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# An Archaeological Survey at Oak Level Mound: Investigating Settlement Patterns and Intrasite Use During the Middle Mississippian Period (A.D. 1150-1350)

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AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY AT OAK LEVEL MOUND:  
INVESTIGATING SETTLEMENT PATTERNS AND INTRASITE USE DURING THE  
MIDDLE MISSISSIPPIAN PERIOD (A.D. 1150–1350)

by

BILLY J. MCCARLEY

Under the Direction of Jeffrey B. Glover, PhD

ABSTRACT

This study is about a Middle Mississippian (A.D. 1150-1350) burial mound site known as Oak Level Mound. Located in the back swamps of Bryan County, Georgia 2.4 km south of the Ogeechee River, the site is situated amongst Live Oak hammocks and palmettoes. The earthen architecture and material remains found at Oak Level Mound during the fall of 2012 and winter 2013 tell a tale of ancient people whose subsistence included oysters, snail, and nuts. Their daily practices are expressed in burial mounds and utilitarian and/or status goods, such as plain, cord-marked, and complicated-stamped pottery. This study, then, seeks to understand those daily practices taking place at Oak Level Mound between A.D. 1150 and A.D. 1350, both locally and regionally.

INDEX WORDS: Mississippian Settlements, Agency, Georgia Coastal Native Americans, Regional Settlement, Savannah Ceramic Complex

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BILLY J. MCCARLEY

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts  
in the College of Arts and Sciences  
Georgia State University

2013

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2013

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## **DEDICATION**

To my Creator: I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Also, to the sweet and shining memory of the little lad whose beautiful life was a visible revelation to me of truth, which teaches me that the divine and the human are not far from one another. I'll always love you little boy blue. I can go on because of you, but I miss you dearly. And to my wife, we will get there somehow. Thanks for not giving up! We've seen the worst.

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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

On August 27th, 2012, I began systematic shovel testing at Oak Level Mound (9BN67) in order to define the limits of the site and better understand its occupational history. Very little information existed on the site other than two previous small-scale phase I surveys (Moss 2012; Simpkins 1989) that identified at least one burial mound 15m in diameter and 1.2 m high. Moss and Simpkins recovered Savannah (A.D. 1150-1350) and Deptford (300 B.C-600 A.D) phase pottery, but the sites major occupation phase could not be determined from their limited testing. Building on their research, I excavated 156 shovel tests over a 3.5 ha area. These shovel tests were completed on seven visits between August 2012 and January 2013.

### **PURPOSE OF STUDY**

This study seeks to understand the spatial extent of Oak Level Mound and its occupational history and to investigate the dynamic role played by material culture and the built environment in the continual constitution of daily life. The extensive shovel-testing program provides me with a better understanding of cultural chronology, short and long-term social interactions, and land use patterns. This then allows me to investigate how the people of Oak Level Mound were positioned within the broader Mississippian world along the Georgia coast.

Rather than applying a simplistic assumption that the people living here between A.D. 1150-1350 were governed by environmental or political constraints, this study focuses more on the agency of individuals. In particular how the daily practices of these people reveal the decisions made, consciously and subconsciously, as they negotiated

the constellation of environmental and social factors that both created opportunities and challenges for the people inhabiting Oak Level Mound.

## RESEARCH DESCRIPTION

This thesis provides the reader a better understanding of the regional and local Mississippian cultures of the Georgia coast. In chapter two I discuss theoretical approaches to prehistoric cultures of the region followed by my interpretive approach to Oak Level Mound. This section outlines an approach to practice theory and how it applies to the Middle Mississippian people living there. Chapter three includes a description of Oak Level Mound and the natural and cultural environments of the coast, including resources available to the prehistoric people living on the Georgia coast between A.D. 1100 and 1350. In addition, the ceramic analysis is discussed in order to better define the people both spatially and temporally along the Georgia coast. Research methodology and data analysis are detailed in chapters four and five, respectively, in order to assess my research questions. Finally, in chapter six, I conclude with future research recommendations at Oak Level Mound.

