ARCHAEOLOGY AT AYERS TOWN

AN EARLY FEDERAL PERIOD COMMUNITY IN THE CATAWBA NATION

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MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

The Ayers Town site (38YK534) was discovered in 2008 during an archaeological and architectural survey by Legacy Research Associates to assess the impact of the proposed SC Bridges over the Catawba River and Twelve Mile Creek project near Catawba, South Carolina. The site was found to contain evidence of an eighteenth-century residential occupation by members of the Catawba Indian Nation and was recommended as being eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion D for its information potential. In 2010, the South Carolina Department of Transportation sub-contracted, through Mulkey Engineers and Consultants, with the Research Laboratories of Archaeology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to undertake archaeological data recovery at the site. Because of the site's small size, its planned impact from the re-location of a high-pressure gas pipeline adjacent to the highway, and the potential for archaeologically and culturally sensitive features being present, the scope of work called for complete excavation of the site.

Archaeological field investigations began on April 20, 2010 and were completed on January 6, 2011. These investigations included: (1) mapping of shovel test pits previously excavated by Legacy archaeologists and comprehensive metal detection survey to identify site limits and determine areas of artifact concentration; (2) remote sensing survey using a gradiometer and soil-auger testing at one-meter intervals to identify subsurface pit features; (3) systematic excavation of 24 1x1-m test pits across the site at 10-m intervals to assess site stratigraphy and sample artifacts from plowed soil deposits; (3) excavation of 87 additional 1x1-m units in 14 blocks to fully expose archaeological features identified in test pits and explore other areas suspected to contain archaeological features; (4) stripping of plowed soil using a mini-excavator and cleaning the exposed top-of-subsoil surface to identify and map archaeological features; and (5) the excavation of identified archaeological features.

One hundred and ninety-one archaeological features were found; of these, 165 are attributed to an historic, late eighteenth-century Catawba site occupation based on artifact content or spatial context, two are attributed to earlier Archaic or Woodland period occupations, and 24 were determined to be natural soil disturbances. Features associated with the main Catawba occupation of the site include: 22 sub-rectangular and circular storage pits; 16 basin-shaped borrow pits; 40 postholes; 45 small, charcoal-filled smudge pits; 31 rectangular graves; five other small pits; five refuse-filled stump holes; and an erosional gully thought to be associated with a late eighteenth-century road running through the site. Cultural deposits within features were excavated stratigraphically, and all fill was processed by a combination of waterscreening through fine mesh and flotation. The spatial arrangement of features indicates a small town comprised of 12 structure or house localities arranged within five residential complexes and three cemeteries located between two of the residential areas. Structures of both horizontal log and vertical, post-in-ground construction appear to be represented. These houses and cemeteries are positioned along both sides of a hypothesized road corridor.

Archaeological investigations at Ayers Town resulted in the recovery of 22,488 cultural artifacts, excluding fire-broken rock, fired clay or daub, and subsistence remains. Of these, 2,148 are attributed to sporadic site occupations during the Archaic and Woodland periods

(between about 8500 BC and AD 1000), and 17 are the result of twentieth-century activities. The remaining 20,323 artifacts are attributable to a historic Catawba village dating to the late 1700s. Catawba-made pottery comprises more than 85% of this assemblage and represents pans, jars, bowls, plates, and cups. Most represent European vessel forms, are burnished or uniformly smoothed, and are made using reddish brown or pale gray clay with little or no visible temper. Some of this clay has been identified through elemental analysis as likely coming from the nearby Nisbet Bottoms where present-day Catawba potters still obtain their clay. Numerous rim fragments have painted lip treatments produced with red sealing wax.

English ceramics, while not abundant, represent several different ware groups, some which were obsolete by the time Ayers Town was occupied. In descending order of frequency, these include creamwares, pearlwares, clouded ware, green-glazed cream-bodied wares, Jackfield ware, tin-enamelled wares, Chinese porcelain, and two fragments of an embossed rocco antico stoneware lid. The uneven distribution of creamware and pearlware ceramics within the excavated features suggests different occupational histories for some of the houses at Ayers Town. Other artifacts from Ayers Town mostly represent European or Euroamerican-manufactured goods and include: cast iron cookware, tinware, and glassware; harness, bridle, saddle, and wagon hardware; hand-wrought nails; gun parts, flints, and ammunition; scissors, needles, pins, and thimbles; buttons and cufflinks; almost 1,500 glass beads; Catawba-made and English kaolin tobacco pipes; Jew's harps; and a 1782 George III Hibernia halfpenny.

Historical documents suggest that Ayers Town, named for the town's leader in the late 1790s, Col. John Ayers, was established by Catawbas returning from Virginia in 1781 and was occupied until about 1800. Lady Henrietta Liston, an English traveler who visited the town in 1797, noted that about 300 Catawbas lived in the Nation at that time and were settled at Ayers Town and two other towns on the opposite side of the river. She observed Catawbas living in two types of houses—cribbed-log structures with a central hearth which she regarded as a more traditional house form, and cribbed-log structures with an end chimney and fireplace—and her overall description of the town indicates that it was larger than the archaeological site that now represents it. Most of the surrounding site area was heavily impacted in the mid-twentieth century by road construction and soil borrowing activities.

