

Archaeological Survey of a Portion of the High Rock Lake Shoreline in the Fox Creek Subdivision of Davidson County, North Carolina

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April 2000

ABSTRACT

An archaeological survey was conducted north of Southmont along the edge of High Rock Lake in the Cotton Grove township of Davidson County. The surveyed area measures some 2200' by 75' along the shoreline beside the new Fox Creek Subdivision. This area is covered primarily by colluvial deposits. Our survey found nothing of archaeological significance within the survey area itself. Currently, development activities are not adversely impacting archaeological resources within the boundaries of the survey described in this report. However, nearby areas may have been favorable settings for significant prehistoric and early historic sites.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

On Tuesday, 28 March 2000, UNC-CH archaeologists H. Trawick Ward and Christopher B. Rodning conducted an assessment of archaeological resources in a tract of land covering some 2200' by 75' along High Rock Lake, beside the new Fox Creek subdivision north of Southmont in Davidson County, NC (figures 1 and 2). This small survey area is within the regions depicted on the Southmont 1:24,000 quad map and the Charlotte 1:250,000 map from the USGS (figures 3 and 4). The southern end of the study area is formed by a small, unnamed stream that was a much smaller, probably intermittent, stream before High Rock Lake was impounded. The northern end of the study area is a lake access road, which reaches the lakeshore close to several houses within the Fox Creek subdivision. When the survey was conducted, the lake was at its highest normal level. A surface survey was carried out, including careful inspection of uprooted trees where significant sections of subsurface deposits are visible. Four shovel test pits were excavated, as well. Two were placed close to the edge of the lake, and two further up the slope of the adjacent hill. The survey was done at the request of the Aluminum Corporation of America (ALCOA), the landowner of this easement along the edge of High Rock Lake.

