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Title: Recent Paleoindian Research in Tennessee.
Year: 1996
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Source: *The Paleoindian and Early Archaic Southeast*. Edited by David G. Anderson and Kenneth E. Sassaman, pp. 288-297. University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa.

Publisher Link: <http://www.uapress.ua.edu/product/Paleoindian-and-Early-Archaic-Southeast,822.aspx>

The Paleoindian and Early Archaic Southeast

Edited by

David G. Anderson and Kenneth E. Sassaman

The University of Alabama Press
Tuscaloosa and London

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manuscript designed by Virginia Horak

The paper on which this book is printed meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Science-Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

The Paleoindian and Early Archaic Southeast / edited by David G. Anderson and Kenneth E. Sassaman
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-8173-0835-0 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Paleo-Indians—Southern States. 2. Indians of North America—Southern States—Antiquities. 3. Southern States—Antiquities.

I. Anderson, David G., 1949—. II. Sassaman, Kenneth E.

E78.S65P35 1996

975'.01—dc20

96-19012

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data Available

ISBN-13: 978-0-8173-8299-5 (electronic)

Recent Paleoindian Research in Tennessee

John B. Broster and Mark R. Norton

In its first attempt to use a systematic approach for data recovery for the entire state, since 1988 the Tennessee Division of Archaeology has been conducting a state-wide Paleoindian projectile point and site survey. Previously, only the survey of Paleoindian fluted points in Smith County could be considered a systematic attempt to gather information (Morse et al. 1964), and while numerous fluted projectile points have been recorded in the *Tennessee Archaeologist*, this was usually based on collectors' sending in information to the journal and was dependent upon the good relations between selected collectors and members of the University of Tennessee anthropology faculty. The majority of the fluted points published were from the Kentucky Lake region; other high-density areas of Paleoindian materials were not as well represented. By 1983, a total of 389 fluted projectile points had been recorded by the University of Tennessee, but unfortunately, no accurate numbers of later Paleoindian types were tabulated during this period of research (Guthe 1983).

In 1988, we decided that a comprehensive survey of sites and projectile points was long overdue. Working with collectors throughout the state, we gathered information on projectile points and uniface tools, our main goal being to establish exact locations for these early tools and to ground-check the accuracy of such finds when possible. Early emphasis was on projectile points, with locational information generally restricted to county provenience. We strove to get more accurate and precise information on actual find spots from the collectors and have been surprisingly successful, for approximately 75 percent of the artifacts examined have been precisely located and have been assigned a state site survey number.

The division has recorded measurements on a total of 2,239 projectile points, with the addition of 748 points being identified in the published literature. Of the total number of fluted projectile points examined by the division, the following types were noted: 654 Clovis, 217 Cumberland, and 4 Redstone (e.g., figures 14.1 and 14.2). The remaining 1,602 projectile points were nonfluted and Middle or Late Paleoindian in age. A total of 225 fluted points were found as isolates (155 Clovis, 65 Cumberland, and 4 Redstones), with 236 isolated Late Paleoindian projectile points being recovered. Some 108 Late Paleoindian and 51 fluted points were found on later multicomponent prehistoric sites. These items probably represent the later use of Paleoindian points by Archaic and Mississippian peoples.

