2009 ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS AT TOWN CREEK INDIAN MOUND STATE HISTORIC SITE

by

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ABSTRACT

Archaeological fieldwork took place at Town Creek Indian Mound State Historic Site during June 2009 to achieve goals of public education and archaeological research. Dozens of volunteers participated in the fieldwork, and numerous visitors to Town Creek were able to observe the excavations. The excavations consisted of seven 10-×-10-ft units. This work documented segments of several palisade lines that run along the periphery of the Mississippian community at Town Creek. The June 2009 excavations also demonstrated that a structure is not present in an area previously thought to contain the remains of a Mississippian building. Additionally, the unexpected recovery of a Clovis point represents the first diagnostic, Paleoindian artifact ever recovered from Town Creek.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The June 2009 fieldwork at Town Creek Indian Mound State Historic Site was a successful endeavor because of the efforts of many people and institutions. Archie Smith has been a proponent of additional fieldwork at Town Creek for some time, and he spearheaded much of the effort that set this project in motion. Funding was provided by the generous efforts of the Friends of Town Creek. The staff of Town Creek Indian Mound State Historic Site supported the project in numerous ways both before and during the fieldwork. The Research Laboratories of Archaeology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the Phelps Archaeological Laboratories at East Carolina University supported the project by providing personnel, equipment, and vehicles. A number of graduate students from the anthropology departments at these two universities volunteered their time and helped to supervise the numerous volunteers who participated in the project. These graduate students included Aimee Bouzigard, David Cranford, Mary Beth Fitts, Theresa McReynolds, Joey Roberts, and Erin Smith. Finally, the success of the project was due to the efforts of 58 volunteers who chose to spend time with us digging at Town Creek.

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INTRODUCTION

Archaeological fieldwork took place at Town Creek Indian Mound State Historic Site (TCIM), Montgomery County, North Carolina during June 2009 under ARPA permit #89 (Figure 1). This work was sponsored by the Friends of Town Creek, TCIM, the Research Laboratories of Archaeology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and the Phelps Archaeological Laboratory at East Carolina University. Excavations were undertaken to achieve goals of public education and archaeological research, and this project was very successful on both fronts. Regarding public education, dozens of volunteers participated directly in the fieldwork, and numerous visitors to Town Creek were able to observe the excavations and ask questions of archaeologists in the field (Figures 2–3). Furthermore, coverage of the excavations by local and regional press provided public exposure for TCIM. Regarding archaeological research goals, the June 2009 excavations were designed to investigate an area in the northwestern part of the site where earlier excavations indicated a circular structure might be present (Boudreaux 2005). This area was thoroughly investigated from June 23 to 26 through the excavation of seven 10-×-10-ft units (Figures 4–6). Although additional evidence for the presence of a circular structure was not found, the June 2009 excavations uncovered portions of multiple palisade lines and recovered a Clovis point, the first diagnostic, Paleoindian artifact ever recovered from Town Creek.

