

SECTION D: EARLY HOLOCENE EVIDENCE

“Until we understand human behaviors ... from the perspective of both natural and social sciences, our ability to understand and manage a world in which *H. sapiens* is the dominant species will be critically compromised.”

James H. Brown and Mark V. Lomolino.

The richest assemblage of cultural and natural material recovered by the Aucilla River Prehistory Project comes from a dark stratum high on the north bank of the Page-Ladson site complex. The ARPP team devoted many seasons to extending excavations on this surface. During the 1990s the work moved eastward from Test C into Tests F and G. During the first year we had missed a subtle stratigraphic distinction between specimens scattered on the surface of the dark stratum and those entombed within a lighter-colored unit rich in biogenic silica thinly deposited above it. But, thereafter, we clearly separated Unit 5 below, affectionately known as “the Bolen Surface”, from Unit 6L.

The five chapters in this section focus closely on changes that led to the Bolen occupation at Page-Ladson and its aftermath. Critical analyses include chemical and physical studies of the subaerial surface (which never formed a proper soil), faunistic and floristic studies, and beautiful details of the siliceous microorganisms that lived in the quiet waters that subsequently covered that surface.

An excellent set of carbon dates from the Bolen Surface clearly place it just after 10,000 ¹⁴C BP. At this same time, right at the beginning of the Holocene, there are major changes in global climates. These changes occur at the end of the Younger Dryas and the beginning of the Preboreal. During the same interval the Gulf of Mexico felt the strong impact of glacial meltwater released into the Mississippi River by Meltwater Pulse 1B. The strong regional drought and lowered local water table induced Bolen people to occupy the apron of the Page-Ladson sinkhole. They retreated when rainfall and water tables rose again. It is interesting to note that when ARPP had excavated equivalent aged sediments in Test B from a more eastern part of the site complex, the Bolen cultural component was less clearly represented, evidently because it lay about 3 m deeper in the sinkhole than the rich beds along the north bank.

The wealth of natural and cultural material that accumulated on the Bolen Surface are truly remarkable. The lithic specimens include side-notched and corner-notched points in many stages of manufacture and reworking. The Dalton-like adzes and novel wood wedges are clearly associated with the many pieces of chopped and otherwise modified wood. Two hearths were recognized on this surface, and others were probably disturbed by subsequent gentle erosion. The unusually high charcoal inputs recorded in Chapter 6 are very probably related to the use of fire in hearths and in land clearing. A very large cypress log was partly modified. Toward the east end, it gave the appearance of being a dugout canoe, but its purpose remains unknown. Dimple stones of chert present an interesting challenge to interpret. The partial cranium of an antlered deer, possibly used as a ceremonial drinking cup, is one of the most

intriguing pieces. In the overlying sediments of Unit 6L artifacts are slightly removed from the probable locus of occupation. On the other hand, two architectural stakes, driven vertically through Unit 6L into Unit 5 presumably anchored a platform (or dock) above the rising water in post-Bolen time.