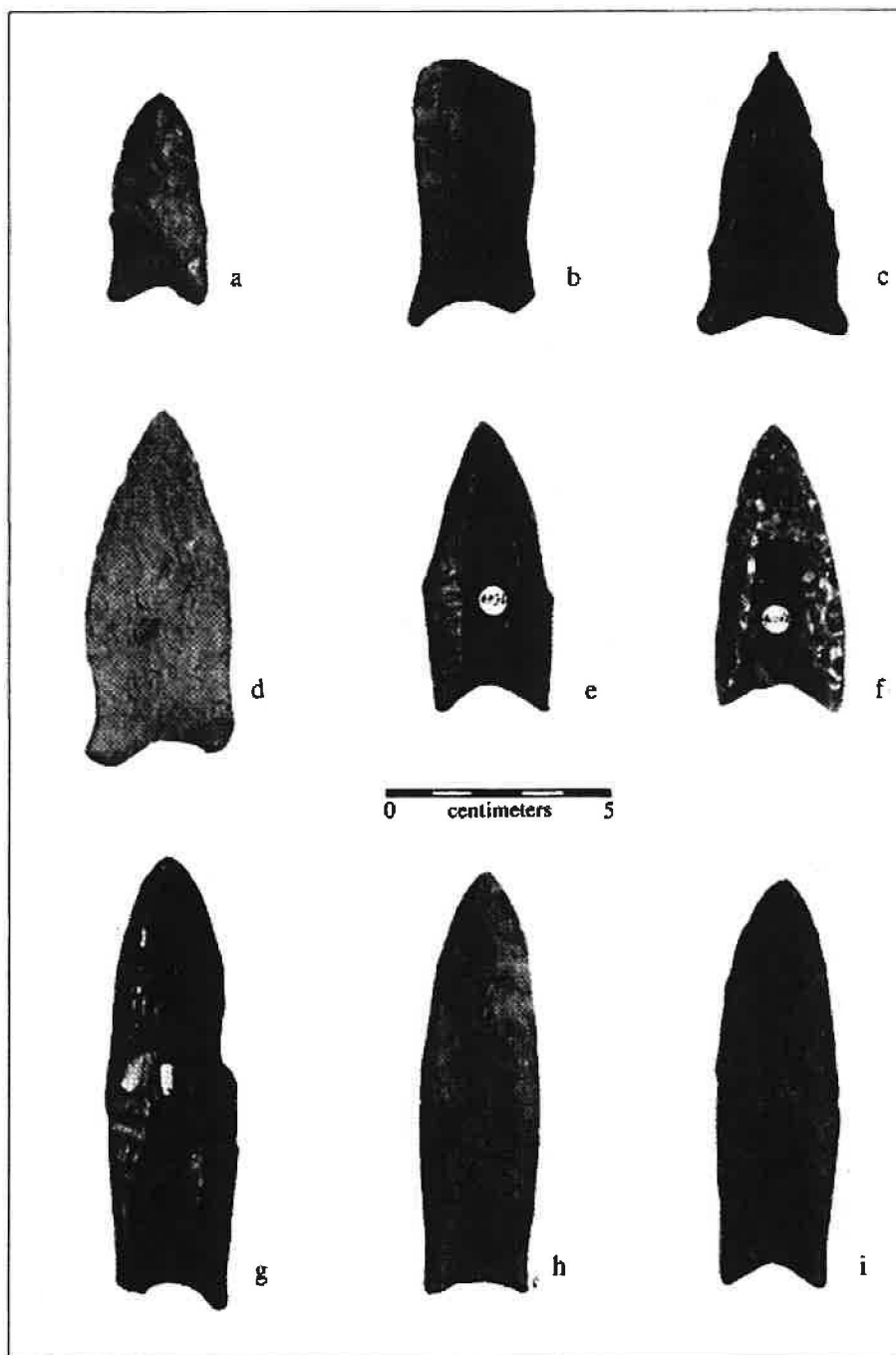


Figure 14.1 Paleoindian points from Tennessee: (a) Dalton [40HS60]; (b) Beaver Lake [40HS60]; (c) Greenbrier [40HS174]; Quad [40HS174]; (e, g-i) Clovis [40HS174, 40HS102, 40HS282, 40HS278]; Clovis/Redstone [40HS60].