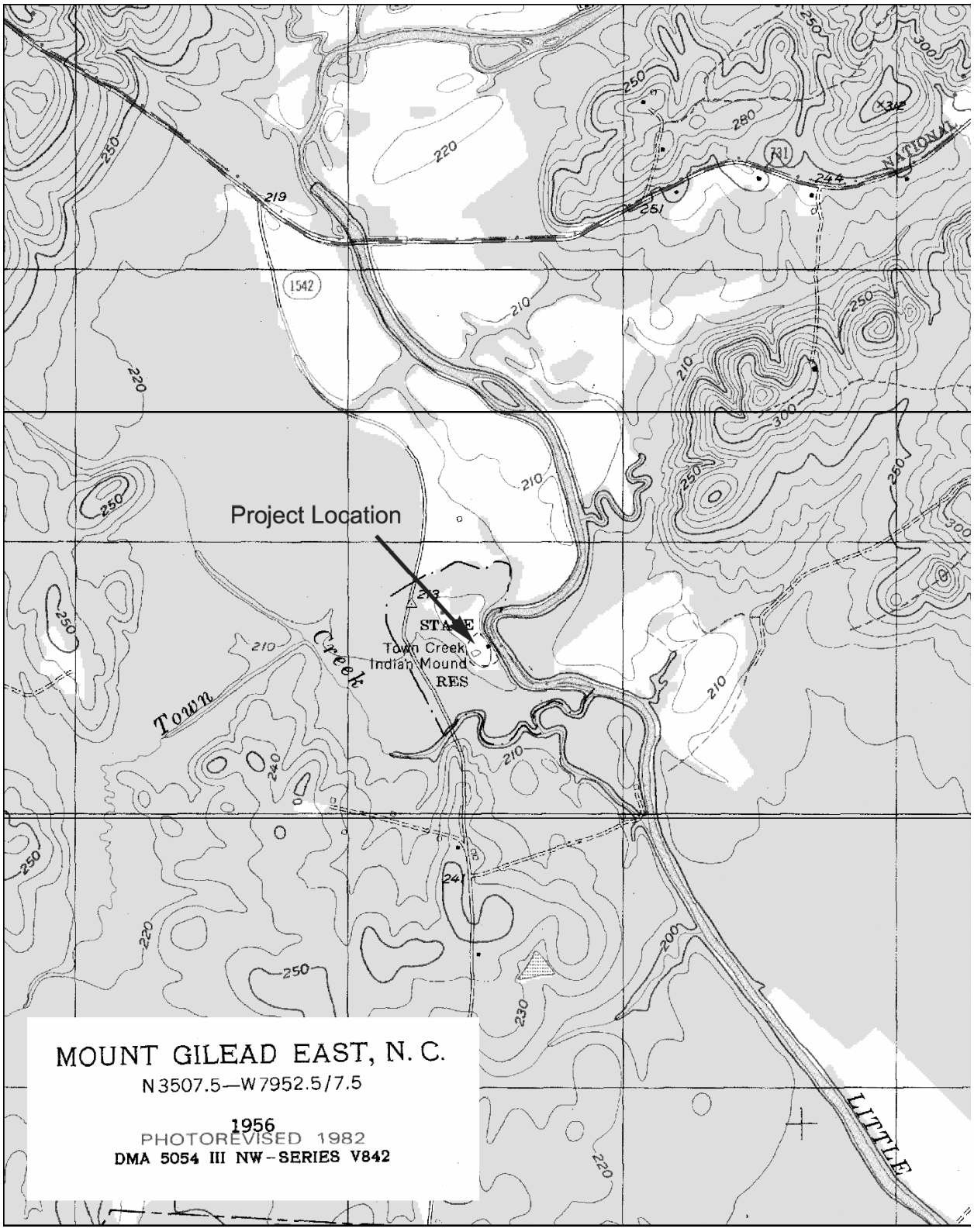

Figure 1. Location of Town Creek Indian Mound State Historic Site.

Figure 2. Steve Davis presenting excavations to a visiting school group.

Figure 3. Archaeologists interacting with visitors.

Figure 4. Map of excavated areas at Town Creek. The arrow and box (at left) indicate the location of the June 2009 excavations.

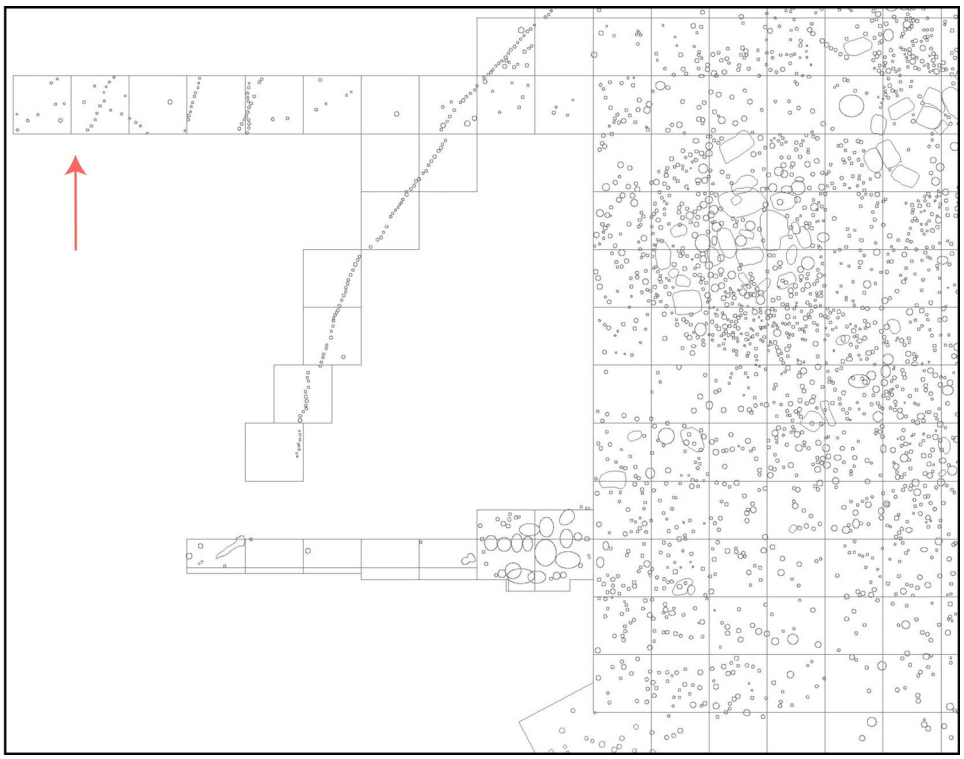

Figure 5. Excavated areas in northwest part of the Town Creek site prior to the June 2009 excavations. The arrow (at left) indicates the location of the possible structure.

