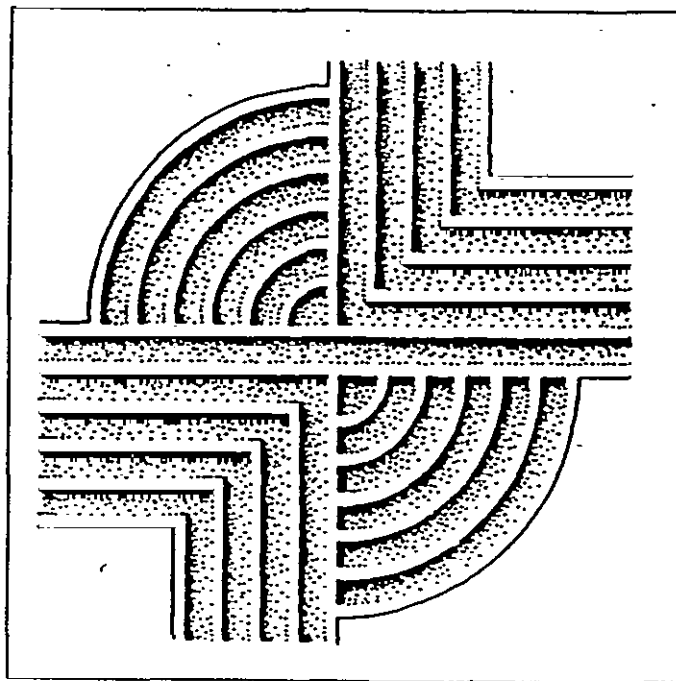


MANAGEMENT SUMMARY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL DATA RECOVERY EXCAVATIONS AT 38BU125/126, KIAWAH ISLAND, CHARLESTON COUNTY, SOUTH CAROLINA



RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION 53

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MANAGEMENT SUMMARY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL DATA RECOVERY
EXCAVATIONS AT 38CH125/126,
KIAWAH ISLAND, CHARLESTON COUNTY, SOUTH CAROLINA

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Chicora Research Contribution 53

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Introduction

Kiawah Island is situated in Charleston County, south of the City of Charleston, and is bordered to north and west by the Kiawah River, to the east by the Stono River and Inlet, and to the south by the Atlantic Ocean. The island is separated from neighboring Folly Island to the east by the Stono Inlet, from Seabrook Island to the west by the Kiawah River, and Johns Island to the north by the Kiawah River and the associated marshes (Figure 1).

The 3,300 acre (highland) island measures about 9 miles in length and 2 miles in width. The island represents a Holocene beach ridge barrier island which, unlike many others, is prograding with a gradual seaward growth (Mathews et al. 1980:149). Prior to development the area was in maritime forest modified by fairly intensive agricultural activity (concentrated in recent times in the north central portion of the island). Elevations on the island range from sea level to 25 feet above mean sea level (MSL). The soils are typical of the area and consist of the Crevasse-Dawhoo complex (mixed drainage), the Dawhoo series (poorly drained), Kiawah series (poorly drained), Seabrook series (well drained), and Wando series (excessively drained) (Miller 1971).

Large portions of the island have been developed as a residential resort community. As a result of an intensive archaeological survey conducted by Brockington and Associates on a section of the undeveloped portion of the island called Rhett's Bluff (Poplin 1989), six of the eight identified sites archaeological sites were determined by the South Carolina State Historic Preservation Officer (SC SHPO) as eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. A Programmatic Memorandum of Agreement between the SC SHPO, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and Kiawah Resort Associates (dated September 6, 1990), requires that these eligible sites be green spaced or receive data recovery excavations. In discussions with the SC SHPO, Kiawah Resort Associates determined that three sites (38CH124, 38CH125/126, and 38CH129) would require data recovery excavations. At the present time the remaining sites are being avoided by development activities (Ray Pantlik, personal communication 1990).

