

DATA RECOVERY EXCAVATIONS AT THE RIVER NECK SITES

Florence County, South Carolina



Pre-Contact Settlement in the
Pee Dee River Basin



Introduction

From October 18–29, 2021, through February 11, 2022, Terracon Consultants Inc. conducted archaeological data recovery excavations at three pre-contact* sites located west of the Great Pee Dee River in Florence County, South Carolina. The work was conducted on behalf of Dominion Energy South Carolina (DESC) by the stipulations of a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), the South Carolina State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), and DESC, dated September 2, 2021, and a Data Recovery Plan dated July 26, 2021.

Field investigations included the excavation of 40 m² at Site 1; 60 m² at Site 2, and 68 m² at Site 3.

- Site 1 is a Late Woodland and Mississippian campsite located on a ridge and bluff that overlooks a pond approximately 450 meters west of the Great Pee Dee River. A total of 1,006 artifacts were recovered from Site 1.
- Site 2 is a Middle Woodland, Late Woodland, and Mississippian campsite located on a ridge slope approximately 300 meters south of Barfield Mill Creek. A total of 1,462 artifacts were recovered from Site 2.
- Site 3 is a repeatedly occupied Middle Archaic, Middle Woodland (Yadkin/Deptford), Late Woodland, and Mississippian (Savannah) period base camp located on a bluff south of a tributary of Bullock Branch. A total of 4,877 artifacts were recovered from 3FL116.

As a result of these investigations, a large amount of information about the prehistoric inhabitants of the Pee Dee River Valley was obtained. Some highlights of the archaeological investigations include:

- The presence of a pit feature at Site 3 with a radiocarbon date of 6210±30 B.P. (cal. 5188–5050 BC, Beta 626602), placing it in the early part of the Middle Archaic Period.
- The primary use of metavolcanics at the three sites is from the Uwharrie Mountains of North Carolina. This zone has a direct link to South Carolina sites via the Yadkin/Pee Dee River drainage.
- The recovery of a large number and variety of lithic and ceramic artifacts dating from the Middle Archaic through Mississippian periods.

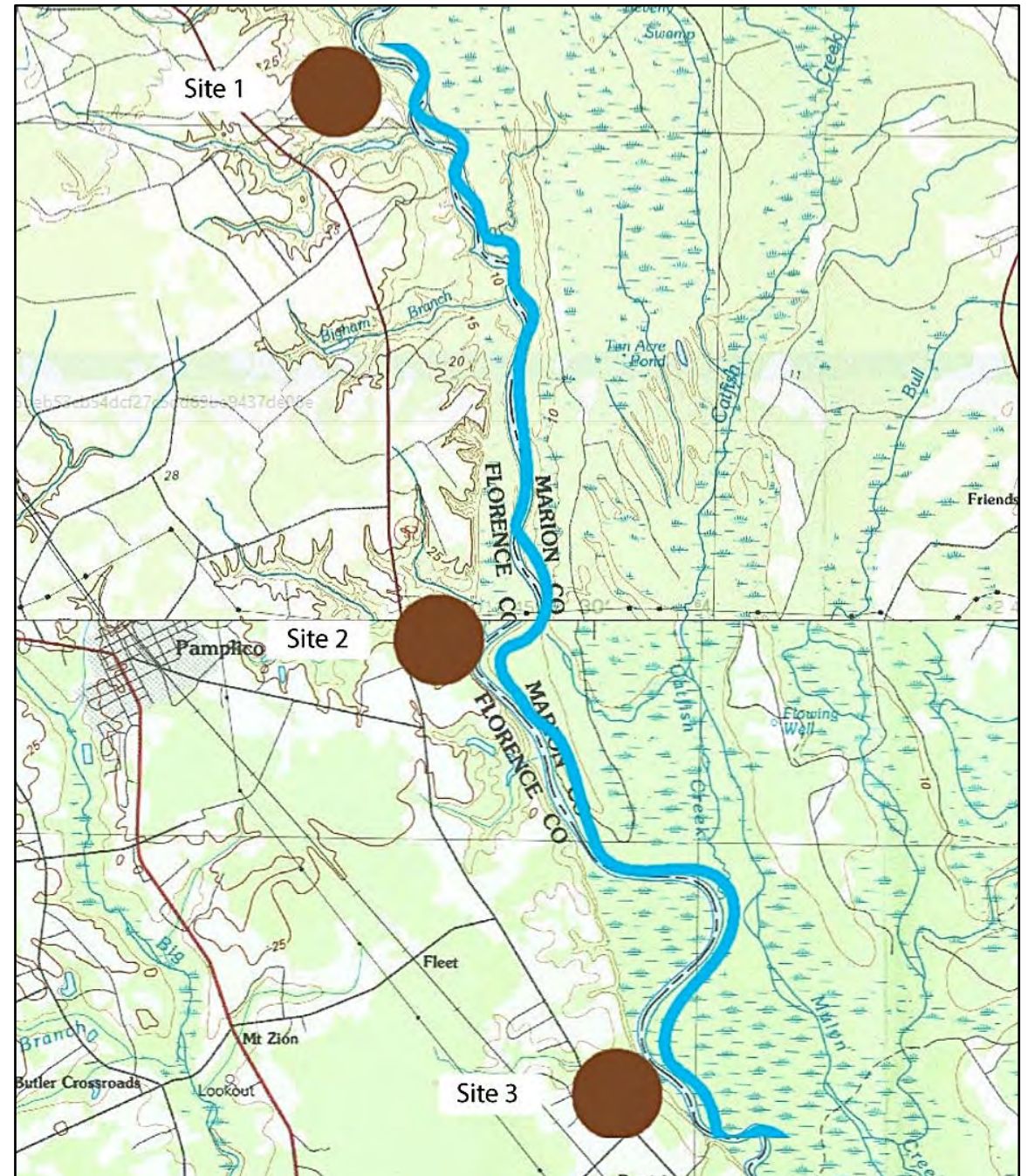
NB. To protect the location of these Pre-Contact period resources, the site numbers have been redacted. They are referred to as Site 1, Site 2, and Site 3. *Pre-Contact refers to the prehistoric period in North America, generally accepted as the period before Columbus and Europeans explored and occupied North and South America, which is typically considered ca. 1500 AD.

