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Abstract

**Living the Life, Part 2: Middle Archaic and Middle-Late Woodland Use of Persistent Places
in the Uplands of Southwestern Virginia at 44RN400**

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Data recovery excavations conducted in 2018 in support of a utility project were conducted at two adjacent upland sites; 44RN400 and 44RN401. Largely contemporaneous with the occupation at nearby 44RN401, the most intensive period of use is associated with Middle Archaic Guilford points. Radiocarbon dates and diagnostic artifacts from 44RN400 indicate the highest intensity of use during the Middle Archaic, the Late Archaic to Early Woodland, and late Middle Woodland periods. Prior to the late Middle Woodland period site use appears to have focused on short-term, logistically-organized and narrowly focused resource extraction activities. The presence of thermal rock features and thick quartz tempered ceramics associated with the late Middle Woodland-early Late Woodland component potentially represent an important change and expansion of site use.

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Data recovery excavations at 44RN400 (**SLIDE**) indicated that the site's use was largely contemporaneous with that at nearby 44RN401 and that there are a number of other significant similarities as well as a number of no less important differences between the two sites. As a persistent place on the landscape for nearly ten millennia the similarities between the two sites point to a degree of consistency/continuity in land-use patterns in this high elevation setting within the context of evolving cultural adaptations from the beginning of the Early Archaic period through the Late Woodland period. Departures from these general trends are illustrative of some of the ways that the use of different parts of a persistent place may vary through time and potentially reflect changes in the broader cultural system of which they are an integral part.

Site 44RN400 lies approximately 215 m further northeast along the edge of the Mill Creek valley on the same general landform on top of Bent Mountain as Site 44RN401 (**SLIDE**). It is separated from Site 44RN401 by a steep slope, an unnamed tributary of Mill Creek, and a small wetland that forms the western boundary of the site. The site is much smaller than its counterpart to the southwest, encompassing 0.23 ha, of which 0.18 ha lie within the project area. The site is at an elevation of between 2,617 to 2,628 ft (**SLIDE**) and features gently rolling terrain (**SLIDE**) with a small area of leveler and more gently sloping ground in the southwestern corner of the site.

The focus of the data recovery excavations was a 159 m² main excavation block (**SLIDE**) and an associated 156 m² of hand stripped plowzone to look for cultural features that were placed in the southwestern portion of the site where the initial phases of investigation indicated the highest artifact densities occurred. An additional 11 outlying 1 m² test units were excavated across the approximate eastern two-thirds of the site area. These test units verified that the deposits across that portion of the site consisted of a diffuse, low density scatter of debris consisting primarily of debitage and very few tools.

The site formed in shallow sandy loam residual soils (**SLIDE**). The soil profiles across the site were homogenous consisting of a 20 cm thick plowzone overlying a sandy clay loam subsoil. Although the site is effectively contained in the plowzone, the basal remnants of nine cultural features were recovered. The features (**SLIDE**) include four concentrations of large pieces of FCR representing probable roasting facilities, one smaller FCR concentration that is another thermal feature of unclear function, three smudge pits, and one medium basin that also appears to have had a heat-related function.

I'm not going to say much about the features themselves due to time limitations. The roasting pits had little in them except for FCR and small amounts of lithics and occasionally some ceramics. Two of the smudge pits are represented by only basal remnants, but they are distinguished by their small circular shapes and dense concentration of charcoal. Except for the smudge pits charred botanical remains from the features was very limited, but it was possible to obtain 11 radiocarbon dates (**SLIDE**) from the feature and one additional date on charred food residue from a fabric impressed Grayson body sherd, however, only 10 of the dates are accurate reflectors of the age of occupations at the site.

The radiocarbon dates form two clusters that match the two periods of most intense site use with a single exception. The first set of five dates have calibrated two sigma intercepts ranging between 5822 and 5326 BP and are associated with the Guilford phase component. The second cluster of dates span the period between 1546 and 1127 BP and are associated with late Middle Woodland through early Late Woodland use of the site. An additional date of between 4426 and 4248 BP is associated with Late Archaic use of the site. In the case of the Middle Archaic dates it looks like old carbon was incorporated into all but one of the features and the current interpretation is that all of the features except one of the smudge pits remnants are associated with the late Middle Woodland-early Late Woodland component based on the occurrence of quartz tempered ceramics in some of them, their spatial relationship with the distribution of ceramics, and other circumstantial evidence.

