickens Counties. These tests were a joint venture with SCIAA, Wofford College, and Furman University archaeologists participating, plus archaeologist Francis Knight, a newcomer to the area from Illinois, and a host of volunteers. Our efforts rewarded us with two prehistoric sites, 38GR1 in Greenville County and 38PN35 in Pickens County, that are worthy of additional research.

38GR1 is a large site, rich in subsurface cultural features and artifacts, indicating a substantial occupation during the Pisgah Cultural period (A.D. 1000-1550). The site contains a number of well-defined stratums to a depth of at least 280 centimeters, at which point, water was encountered, that for the present, prevented deeper explorations. Our expectations are to find a series of increasingly earlier cultural components within these various stratums. An unexpected find was a ceramic sherd of Thoms Creek pottery, seldom found north of Columbia and previously unrecorded that far north.

Tests at 38PN35 were equally rewarding, but different. There is a shallow Woodland component near the ground surface and just below it

is a well-defined stratum rich with Late Archaic cultural materials. Below the Archaic stratum is a sterile lens of soil, and below that, a well defined but yet unidentified cultural deposit of cracked and utilized rock. The perimeter of this site was being cleared of trees as we tested, and a tree was felled that pulled up a large sherd of Stallings Island Punctate pottery. Stallings Island is among the oldest known pottery in North America, and like the Thoms Creek pottery, Stallings Island has never been reported this far north and away from the Savannah River in South Carolina. At these two sites, conducting very limited excavations, we have already discovered two types of prehistoric pottery that are older than any yet recorded from this region of South Carolina. This reflects how little we know about the regions' prehistory, and how fortunate we are to have these two sites with potential to yield prehistoric cultural data never before examined on the South Carolina Upstate.

Our plans for excavation are, using a "Gradall," a large piece of construction equipment, to remove the plow zone from a large area at site 38GR1. Removing the plow zone should reveal a large number of cultural features in the soil stratum immediately below the plow zone. We anticipate that these features will reveal the shape of prehistoric structures, as well as hearths and storage and roasting pits. From these features,

data may be recovered that will establish times and seasons of occupations and perhaps information about prehistoric plant domestication and use. Because the sites are located on land that is cultivated yearly, the window for research is after crops are harvested in the fall and before it is time to plant in the spring. We are seeking funds as well as volunteers in the field to support these two excavations.

A finite start up date will soon be made and those persons interested in taking part, or supporting these excavations may contact the following persons. Tommy Charles, University of South Carolina, South Carolina Institute of Archeology, 1321 Pendleton Street, Columbia SC, 29208, (803) 777-8170 (office), e-mail: charlest@sc.edu; Dr. Terry Ferguson, Wofford College, Geology Department, 429 N. Church St., Spartanburg, SC 29303-3663, (864) 597-4527 (office), e-mail: FergusonTA@Wofford.edu; and/or Dr. Brian Siegel, Furman University, Department of Sociology, 3300 Poinsett Highway, Greenville, SC 29613-0476, (864) 294-3304 (office), e-mail: bsiegel@furman.edu.



Dr. Francis Knight and Dr. Terry Ferguson testing at archaeological site 38GR1. (SCIAA photo by Tommy Charles)