The River Neck Sites

This webpage presents the findings from Phase III Data Recovery Excavations at the River Neck Sites located near the Great Pee Dee River in Florence County, South Carolina. Terracon conducted this work from October 2021 through February 2022.

The three Pre-Contact sites were excavated within an existing utility right-of-way that runs parallel to Old River Road just west of the Great Pee Dee River. The sites are divided into two types: “base camp” and “campsite.”

Site No.	Cultural Context and Site Type	Area Excavated	Artifacts Recovered
Site 1	Late Woodland to Mississippian campsite on a ridge bluff overlooking a pond.	40 m ²	1,006
Site 2	Woodland to Mississippian campsite on a ridge slope.	60 m ²	1,462
Site 3	Repeatedly occupied Archaic – Woodland - Mississippian period base camp on a bluff.	68 m ²	4,877



River Neck Artifacts



This is a collection of Pre-contact pottery with different surface treatments on the top from left to right are check stamped and cord-marked. The bottom from left to right is cord wrapped dowel and simple stamped.



This is a collection of Pre-contact pottery with different surface treatments on the top row from left to right is punctated and plain, the middle row is cord-marked and simple stamped, and the bottom row is cord-marked and fabric impressed.



This is a collection of Pre-contact pottery all that have a cord-marked surface treatment but different types of cord-marking. The top sherd is cord-marked and punctuated, the bottom row is cord-marked and fine cord-marked.



This is a Pre-contact clay pipe.



This is a collection of Pre-contact lithic tools. From the top left to right is a expedient tool that is a retouched flake, and a ground-stone abrader. The bottom tool is a chipped stone axe.



This is a collection of Pre-contact point fragments. On the top row from left to right is a base fragment, and a triangle point fragment. On the bottom row is a triangle point fragment missing the base, and a small complete triangle point.



This is a collection of Pre-contact point fragments. On the top row from left to right is a Uwharrie base fragment, a tip fragment, a triangular base fragment, and a small triangular fragment. The bottom row is a Savannah River, Santee Lanceolate, Yadkin, and a triangular base fragment.



This is a Pre-contact pottery sherd that has a cord-marked surface treatment.