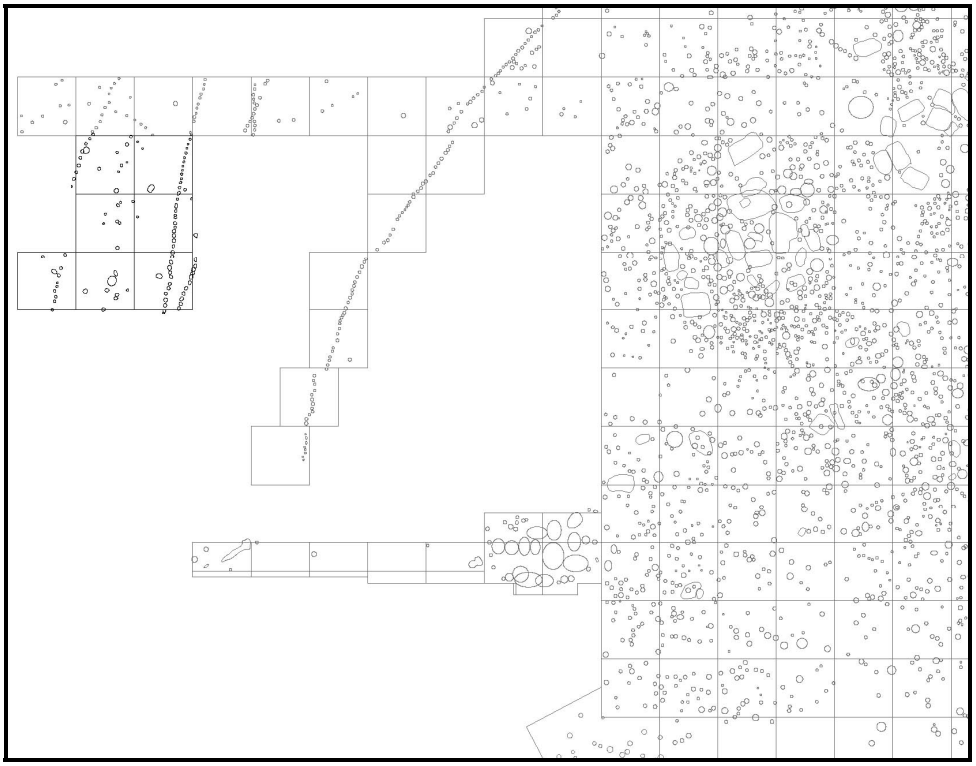

Figure 6. Excavated areas in the northwest part of the Town Creek site after the June 2009 excavations.

BACKGROUND

The Town Creek archaeological site (31Mg2 and 31Mg3) is one of the most extensively investigated sites in North Carolina (Boudreaux 2007; Coe 1995; Ward and Davis 1999). Decades of fieldwork at Town Creek have exposed approximately 100,000 ft^2 of archaeological deposits, and they have produced an extraordinary amount of data and material related to the site's occupation by Native American groups. Excavations began at Town Creek in 1937, and they have continued in several phases up to the present. Fieldwork between 1937 and 1940 took place as part of various Depression-era, "make-work" projects that employed local laborers under the direction of professional archaeologists (Coe 1995; Ward and Davis 1999). Between 1949 and 1983, fieldwork at Town Creek consisted of two or three-person crews excavating a few units at a time (Coe 1995). Field investigations at Town Creek between 1983 and 2006 consisted of compliance-related work directly related to maintenance projects undertaken at the site (Carnes-McNaughton n.d.). Since 2006, several short-term, volunteer-based, research-oriented projects have been undertaken at Town Creek (Davis 2007, 2008), and the work reported here represents another such project.

The vast majority of the archaeological deposits at Town Creek date to the Mississippi period (A.D. 1050–1400) when the site was regionally important as a town and ceremonial center (Boudreaux 2005, 2007). Prior to the 2009 fieldwork, it was known that Town Creek had been an important place for nearly 10,000 years because diagnostic artifacts indicated that the site was used at least intermittently by Native

Americans from the Early Archaic through Protohistoric periods (8000 B.C.–A.D. 1700) (Boudreaux 2005; Coe 1995:Table 10.1). The recovery of a Clovis point (Figures 7–8) from Sq. 80L280 during the 2009 excavations suggests that Town Creek also may have been occupied during the Paleoindian period (9500–8000 B.C.) (Ward and Davis 1999). With this discovery, we can now infer that Town Creek was occupied during all periods of North Carolina's prehistory.

