

The Hardaway Site: A Treasure Preserved

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Early Americans saw something to distinguish the Hardaway site from the surrounding terrain in the North Carolina Piedmont, for they started visiting this rocky ridge, perched nearly 300 ft above the Yadkin River, as early as 14,000 years ago to refurbish their toolkits and hunt local game. Successive occupations continued until historic times.

Research at this enormously rich site has so expanded our knowledge of Paleo-Indian and early-Archaic artifact typologies and occupation chronology that in 1990 the federal government designated the Hardaway site (31St4) a National Historic Landmark, the highest honor that can be bestowed on a cultural property, for having yielded information crucial to understanding the earliest periods of human occupation in the eastern United States. A large part of the credit goes to ALCOA, Aluminum Company of America, which for decades has protected the Hardaway site and encouraged research.

A lithic workshop on a mountaintop

The Hardaway site lies 140 ft above the west bank of Badin Lake, a reservoir created when the Narrows Dam was constructed early in the 20th century. Before then, the site lay approximately 280 ft above the Yadkin River. The site sits at the northern end of a ridge, referred to as Hardaway Point, on a relatively level area capped by two knolls. Separating the two knolls is a low saddle, which is believed to contain an old springhead and today tends to be wet and muddy much of the year. Local tradition holds that the saddle was once a small pond that was graded and filled to create a railroad bed by the Hardaway Construction Company, for whom the site is named.

The ridge on which the Hardaway site is located is part of the Uwharrie Mountains, and lies within the Slate Belt of central North Carolina that was formed by extensive volcanic uplifting of the slate beds. The rocks of the slate belt are of volcanic and sedimentary origin, and include slate, shale, mudstone, argillite, greywacke, conglomerate, siltstone, and sandstone.

The first archaeological investigations

H. M. Doerschuk, an amateur archaeologist, first brought the Hardaway site to the attention of Joffre L. Coe of the University of North Carolina (UNC) at Chapel Hill in 1937. In 1948, and again in 1951, Doerschuk, Paul Strieff, and Coe and his students sank a single 5-by-5-ft square, which they excavated in arbitrary 6-inch levels. These first excavations produced meager results, however, because intrusive features and pits and other complications masked the natural and cultural stratigraphy.

In 1954, UNC obtained a lease from the Carolina Aluminum Company, forerunner of ALCOA, to conduct additional excavations at the Hardaway site. In the course of systematic excavations begun in 1955, cultural stratigraphy was identified by

excavating “natural” layers. Coe noted a 28-in-thick “midden” (later identified as stratigraphic Zones II and III) overlying a 2-ft-thick layer of original topsoil. Lithic toolmaking debris constituted about 40 percent of the volume of the midden zone. The results of the first phase of excavations (1954–1958) formed the basis of Coe’s dissertation, which was published in 1964 by the American Philosophical Society as *The Formative Cultures of the Carolina Piedmont*.

Together with co-investigator H. Trawick Ward of UNC–Chapel Hill, Coe undertook a second phase of excavations from 1975 to 1980 in an area of the site south of the previous work. The research objectives, according to Dr. Ward, consisted of “defining the limits of the occupation, obtaining subsistence data, and collecting radiocarbon samples.” Although their investigations weren’t thoroughly analyzed at the time, they did show that the occupation area of the Hardaway site covers the entirety of Hardaway Point. (Archaeologist I. Randolph Daniel, Jr. of East Carolina University analyzed all the excavated data as his own doctoral dissertation, later published in 1998 as *Hardaway Revisited: Early Archaic Settlement in the Southeast*.)

To date, 143 5-ft squares have been excavated at the Hardaway site, removing over 8,300 ft³ of soil. In addition, test excavations have been dug at various locations along the ridge, including 3 5-ft squares on the northern end of Hardaway Point. By the end of the 1980 field season, over 7 metric tons of cultural materials had been recovered from the site, including more than 3,000 projectile points, 5,000 scrapers, and other types of tools.

Site and stratigraphic analysis

Work at the Hardaway site has confirmed five stratigraphic zones, of which four contain cultural material. The oldest of these zones is Zone V, a red clay cap 2 to 10 ft thick. Except for a few artifacts in the uppermost portion, which possibly became embedded when the exposed clay dried and cracked, this zone is culturally sterile and predates human occupation at the site.