## **2 APPLIED THEORY, PAST AND PRESENT**

### INTRODUCTION

Over the years, various theoretical approaches have been used to interpret Mississippian settlements and political organization. In the Southeast, many theories have been used to explain the Mississippian cultural change, all with varying degrees of success. Recently, though, a new theoretical direction employed by Timothy Pauketat (2007), among others, is challenging the cultural evolutionary model of Mississippian social organization that states that cultures start off simple and progress in complexity (Johnson 2010: 23). The cultural evolutionary model leaves out social actors in historical processes and focuses on environmental or economic pressures as the main driving force of social change (Joyce 2005). The new approach by Pauketat (2007) is rooted in practice theory and disputes the notion that elite rulers had the power to manipulate commoners into building monumental architecture or in offering up hard gained tribute to the chief (Joyce 2005; Pauketat 2007;). The “commonwealth,” as Pauketat (2003) calls the commoners of the Mississippian society, operate more like a democracy, establishing change through intended and unintended actions. It is because of this approach that I have found practice theory most applicable to interpret the archaeological materials associated with the Middle Mississippian people living at Oak Level Mound at least a millennium ago. But I apply practice theory in line with Pauketat’s (2005) and Giddens’ (1984) vision of commoner agency as an agency of realization and intentionality. However, I cannot not ignore habitus as expressed in traditions, either (Bourdieu 1992). After all, it is through structured structures and structuring structures that communities are born and reborn (Bourdieu 1992).



Lopiparo (2005: 2) describes Bourdieu's (1992) "Habitus" and dispositions as "Practice Theory Dark" in which "structures are inscribed into social memory" and the actors are acting from habit and in a non-discursive manner. On the other hand, she asserts that Giddens' Theory of Structuration is like "Practice Theory Light" where free will and dynamic change are reflexive and discursive. One is oppressive (Practice Theory Dark) and the other (Practice Theory Light) is liberating. In the following sections, I discuss the history of various theoretical approaches used to understand Mississippian societies. I then outline my own theoretical approach, which draws from practice theory (light and dark), to better understand the daily practices of the Oak Level Mound residents.

## CULTURE HISTORY

The culture historical approach has been characterized as normative and useful only in that it is descriptive of cultural sequences through artifacts. For archaeologists following the Culture History approach, these artifacts are expressions of cultural ideas, reflections of cultural characteristics (e.g., Johnson 2010). House forms, ceramic styles, settlements, burial patterns, and ornaments could all be traced to some historical development that repeated rather than evolved and could be deemed a "complex of material expression of what today would be called a people" (Childe 1951: i-v).

One way cultural historical theory explains change is through migration of people or diffusion of ideas through contact (Johnson 2010:41). Traditions and cultural complexes change and emerge through a meshing of ideas of people who are static. Oftentimes, ethnohistorical accounts and linguistic boundaries are used to trace in reverse, the historical spread of cultures throughout regions in time and space (Johnson

2010) – the direct historical approach. But, as we will see, a meshing of theoretical ideas can yield a better understanding of past cultures. Therefore, culture history is not dead but is being used, for example, in a more sophisticated manner in the Southeast to explain cultural change in areas along the Chattahoochee River in Georgia and Alabama (Blitz et al. 2002).

## PROCESSUALISM

Prominent in the 1960s and 1970s, processualism, or the “New Archaeology,” challenged culture history to explain processes of cultural change rather than merely describing the cultural traits. There are several qualities of processual theory that must be noted. Processualism approaches the study of past cultures through an evolutionary framework. Therefore, cultural evolution, the idea that cultures evolve from simple to complex, is the main tenet of processualism (Johnson 2010). But Yoffee (2005) sees this approach as limited because it places cultures into types for the purpose of classification, using the classification as a means of describing biologic processes among different groups that change due to environmental pressures or population growth. But where culture history is particularistic, processualists view cultures in general terms, avoiding the specific individuals in exchange for an overview of processes (Johnson 2010).