Chicora Foundation was requested by the developer's representative, Mr. Ray Pantlik, to prepare a budget proposal based on a scope of work previously submitted to and approved by the S.C. SHPO (dated August 23, 1990). A proposal for those investigations was submitted by Chicora on August 28, 1990 (with an addendum dated September 7, 1990) and the work was approved by the developer on September 12, 1990. The work was approved by the SC SHPO on

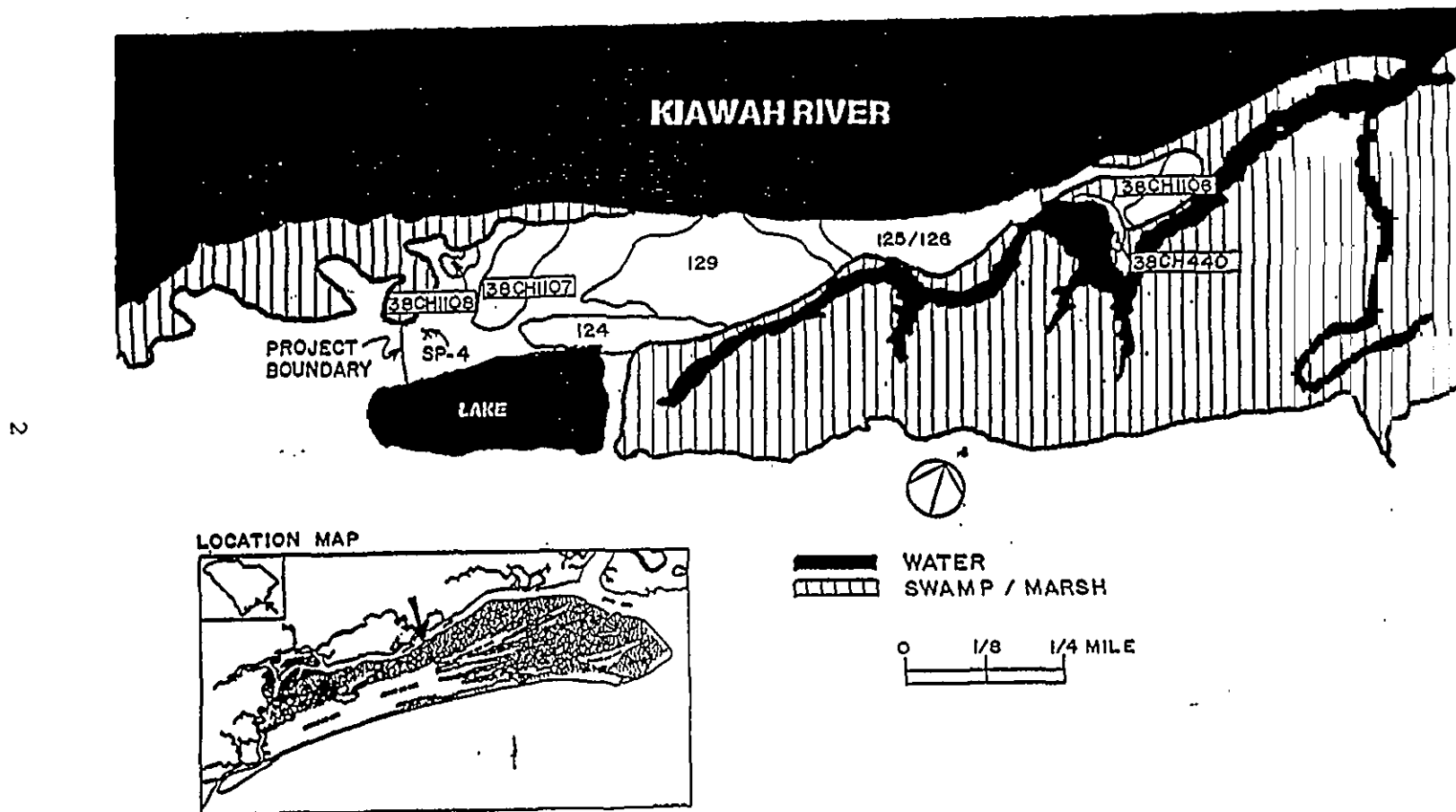


Figure 1. A portion of Kiawah Island showing the location of 38CH125/126. Adapted from Poplin 1989:Figure 6.

