North Carolina Archaeological Society

Newsletter

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Pocosin Archaeology in North Carolina

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Nine prehistoric sites located in the Greater Sandy Run pocosin, within the reservation of Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, Onslow County, North Carolina, were evaluated recently by archaeologists associated with Louis Berger & Associates, Inc. (Reid 1997a). The work was conducted at the request of the Wilmington District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) with funds provided by Camp Lejeune and administered by the Mobile District, USACE. The objective of the investigation was to evaluate the significance, in terms of eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places, of these sites. This served to orient the research toward a study of stratigraphy, to ascertain whether intact cultural deposits were present; to identify cultural and temporal associations; and to determine site structure and function.

These sites were among 22 prehistoric and historic sites initially recorded during a series of archaeological surveys in four areas designated for Marine Corps construction projects (Reid et al. 1995). Further investigation was proposed for a representative sample of nine sites, based on the presence of relatively deep cultural deposits. All of the sites also shared the characteristics of small size, presence of similar numbers and classes of artifacts, and location within a similar topographic setting.

The physical environment of the Greater Sandy Run study area is dominated by two large pocosin basins, extensive areas of hardwood swamp bordering the steams which drain the pocosin basins, and a wide range of plant and animal life. Substantial areas of pine plantation are also present, soils tend to be poorly drained, and relief is minimal. These features have acted to limit access in the historic past and to hinder recent efforts at systematic archaeological survey and evaluation within the region.

Another aspect of the environment has had a major impact on cultural deposits present (Wagner 1996). This area has long been subjected to erosional and depositional processes driven by the changing climates of the later Pleistocene and Holocene periods, and most soils and landscapes have originated from periods of landscape instability and restabilization greatly postdating the formation of the original landform. During periods of reduced vegetation, created by climatic change and perhaps exacerbated by fire, the exposed fine sandy soils predominating in the study area were highly susceptible to aeolian movement. Consequently, soils in which the upper levels have been reworked by aeolian activity during one or more periods in the past 10,000 years are common.

In pursuit of the goals of the investigation, a large number of test units were excavated at the nine sites. No cultural features were identified and the relatively deep archaeological deposits were determined to be culturally mixed. As a result, the sites, as well as all similar sites (i.e., small, multi-component, and stratigraphically mixed) within the Camp Lejeune military reservation, were recommended as not eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. However, considerable new information was acquired about this group of small pocosin sites.

Stratigraphically, aeolian winnowing and redeposition, along with other pedoturbational processes prevalent in sandy soils, were found to have effectively eliminated any stratigraphic separation of chronologically different cultural materials present at the sites (Wagner 1996). The upper sandy layers, in which cultural materials were contained, are believed to have originated from one or more episodes of aeolian reworking of the site deposits, during which soils above the

argillic horizon were mobilized and redeposited, causing artifacts to drift downward in the soil matrix.

The material culture assemblage recovered from the sites reflects limited diversity and density, and consists primarily of prehistoric pottery and lithics. Another distinguishing characteristic of the collection of artifacts is the ratio of prehistoric pottery to chipped-stone lithics; pottery represents approximately 75 percent of the collection, while lithics comprise less than 25 percent. The relatively small size of the lithic assemblage, in comparison to sites of similar dimensions in the Ridge and Valley physiographic province of Virginia (see Reid 1997b), serves to underscore the scarcity of lithic material suitable for tool manufacture in the North Carolina Coastal Plain, suggests that formal lithic tools may have been highly curated, and implies that tools of bone, shell, and wood, which would have deteriorated over time, may have been of considerable importance.

Six different pottery types were identified. The largest percentage within the assemblage, and at each of the sites, was clay/grog-tempered Middle Woodland Hanover ware. Thermoluminescence dating of a sherd of Hanover pottery produced a date of AD 621 ± 246 (UWash NC596). Following in density, and close in relative percentage present, were Early Woodland coarse sand-tempered New River pottery and Middle Woodland grit/pebble/sand-tempered Cape Fear series. These materials were not present at all of the sites and percentages varied widely at the sites where they did occur. A sherd of New River pottery was also subjected to thermoluminescence dating, and produced a date of 593 ± 441 BC (UWash NC542). Present in much smaller percentages in the pottery assemblage were limestone/marl-tempered Hamps Landing, tentatively identified by Hargrove (1993) as an Early to early Middle Woodland material; sand-tempered Thom's Creek Punctate; and steatite-tempered, probable Marcey Creek wares. Small amounts of burned clay or daub, some exhibiting plant fiber and tree branch impressions, were also recovered at several of the sites, suggesting that structures may have been present.