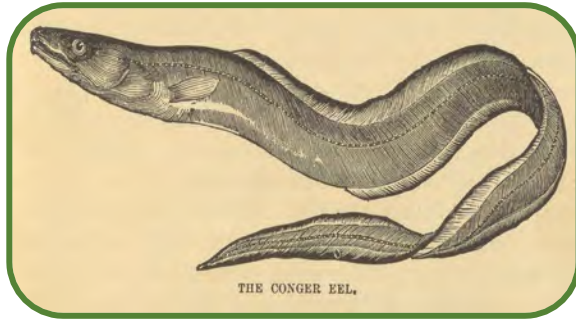
Timeline of Indigenous Cultural Periods

Paleoindian Period (13,500–10,000 BP) *	Archaic Period (10,000–5000 BP)	Woodland Period (5000–1000 BP)	Mississippian Period (1000–450 BP)
<p>During the Paleoindian Period (3,500 years), the earliest ingenious cultural groups hunted megafauna (large animals) in areas with boreal tundra and spruce-pine forests. They used large stone blades, tools, and points characteristic of the Clovis culture in hunting activities. They lived in small, relatively mobile groups that occupied hunting camps and seasonal settlements concentrated along major rivers. There is evidence of mobility in that stone tool materials were sourced from a wide-ranging territory.</p>	<p>The Archaic Period (5,000 years), a time of significant change marked by the extinction of megafauna and the emergence of the mixed oak-hickory forest, saw indigenous people adapt to the changing environment with remarkable resilience and resourcefulness. They created smaller and more varied stone tools for woodworking and plant processing, including ground stones, carved soapstone bowls, atlatl weights, stone smoking pipes, and decorative beads. They developed new forms, including side and corner-notched projectile points, broad-bladed stemmed points, soapstone cooking discs, winged banner stones, cruciform drills, shell tools, and worked bone. Settlements increased in group sizes but territory decreased, as seen in sites with seasonal camps between the Coastal Plain and the Inland Piedmont region. At the end of the Archaic period, pottery technology emerged, a significant cultural development that started with types made from plant fibers and clay and later evolved to sand-tempered varieties. Additionally, the importance of shellfish as a food source is underscored by the presence of large shell mounds.</p>	<p>The Woodland Period (4,000 years) is marked by the introduction of the bow and arrow and the smaller arrowhead points associated with this type of hunting. Pottery styles become more diverse with new kinds of temper and surface treatments, with simple and dentate stamping decorations, punctate, brushed, cord-marked, textile-impressed, and complicated stamped types tempered with sand and crushed quartz. Settlements indicated an increase in population density and the intensification of sedentism and horticulture of maize (corn) and grains. The construction of conical burial mounds supports evidence of long-term settlement patterns. Evidence of the widespread adoption of pottery is represented by many different vessel forms and sizes. Also, the diversity of materials recovered from sites during this period shows the establishment of long-distance trading networks.</p>	<p>The Mississippian Period (550 years) is marked by an intensification of maize agriculture and other cultigens. The food supply was supported by hunting and the exploitation of aquatic resources. The stone tools are dominated by small triangular projectile points, ground stone tools, and polished stone objects. Decorative items made from stone, bone, shell, mica, and copper are also in evidence. Complex sociopolitical development, with large permanent village settlements with mound complexes, that were situated in floodplains along major river systems. Settlements were organized into chiefdoms with long periods of occupation. These people constructed flat-topped platform mounds and created art with decorative and ceremonial items not associated with food production.</p>

*BP refers to the years Before Present.

The River Neck Sites

"Base camps" are seasonal areas used for obtaining raw materials, such as river cobbles, and food resources like fish and seasonal vegetation. These sites were utilized over generations, but each occupation lasted only a short time.



"Camp sites" indicate a sustained but less permanent occupation, often associated with seasonal use. Unlike more permanent village sites, they lack storage features and dwelling structures but may have multiple small hearths and a higher concentration of food remains and pottery, suggesting meal preparation. These sites can reflect the age of occupation and cultural differences. Sites used for short periods may date back to early cultures, where small groups migrated and left minimal evidence. Additionally, a lack of pottery can suggest an earlier time before pottery technology was developed.