September 28, 1990 (letter from Dr. Linda Stine to Dr. Michael Trinkley). The proposal was forwarded to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for submittal to the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation on October 6, 1990. No comments were received from either the Army Corps or the Advisory Council. An agreement to perform the work was signed by Kiawah Resort Associates on October 18, 1990.

This management summary has been prepared immediately upon completion of the fieldwork at 38CH125/126 and does not contain information on artifact or subsistence analyses. It is intended solely to provide a brief descriptive statement of the work conducted by Chicora and to allow the SC SHPO, Advisory Council and the Army Corps to verify that the proposed work has actually been accomplished. The management summary is minimally necessary for Kiawah Resort Associates to continue with the development of the land encompassing 38CH125/126. This construction will destroy portions of the site and, of course, created the need for archaeological mitigation activities initially.

Archaeological investigations were begun at 38CH125/126 by a crew of five (including the principal investigator) on November 5, 1990 and continued through November 9, 1990. A total of 172 person hours were spent in the field and an additional 6 person hours were spent on laboratory analysis and field processing. As a result of this work 370 square feet of site area were opened and 707 cubic feet of soil were moved in primary excavations, all screened through either 1/4-inch mesh.

The proposed investigations at 38CH125/126 were to include the excavation of 75 2-foot units (representing 2.4% of the site core to be impacted) at 15-foot intervals within the site core as identified by Brockington and Associates (Poplin 1989; this site core, originally flagged by Brockington and Associates, was also incorporated on development base maps). Following this field work, all identified features and artifact concentrations would be plotted on the site map. At the conclusion of this work Chicora would contact both Kiawah Resort Associates and the S.C. SHPO regarding the necessity of additional work. If features or other structural remains associated with the prehistoric occupation were identified, the site would be mechanically stripped, with features plotted and excavated.

The work conducted by Chicora exceeded these requirements with the excavation of 80 2-foot squares and a 5 by 10 foot trench. This management summary will initiate the consultation process with the S.C. SHPO and Mr. Ray Pantlik has been verbally informed of these initial findings.

Previous Investigations

Sites 38CH125/126 were originally reported by Combes (1975).

Additional work conducted by Brockington and Associates (Poplin 1989:32) suggested that the two sites reported by Combes were, in effect, one site. Brockington and Associates excavated a total of 29 shovel tests at the site, recovering small quantities of primarily Early Woodland Thom's Creek pottery, although a later Middle Woodland occupation was mentioned, as was a small quantity of historic material. The site core, encompassing about 210 feet east-west by 60 feet north-south, was based on the somewhat greater density of remains in 11 tests. The remainder of the site was apparently felt to be of minimal significance.

Brockington and Associates apparently did not have access to work conducted on Kiawah Island by Dr. Larry Lepionka in the early 1980s for a previous developer, The Scott Company. Two studies, in particular, provide important information on the Rhett's Bluff area (Lepionka 1981, 1982). While probably not suitable for compliance purposes, the work by Lepionka clearly reveals the confusion surrounding the location of sites 38CH125 and 38CH126. Lepionka notes that:

[site 38CH125] is not to be found where indicated on the map in Combes (1975:A11), and it is also true that there is considerable confusion between 38CH125 and 38CH126 as Combes reports them It was not until after submission of the 1981d report that we chanced upon a site map at the Institute of Archaeology whereon 38CH125 was recorded in a different location from Combes 1975 -- a recording that may have been made by Combes himself. At that time we realized that the shell exposure found in our survey . . . was not a new site, but the 38CH125 that had been originally identified but incorrectly plotted by Combes (Lepionka 1982:6).