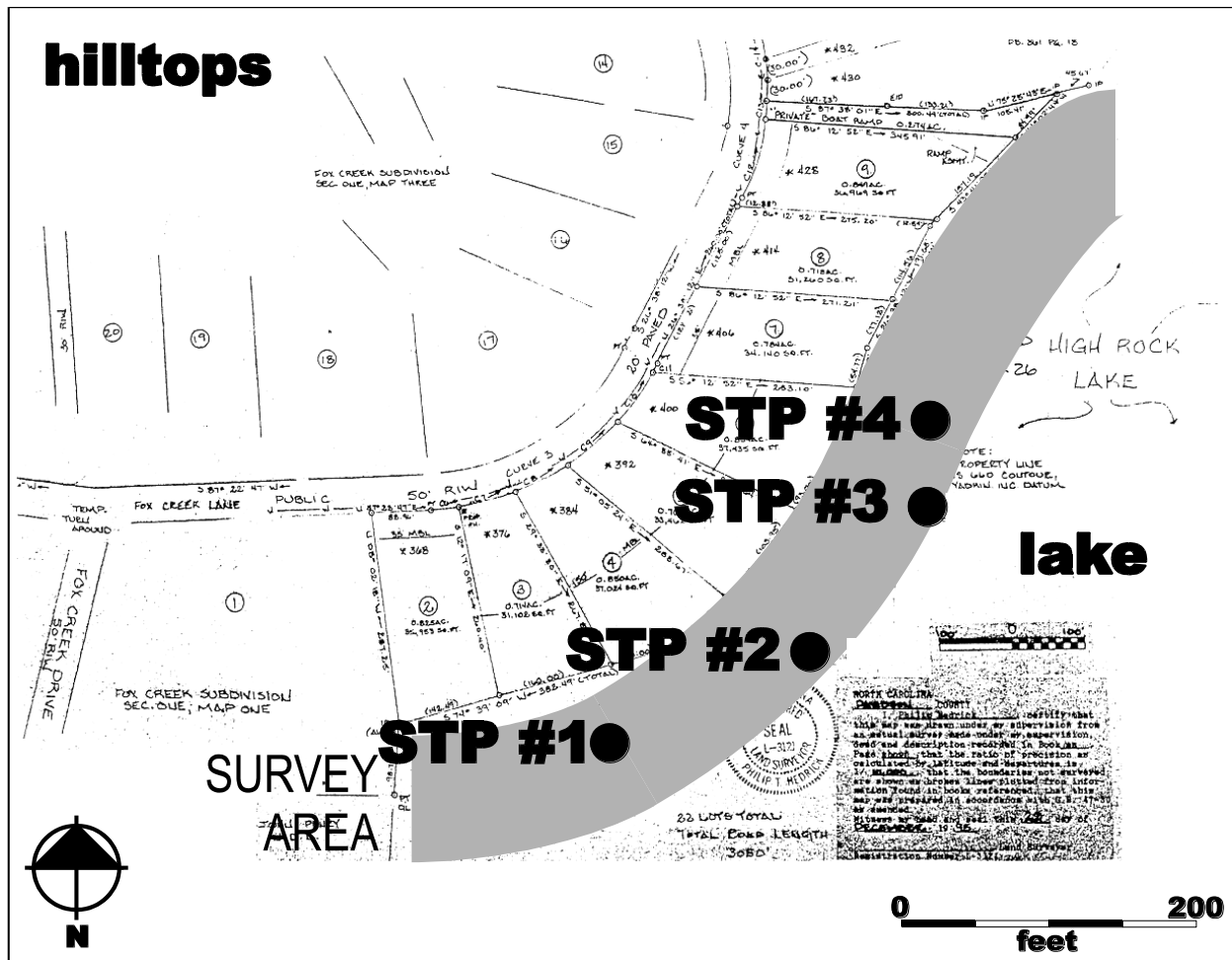


Figure 1
Section of land surveyor maps for Fox Creek Subdivision
(land surveyed by Abbotts Creek Surveying, 1995)