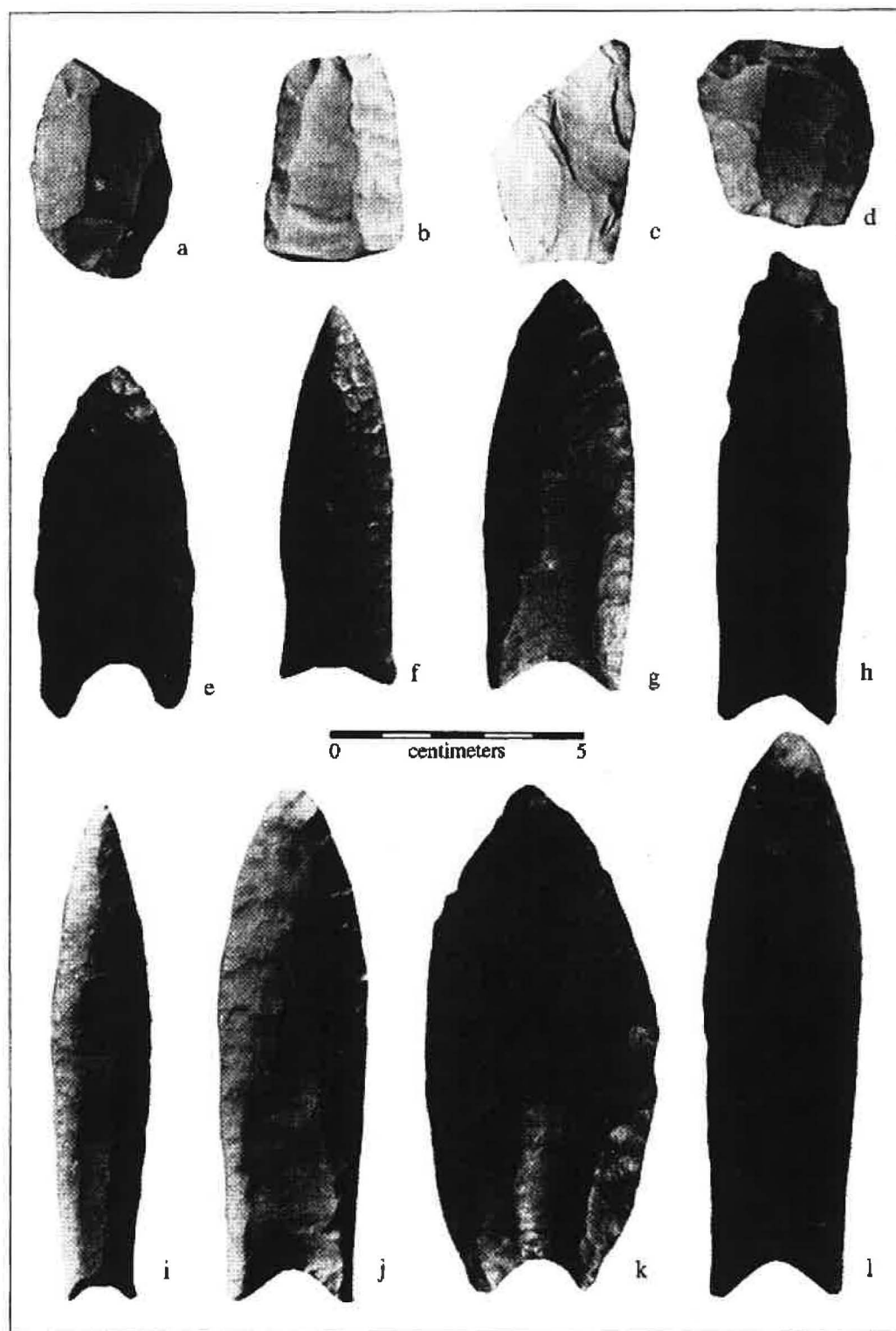


Figure 14.2 Paleoindian artifacts from Tennessee: (a-d) fluted preforms [40BN190]; (e, g, h, j-l) Clovis; (f, i) Cumberland.

Of probable greater importance than raw projectile point counts was the recognition of 47 Paleoindian sites and 77 localities within the database, although the difference between sites and localities was arbitrary, with five or more diagnostic artifacts being used as the determination of an

archaeological site versus a locality. This definition, given certain inherent problems of visibility at the time of investigation, has still proved to have its analytical usefulness. Early Paleoindian fluted point components are represented on 29 sites and 63 localities (Broster and Norton 1992:table 15.1).