From the drawing album of British artist John White, while he was living in Roanoke and North Carolina during 1585 to 1593. In the collection of the British Museum: The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons license. <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/term/BIOG50964>

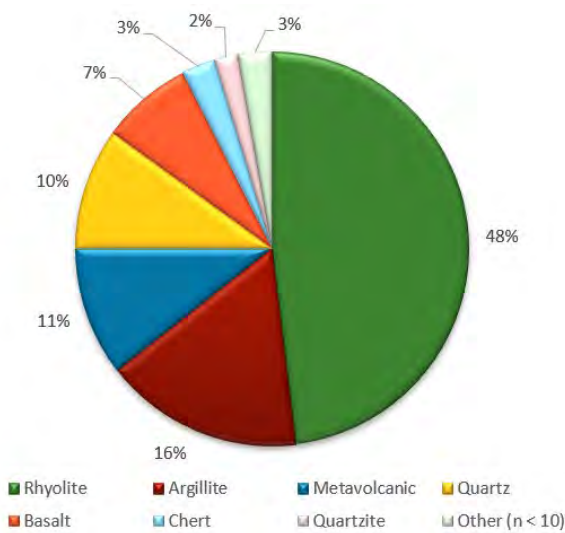
Site 1

Site 1 is located on a terrace along the Great Pee Dee River. Prehistoric artifacts found at the site include four projectile points, six cores, one tested cobble, three possible groundstone artifacts, one utilized flake, 10 pieces of FCR Fire Cracked Rock, and 355 pieces of debitage. Diagnostic projectile points include two triangular points that date to the Mississippian Period.

A total of 600 ceramic artifacts were recovered. Prehistoric ceramics recovered include Hanover, Savannah, Yadkin, Stallings , and Deptford types dating from the Late Archaic through Mississippian periods.

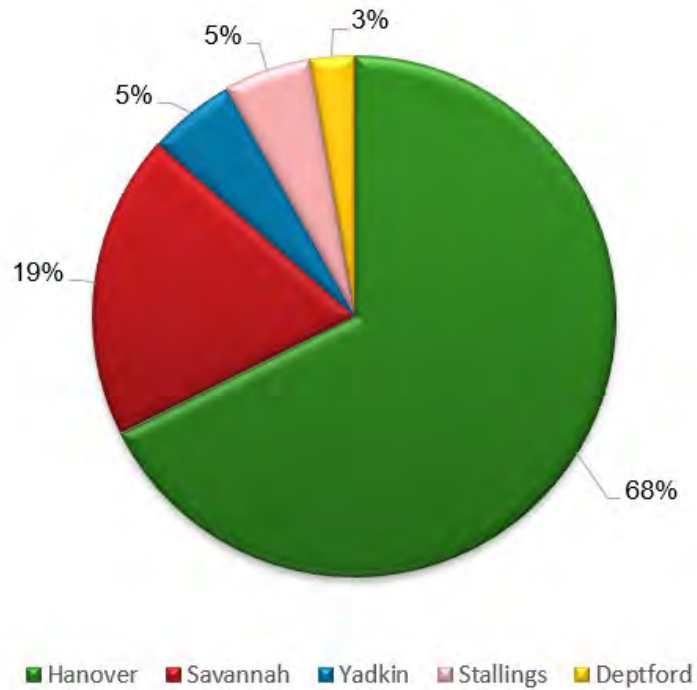
Findings: Site 1 is a multi-component site that was most intensively occupied during the Middle to Late Woodland (3000–1000 BP) periods. During these periods, the site was probably used as a seasonally occupied base camp as indicated by the diverse tool assemblage, low frequency of expedient tools, and high proportions of late-stage debitage.

Debitage	Tools	FCR	Total
189	2	5	196
166	13	5	184
355	15	97	380



Top row (left to right): projectile point base fragment and small triangular point.
Bottom (left to right): projectile point tip and small quartz triangular projectile point.