In essence, Lepionka suggests that the site recorded as Brockington and Associates as 38CH125/126 is 38CH125 and that identified by Brockington and Associates as 38CH440 is actually 38CH126. While it clearly makes little difference at this point what the individual sites are called (as long as all of the collections are attributed to the correct site), the South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology may wish to further examine the numbering system and ensure that the state files are consistently numbered.

The site called by Brockington and Associates 38CH125/126 is situated at the east end of Shulbred Point (now known as Rhett's Bluff). It is bordered to the north by the Kiawah River and to the south by Bass Pond Creek (a tributary of Kiawah River). Elevations range from about 7 to 8 feet MSL, with the site core situated on the higher elevations of the sandy ridge. The proposed development plans call for a series of lots, a road, and underground utilities to eventually destroy the site.

Investigations by Brockington and Associates revealed the

presence of primarily Thom's Creek wares, although a small quantity of possible Wilmington pottery and several historic artifacts were also reported (Poplin 1989:32). This site was recommended as eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic sites based on the "density and variety" of the recovered materials and the potential for "intact cultural deposits" (Poplin 1989:32, 50). However, only a small portion of the relatively large site was felt to contain these intact deposits and was therefore defined as the core area and flagged in the field.

Excavations at 38CH125/126

The work at 38CH125/126 involved the excavation of 80 2-foot units systematically placed across the site area in order to investigate artifact density and the potential to recover intact features such as post holes and pits. The site grid, established N7°45'E, roughly oriented with the site core established by Brockington and Associates, was tied into a surveyed lot markers in order to maintain long-term horizontal control. This base line is considered grid north-south. Given the limited site area (210 by 60 feet), only one permanent grid point was established, at the northwest edge of the site. Vertical control was maintained through the use of a nearby temporary benchmark (a nail in the base of an oak tree) with a mean sea level (MSL) elevation of 7.84 feet.

The tests were placed at 15 foot intervals (using the southeast corner of the test) on the established grid, with each test assigned a sequential number from west to east and north to south. The first 75 tests provided coverage of the originally defined site core, but an additional five units were placed in the south central portion of the site in order to further explore site variability toward Bass Pond Creek (Figure 2).

Test unit was excavated in natural stratigraphic zones. These included Zone 1, a brown loamy sand, Zone 2, a reddish brown sand, and Zone 3, a light reddish-brown sand. Zone 1 varies in depth from 0.6 to 1.2 foot, while Zone 2 varies from 1.0 to 1.8 foot in depth. Zone 3 was penetrated a maximum of 0.4 foot. Zone 1 was identified as a plowzone. Artifacts within this zone are uncommon and tend to be small (i.e., heavily plow damaged). The densest concentration of artifacts consistently occurred in the upper half of Zone 2, with the density gradually declining toward the base of the zone. Zone 3 was found to be culturally sterile.

Several of the tests also revealed a lens of black loamy sand immediately underlying the Zone 1 soils. These lenses were designated Zone 1a. This zone contained primarily historic remains, including shell mortar, occasional brick fragments, several historic artifacts, and small quantities of daub. The excavations eventually revealed Zone 1a to represent the remnants of a probable sheet midden associated with a historic period occupation. It is found, however, only in plowscars and has been heavily damaged by