For many years, Tennessee has been known to produce numerous Paleoindian projectile points and tools, and several locations and sites have been published in the regional literature (Broster 1982, 1987; Guthe 1966, 1983; Lewis and Kneberg 1958; Nuckolls 1958). The first year of survey revealed a great number of artifacts that were potentially available for study (Broster 1989). Because of the magnitude, we decided to concentrate our efforts within two specific regions, and toward this effort, work in recent years has concentrated in the Kentucky Lake region (Tennessee River) and the Cumberland River centered within the Nashville Basin and the Western Highland Rim. Eighteen sites and 10 localities have been recorded in the Kentucky Lake region. The Cumberland drainage has produced 12 sites and 19 localities. Interestingly, eight of the sites in the Kentucky Lake survey have produced 100 or more artifacts of a Paleoindian age. Data on one of these sites, Nuckolls, were published in the late 1950s (Lewis and Kneberg 1958); reports have been completed on two of the remaining sites, Nuckolls Extension and Twelkemeier (Broster and Norton 1990, 1991; Norton and Broster 1992); and reports on others are in progress.

In February of 1992, excavations were initiated at the Carson-Conn-Short site (40BN190) (Broster and Norton 1993; Broster et al. 1994). The site had been found and lightly surface collected by three local avocational archaeologists, Harlan "Kit" Carson, Gary Conn, and Hal Short, who generously notified the Tennessee Division of Archaeology about their find and donated their collections for permanent curation and study. Some seven distinct areas of the site have been identified, and one of them, designated area A and extending over an area of approximately 300 × 50 meters, was selected for intensive testing. Eastern Clovis and Cumberland fluted points and related unifacial tools had been found in the surface collections from this area, with no evidence for subsequent occupation (Broster and Norton 1993). The Cumberland points, of which two had been initially found, came from an area only about 15 meters in diameter. Nine 1-meter test units have been opened at the site (six in area A), and some 425 tools, cores, and hammerstones were mapped in place.

Test units opened in area A displayed similar stratigraphic profiles, and numerous fluted points and point fragments, prismatic blades, and unifaces were found in the deposits (figures 14.2–14.3). Many of the artifacts came from 30 to 55 centimeters below the present ground surface, in two distinct strata, suggesting that there may be stratigraphically distinct occupations present. The production of fluted points and prismatic blades appears to be the main activity that occurred in this area, which is within 100 meters of an exposed alluvial fan containing cobbles and tabular pieces of a high-quality locally derived chert. All of the Paleoindian artifacts that were found were made from this material, an outcrop of which occurs within 250 meters of the site area.

Some 60 clusters of fire-cracked chert were found amid the scatter of Paleoindian points and tools, which were initially interpreted as deflated hearths but now appear more likely to be the remains of heat-treating facilities for nodules of the local chert. This kind of feature is usually associated with Middle to Late Archaic components locally, an inference supported by two radiocarbon dates from a cracked rock cluster found in one of the test units (3445 ± 135 B.P., AA-11013; 3820 ± 200 B.P., Beta 62970). No Archaic diagnostics have been found in this part of the site, however, suggesting that, if the area was indeed used during the Archaic period, it was exclusively for heat-treating cobbles, which were then transported to another location for processing. Through late 1994, some 1,700 tools have been either mapped, excavated, or donated from Carson-Conn-Short, and all but a handful appear to be Paleoindian in age.

In the Nashville Basin, test excavations were conducted on the Johnson-Hawkins site (40DV313). Clovis, Cumberland, and Beaver Lake projectile points were found eroding from the bank of the river. Testing revealed that the majority of the Paleoindian occupation appears to have been eroded into the river. In the process of excavating this site, we learned of another potentially buried river site. The Johnson site (40DV400), a large multicomponent Paleoindian to Early Archaic site, was first noticed as a scatter of lithic debris eroding out of the south bank of the Cumberland River. The Division made an initial collection of materials consisting of projectile points,

biface/preforms, uniface tools, and numerous biface reduction flakes and found diagnostic artifacts to include Clovis, Cumberland, Beaver Lake, Kirk Corner-Notched, St. Albans Side-Notched, MacCorkle Stemmed, and Harpeth River projectile points (Broster and Barker 1992; Broster et al. 1991).