These general ideas about cultures placed people within a system; an approach linked to General Systems Theory (Binford 1968; Flannery 1972) Each culture has a system or subsystem that coexists along with a number of subsystems that create the whole. Each social system is viewed in its functional context as it relates to other social systems. For example, religious beliefs or political organizations are considered a part of

the cultural system that legitimates power (Johnson 2010). Therefore, when these systems change, cultures adapt. Flannery (1972) further defines the cultural evolutionary model by subdividing the highest level of sociopolitical organization (state) into subsystems of control and feedback. Each subsystem is responsible for regulating, say, irrigation or crop harvesting. Those systems at the top, usually run by political leaders, are responsible for the whole. However, if lower order subsystems fail, those offices in higher order can and will intervene. This circular system of production and feedback forges the power of the state or perhaps even the transition from complex society to state. Therefore, it is the forced intervention of the higher order that causes the sociopolitical organization to evolve or collapse.

Binford (1968) compared cultural adaptations to animals. He believed animals adapted physically to environmental pressures, while humans adapted culturally to environmental pressures. Therefore, human systems of cultural interaction, operation, and function were basically the same around the globe given the same environmental and technological parameters (Johnson 2010). This conceptualization of the adaptive ability of cultures is deterministic and predicates cultural change on things other than intentions of all social agents. One such example in the Southeast is the emergence of complex society associated with Mississippian people. Scholars, following a processual framework, believe that cultures evolved from Paleo-Indian to Mississippian. According to this framework, Paleo-Indian cultures began as simple bands of hunter-gatherers, whose seasonal mobility patterns followed available resources. Then, during the Archaic period, ceremony and semisedintary settlement patterns developed. Next, during the Woodland period, when group populations grew, so did the need to gather and cultivate seeds and form regional ties of interaction based on group interests. Finally, during the

Mississippian period, when agricultural farming and corn cultivation began, a surplus of corn accumulated, and there became a need to protect the corn. This is the root of complex political separation. Palisaded walls were erected to protect corn. Mounds were erected to separate the elite controllers of the corn from the producing commoners, and the cycling of chiefly centers began (Anderson 1994). This generalized model, from Paleo-Indian to Mississippian Indians, ignores particular groups and individual roles in cultural change.

Finally, processualists were interested in a more scientific approach to studying cultures, one where assumptions and biases could become a part of the discussion (Clarke 1968; Johnson 2010). They were interested in describing specific details about how analysis takes place within their research. For example, boundaries must be established for methods and analyses (Johnson 2010). A standard of operation must be established so that biases could be discovered by others. Clarke (1968) established this reasoning by using old descriptive methods for describing artifacts, but he used the descriptions generally and spent more time describing the analytical methods and approaches more specifically. However, there still remains a need to understand human actions and intents, and processualism fails to address these needs.

## POST-PROCESSUALISM

Like processualism, post-processualism encompasses a wide range of theoretical ideas. There are a number of movements within post-processualism that seek to understand the issues within archaeology that cultural evolution does not. Rather than focusing on general processes or particularistic culture historical descriptions, some

post-processualists seeks to understand the individual, including his or her actions, intents, symbolic meaning, and the structural institutions within each culture..

Postprocessualists reject the positivism and cultural evolutionary perspective of processualist, believing instead that symbols and things mean something to the person(s) who create them. Interpretations, therefore, are sometimes hermeneutic in that we assign our own meaning to artifacts, assuming that the past cultures saw the item in the same way. Thoughts and values are important (Johnson 2010; Hodder 1987). While processualists view cultural change as deterministic and based on processes of evolution due to outside pressures, post-processualists believe that cultures may have interacted with the environment differently, acting rather than reacting. An ontological approach and the understanding of “being” takes center stage here. What and were past cultures doing within time and space, how were they doing it, and why did they act this way? What might they have been thinking and how did they view the landscape, environment, and others? Understanding personhood and embodiment within our interpretive framework may help us remove our subjective minds from the process (Heidegger 1962). Rather than viewing landscape as a collection of environmental variables that influence actions of hunter-gatherers or farmers, we can understand that cultures living in prehistoric landscapes may have viewed the landscape very differently because it is the perception of the landscape that matters, and that perception is a direct result of people’s cultural beliefs (Johnson 2010).