Most of the cultural features at Ayers Town have been excavated; however, unlike most sites that undergo archaeological data recovery to mitigate their loss due to the adverse effect of a project, Ayers Town remains a significant cultural resource. As an archaeological site, it has yielded significant new information about the Catawba Nation during the late 1700s and provides tangible evidence of the Catawbas' long and rich heritage; and as an extant cemetery, it remains a place that is sacred to the descendant Catawba community. For both of these reasons, it is imperative that Ayers Town be properly managed and monitored to insure its long-term protection.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, we would like to thank Mr. Chad Long, NEPA Coordinator/ Archaeologist with the South Carolina Department of Transportation, both for his advocacy of archaeological data recovery at the Ashe Ferry and Ayers Town sites and for his helpful assistance throughout the field and analysis phases of the project. We also are grateful for the advice given by Mr. Charles Cantley of the South Carolina State Historic Preservation Office and Dr. Wenonah Haire of the Catawba Tribal Historic Preservation Office.

Site excavations were contracted through Mulkey Engineers and Consultants of Cary, North Carolina, and we wish to acknowledge Ms. Michelle Fishburne of that office for her assistance in administering the contract. Her counterparts at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill were Ms. Brenda A. Moore and Ms. Lisa-Jean Michienzi, both with the Research Laboratories of Archaeology, and Ms. Cathy Rogers of the UNC Office of Sponsored Research. Dr. Vincas P. Steponaitis, director of the Research Laboratories of Archaeology, provided much behind-the-scenes guidance in facilitating the project.

Archaeological data recovery at the Ayers Town site was directed by Drs. Brett H. Riggs and R. P. Stephen Davis, Jr., and undertaken in three phases. The first phase of fieldwork, undertaken between April 20 and May 5, 2010 and consisting of initial site mapping and systematic metal detecting, was performed by Mary Beth Fitts and Johann Furbacher.

During the second phase of investigation, between May 13 and July 1, 2010, students and staff of the UNC archaeological field school conducted systematic test excavations, block excavations, auger testing, and excavation of archaeological features. A magnetometer survey of the site was conducted by Dr. Gerald F. Schroedl and Mr. Stephen Yerka of the University of Tennessee. Following initial testing and remote sensing, a portion of the site was exposed by mechanical stripping of topsoil using a mini-excavator. This operation was skillfully performed by Mr. Byron K. Hill of B. K. Hill and Associates, LLC, of Rock Hill, South Carolina. The field school staff consisted of Brooke Bauer, David Cranford, Elise Duffield, Duane Esarey, Mary Beth Fitts, Johann Furbacher, Bill Jurgelski, Mark Plane, Anna Semon, Erin Stevens, and Rebecca Wingo. Field school students included Timothy Barco, Rosanna Crow, Natalie DeMasi, Yosha Gunasekera, Shane Hale, Jonathan Leggett, Katherine Mullis, Laura Parks, Alyssa Parry, Sarah Settle, Michelle Stanfield, Elaine Tolbert, Mary Walker, and Abigail Winegarden. Lillian Ondus also assisted as a volunteer.

The final phase of investigation occurred between November 19, 2010 and January 6, 2011, and involved stripping the remainder of the site, mapping exposed archaeological features, and excavating all features other than graves. This work was conducted by David Cranford, Eric Deetz, Elise Duffield, Duane Esarey, Mary Beth Fitts, Johann Furbacher, Bill Jurgelski, Lillian Ondus, and Erin Stevens. Byron Hill again operated the mini-excavator and backfilled the excavation at completion of the project.

Cleaning and cataloging of the artifacts recovered from Ayers Town were performed by undergraduate employees and volunteers in the Research Laboratories of Archaeology. They included Jacqueline Berton, Jonathan Branch, Caroline Carter, Rosie Crow, Elise Duffield, Shane Hale, Cassie Marcelo, Carmen Mendoza, Bouran Mozayen, Becka Rohrer, Sarah Settle, Archie Smith, Janice Tse, and Andy Valiunas.

David Cranford assisted Steve Davis with the ceramic analysis, and David Cranford and Elise Duffield illustrated the ceramic vessel sections shown in Appendix B. Elise Duffield also analyzed the glass beads found at the site and assisted with other artifact analyses. Bouran Mozayen analyzed the buttons, and Mallory Melton conducted a preliminary study of the clay pipes and pipe fragments. Rosanna Crow undertook a chemical characterization study of Catawba ceramics and potter's clay samples from the site to evaluate potential clay sources and examine relationships of the site to the Old Town site. Dr. Thomas R. Whyte of Appalachian State University undertook the analysis of zooarchaeological remains, and Mary Beth Fitts conducted the analysis of paleobotanical remains in consultation with Dr. C. Margaret Scarry of the University of North Carolina. David Cranford wrote the descriptions of archaeological features presented in the appendix.

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