A distinctive part of the excavation procedure at Town Creek throughout nearly all periods of its fieldwork has been the taking of photographs for a site-wide photomosaic (Boudreaux and Davis 2002; Coe 1995; Davis 2007). This process involved the systematic preparation of each excavated unit prior to photographing and mapping, and the use of a wooden tower to obtain precise vertical photographs of each unit. The construction of this photomosaic in a digital format by Steve Davis has allowed an image of each excavated unit recorded over a period of several decades to be assembled into a single document (Boudreaux and Davis 2002). The digital photomosaic has played a critical role in recent work that has developed new interpretations of Town Creek's site structure and community evolution (Boudreaux 2005; Boudreaux and Davis 2002). This research has shown that the form and function of public and domestic architecture changed significantly during Town Creek's occupation during the Mississippi period (Boudreaux 2005, 2007).

Figure 7. Clovis point recovered during the 2009 excavations (photo by Steve Davis).

Figure 8. Archie Smith with Clovis point (photo by Rich Thompson).

2009 INVESTIGATIONS

The research goal of the June 2009 excavations at Town Creek was to investigate an area where earlier excavations suggested a circular structure might be located. Features suggesting the possibility of a structure in this location were exposed during the earlier excavation of a line of 10-×-10-ft units that extended away from the main excavation area into the northwest part of the site. The June 2009 excavations were undertaken in order to: (1) determine if this structure was real, and (2) expose and map the structure if present. The excavation of seven additional units in the area clearly demonstrated that a structure was not present. In addition to demonstrating that a Mississippian structure was not located in this part of the site, the June 2009 excavations recovered a significant number of artifacts (Appendix A), and additional segments of several palisade lines encountered during earlier excavations (Boudreaux 2005, 2007; Coe 1995) were documented.

Re-establishing the Grid

In order to align the 2009 investigations with the excavation grid that has been used throughout excavations at Town Creek (Coe 1995), Steve Davis and Brett Riggs of the Research Laboratories of Archaeology relocated several grid points—marked by earlier excavators with metal posts or rebar—along the L100 line. These grid points (100L100, -100L100, and -150L100) were used in conjunction with a United States

Geological Survey monument near the northeast corner of the reconstructed mound summit to orient the survey instrument, a total station, so that local benchmarks could be placed at known locations on the excavation grid in the area to be excavated. Because the 2009 excavation area was located outside of the reconstructed palisade, it was necessary to place the survey instrument on top of the mound in order to see both the known points on the excavation grid and the area to be investigated (Figure 9). Once benchmarks were established at known grid points in the vicinity of the planned excavations, pins were shot in along the perimeter of a 30-×-30-ft block with corners at 100L270, 70L270, 70L300, and 100L300. Seven 10-×-10-ft excavation units (Sqs. 90L280, 90L270, 80L280, 80L270, 70L290, 70L280, and 70L270) were excavated within this block between June 23 and 26, 2009.

Excavation of Units

The procedure used to excavate and document units was as follows (Figures 10-14). A string was pulled between the corner pins to outline each unit, and the sod was then carefully removed. Each unit was then divided into four 5-×-5-ft quadrants (northeast, southeast, northwest, southwest). Each quadrant was excavated and screened separately. Excavations began with the removal by shovel of the 10–20-inch layer of plowed soil. Because the units excavated in 2009 had not been previously excavated, all soil from the plowzone was hand-sifted through quarter-inch mesh. When excavations reached a depth about 0.2 ft above the top of subsoil, and the tops of unexcavated pits and

Figure 9. View of excavations from mound summit, facing north (photo by Rich Thompson).

Figure 10. Removing sod (photo by Rich Thompson).

Figure 11. Screening soil through quarter-inch mesh (photo by Rich Thompson).

Figure 12. Using flatshovels at the base of plowzone, facing southeast (photo by Rich Thompson).

Figure 13. View of excavations, facing southeast.

Figure 14. View of excavations, facing south.

postholes, flatshovels were used to remove the remaining plowed soil. Excavation continued in this manner until subsoil was reached. The tops of pits and postholes were carefully cleaned with trowels, and any artifacts protruding from the tops of those features were left in place.