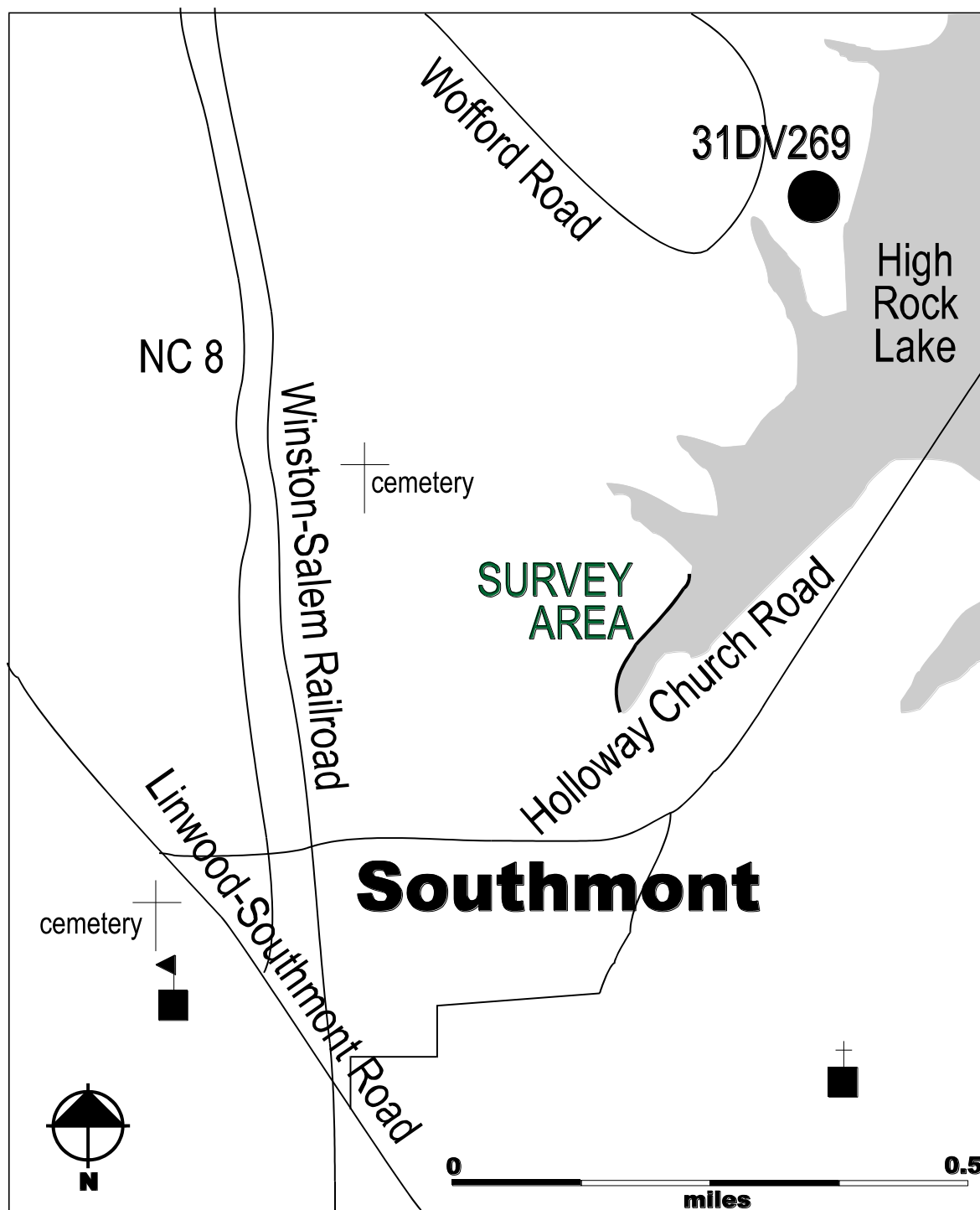


Figure 2
Schematic map of the survey location along High Rock Lake
(based on map by the United States Geological Survey, 1962)