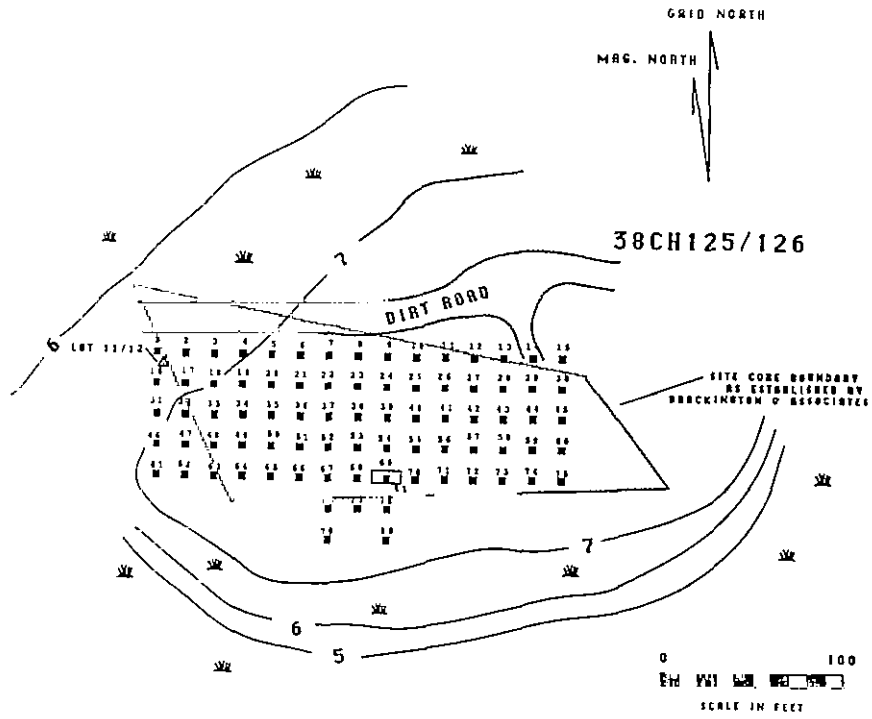


Figure 2. 38CH125/126 site area.

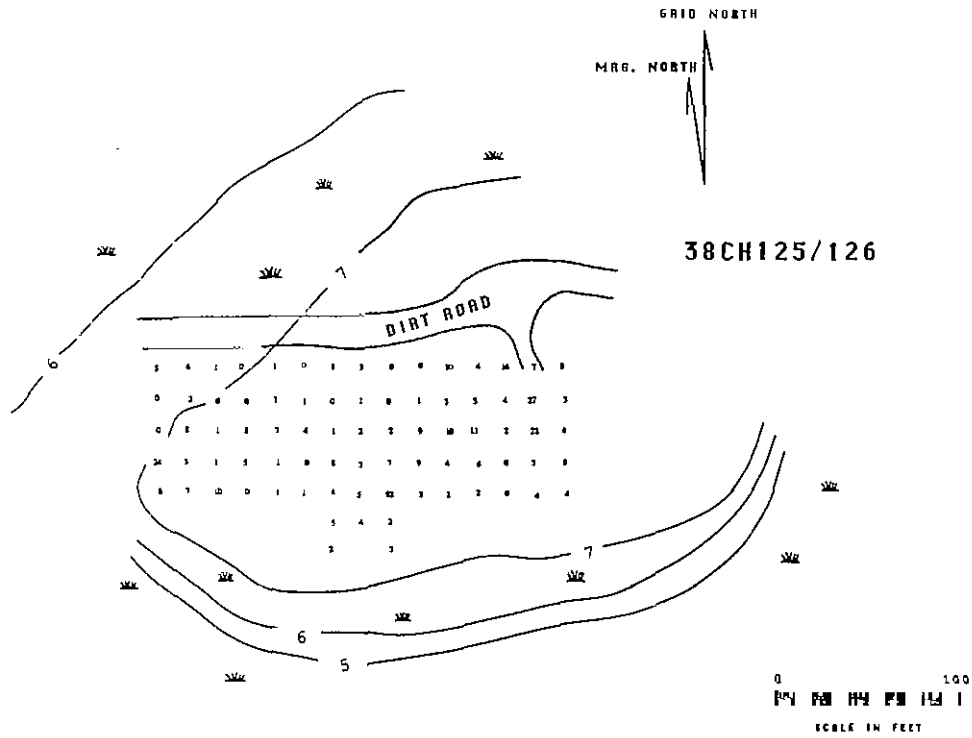


Figure 3. Distribution of Thom's Creek sherds greater than 1 inch in size.

agricultural activities.