Each unit was photographed for inclusion in the digital photomosaic, and this required the undertaking of several additional steps in the excavation process (Figures 15–18) (see Davis 2007, 2008). Once all plowed soil had been removed from a unit, an additional 0.5-ft margin was excavated so that photographs of the unit's entire excavated surface could be taken without shadows from the adjacent excavation walls. Additional pins also were placed midway between the corner pins and at the center of the unit to provide photographic registration points for the quadrants within each unit. Finally, the entire excavated area was trowelled to produce a clean surface. The excavated surface of each unit was photographed by quadrant for the digital photomosaic, following the method described by Davis (2007). Once photographed, each unit was mapped using a total station. Pits and posthole outlines were etched with the point of a trowel, and these outlines were plotted with the surveying instrument. Unit plots were constructed later using CAD software.

Results

The 2009 excavations at TCIM produced several important insights regarding archaeological research at the site. First, it was clearly demonstrated that a structure was not located in this part of the site, despite earlier indications. Second, the recovery of a

Figure 15. Cutting back unit walls for photomosaic photography, facing south.

Figure 16. Cutting back unit walls for photomosaic photography, facing southwest.

Figure 17. Trowelling prior to photographing and mapping units, facing west (photo by Rich Thompson).

Figure 18. Mapping units, facing south (photo by Rich Thompson).

Clovis point provides the first indication that Town Creek may have been occupied during the Paleoindian period. Third, the excavations documented sections of multiple palisade lines, and it is hoped that the artifacts recovered may be useful in dating these constructions. Fourth, the seven units were added to the site's digital photomosaic (Figure 19). Regarding public education, 58 people volunteered during the course of the week, and many of these people spent multiple days at the site. Additionally, numerous visitors to TCIM were able to observe the excavations, ask questions of the archaeologists, and receive a tour of the excavations.

CONCLUSIONS

The archaeological project undertaken at TCIM in June 2009 successfully achieved its goals of public education and archaeological research. Public education goals included providing an opportunity for interested volunteers to participate in archaeological fieldwork and providing visitors to Town Creek the opportunity to observe archaeological fieldwork. The June 2009 excavations thoroughly investigated an area in the northwest part of the site through the excavation of seven 10-×-10 ft units. Excavations recovered numerous artifacts, documented segments of several palisade lines, and demonstrated that a structure was not located in this part of the site. The unexpected recovery of a Clovis point has provided the first diagnostic, Paleoindian artifact from Town Creek. The June 2009 excavations also demonstrated that the efforts