Zone IV is a thin (2–3 in) layer of ancient humus, now an orange-red clay. Identified by Coe as the earliest human occupation level at the Hardaway site, this layer contains evidence of what Coe called the Hardaway cultural complex. Ward believed the Hardaway cultural complex existed during the earlier part of the Paleo-Indian period in North Carolina; he estimated the date at 14,000–12,000 yr B.P. Subsequent comparison of Hardaway materials with those from other sites, however, and reanalysis of the original data have identified the Hardaway complex as a manifestation of the early-Archaic period, rather than a definite Paleo-Indian occupation. Excavations of the Hardaway Zone IV revealed stone-lined hearths and recovered projectile points, blades, drills, end- and sidescrapers, and large quantities of primary and secondary debitage.

Zone III is a 5- to 6-in-thick layer of brown clayey loam containing materials associated with the Palmer cultural complex, named after Palmer Mountain, located a short distance to the north of Hardaway Point. Dating to an early part of the Archaic period (ca. 10,000 yr B.P.), the Palmer occupation at the Hardaway site accumulated more cultural debris than the earlier occupation in Zone IV. This suggests either that larger groups were occupying the site, or that the site was being occupied more frequently or for longer periods than during the Hardaway

occupation. In Zone III stone-lined hearths have been found and large quantities of Palmer-type projectile points and other tools have been recovered, along with substantial primary and secondary debitage.

Zone II is associated with the Kirk complex (named after the nearby colonial Kirk homestead). The Kirk Zone II, a dark brown clayey loam matrix 1–1.5 ft thick, is so rich in cultural debris that Coe in 1983 estimated that the volume of artifacts is greater than the volume of soil! The types of stone tools recovered are consistent with those found in Zones III and IV; moreover, the Kirk occupation appears also to have engaged in intensive production of bifaces, resulting in a thick deposit of accumulated lithic debitage. Based on comparable sites in Alabama, Virginia, Tennessee, and West Virginia, the early-Archaic Kirk occupation at Hardaway appears to date to 10,000–8000 yr B.P.

The uppermost Zone I is an 8- to 10-in-thick plow zone containing cultural materials whose provenance ranges from the middle Archaic (ca. 8000 yr B.P.) to historic Caraway Indian occupations of the early 18th century. Successive occupations by cultural groups that visited the Hardaway Point area to make tools from native stone may have produced layered deposits similar to those of occupations in Zones II to IV. Historic farming activities, unfortunately, have completely intermixed all these materials.

18 Sharpening archaeological method and theory

Coe's definitive work published in 1964 resolved ambiguity about the relative dating of such early-Archaic projectile point styles as Hardaway, Palmer, and Kirk. His definitions of these tools have since been used to date archaeological sites throughout the eastern U.S. that yielded similar points.

It's difficult to overstate the debt American archaeology owes to the Hardaway site for its role in advancing our understanding of the sequential development of prehistoric cultures in the eastern U.S. Today the Paleo-Indian and early-Archaic sequences from the site remain largely unchanged and are still used to date sites in much of the eastern U.S. occupied between 12,000 and 8000 yr B.P.

Relative chronology established at the Hardaway site was particularly important because, as Bruce Trigger notes, "A major problem that confronted archaeologists in eastern North America before radiocarbon dates became available in the 1950's was the establishment of a reliable calendrical chronology. . . . On the basis of guesswork, a very rough chronology was adopted to which Late Archaic cultures that are now dated around 2500 B.C. were placed no earlier than A.D. 300." The initial excavations at the Hardaway site pushed Southeastern prehistory back to at least 10,000 yr B.P. Dr. Daniel has since established that the earliest occupation of the area may date as far back as 14,000 yr B.P.

Prior to research at the Hardaway site, little accurate information was available on the Paleo-Indian and early-Archaic periods of prehistory in the Eastern U.S. In the 1930s archaeologists attempting to understand cultural variation in prehistoric times used what was called the Midwestern Taxonomic Method (MTM). By this rule of thumb, the contents of individual sites or components were catalogued according to trait lists; neighbor-

ing sites that shared an overwhelming number of traits were grouped to form foci, equivalent to an ethnological tribe.

Using the MTM analytic technique resulted in interpretations of archaeological sites that were often grossly inaccurate. Extensive erosion throughout much of the Southeast resulted in the deflation of archaeological sites and their contents, which meant that artifacts that may originally have been stratigraphically separated by inches or feet of culturally sterile soil might be found immediately next to each other within the same soil zone. Using the MTM, or trait-list approach, the archaeologist assumed that all artifacts within the same soil zone were related and thus belonged to the same "ethnological tribe." In reality, artifacts might be separated from each other by thousands of years.