In addition to the radiocarbon dates, gauging the periodicity of site use through time and its relative intensity relies heavily on the 68 diagnostic projectile points from the site. Distribution of the diagnostic projectile points by period shows extended periods of low-level use punctuated by several periods of much higher use (**SLIDE**). Use of the site begins at the beginning of the Early Archaic as indicated by two points possibly related to Hardaway Blades, a Big Sandy point, and a Kirk Corner Notched point. Following the same pattern as at 44RN401, there is a small up-tick in site use during the later parts of the Early Archaic represented by four Bifurcate Tradition points (**SLIDE**) that continues into the early part of the Middle Archaic period. The first substantial use of the site takes place during the Middle Archaic Guilford phase (**SLIDE**) which is represented by 13 points. After this, the level of site use drops-off once again from the Late Archaic (**SLIDE**) to the later parts of the Middle Woodland period followed by another significant increase in site use represented by a variety of small notched and expanding stemmed points during the late Middle Woodland to early Late Woodland period (**SLIDE**). The assemblage of 3,057 badly fragmented and eroded quartz-tempered Grayson series ceramics are also associated with that component. The presence of a number of small triangular points (**SLIDE**) indicates that sporadic use of the site continued throughout the remainder of the Late Woodland period. The lack of any ceramics that could confidently be classified as either Dan River or Wythe ware, whose appearance post-dates about 1000-900 BP, underscores what appears to be only sporadic use of the site during the later parts of the Late Woodland period.

The palimpsest nature of the deposits at 44RN400 and their concentration in a relatively small part of the site presents the same types of interpretational challenge as seen in the previous paper on nearby site 44RN401. Nonetheless, some trends that point to similarities and differences in how the sites were used are evident

The artifact assemblage from 44RN400 was much larger than that at 44RN401, consisting of slightly more than 8,600 artifacts including 223 chipped stone tools, 14 groundstone tools, and 48 cores. The structure of the tool assemblage, however, was generally similar to that at 44RN401 in that while there was a moderately broad range of tool types represented, the assemblage is dominated by a small number of types indicative of only a narrow range of activities being carried out, namely hunting, tool productions, and toolkit maintenance. Together, projectile points, bifaces, bifacial preforms, and expedient flake tools account for 87 percent of the chipped stone tool assemblage. Of these, projectile points and bifacial preforms (**SLIDE**) are the most prominent representing nearly 40 percent and 20 percent of the chipped stone tools, respectively. Finished

bifaces and expedient edge modified flakes, representing about 13 percent and 14 percent of the chipped stone tools, respectively, are the only other tool types to exceed more than 10 percent. Other tool types such as end scrapers, side scrapers, unifaces, perforators, graters, and spokeshaves all occur in significantly smaller numbers indicating that toolkit maintenance tasks, while occurring, were taking place at reduced levels and were most likely geared towards immediate rather than anticipatory needs. The predominance of debitage derived from the early to middle stages of core reduction and biface manufacture and significantly lesser amounts of flakes from the final stages of tool manufacture and tool maintenance underscore this point.

These overall similarities with Site 44RN401, however, belie a number of important differences between the two sites. While one of the peak periods of site use takes place during the Middle Archaic Guilford phase, it differs from that at Site 44RN401 in several important ways. First (**SLIDE**), it is less intense at Site 44RN400 with only 13 Guilford points compared to 23 at Site 44RN401. Second, the association with the use of quartzite and the reduction of quartzite preforms seen at 44RN401 is not seen at 44RN400. The reason for this difference is not clear, although the lower lying, more sheltered position of Site 44RN401 on the landform raises the potential for seasonality to be a factor.