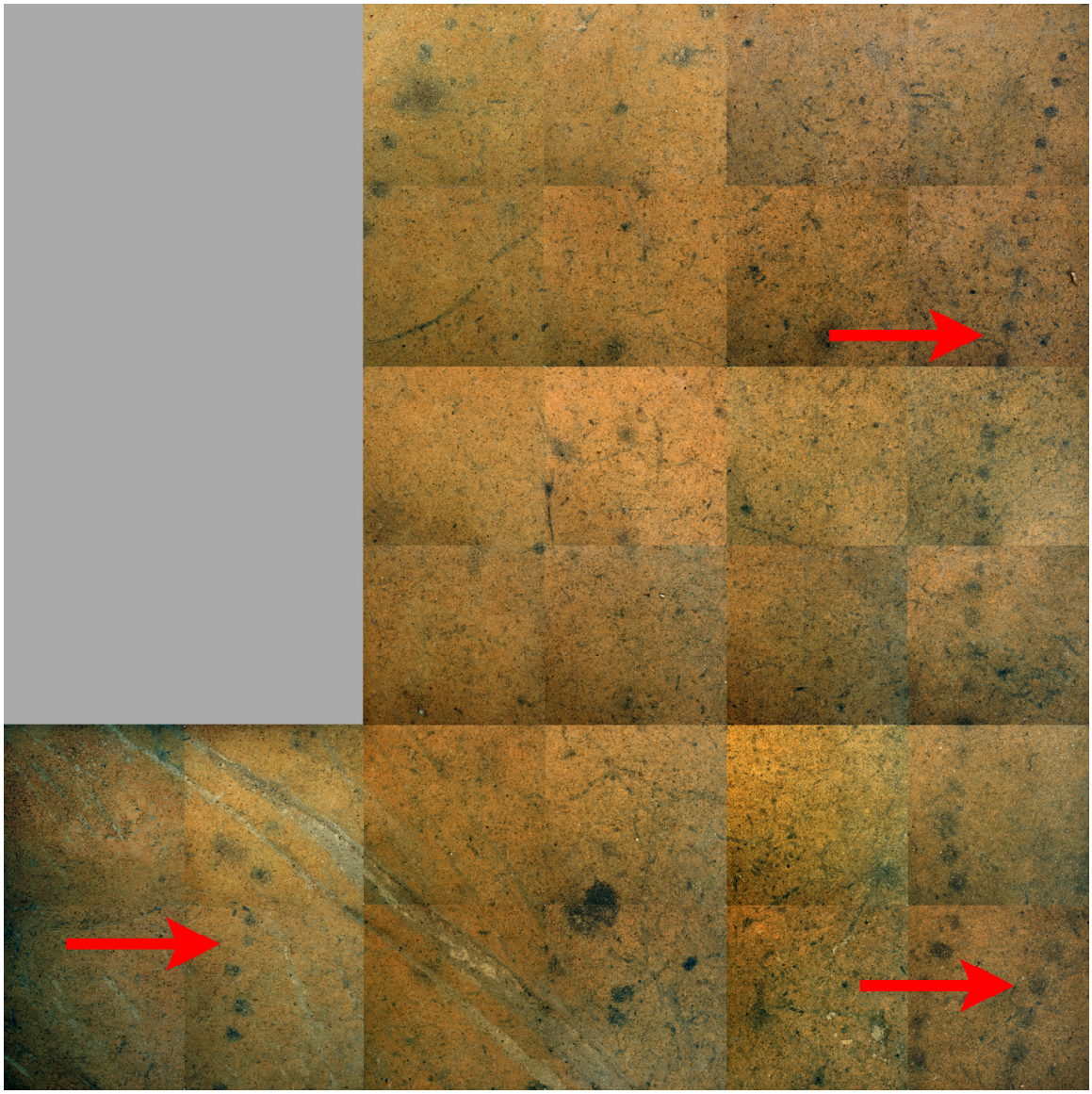

Figure 19. Digital photomosaic of June 2009 excavation units (arrows indicate palisade lines) (photomosaic assembled by Steve Davis).

of volunteers, under the direction of a sufficient number of trained archaeologists, can accomplish a great deal in a relatively short amount of time. This suggests that with sufficient interest from volunteers and professionals, short-term projects at Town Creek can be used to successfully address archaeological research goals.

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Appendix A: Catalog of Artifacts Recovered During 2009 Investigations at Town Creek.

Context Description	Count	Size
Square 70L270, Southeast Quadrant, Level 1 (Plowzone)		
Calcined Bone	1	1/4"
Historic Sherd	1	1/4"
Potsherds	417	1/2"
Potsherds	300	1/4"
Cores	3	1/4"
Projectile Points	9	1/4"
Drill	1	1/4"
Flakes	93	1/2"
Flakes	552	1/4"
Perforator	1	1/4"
Clay Pipe Fragment	1	1/4"
Daub	152	1/4"
Square 70L270, Southwest Quadrant, Level 1 (Plowzone)		
Historic Sherd	1	1/4"
Potsherds	510	1/2"
Potsherds	689	1/4"
Cores	4	1/4"
Projectile Points	3	1/4"
Flakes	140	1/2"
Flakes	679	1/4"
Worked Flakes	3	1/4"
Clay Pipe Fragment	1	1/4"
Daub	89	1/4"
Glass Fragment	1	1/4"
Square 70L270, Northeast Quadrant, Level 1 (Plowzone)		
Potsherds	360	1/2"
Potsherds	597	1/4"
Pottery Rosette	1	1/4"
Cores	3	1/4"
Projectile Points	3	1/4"
Flakes	278	1/2"
Flakes	492	1/4"
Worked Flake	1	1/4"
Daub	60	1/4"
Glass Fragment	1	1/4"
Iron Fragment	1	1/4"

Context	Description	Count	Size
Square 70L270, Northwest Quadrant, Level 1 (Plowzone)			
	Calcined Bone	1	1/4"
	Historic Sherd	1	1/4"
	Potsherds	430	1/2"
	Potsherds	408	1/4"
	Biface	1	1/4"
	Projectile Points	7	1/4"
	Flakes	91	1/2"
	Flakes	517	1/4"
	Perforator	1	1/4"
	Worked Flake	1	1/4"
	Clay Pipe Fragment	1	1/4"
	Daub	33	1/4"
Square 70L280, Southeast Quadrant, Level 1 (Plowzone)			
	Potsherds	417	1/2"
	Potsherds	387	1/4"
	Biface	1	1/4"
	Core	1	1/4"
	Projectile Points	9	1/4"
	Flakes	93	1/2"
	Flakes	630	1/4"
	Worked Flakes	3	1/4"
	Clay Pipe Fragment	1	1/4"
	Daub	49	1/4"
Square 70L280, Southwest Quadrant, Level 1 (Plowzone)			
	Historic Sherd	1	1/4"
	Potsherds	250	1/2"
	Potsherds	344	1/4"
	Core	1	1/4"
	Projectile Points	6	1/4"
	Drill	1	1/4"
	End Scraper	1	1/4"
	Flakes	60	1/2"
	Flakes	463	1/4"
	Worked Flakes	2	1/4"
	Daub	65	1/4"
	Iron Objects	2	1/4"