His work at the Hardaway site convinced Coe of the fallacy of this MTM technique. He noted that "recurring complexes of traits were in reality the remains of recurring occupations . . . by the same sequence of people." By isolating stratigraphically distinct layers of cultural deposits, he found it was possible to define artifact assemblages characteristic of the Hardaway, Palmer, and Kirk cultural periods. The principles of archaeological observation and analysis that Coe pioneered prevail today.

Preserving the site

Coe estimated that 50 to 65 percent of artifact-rich Zone IV remained at the Hardaway site in the 1970s, from which substantial information could be extracted. Sadly, much of that material was lost to relic hunters in the 1980s.

Since 1983 ALCOA, the site owner, empowered by the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources (DCR), has restricted access to the site, enforced protection under the State Archaeological Resources Protection Act, and maintained the site as a mowed field to forestall erosion. In 2005 ALCOA agreed to transfer collections recovered from past archaeological investigations to UNC–Chapel Hill. Most recently, Alcoa Power Generating, Inc. in 2007 entered into an agreement with North Carolina State Parks to purchase and donate 1,400 acres of land along the Yadkin River—including the Hardaway site—as part of the Yadkin Hydropower licensing agreement with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. Specific management details for Hardaway and other sites contained in the tract will be mapped out between DCR's Office of State Archaeology and the North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation.

The significance of the Hardaway site in American archaeology becomes even more pronounced as we approach the century mark in serious Paleo research. Today the site enjoys protection by virtue of its dual status as a National Historic Landmark and as a historic site under the care of the State of North Carolina. Work now in progress is further refining the dating of material recovered from this site and other classic sites that are the foundation of our studies of the peopling of America. Without the protection of cultural resource management, this critical reexamination wouldn't be possible. At the very least, we can expect that the future promises even greater research opportunities at this classic early American site.

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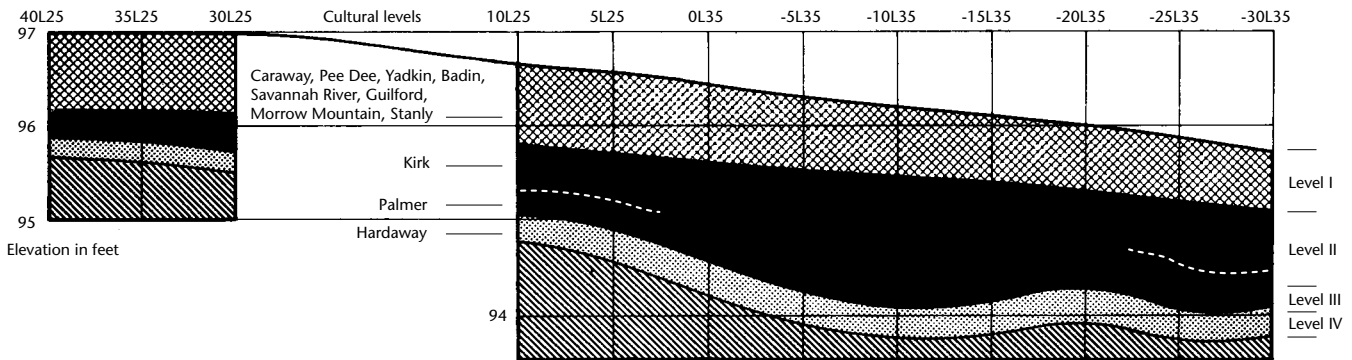
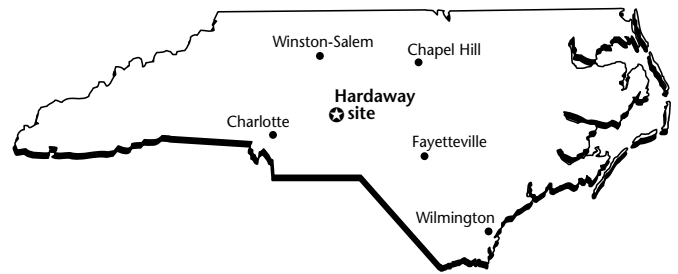
Suggested Readings