Late Archaic through Early Woodland use of the site is also much higher than at Site 44RN401. These projectile points represent slightly more than one-quarter of the diagnostic point at Site 44RN400, while representing only 18 percent of the diagnostic points at Site 44RN401. The inability to isolate activity areas with these components prevents identifying a reason, but once again the position of the site and its easy access to Mill Creek as well as seasonality must be considered as potential factors.

During the late Middle Woodland to early Late Woodland component there is a significant addition to the range of tasks carried out at the site and an important departure from how the site had been used for many millennia. In addition to the hunting and tool production-focused nature of site use, ceramics are added as a part of the artifact repertoire used at the site, several different feature types are represented, and evidence for the exploitation of plant resources is present. Although features were not numerous with only nine identified at Site 44RN400 and none at Site 44RN401, the features signal a shift in how the area was being used. The features were badly truncated by plowing (**SLIDE**), but four appear to represent medium-sized roasting facilities indicated by concentrations of large pieces of FCR, steeply side pit morphology, as well as a general paucity of charcoal and the lack of soil reddening from fire. Phytoliths recovered from one of the roasting pits indicate that lily family tubers were processed in the pits and that grasses were used to line them. The ceramics are highly fragments and badly eroded, but have been classified as Grayson Series (**SLIDE**) and, by far, most commonly exhibit fabric impressed exteriors. The occurrence of the ceramics is concentrated proximate to the roasting pits indicating a role in those processing activities. In addition to the evidence for the exploitation and processing of tubers limited evidence for nut mast exploitation also was recovered from a small basin-shaped features associated with the Grayson component that contained a small concentration of burned acorn shells.

Along with the roasting pits and the basin-shaped feature, several smudge pits are also associated with the late Middle Woodland to early Late Woodland component. Smudge pits are closely

linked with hide processing activities. Although they cannot be securely associated with this late component at the site, it is perhaps not coincidental that there is a greater number of end scrapers at Site 44RN400 than seen at its contemporaneous neighbor to the west.

The greater emphasis on hide processing coupled with the exploitation of tubers and nut mast resources has implications regarding the nature of the group using the site as well as the timing and duration of these occupations. First, the combination of hunting and plant resource exploitation implies a mixed gender group of men and women who traditionally carry out these respective tasks. While additional plant resource and hide processing activities seen during this time entail longer periods of occupation these episodes of site use are still relatively short, perhaps on the order of a week or so by small task specific groups. Finally, the limited subsistence data from this period of site use provide a clue as to the season of use. Although tubers are typically collected in the early spring when they begin flowering, they can also be collected in the fall when the tubers are at their maximum size and starch content. The fall is also the time when hunting increases in importance as well as hide processing. The fact that there does appear to be some degree of spatial separation between the ceramics and roasting pits and some of the areas where lithic reduction tasks were taking pace suggests that the plant processing and hunting activities are occurring at the same time and a fall occupation is favored for this component.

In conclusion, archaeological investigations at Sites 44RN400 and 44RN401 documented two closely related extensive lithic scatters whose use spans most of the Pre-Contact era. Featuring periodic, long-term use of a mountain top locale in the Blue Ridge Province of southwestern Virginia, these sites clearly meet the definition of a persistent place on the regional landscape. Site function over this extended period of time remained very consistent with a focus on hunting and associated toolkit maintenance tasks. Tool production in the form of core reduction and the reduction of bifacial preforms on anticipation of future needs also appears to have been an important aspect of site use during the several periods of more frequent use in Middle Archaic at Site 44RN401 and late Middle Woodland to early Late Woodland times at Site 44RN400. During this latter period at Site 44RN400 the exploitation of tubers and nut mast also takes on a degree of importance, while at Site 44RN400 its use during this time appears to remain focused on hunting and lithic reduction. Under some of the current site typologies these sites were variously used as transient camps as people moved across the uplands and as short-duration resource procurement camps used by small task-specific groups emphasizing hunting and tool production for both immediate and future needs. Clearly, typologies help summarize the data, but caution must always be exercised in their development and use since they can also mask important aspects of variability in the way in which people mapped themselves across the landscape at particular points in time, but also over extended periods of time.