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Across the Coastal Plain: Examining the Prehistoric Archaeology of the Inter-Riverine Zone Through Private Collections

By Albert C. Goodyear and Joseph E. Wilkinson

Most of the large prehistoric sites that have been excavated on the southern South Carolina Coastal Plain have been associated with the large rivers such as the Savannah, Congaree, and Santee. Sites on the Savannah River like those on Groton Plantation, the Lawton mound, Topper, Big Pine Tree, the Lewis site, and Ft. Watson and the Mattassee Lake sites on the Santee, have provided much of our cultural historical frameworks for prehistory. These sites with their alluvial stratigraphy, mounds, and occasional shell middens have provided the contexts for buried artifacts, features, and assemblages so necessary for dating and interpreting human behavior in large residential sites.

The zone between the major rivers, referred to here as the inter-riverine zone, has seen little survey and excavation to illuminate how prehistoric peoples utilized and potentially occupied this vast area. In the Upper and Middle Coastal Plain, few sites have been excavated and some only

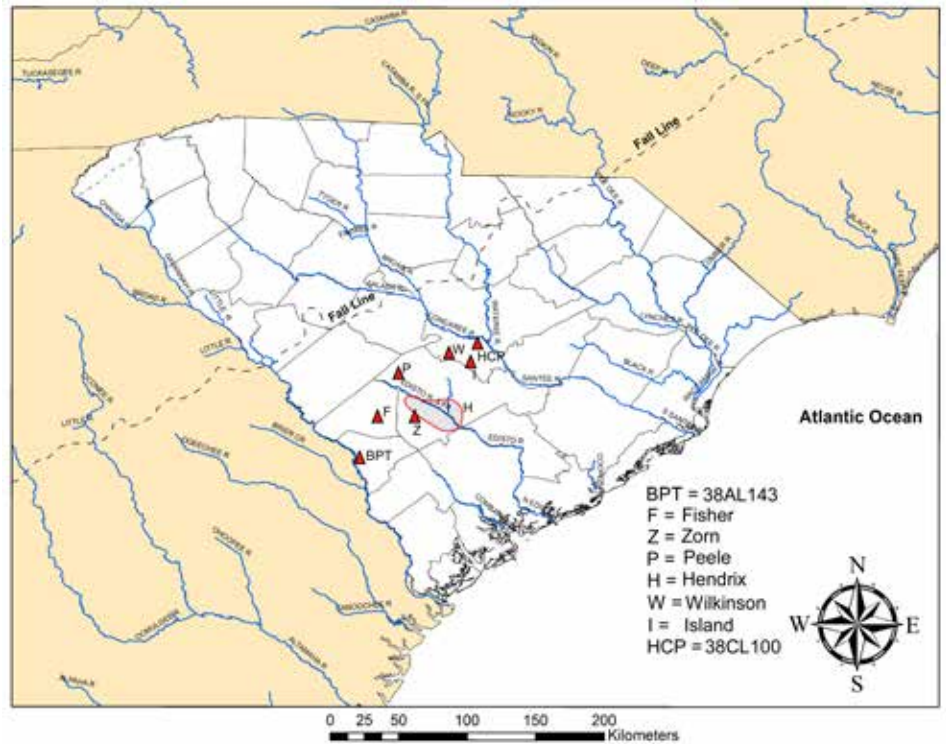


Figure 2: Map showing locations of private collections studied in the inter-riverine zone of the southern South Carolina Coastal Plain. (Map courtesy of Christopher Moore)