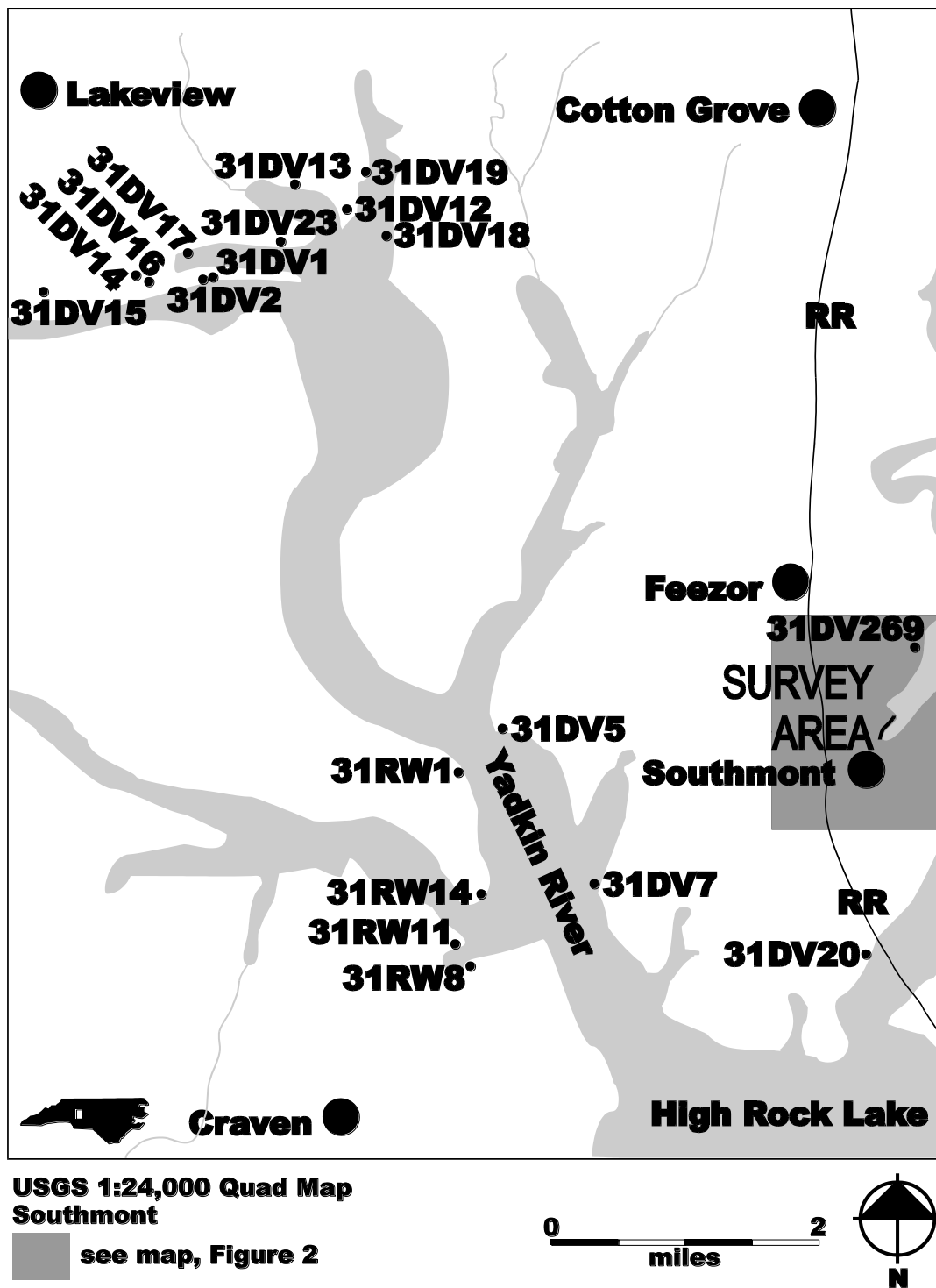


Figure 3
Archaeological sites close to Southmont (USGS 1:24,000 Southmont quad)