Site 1 Prehistoric Ceramic Types



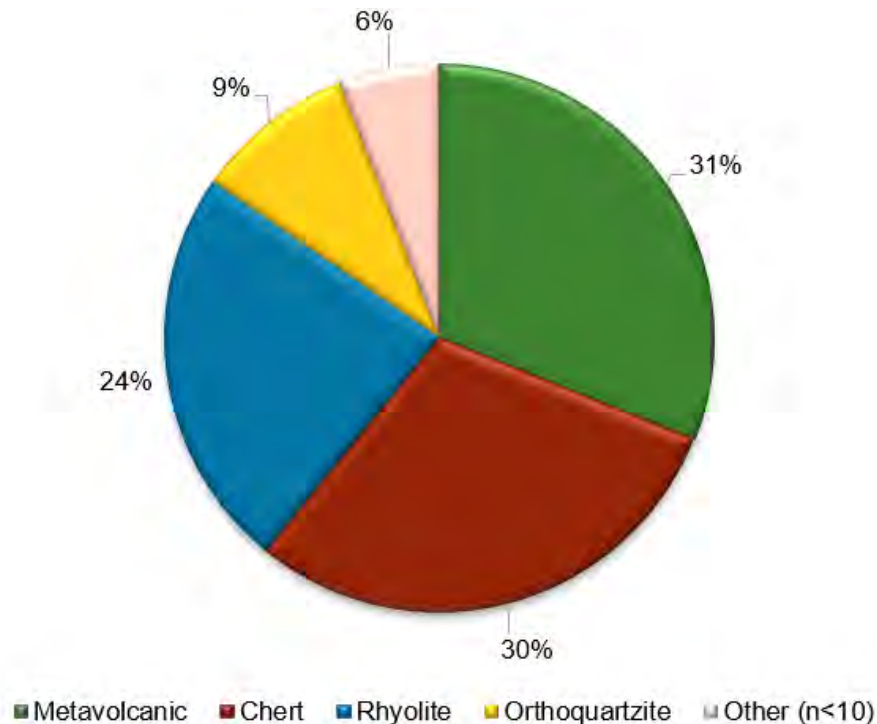
Hanover pottery from Site 1. Plain and fabric-impressed.



**Savannah pottery from Site 1.
Top: Cordmarked and punctate.
Bottom (left to right): cordmarked rim and
fine cordmarked.**

Site 2

Site 2, located on an Early Pleistocene alluvial terrace, yielded 625 lithic artifacts, accounting for about 43% of the total assemblage. The majority of the artifacts are made from metavolcanic (29%) and chert (28%) materials. Key findings include five diagnostic lithic artifacts that indicate occupations from the Middle Archaic, Late Archaic, and Middle to Late Woodland periods. The tools comprised eight projectile points, two bifaces, utilized and retouched flakes, and a hammerstone, along with a significant amount of debitage (584 pieces). The lithic assemblage is primarily identified as metavolcanic (184), chert (179), and rhyolite (141), along with smaller quantities of other materials.



Top (left to right): Small triangular point, point tip point midsection, and point basal fragment.
Bottom (left to right): small Savannah River point Santee Lanceolate point, Yadkin/Uwharrie point and Late Woodland triangular point.

Site 2, cont.

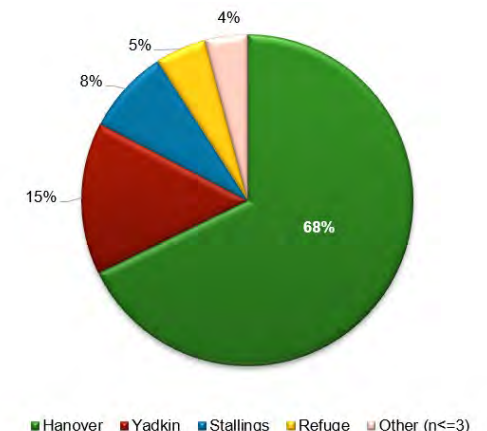
A total of 837 ceramic artifacts were recovered from Site 2. Of these, 225 were classifiable by surface treatment, and 115 could be assigned to specific types. The majority of the ceramics (83%) date to the Middle Woodland Period, with smaller percentages from the Late Archaic (10%), Early Woodland (5%), and Early Mississippian (3%) periods. Seven ceramic types were identified: Hanover (82), Yadkin (18), Stallings (10), Refuge (6), Savannah (3), Deptford (1), and Thom's Creek (1). The dominant temper was very coarse sand (91), followed by fine to coarse sand (76) and grog (65). Most of the identifiable pottery types were Hanover, characterized by fabric-impressed surface treatments (82 pieces). Other surface treatments included check-stamped (4), cord-marked (3), and plain (1). Hanover pottery primarily used grog temper (65 pieces), with minor inclusions of very coarse (13) and coarse (4) sand.

In addition, 18 pieces of Yadkin pottery were recovered, featuring a mix of surface treatments and crushed quartz or very coarse sand tempers. Stallings pottery was entirely fiber-tempered and plain (10 pieces), suggesting it may date to an early phase in the ceramic sequence, possibly belonging to the Stallings I group, around 4,500 years ago. The similarities between Stallings pottery at Site 2 and that at Site 3 indicate that the two occupations might be contemporaneous.