A series of charcoal-laden levels was observed in the bank profile, and a radiocarbon date was obtained from wood charcoal from the lowest level. It was a general sample associated with a fluted preform base (probably Clovis) and was radiocarbon dated at $11,700 \pm 980$ B.P. (TX 7000). A second date was obtained from the Early Archaic level located above the Paleoindian level. It came from a hearth, feature 8, and dated at 8940 ± 110 B.P. (TX-7453). This is well within the expected range for Early Archaic within the region. It is hoped that further testing can be carried out at this very important site. A series of dates from the lower levels and the later Early Archaic occupations need to be obtained for collaboration of the initial dates. It seems that the entire sequence for Paleoindian to late Early Archaic may be present at this site.

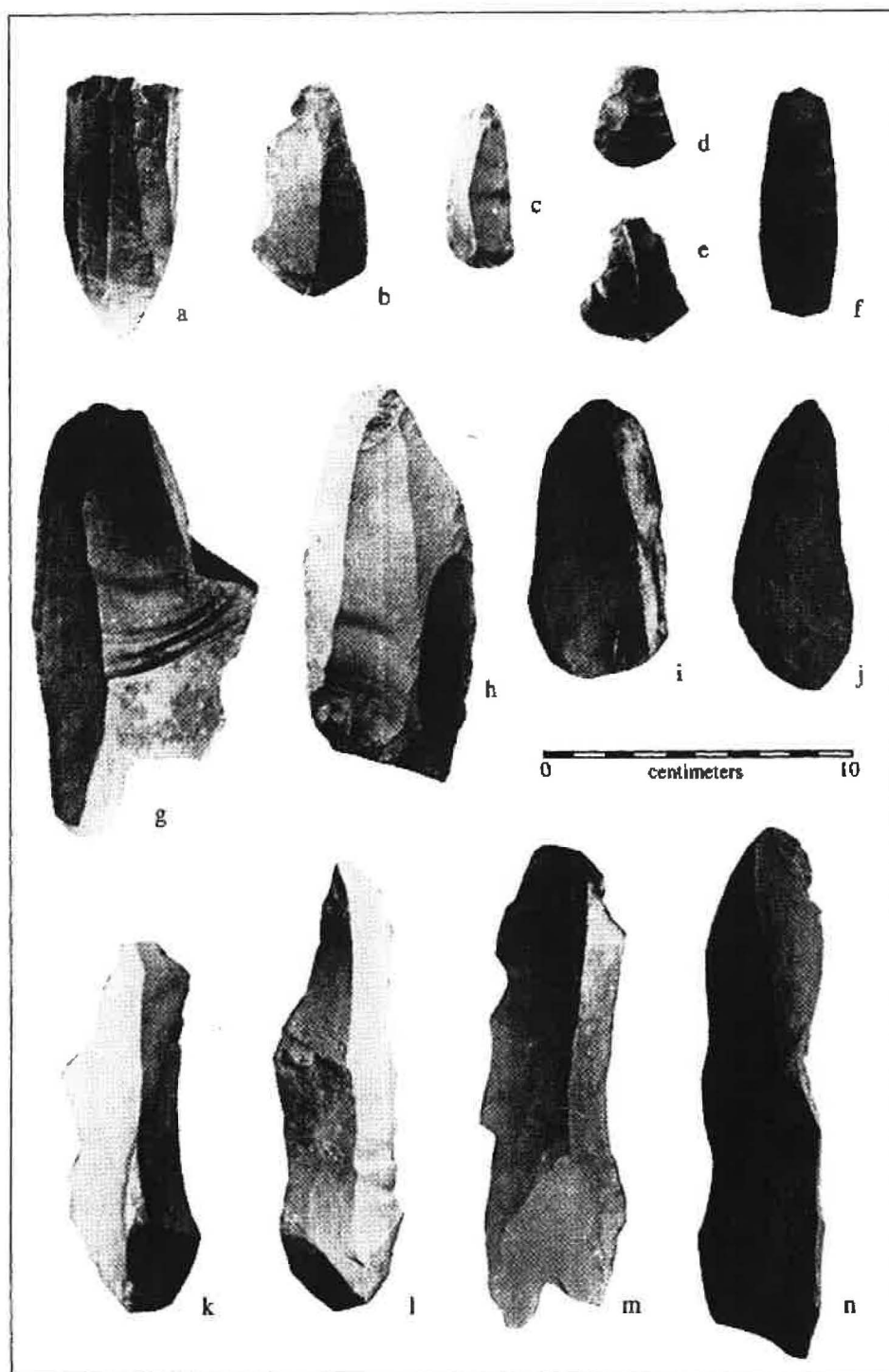


Figure 14.3 Blade tool assemblage, Carson-Conn-Short site (40BN190). (a) core; (b-e) end scrapers; (f, k-n) utilized knives; (g-i) side scrapers; (j) knife.

A fourth site, tested in the fall of 1991, was the multicomponent Puckett site (40SW228), which also disclosed Clovis, Beaver Lake, Dalton, and Kirk Corner-Notched projectile points where the site erodes into the Cumberland River. Tests produced an intact level of Dalton projectile points overlain by a substantial Kirk Corner-Notched component. A radiocarbon sample from the Dalton component has produced a date of 9790 ± 160 B.P. (Beta 48045) (Norton and Broster 1993), which is probably a terminal date for Dalton occupation in the region, since the projectile points from the component are similar to the subtype considered late by Morse and Morse (1983:105) for Arkansas.

The site probably has tremendous potential for dating the Late Paleoindian to Early Archaic period for the region, and excavations are planned for 40SW228, 40BN190, and 40DV400 in the near future.

In the middle Tennessee area, three sites are now known to contain intact deposits of Paleoindian and Early Archaic components. We feel that similar topographic locations may produce additional important sites. Further research will be devoted toward an investigation of these potential locations to ascertain whether other such archaeological manifestations exist.