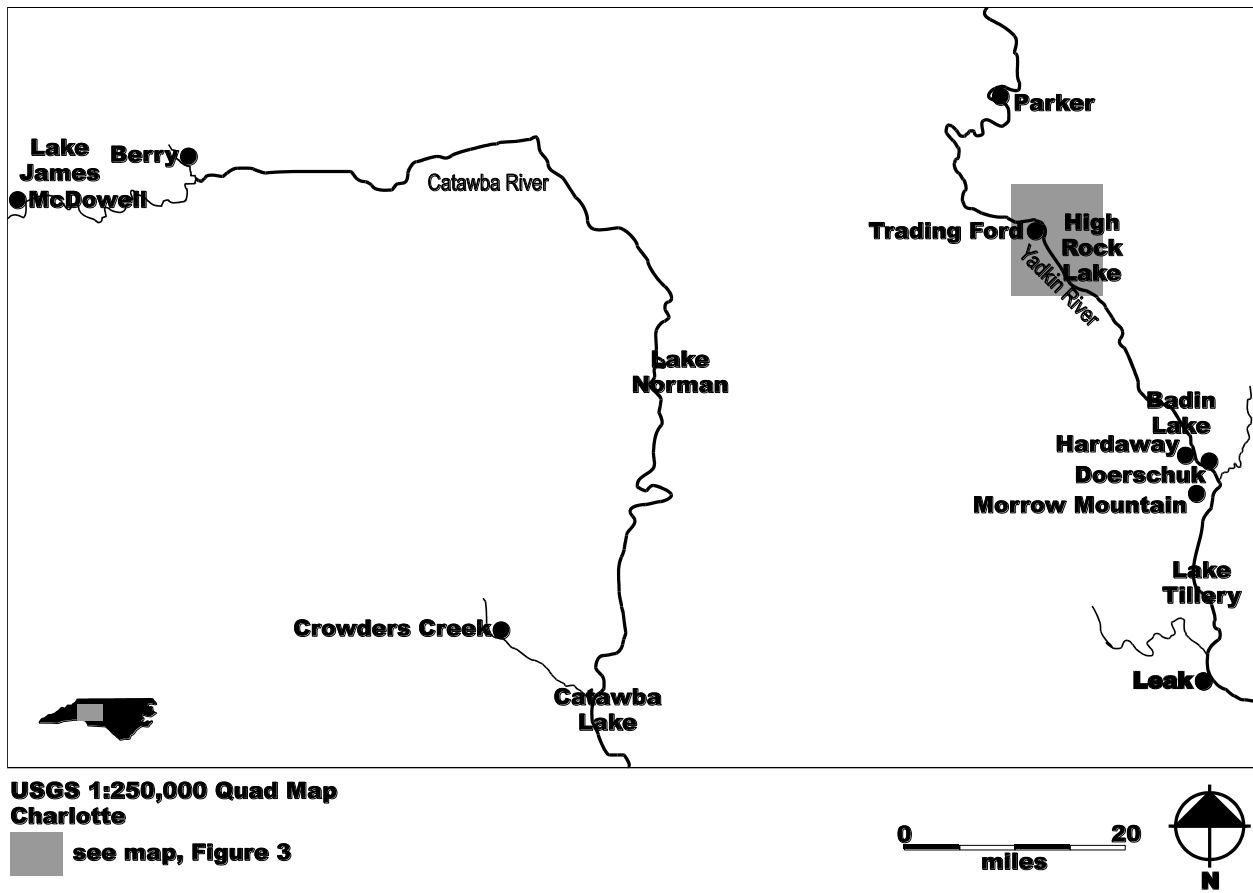


Figure 4
Archaeological sites in the Piedmont (USGS 1:250,000 Charlotte map)

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

The rolling hillsides of central North Carolina run from east to west between the Coastal Plain and Blue Ridge provinces. The Yadkin River forms one major watershed in this part of the Carolinas, running from the Blue Ridge through the Uwharrie Mountains. High Rock Lake was created by the dam built close to Poole Town, and it is one of several lakes created by dams along the Yadkin and other rivers in the central and western Piedmont.

The Piedmont is blanketed with hardwood forests, although rural fields and woods around Southmont are rapidly giving way to new houses and roads, especially close to High Rock Lake itself. These forests would have offered an abundance of nuts, firewood, and wild grasses to its native residents. In addition, native people could have hunted deer, squirrel, bear, turkey, and many other mammals and birds.

The Yadkin watershed is covered primarily by red clays, and within its soils are an abundance of slate as well as quartz and rhyolite. Indeed, rhyolite sources were likely especially significant to ancient native people in the region. Meanwhile, alluvial floodplains along rivers and their major tributaries would have offered rich farmland for late prehistoric villagers.

The study area for this particular project near Southmont lies along the course of Abbott Creek some four miles north of its former confluence with the Yadkin River itself. The surveyed strip of land along High Rock Lake would have been roughly halfway up the hill slope from a small tributary stream to the flat hilltops extending westward toward the river. Some of the landforms at the edge of High Rock Lake owe

their presence to colluvial deposition as the hilltops have eroded. Of course, this erosion has been accelerated since the European colonial settlement of this region, and the intensive land use practices of the twentieth century. This situation notwithstanding, it is our opinion that many undeveloped areas near Southmont are good candidates for the locations of archaeological sites.

CULTURAL HISTORY

Native people have been living in central North Carolina for at least ten thousand years (Coe 1964; Ward and Davis 1999). Archaeologists have outlined several different periods within the cultural history of these native peoples, each characterized archaeologically by specific forms of lithic and ceramic artifacts. The following reviews some of the major characteristics of native cultures at these different points in the past, as they are currently understood by archaeologists.

During the Paleoindian period (9500-7900 BC), native North Carolinians were mobile bands of foragers, who probably moved from one seasonal camp to another within annual settlement cycles covering vast geographic territories and perhaps many different environmental zones (see Anderson 1990; Daniel 1998; Ward and Davis 1999:32-46). Material remnants of their activities include a form of stone spear point bearing a groove near its base, diagnostic of the earliest known settlers in eastern North America. Many of these fluted points, and other contemporary lithic artifacts, have been found on the ground surface at several sites in North Carolina. Unfortunately

archaeologists have not found any intact and unexposed Paleoindian sites in North Carolina (Ward and Davis 1999:1-2).