Although the pottery indicates that the sites were occupied during the Early and Middle Woodland periods, lithic diagnostic materials present a somewhat different picture. Of the seven projectile points recovered, five are associated with the Middle Archaic period. These include one Stanly Stemmed, one Halifax Side-Notched, one Morrow Mountain I, and two Morrow Mountain II points. A slightly eared point, classified as either a Paleoindian Transitional (Phelps 1983) or a Middle Woodland Nomini (Waselkof 1982), as well as a Roanoke Triangular type, were also uncovered. The apparent Middle Archaic presence at this group of sites is interesting. Unfortunately, no other record of these occupations was found which would add to our knowledge of Middle Archaic utilization of the pocosins.

The lithic debitage assemblage also provides insights into the nature of the occupation of these sites. Although a relatively small of amount of debitage was collected, it appears that all stages of lithic tool manufacture and maintenance occurred at the sites. Raw materials included rhyolite, quartz, and quartzite, with rhyolite occurring more than twice as frequently as quartz, the next most prevalent material. Chert, jasper, and chalcedony were also present in small amounts. Notably, cobble cortex occurred most frequently on the quartz artifacts, suggesting local procurement from nearby streams and estuaries, while the rhyolite artifacts exhibited block cortex, implying acquisition from surface outcrops, probably in the Piedmont.

All of the sites are located on well-drained microlandforms. These landforms, which are generally no more than 50 to 100 meters across their largest expanse, tend to exist as hillocks or low ridges which rise above the surrounding terrain by less than one meter. At other times they can be discerned as areas of well-drained soil, noticeable only by the type and density of vegetation, a reflection of the quality of soil drainage. The surrounding land surface is often poorly drained. The sites are all located on the periphery of the hardwood swamps which border the streams, and most are on small peninsulas which extend into the swamp.

In reviewing these data, it seems apparent that all of these sites are of a similar type and represent small, resource procurement locations. Also termed exploitative-foray, short-term habitation, or extraction sites, these locations were likely occupied, primarily during the Early and Middle Woodland, on a seasonal basis for short periods of time, by small numbers of people, and were infrequently reoccupied. The focus of this series of limited settlements may have been on the exploitation of locally available resources, possibly the acorns, hickory nuts, and deer found in the bottomlands along the streams.

The question remains as to why these pocosin sites were occupied primarily during the Early and Middle Woodland, and why no evidence of Late Woodland occupation was found, even though the Late Woodland period is heavily represented at nearby larger sites along the sounds and estuaries. Among the possible explanations are: (1) increased sea levels, which would have had a major impact on the low-lying pocosins and associated streams and swamps; or (2) the arrival of another cultural group with an exclusive orientation toward estuarine resources. Further work is required, however, to explain this apparent shift in settlement patterns beginning with the Late Woodland period.

References Cited

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1997 Archaeology Month Posters

The commemorative poster for North Carolina Archaeology Month 1997 will be ready at the end of September. Copies of this poster are free to members of the North Carolina Archaeological Society by requesting one from the Office of State Archaeology at 109 East Jones Street, Raleigh, North Carolina 27601-2807, by phone at (919)733-7342, or by e-mail at: archaeology @ncsl.dcr.state.nc.us. Every member of the Society is entitled to one free poster. Additional posters may be ordered for $1.00 each, plus $2.00 shipping per order. Copies of the poster to be used for educational purposes are also free. Proceeds from the sale of additional posters will go toward the design and production of next year's poster.

The Poster Committee (Tom Beaman, Danny Bell, Linda Carnes-McNaughton, and John J. Mintz) again wishes to thank all Society members who contributed time and/or money to make the 1997 Archaeology Month poster a success.

NCAS Chapter to be Organized in Greenville

A local chapter of the North Carolina Archaeological Society is being organized in the Greenville area. The first meeting will be held at 7:00PM on October 16, 1997, in the Phelps Archaeological Laboratory at East Carolina University. At the meeting, officers of the new chapter will be elected, a name for the chapter will be selected, and future chapter activities will be planned. Also, Dr. Randy Daniel will speak on his reanalysis of the Hardaway Site, a prominent Archaic period site in the North Carolina Piedmont, which is the subject of his forthcoming book by the University of Alabama Press. Light refreshments will be served. For more information, contact either Tom Beaman (126 Canterbury Road, Wilson, NC 27896, phone 919/291-2768, e-mail TBeamanJr@aol.com) or the Phelps Archaeological Laboratory (919/328-6905).

NCAS Annual Fall Meeting Scheduled for October 18 at the Schiele Museum of Natural History in Gastonia, North Carolina

Agenda Inserted

1997 NC State Fair

We are planning for the 1997 NC State Fair exhibit for October 17-26. We still have a few openings if you want to help man our booth located in the Kerr Scott Building. Please contact Dee Nelms @ 919/733-7342 for available times. You will get an entrance pass for the day(s) you work. We need your help. Thank you.

NCAS Newsletter Publication Schedule

All NCAS members are encouraged to submit articles and news items to Dee Nelms, Associate Editor, for inclusion in the *Newsletter*. Please use the following cut-off dates as guides for your submissions:

Spring Issue	February 28
Summer Issue	May 31
Fall Issue	August 31
Winter Issue	November 30

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