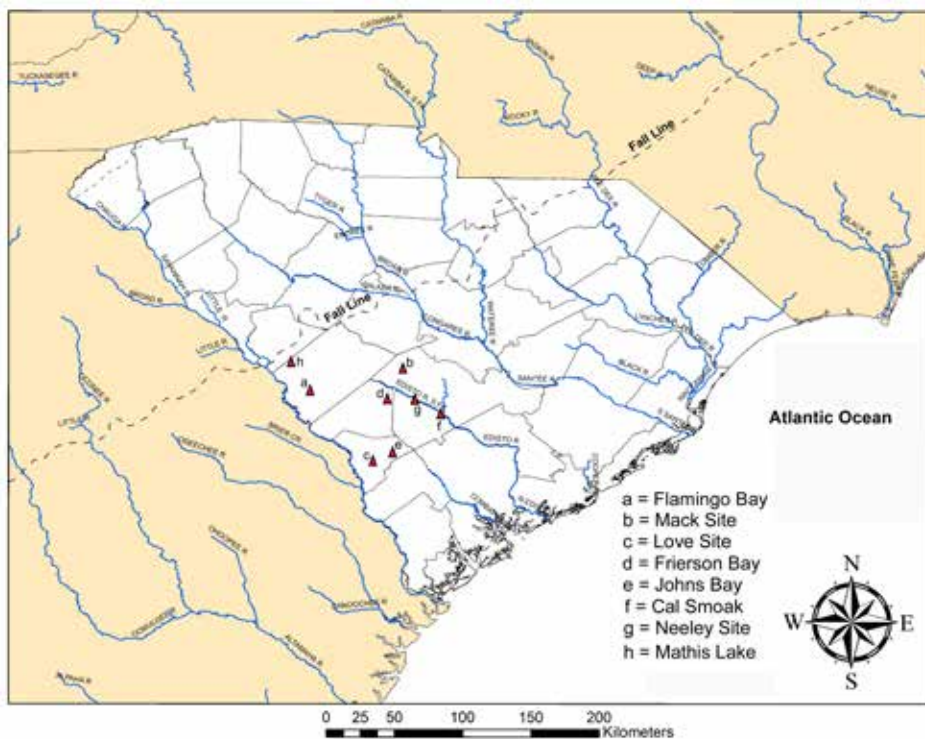


Figure 1: Map showing locations of excavated and tested sites in the inter-riverine zone of the southern South Carolina Coastal Plain. (Map courtesy of Christopher Moore)

minimally tested (Figure 1). The major published exception is on the Cal Smoak site (38BM4) located near the juncture of the South and North Edisto Rivers, which was excavated by members of the Archaeological Society of South Carolina and written up by David Anderson (Anderson, Lee, and Parler 1979). The Alan Mack site, (38OR67) (Michie 1982), located on the west bank of the North Edisto River, was excavated by Jim Michie, Bob Parler, and Sammy Lee, and members of the Archaeological Society of South Carolina. It is perhaps the largest excavation of a prehistoric site in the inter-riverine zone on the southern Coastal Plain, although as yet, it has not been published. One large, well collected private collection, that of Sonny Zorn from around his home south of Denmark (Figure 2), was analyzed by Ken Sassaman and the staff from the Savannah River Plant (Sassaman et al.



Figure 3: Kat Salley with her artifact collection from High Creek Plantation. (Photo by Albert Goodyear)

2005). This collection had nearly 1,500 artifacts, including 1,329 typed points. The sheer numbers of diagnostic artifacts from nearly all time periods makes this a major study for the Coastal Plain.

Recently the authors had the opportunity to study several large private collections from the inter-riverine zone, which together form a transect from the Savannah to the Congaree and Santee Rivers (Figure 2). The analytical value of these collections is great, as they were made by one person or a family with very thorough collecting methods. A total of 2,764 hafted bifaces (points) were classified ranging from Clovis to Mississippian. In addition, other stone tools besides points were also inventoried to give a more complete idea of what kind of technologies were being brought into the zone.

One large collection has been made by the Salley family, owners of High Creek Plantation (38CL100) from their 1,700-acre tract overlooking the Congaree River (Figure 2). Mrs. Kat Salley has collected cultivated fields and dirt roads several times a year for 12 years amassing a large assemblage of lithics and ceramics (Figure 3). Likewise her daughter-in-law, Mrs. Jane Salley (Figure 4) has collected fields and roads, especially near their home overlooking the Congaree River. High Creek Plantation is also the source of a Coastal Plain chert known as Black Mingo Chert. Extensive evidence of quarrying was found in the form of waste flakes

and discarded biface preforms over the entire property. Analysis of their artifact collection allowed us to evaluate the occupational history over a 13,000-year span and to determine during what time periods the chert was most frequently utilized (Goodyear and Wilkinson 2014).