Findings: Site 2 is a multi-component site that was most intensively occupied during the Middle Woodland period and possibly the Late Woodland period (3000 – 1000 BP), with smaller, more ephemeral occupations occurring during the Middle Archaic, Late Archaic (10,000 – 2500 BP), Early Woodland, and Mississippian periods (1000 – 450 BP).



Top (left to right): Thom's Creek punctate and Stallings Plain. **Far left:** Savannah cordmarked. **Center:** Yadkin cordmarked. **Middle right:** Refuge simple stamped. **Bottom right:** Hanover fabric-impressed.



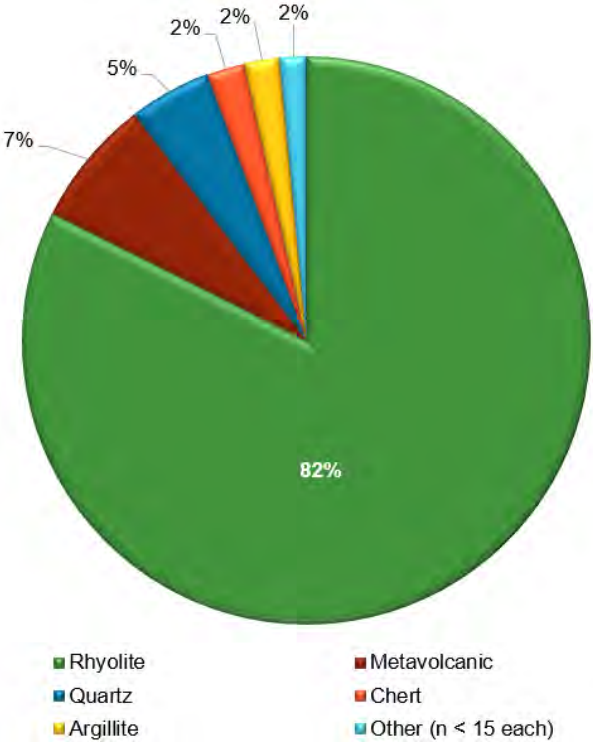
Site 3

Site 3 is located on an ancient alluvial terrace from the Early Pleistocene and yielded 3,121 lithic artifacts, 64% of the total assemblage. Rhyolite is the dominant material, making up 79% (2,477 artifacts) of the collection. The assemblage includes temporally diagnostic artifacts from the Middle and Late Archaic periods, such as Morrow Mountain points and other chipped stone tools. A significant portion of the assemblage consists of debitage (2,953 pieces), primarily rhyolite (90%). In total, 3,005 lithic artifacts were identified by material type, with 82% being rhyolite tools and debitage. Rhyolite tools include one Morrow Mountain point, one drill, seven bifaces, one preform, and six possible groundstone artifacts.

Provenience	Debitage	Tools	FCR	Unidentified	Total
Block A	76	9	16	2	103
Block B	2,654	33	70	2	2,759
Block D	223	22	11	3	259
Total	2,953	64	97	7	3,121



Rhyolite drill from Site 3



Lithic Artifacts from Site 3



Top (left to right): Morrow Mountain point, unidentified corner-notched point, and projectile point tip.
Bottom (left to right): Morrow Mountain point, stemmed point, and projectile point base.



Top (left to right): Utilized flake and sandstone abrader
Bottom: Chipped stone axe.

Site 3, cont.

A total of 1,731 ceramic artifacts were recovered from Site 3, with 832 classifiable by surface treatment and 337 assigned to specific types. Identified ceramic types included Hanover (162), Yadkin (85), Stallings (53), and others. Most pottery dates to the Middle Woodland Period. The prevailing temper was very coarse sand, followed by grog and grit. Hanover pottery comprised 47% of the assemblage, primarily characterized by grog temper and fabric-impressed surface treatments, typical for the Southern Coastal region of North and South Carolina.

Findings:

Site 38FL116 is identified as a Middle Archaic, Late Archaic, Middle Woodland, and Mississippian base camp, with a small Early Woodland component. Evidence for Middle Archaic occupation includes Morrow Mountain points and a pit feature dating to 6210 ± 30 B.P. Late Archaic activity is suggested by stemmed points and Stallings pottery, while Refuge pottery indicates a minor Early Woodland presence. A substantial Middle Woodland occupation is represented by Hanover, Yadkin, and Deptford pottery. Additionally, a likely Mississippian (Savannah Phase) component is indicated by complicated stamped pottery, and there may also be a Late Woodland component featuring Hanover pottery alongside untyped sand-tempered cordmarked and fabric-impressed pottery.