In several of the tests a thin lens of shell (consisting entirely of oyster) was encountered. These lenses vary from 0.2 to 0.3 foot in thickness and appear to represent the basal remnants of heavily plowed middens. While no artifacts were encountered in the shell lenses, their stratigraphic position suggests that they are associated with the historic occupation at the site.

All soil was sifted through 1/4-inch mesh and artifacts were bagged by provenience. Shell was weighed and discarded in the field, although a sample of left oyster valves was collected for analysis by our shellfish consultant on the project, Dr. David Lawrence. Soil samples were also collected from several representative units. The profile of each unit was troweled and a drawing was made at a scale of 1 inch to 1 foot. Selected profiles were photographed in black and white and color.

In addition to the small test units, a 5 by 10 foot unit (designated TP 81) was excavated in the area of TP 69 (which produced a large quantity of prehistoric remains as well as a very clear Zone 1a). This unit was excavated using the same stratigraphic zones as previously discussed, although Zone 2 was divided into two levels. Soil in this unit was also sifted through 1/4-inch mesh. Plan drawings and photographs were made at the base of Zone 1; Zone 2, level 1; and Zone 2, level 2.

Animal bone is very rare at the site, with the few examples identified all being calcined. They probably represent burnt animal bone and they are preserved by virtue of this burning. Ethnobotanical remains consist of very occasional fragments of wood charcoal and relatively common remains of hickory nutshell. The animal bone and nutshell fragments were confined to Zone 2.

None of the 2-foot unit revealed any evidence of either prehistoric or historic features (excluding the very thin remnants of the probable historic shell middens and the sheet midden). Several of the tests, however, clearly revealed plow troughs and ridges in plan or profile views. TP 81 yielded evidence of three tree stains, one of which was found to be the source for the abundance of prehistoric remains found in the original 2-foot test unit.

Artifacts recovered from the site are predominately Thom's Creek phase pottery. Reference to Figure 3 reveals that the Thom's Creek pottery is found across the entire site core, although concentrations may occur at the northeast and southwest corners, and in the southeast quadrant of the site. Associated with the Thom's Creek wares are a small quantity of coastal plain and rhyolitic flakes, two basal portions of Small Savannah River Stemmed projectile points, and one hammerstone. The lithic materials are found primarily at the eastern edge of the site

(Figure 4). Also recovered in association with the Thom's Creek wares are a small quantity of Stallings pottery which appear to have no real concentrations.

A total of 10 Deptford series sherds over 1 inch in size were found on the site, most from Zone 1. No concentrations were observed, nor were any Wilmington materials found.

While not a primary emphasis of this project, the historic materials are of passing interest. The materials recovered include both nineteenth century (such as a machine cut nail and a whiteware ceramic) and eighteenth century (a lead glazed slipware ceramic and a wrought nail) specimens. The origin of the nineteenth century remains could not be identified, although the eighteenth century remains appear to be associated with a probable structure at the south central edge of the site core. Also recovered from this area were small quantities of shell mortar, small brick fragments, and clay daub. Unfortunately, these remains have been heavily damaged by agricultural activities and it is highly unlikely that intact historic deposits could be identified.

Field notes were prepared on pH neutral, alkaline buffered paper and photographic materials were processed to archival standards. All original field notes, with archival copies, will be curated at a repository approved by the parties to the Programmatic Memorandum of Agreement. Chicora will recommend to Kiawah Resort Associates that the materials be curated at The