Context	Description	Count	Size
Square 70L280, Northeast Quadrant, Level 1 (Plowzone)			
	Historic Sherds	3	1/4"
	Potsherds	402	1/2"
	Potsherds	347	1/4"
	Bifaces	2	1/4"
	Core	1	1/4"
	Projectile Points	5	1/4"
	Flakes	96	1/2"
	Flakes	559	1/4"
	Worked Flake	1	1/4"
	Clay Bead	1	1/4"
	Daub	43	1/4"
Square 70L280, Northwest Quadrant, Level 1 (Plowzone)			
	Potsherds	265	1/2"
	Potsherds	246	1/4"
	Cores	2	1/4"
	Projectile Points	4	1/4"
	Flakes	100	1/2"
	Flakes	524	1/4"
	Worked Flake	1	1/4"
	Daub	36	1/4"
Square 70L290, Southeast Quadrant, Level 1 (Plowzone)			
	Calcined Bone	1	1/4"
	Historic Sherd	1	1/4"
	Potsherds	406	1/2"
	Potsherds	478	1/4"
	Biface	1	1/4"
	Cores	2	1/4"
	Projectile Points	5	1/4"
	Drill	1	1/4"
	Flakes	103	1/2"
	Flakes	670	1/4"
	Worked Flake	1	1/4"
	Clay Pipe Fragment	1	1/4"
	Daub	99	1/4"
	Glass Fragments	2	1/4"
	Frizzen	1	1/4"
	Iron Tack	1	1/4"

Context	Description	Count	Size
Square 70L290, Southwest Quadrant, Level 1 (Plowzone)			
	Calcined Bone	1	1/4"
	Historic Sherd	2	1/4"
	Potsherds	390	1/2"
	Potsherds	403	1/4"
	Biface	1	1/4"
	Core	1	1/4"
	Projectile Points	11	1/4"
	Flakes	127	1/2"
	Flakes	721	1/4"
	Perforators	3	1/4"
	Clay Pipe Fragment	1	1/4"
	Daub	46	1/4"
	Cast Iron Vessel Fragment	1	1/4"
	Nail Fragment	1	1/4"
Square 70L290, Northeast Quadrant, Level 1 (Plowzone)			
	Potsherds	254	1/2"
	Potsherds	178	1/4"
	Biface	1	1/4"
	Chipped Hoe	1	1/4"
	Projectile Points	4	1/4"
	Flakes	77	1/2"
	Flakes	428	1/4"
	Worked Flake	1	1/4"
	Brick Fragment	1	1/4"
	Daub	8	1/4"
	Glass Fragment	1	1/4"
Square 70L290, Northwest Quadrant, Level 1 (Plowzone)			
	Potsherds	231	1/2"
	Potsherds	301	1/4"
	Projectile Points	3	1/4"
	Flakes	65	1/2"
	Flakes	418	1/4"
	Worked Flake	1	1/4"
	Brick Fragment	1	1/4"
	Daub	16	1/4"
	Iron Fragment	1	1/4"

Context Description	Count	Size
Square 80L270, Southeast Quadrant, Level 1 (Plowzone)		
Potsherds	219	1/2"
Potsherds	135	1/4"
Core	1	1/4"
Projectile Points	2	1/4"
Flakes	68	1/2"
Flakes	300	1/4"
Brick Fragments	5	1/4"
Daub	54	1/4"
Square 80L270, Southwest Quadrant, Level 1 (Plowzone)		
Historic Sherd	1	1/4"
Potsherds	276	1/2"
Potsherds	279	1/4"
Cores	2	1/4"
Projectile Points	5	1/4"
Drill	1	1/4"
Flakes	72	1/2"
Flakes	412	1/4"
Worked Flakes	2	1/4"
Clay Pipe Fragment	1	1/4"
Daub	35	1/4"
Square 80L270, Northeast Quadrant, Level 1 (Plowzone)		
Potsherds	251	1/2"
Potsherds	247	1/4"
Biface	1	1/4"
Cores	2	1/4"
Projectile Points	7	1/4"
Flakes	76	1/2"
Flakes	334	1/4"
Worked Flakes	7	1/4"
Brick Fragments	2	1/4"
Daub	8	1/4"
Square 80L270, Northwest Quadrant, Level 1 (Plowzone)		
Potsherds	282	1/2"
Potsherds	304	1/4"
Flakes	62	1/2"
Flakes	302	1/4"
Worked Flakes	2	1/4"
Daub	23	1/4"
Hammerstone Fragment	1	1/4"