Top (left to right): crossed simple stamped, Stallings plain, and Hanover net-impressed.

Middle (left to right): cordmarked, incised, and fabric-impressed.

Bottom left to right: cord-wrapped dowel and smoothed over check stamped.

Summary

Data recovery excavations at Sites 1, 2, and 3 yielded over 7,300 artifacts. Additionally, a Middle Archaic pit feature was excavated at Site 3. The excavations across these three sites uncovered evidence of prehistoric occupations that span from the Middle Archaic to the Mississippian periods. The most intensive occupation appears to have occurred at Site 3, which exhibited a high density of artifacts, a diverse array of tools and raw materials, and a significant number of expedient tools.

All sites contained a broad variety of raw materials, which is expected given their location along the major transportation corridor of the Yadkin/Pee River complex, extending from the Carolina Terrane into the Coastal Plain. Rhyolite was the dominant material among the lithic artifacts, while Hanover pottery was the most prevalent pottery type, comprising over 50 percent of the diagnostic pottery assemblage at both Sites 2 and 3.



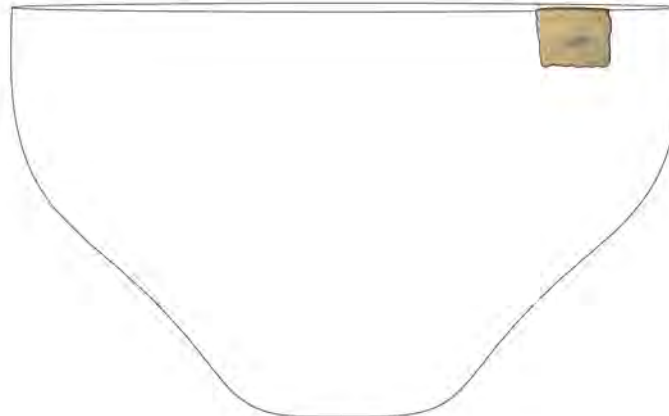
Savannah River Point



Small Triangular Point



Fabric Impressed
Elongated Globular Vessel with
Flaring Out Rim



Cord Marked
Low Open Bowl with
Straight Sides that Concave to a
Slightly Rounded Bottom



Cord Marked
Semi-Conical Jar with
Straight Sides

GLOSSARY

Alluvial Terrace: a bench or step-like feature elevated above a stream channel, is created by deposits of sediment during flood events.

Artifact : any object formed or used by humans.

Diagnostics: an artifact type that contains characteristics associated with a specific date range of manufacture, related to technological advancements.

Lithics : types of rocks (stone), such as jasper, quartz, and chert, used by prehistoric people to make tools.

- Chert, a sedimentary rock composed of silica.
- Quartz, a glassy mineral found in various colors or as clear, six-sided crystals
- Quartzite, rock metamorphosed from quartz-rich sandstone
- Rhyolite, a silica-rich volcanic rock

Debitage : during the process of creating a stone tool or sharpening the edges of an existing one, small stone flakes are chipped off as the stone material is shaped or sharpened; this is the byproduct of making lithic projectile points and tools.

Fire-Cracked Rock (FCR): Rock fragments created by exposure to intense heat, typically from cobbles placed in a hearth fire.

Hammerstone: a stone cobble used during tool manufacture to knock flakes off a lump of stone

Scraper: a small, flaked stone tool used for scraping hides, bone, and other materials

Preform: a rough, basic form of an unused stone tool, such as a blank arrowhead.

Projectile Point: a sharpened stone or bone object hafted (attached) to the tip of a projectile, such as a spear or arrow.

Temper: a material (such as sand, shell, or stone flakes) added to the clay to control shrinkage during firing when making pottery.

Questions about this project?

Contact:

Mills Dorn

Environmental Planning Group Manager

521 Clemson Road | Columbia, SC 29229

D (803) 638-7053 F (803) 741-9900 M (803) 480-2899

Mills.Dorn@terracon.com | Terracon.com



**Dominion
Energy®**

Terracon
Explore with us