In the Kentucky Lake region, the fluted point sites are located at the mouths of tributary streams on well-drained terrace remnants adjacent to the old Tennessee River channel. These maintenance/manufacturing camps may be associated with kill or butchering sites located at lower elevations along the river, but unfortunately, such sites, if they exist, are permanently under many meters of water.

Almost all of the sites recorded in the Kentucky Lake region represent light to moderate concentrations of lithic debris, with numerous fluted preforms present, the exception being 40BN190, which contains thousands of artifacts and is probably one of the largest Clovis sites in the Southeast. Projectile point manufacture and maintenance of hunting equipment seems to be an important function of these sites. The large number of uniface knives and side scrapers probably denotes some secondary butchering activities taking place. On four of the sites, significant numbers of spurred end scrapers and graver/spokeshave uniface tools are possible indicators of hide- and wood-working activities.

Before the creation of the lake, maintenance/manufacturing sites would have been situated at relatively short distance from low swampy areas. Site locations on major river terraces would have provided Paleoindians with dry elevated areas proximate to probable watering and feeding areas for large herd animals. Aquatic resources may also have been important in these locations.

Site locations along the Cumberland River compare favorably with those from the Kentucky Lake region, the only major difference being a lack of large numbers of uniface tools per site. The major definable function of these sites appears to be projectile point manufacture and the maintenance of hunting equipment. The sites appear to be much smaller in extent and density of artifacts recorded. The continued reuse of the exact location does not seem as critical a factor for the settlement system as for the Tennessee River area.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The limited excavations at the Carson-Conn-Short and the Johnson sites demonstrated the existence of intact Clovis period occupations. The significance of these two finds cannot be overstated. These sites are probably two of the most important sites to be located in the Southeast in the history of southern Paleoindian studies. In parts of site 40BN190, in situ Clovis occupations are known to extend some 47 centimeters below the present surface. The potential for spatial analysis of features and tools on this site is extremely important for understanding Clovis adaptations in the Southeast.