Context Description	Count	Size
Square 80L280, Southeast Quadrant, Level 1 (Plowzone)		
Potsherds	326	1/2"
Potsherds	152	1/4"
Projectile Points	5	1/4"
Flakes	73	1/2"
Flakes	538	1/4"
Worked Flake	1	1/4"
Daub	22	1/4"
Iron Objects	2	1/4"
Square 80L280, Southwest Quadrant, Level 1 (Plowzone)		
Potsherds	330	1/2"
Potsherds	372	1/4"
Biface	1	1/4"
Projectile Points	9	1/4"
Flakes	145	1/2"
Flakes	679	1/4"
Scrapers	2	1/4"
Brick Fragment	1	1/4"
Daub	28	1/4"
Abraded Stone	1	1/4"
Square 80L280, Northeast Quadrant, Level 1 (Plowzone)		
Potsherds	218	1/2"
Potsherds	141	1/4"
Biface	1	1/4"
Core	1	1/4"
Projectile Points	5	1/4"
Flakes	66	1/2"
Flakes	382	1/4"
Worked Flakes	2	1/4"
Brick Fragment	1	1/4"
Daub	17	1/4"
Square 80L280, Northwest Quadrant, Level 1 (Plowzone)		
Potsherds	227	1/2"
Potsherds	184	1/4"
Clovis Projectile Point	1	1/4"
Projectile Points	3	1/4"
Flakes	76	1/2"
Flakes	439	1/4"
Worked Flake	1	1/4"
Daub	3	1/4"
Ground Stone	1	1/4"

Context Description	Count	Size
Square 90L270, Southeast Quadrant, Level 1 (Plowzone)		
Historic Sherd	1	1/4"
Potsherds	208	1/2"
Potsherds	392	1/4"
Projectile Points	5	1/4"
Flakes	51	1/2"
Flakes	343	1/4"
Brick Fragment	1	1/4"
Daub	60	1/4"
Square 90L270, Southwest Quadrant, Level 1 (Plowzone)		
Potsherds	221	1/2"
Potsherds	202	1/4"
Projectile Points	7	1/4"
Flakes	73	1/2"
Flakes	345	1/4"
Daub	11	1/4"
Glass Fragment	1	1/4"
Square 90L270, Northeast Quadrant, Level 1 (Plowzone)		
Potsherds	213	1/2"
Potsherds	90	1/4"
Biface	1	1/4"
Cores	2	1/4"
Projectile Points	2	1/4"
Flakes	84	1/2"
Flakes	257	1/4"
Perforator	1	1/4"
Worked Flakes	2	1/4"
Daub	5	1/4"
Square 90L270, Northwest Quadrant, Level 1 (Plowzone)		
Potsherds	223	1/2"
Potsherds	464	1/4"
Projectile Points	3	1/4"
Flakes	84	1/2"
Flakes	404	1/4"
Worked Flakes	4	1/4"
Brick Fragment	1	1/4"
Daub	89	1/4"
Horseshoe	1	1/4"

Context	Description	Count	Size
Square 90L280, Southeast Quadrant, Level 1 (Plowzone)			
	Potsherds	201	1/2"
	Potsherds	168	1/4"
	Cores	2	1/4"
	Projectile Points	5	1/4"
	Flakes	88	1/2"
	Flakes	43	1/4"
	Worked Flakes	5	1/4"
	Clay Pipe Fragments	2	1/4"
	Daub	14	1/4"
Square 90L280, Southwest Quadrant, Level 1 (Plowzone)			
	Potsherds	212	1/2"
	Potsherds	206	1/4"
	Cores	2	1/4"
	Projectile Points	5	1/4"
	Flakes	70	1/2"
	Flakes	395	1/4"
	Worked Flakes	2	1/4"
	Brick Fragment	1	1/4"
	Daub	6	1/4"
	Iron Object	1	1/4"
Square 90L280, Northeast Quadrant, Level 1 (Plowzone)			
	Potsherds	176	1/2"
	Potsherds	342	1/4"
	Biface	1	1/4"
	Projectile Points	5	1/4"
	Flakes	54	1/2"
	Flakes	382	1/4"
	Worked Flakes	2	1/4"
	Clay Pipe Fragment	1	1/4"
	Daub	16	1/4"
Square 90L280, Northwest Quadrant, Level 1 (Plowzone)			
	Potsherds	109	1/2"
	Potsherds	186	1/4"
	Core	1	1/4"
	Projectile Points	4	1/4"
	Drill	1	1/4"
	Flakes	62	1/2"
	Flakes	384	1/4"
	Worked Flakes	4	1/4"
	Daub	6	1/4"
Total		33090	