During the Archaic period (8000-1000 BC), native North Carolinians began tailoring their lifestyles more and more closely to the sources of specific natural resources, and these people had developed considerably greater geographic knowledge of their surroundings than the earliest settlers of these regions had (see Daniel 1998; Sassaman 1993; Ward and Davis 1999:2-3). Small bands of hunters and gatherers moved from one seasonal settlement to another, probably gathering with other related bands for social and ritual activities at widely known localities, at specific points within their annual calendars. By the end of this period, native people were quarrying soapstone to make bowls and even experimenting with forms of clay pottery, which became much more common in later centuries. Sites such as Hardaway offer artifactual evidence of many different kinds of tasks that were part of the daily lives of people during this period (Daniel 1998:144-146), including axes and adzes for cutting wood, scrapers for working deer hides, groundstone slabs for grinding nuts, and different forms of spear points and other accoutrements of the spear throwers that were part of hunting toolkits. Recent archaeological research has demonstrated that these groups often revisited certain spots within the Piedmont landscape to quarry rhyolite (Daniel 1998:202-204), an excellent raw material for making many kinds of stone tools. Archaeologists should continue to study the role of natural resources such as rhyolite and soapstone as determinants of settlement patterns of Archaic peoples in and around North Carolina (Ward and Davis 1999:55-67).

During the Woodland period (1000 BC-AD 1540), many if not most native North Carolinians were farmers, living in sedentary villages and in some cases formally planned towns (see Coe 1952; Wright 1947; Ward and Davis 1999:76-137). Certainly, some people would have lived in rural hamlets or farmsteads between villages, amid gardens and woodlands where both wild and domesticated resources were abundant. Meanwhile, native people developed the bow and arrow during this period, as an innovation in hunting gear that probably reflects different forms of hunting than the earlier reliance on spears and spearthrowers. The regional landscape of the Piedmont seems to have become more and more densely settled, and in some cases palisaded villages seem to reflect competition for the valued resource of farmland (Davis and Ward 1989:48). Ceramics and traces of wooden houses are abundant at some Piedmont archaeological sites, and specific characteristics of this material culture demonstrate ancestral relationships between Woodland-period groups and some historically known Siouan-speaking tribes in this region (Davis and Ward 1999:99). Most native peoples in the Piedmont were part of the "Piedmont Village Tradition," within which egalitarian village communities became more closely tied to specific localities and areas within the Piedmont landscape (Ward 1983; Ward and Davis 1999:78-79). Some groups south of the Uwharries are characterized by archaeologists as part of "South Appalachian Mississippianism," the widespread pattern of hierarchical communities centered around earthen mounds characteristic of many regions of the Southeast between the eleventh and sixteenth centuries (Coe 1995; Ward and Davis 1999:119-134). Woodland

period peoples of the Yadkin watershed are much less well known than their contemporaries in other parts of North Carolina (Ward and Davis 1999:98-119).

From the sixteenth through early eighteenth centuries AD, this region was home to several groups of native people who spoke distinct but related Siouan languages. These people lived in sedentary villages, although they very likely lived part of each year in hunting camps dispersed throughout the Piedmont. They grew several different crops in gardens and fields surrounding their villages, and they almost certainly harvested nuts and wild grasses common across most of the Piedmont. John Lederer crossed the Yadkin River at the Trading Ford somewhere near contemporary Southmont in 1670, and he visited a Sara village on the north bank of the Yadkin (Cumming 1958). John Lawson toured this part of the Piedmont in 1701, and he found a Saponi village somewhere along this same stretch of the Yadkin (Lefler 1967). The most likely areas to find archaeological remnants of these and other native villages in the western Piedmont are the floodplains and first terraces along major rivers.

Beginning in the late eighteenth century AD, groups of Scots-Irish, German, and other nonnative colonists began settling this region. Farmers grew considerable amounts of corn, wheat, oats, and flax during the 1700s. People mined gold, silver, lead, and copper throughout much of the 1800s. Dams built along several rivers in the western Piedmont beginning in the early twentieth century have dramatically changed the natural and cultural landscape of the region.