During our survey of Paleoindian sites, a Clovis occupation at 40DV400 has been dated in the Nashville Basin at between 11,700 to 11,980 B.P. (Broster et al. 1991). These dates have been obtained from hearth features, which are very similar to those found at 40BN190. The potential dating of these two sites may be of the greatest importance in understanding the origin of Clovis culture and how and when it spread across the continental United States.

The lithic assemblage represented by our excavations and surface collections appears to replicate the tool kit described for Clovis occupation in both the western and eastern United States (Collins 1990; Sanders 1990; Stanford 1991; Young and Collins 1989). These sites are the first intact single-component Clovis sites to be investigated in Tennessee and could provide years of potential research into the early fluted point cultures of North America.

The work at the Carson-Conn-Short site (40BN190) and the Johnson site (40DV400) has provided new information on the potential area of origin for the Clovis culture and does support arguments for a southern beginning for the fluted point tradition (Bryan 1991:17; Stanford

1991:9–10). We believe that future research and analysis of 40BN190 will be instrumental in bringing about a new and clearer interpretation of Clovis culture and the peopling of the Americas. In a recent work dedicated to the study of the origins of Clovis, only a passing reference is made to Clovis occupations in Tennessee (Bonnichsen and Turnmire 1991). In time, these sites and the information they contain will change current models of Clovis adaptation and will hopefully bring us to a better understanding of this very complex period of human history in the New World.

The data from our survey, especially from the Kentucky Lake region, appear to be somewhat at odds with the Paleoindian settlement model proposed by Meltzer (1984, 1988). He has stated that in the Southeast there are a great number of isolated fluted points and a scarcity of large dense archaeological sites. This leads him to believe that what is represented in the Early Paleoindian period is a generalized, foraging adaptation by highly mobile part-time big-game hunters. However, we have recorded some eight extremely dense fluted point sites in the Kentucky Lake region, averaging over 100 tools per site. Even though one of these sites, 40BN190, contains over 40 hearths and has an estimated density of over 5,000 finished tools, it is suspected that this site is by no means unique, based on information obtained from local collectors.

There is always a problem of designing models that are based on insufficient data. What has been recorded and what is actually present in the field do not always coincide. Collectors are often very hesitant to divulge exact locations of finds. Thus, their material has generally been located by county or drainage location at best. In the literature, these finds have usually been assumed to be isolated occurrences. However, we have found that after several collections have been recorded and precise locations have been obtained, many of these isolated points are in fact from the same location. Ground truth checks of these find spots have also produced uniface tools and numerous waste flakes that were of no interest to the average collector. Many “isolated finds” have turned out to be fairly substantial Paleoindian sites.

We must be careful that the data we use to generate models of behavior are firmly based in archaeological reality. We state this not to find fault with those who create these models but to chide those archaeologists who have not always published their regional data in a timely fashion.

The numerous Clovis and Cumberland sites in Tennessee are a possible indicator that the area was a loci for initial colonization and that it may well represent one of the major staging areas for the peopling of the New World, as defined by Anderson (1990a; chapter 3, this volume). Considerable more research is needed before this can be determined. In the past, fluted points in the Southeast have been assumed to be slightly younger than their western counterparts. The new dates coming from the Johnson site may make this observation obsolete.

There is a great amount of research left to be accomplished. Several large private collections remain to be recorded. It is hoped that, through continued cooperation between amateur and professional archaeologists, additional research can be successfully completed. The information held by collectors can be extremely useful to the professional archaeologist and should be pursued, for without the help of these individuals, we would know almost nothing about this very important period of occupation in Tennessee.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank BethAnn McVickers for help with the photography, and David G. Anderson and Julie Barnes Smith for help with assembling the plates.