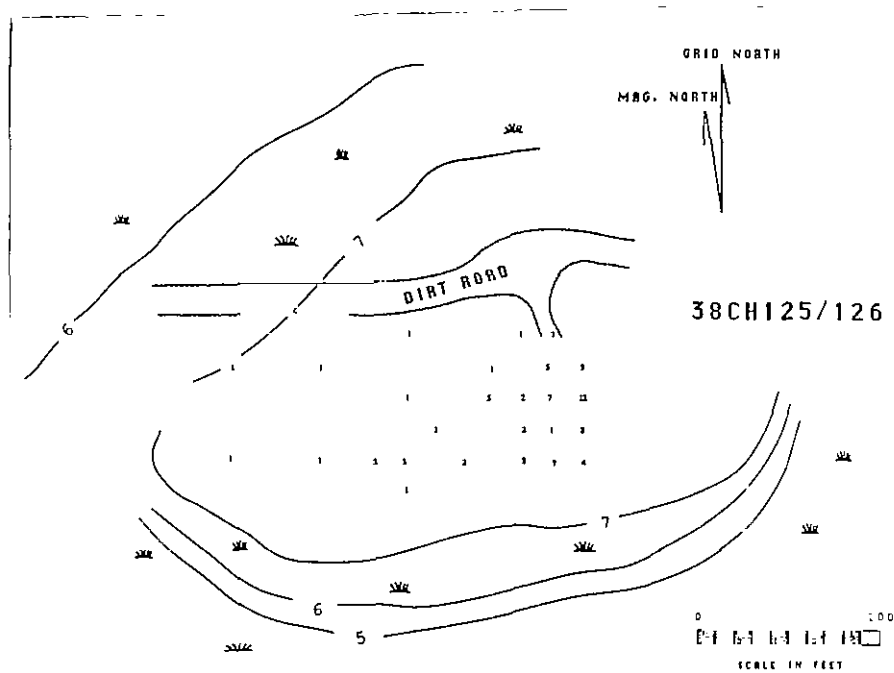


Figure 4. Distribution of lithic materials.

Charleston Museum in order to maintain the collections at the local level. All specimens will be evaluated for conservation needs prior to curation, although field assessments indicate that the prehistoric materials are stable.

Interpretations

Site 38CH125/126 represents a non-midden Thom's Creek coastal site and is very similar to the Stallings phase Fish Haul site (38BU805) on Hilton Head Island (Trinkley 1986). Both sites have produced Early Woodland ceramics in association with a diverse lithic assemblage and abundant hickory nutshell shells, but very limited (or absent in the case of 38CH125/126) shellfish remains. It seems likely that 38CH125/126 represents a short-term, seasonal encampment established in order to exploit hickory nut masts. In addition, the lithic assemblage (dominated by flakes of bifacial retouch) suggest that hunting was also taking place. Both of the Small Savannah River Stemmed projectile point are represented only by the basal portions, snapped at the haft, perhaps from use as knives. The absence of evidence for shellfish collecting, and the proximity of the site to the Bass Pond site (38CH124) certainly support the significance of 38CH125/126 to a more complete understanding of cultural diversity during the Early Woodland.

Unfortunately, the combination of loose sandy soils and high soil acidity, have made the recovery of features tenuous. Excavations at 38BU805 revealed primarily features with shell fill (Trinkley 1986), which mitigated against the natural soil conditions. Although non-shell features have been found at sites with similar soils, such as 38BU805 and 38LX5 (Trinkley 1980), they have been identified only with very intensive hand excavation of large blocks. While mechanical stripping of 38CH125/126 might reveal features, we have no clear or convincing evidence that such features exist. Nor are there areas of exceptionally dense artifact remains (although it may be argued with equal validity that structural remains will be located in areas of low, rather than high, artifact density). Consequently, we cannot recommend that additional work (i.e., mechanical stripping) take place at 38CH125/126.

The later Woodland remains are contained entirely within the plowzone, are very uncommon, and therefore cannot be considered contributing features of the site's eligibility. The historic occupation at 38CH125/126, while very interesting, has likewise suffered extensive damage from cultivation and has left only ephemeral evidence. This is particularly unfortunate since the general character of the historic component suggests an isolated, early to mid-eighteenth century structure in many respects similar to that identified on Spring Island in Beaufort County (Trinkley 1990).

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