Archaeologists have recorded several hundred archaeological sites in Davidson and surrounding counties. Site 31DV1 is a prehistoric mound upstream from the

confluence of Potts Creek and the Yadkin River, and it is likely the setting for the Saponi village visited by Lawson in the 1700s and the town of Guatari visited by Spaniards in the 1500s (RLA site files, UNC-CH). Site 31DV2 is a village associated with this mound, and archaeologists have recovered potsherds, stone tools, and many other artifacts from this locality (RLA site files, UNC-CH). Another mound along the Yadkin has been identified at the Parker site (numbered as site 31DV25). This mound is close to the river along the border between Davidson and Davie counties (across the river from 31DE6). Mounds are especially significant late prehistoric sites, because native people tended to build towns and villages around and near them for several centuries, even if these settlements were temporarily abandoned for periods of time. This mound and village are several miles upstream from the setting of the archaeological survey described here.

Several dozen sites in Davidson and surrounding counties hold significant clues about much earlier native peoples as well. At site 31DV30, archaeologists have found spear points, arrowheads, and other artifacts dating to every period of cultural history in North Carolina (RLA site files, UNC-CH). At site 31DV109, archaeologists have found spear points, grinding stones, stone drills, and other remnants of early native residents in North Carolina (RLA site files, UNC-CH). Local resident James Bingham has reported finding great quantities of stone artifacts dating from Paleoindian through the end of the Archaic period at site 31DV8. His notes further indicate the presence of many early artifacts at site 31DV10.

Notes by Wake Forest archaeologists indicate the presence of considerable quantities of soapstone and Archaic period spear points near the contemporary Midway school at site 31DV156, which is significant because Late Archaic period residents of the Carolinas quarried and traded soapstone as raw material for cooking gear before the advent of clay ceramics. All of these kinds of early artifacts have been found at several sites clustered close to the mound at 31DV1, indicating that this specific part of the Yadkin River watershed attracted native groups living in the Piedmont for several thousand years.

On the west side of the Yadkin River, archaeologists have found grooved axes and one soapstone pipe at site 31RW1, at the former mouth of Crane Creek (RLA site files, UNC-CH). Further south in Rowan County, archaeologists have found many projectile points, a scraper, a pitted grinding stone, and an atlatl weight at and near site 31RW2, at the former mouth of Panther Creek (RLA site files, UNC-CH).

These are significant archaeological materials, worthy of further study to reconstruct what life was like for the native people whose ways of life are preserved in some ways at these and other archaeological sites in the region. The survey described in this report, however, did not recover any materials that would help advance archaeological knowledge about ancient lifeways of native peoples in this region.

SURVEY

The ground surface was searched for evidence of archaeological sites within the wooded study area, and four shovel test pits were excavated to assess subsurface conditions. No artifacts were found on the ground surface, including in areas where uprooted trees have exposed buried deposits. The four shovel tests also produced negative evidence. These tests were each roughly 2'-3' in diameter, and they ranged from 1'-3' deep, depending on the kinds of soils encountered. STP's #1 and #3 were dug through dark gray to tan loamy clays that rapidly filled with water. STP's #2 and #4 were dug through red clayey loam extending deeper than our shovels would reach.

Given the presence of colluvium across the study area, any archaeological materials encountered in it may have been deposited there after having been eroded from the point of their deposition in the archaeological record, and it could be argued that any artifacts found in the lakebed within this survey tract during periods of low lake levels may have been subject to the same process of colluvial deposition.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Current development of the Fox Creek Subdivision and related landscaping activities north of Southmont are not adversely impacting archaeological sites within this study area. However, we do think that some development taking place in surrounding areas that are more likely locations of ancient archaeological sites, including areas well upstream along the creek forming the southern boundary of the survey area described here, may have an adverse impact on cultural resources. Our recommendation is that ALCOA continue monitoring land use activities near its properties to assess their potential impacts on cultural resources, but there is no action that need be taken at this point in time in the survey area described in this report.

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