One individual is personally responsible for two large collections, one from Orangeburg County (Peele) and one from Calhoun County (Island) (Figure 2). Steve Williams (Figure 5) is a skilled flintknapper and a long time participant in the Allendale Paleoamerican Expedition excavations at Topper and Big Pine Tree. His collecting behavior is enhanced by his ability to make stone tools, insuring that more than just the obvious projectile points were collected. His collection from the Peele site yielded 362 typed points and that from Island summed to 711. His work represents over 1,000 points and other tools collected by one person. Another important single site collection is that of Lorene Fisher (Figure 6) in her yard from her vacation home outside of Barnwell. This site (38BR1373) is located on a small creek north of the Salkehatchie River. Other collections include that of Dennis Hendrix from life long collecting primarily in the Bamberg County area and that of the Wilkinson family on their land outside of St. Matthews (Figure 2).

Joe Wilkinson is taking a subset of these collections, plus adding other smaller private collections and conducting an analysis of the Early Archaic archaeology within this transect. Hafted bifaces from the Big Pine Tree site (Figure 2), an extensive Savannah River Coastal Plain chert quarry with a heavy Early Archaic presence, is also being included, plus Sassaman's published analysis of the Zorn collection. Combining all of the collections, he is working with a sample of 655 typed Early Archaic points, including side notched, corner notched, Kirk stemmed, bifurcates, and Stanlys (Wilkinson 2014). In addition, he is evaluating the Early Archaic flake tools, such as end and side scrapers, Waller knives, and Edgefield scrapers. His work should result in adding to the models of Early Archaic settlement types and mobility ranges as originally formulated by Sassaman, Hanson, and Charles (1988), Anderson and Hanson (1988), and Randy Daniel (2001). Connecting the Early Archaic sites and technology of the inter-riverine zone with that of the major river sites should provide for a more complete picture for this time period.

Well provenienced and conscientiously collected private collections are a prime means by which archaeologists can gain an understanding of large portions of the state. Given the vast areas that early people moved over their annual rounds, such collections provide invaluable data



Figure 4: Jane Salley with her artifact collection from High Creek Plantation. (Photo by Joseph E. Wilkinson)



Figure 5: Steve Williams at the Island site, 38CL102. (Photo by Albert Goodyear)

toward understanding variation in sites commensurate with the geographic extent of their settlement ranges. It is clear from our study of this transect that people for thousands of years regularly moved from the Savannah River to the Congaree and Santee Rivers bringing numerous chert tools manufactured from Allendale type chert. Archaeologists should make an effort to work with collectors analyzing their collections, especially large ones that often contain statistically rare types of artifacts that are hard to find otherwise. An example of this can be found in a recent study of fluted points in the COWASEE Basin which relied exclusively on private collections (Goodyear 2014). Following Sassaman et al. (2005), archaeologists should endeavor to acquire certain collections to curate them for future generations who no doubt will have new questions and methods. Private collections often do not come to a good end when the collector stops collecting or passes on. Heirs and relatives are not always interested in them, may even think they should be sold, can be stolen or destroyed in house fires. Two important collections that the senior author is familiar with were burned up in house fires. Chert artifacts and flames do not mix well.

Acquiring significant private collections for permanent curation is a

worthy goal, both now and in the future, to help ensure critical data are available for future studies and display.

We thank the members of the public who made these collections available to us and in so doing joined professional archaeologists in coming to a better understanding of South Carolina archaeology. Besides the collectors mentioned above, we thank Lee Thomas, Gene Porter, and Tim Ridge who also allowed us to study their collections. Fortunately, in the tradition of the original Collectors Survey conducted by Tommy Charles, SCIAA is continuing this program with Jim Legg who is recording both prehistoric and historic artifact collections.

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Figure 6: Lorene Fisher with one of her finds at the Fisher site, 38BR1373. (Photo by Jessica Phillips)