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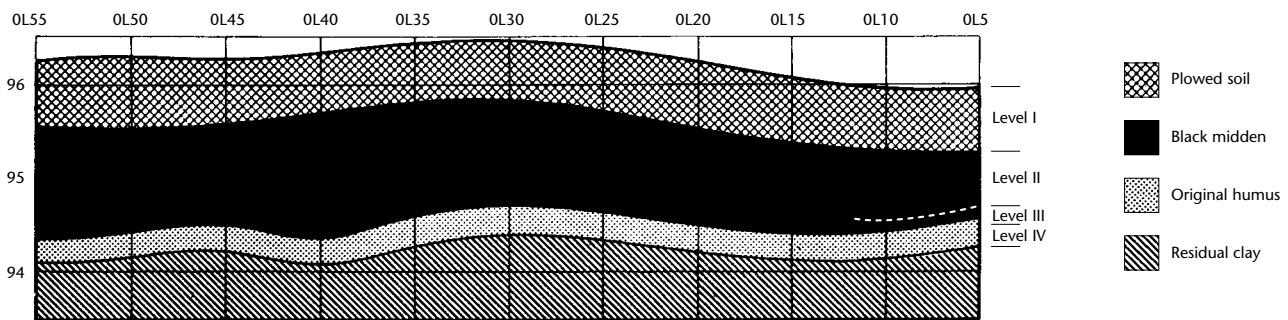
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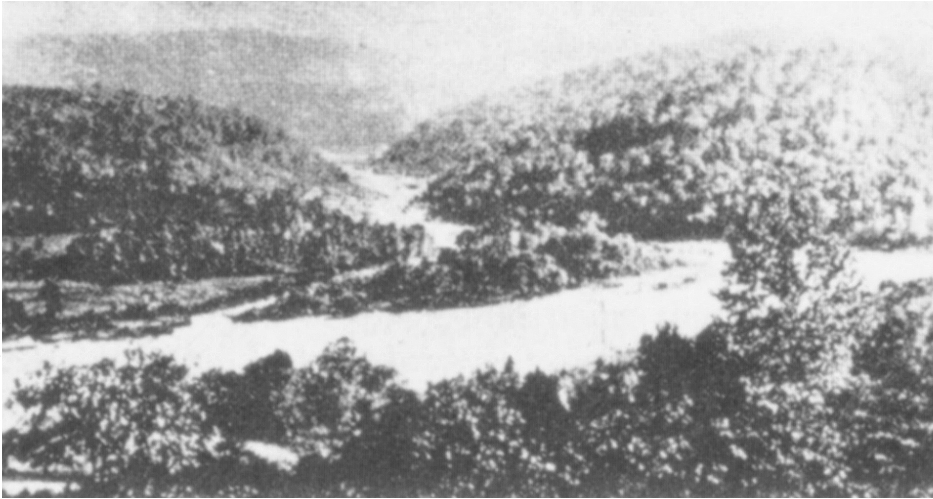
North-south profile



East-west profile

- 38 Stratigraphic profiles of the Hardaway site.

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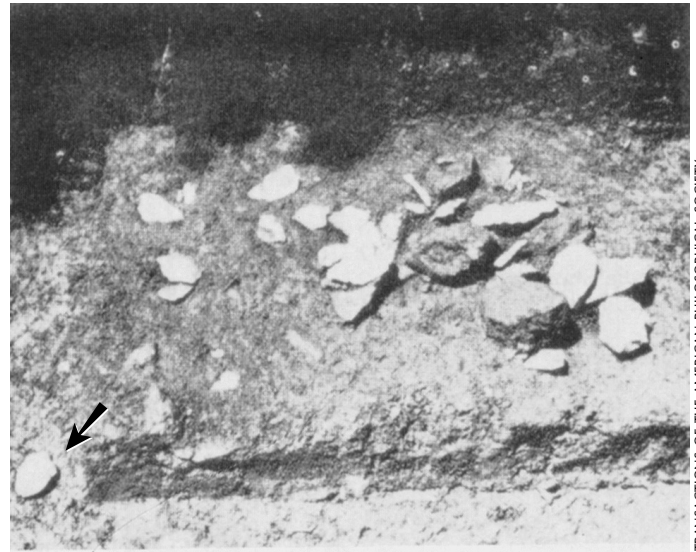


The Narrows of the Yadkin River, about 1890. The Hardaway site lies at the top of the hill to the right. Most of the area seen in this photograph became submerged after the Narrows Dam was built, forming Badin Lake. 39

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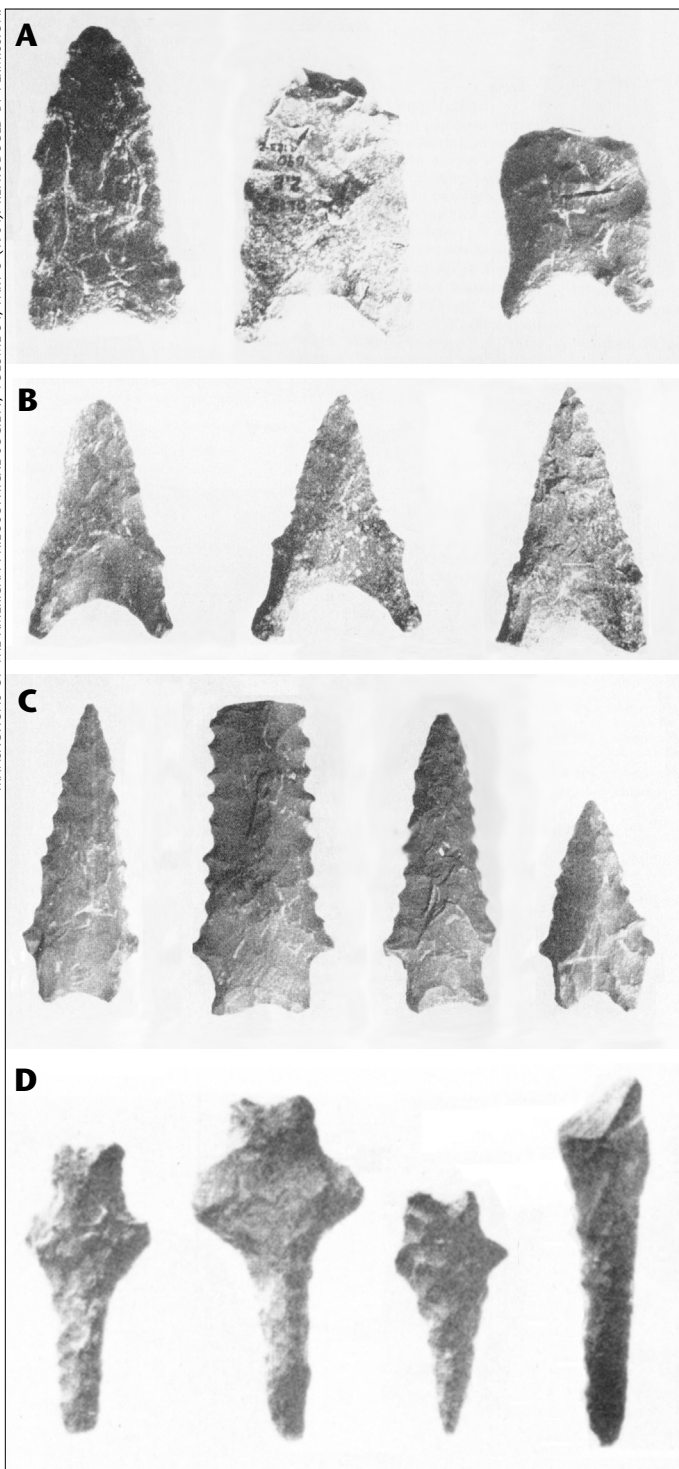


40 A worker clears a Hardaway hearth in the 1958 season. Soil Zones I through IV appear on the profile above the hearth.



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A classic Kirk hearth at the Hardaway site, consisting of a cluster of rocks surrounded by flakes, blades, scrapers, projectile points, bone fragments, and flakes of charcoal. The sidescraper (*arrow*) lies in the Hardaway zone. 41



42 **Lithic artifacts from the Hardaway site. A,** examples of the Hardaway Blade projectile point type recovered from Zone IV; the two specimens on the right are considered "typical Quad" points. **B,** Hardaway-Dalton points from Zone IV. **C,** Kirk Serrated points. The fractured point is from Zone III; all the others were recovered from disturbed soil. **D,** chipped-stone drills. The leftmost three are Kirk drills from Zone II and disturbed soil; the rightmost is a Hardaway drill from Zone IV.



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The author (*left*) congratulates Joffre Coe at the ceremony designating the Hardaway site a National Historic Landmark held November 1990 in Badin, North Carolina.

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A living floor uncovered at the Hardaway site.

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