Practices and actions of people do not begin in the abstract. They are developed as a rhythm of movement about the landscape (Johnson 2010). Historical thoughts and values are important in understanding how and why cultures change or remain the same. Mounds and mound centers may be constructed from factions of migrants that

have an ideal of a village in their minds. They remember tradition and migrate into other regions, constructing villages, farmsteads, and compounds based on past practices. But as Giddens (1984) asserts in his Structuration Theory, unintended consequences are also agents of change. Giddens (1984) states that individual agents are not just passive actors within society, carrying on traditional practices like robots. Individuals understand the social rules around them and consciously (and unconsciously) manipulate them to form and reform society. Pauketat (2000) and Yoffee (2005) see this agency among the people as a commonwealth of people who, in reality, are not so much controlled as they are the movers in their own negotiations within the social context. In this research on the archaeological record at Oak Level Mound, I use practice (agency) theory as an interpretative guide, focusing on the idea that individual agents formed and reformed social statuses, relationships, connections to politics, and settlement patterns.

Practice Theory has been forged by philosophers and social scientists such as Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens, among others. Both assume a dialectical relationship between structure and agent. However, each of these men approaches practice and agency differently. Bourdieu (1992) asserts that the daily practices of the individual are centered on habits learned but practiced unconsciously, an assumed natural social order of things or the unspoken rules by which a society lives by. He calls this habitus. Habitus is comprised of three types of cultural practices that enable cultural change or stasis: Doxa, orthodoxy, and heterodoxy.

Doxa, for Bourdieu, is the assumed nature of things or the assumed order in which social communities implement and reconstruct traditions and practices. It is the unspoken system by which we unconsciously live (Bourdieu 1992). Orthodoxy is the

dominant ideology or practice and is in agreement with the accepted norm. It is, perhaps, responsible for cultural stasis. Heterodoxy, then, is the “state of challenged dispositions” or antagonistic beliefs (Bourdieu 1992: 164). It challenges orthodoxy and can be responsible for cultural change.

Giddens’ (1984) *Structuration Theory* suggests that individual agents have the cognitive ability to knowingly affect change or comply with the norm. The actors know what the rules are and they follow them or they resist. Reflexivity, in Giddens’ view, is not only self-consciousness, but a constant monitoring of ongoing life. But there is an overarching concept of “duality of structure” with Giddens’ theoretical framework. It states that structures shape and form individual practices and individual practices “constitute and reproduce” structure (Giddens 1984: 27). This dichotomy seems paradoxical. The notion and concept of structure, its creation and recreation, and individual’s roles within that structure are hard to conceptualize in the recreation of past cultural changes and practices. Individual agent’s actions, motives, and thoughts are constrained by social structures and cultural norms, yet individuals can and do “improvise” to affect change, over time, of the entire system (Sewell 1992: 5). But how might Bourdieu (1992) and Giddens’ (1984) be reconciled to formulate a means by which we, as archaeologists, might apply Practice Theory in our reconstruction of the daily lives of past cultures?

Oftentimes, we assume that the agent or actors in daily practices are always at a disadvantage. As I have stated previously, a “commonwealth” can and may be responsible for changes within a culture. But we must also consider that the “commonwealth” may not be at a disadvantage (Sewell 1992) within a culture, and that practices of alienation and power struggles may isolate cultures or small groups, thereby

forming a constant creation and recreation of landscapes scattered with small groups seeking an identity and moving about looking for a place to fit in (Cobb 2005).

The issue with Giddens is with his idea of structure as being virtual rules or a process of imagination and memory. Structure, in his view, is substantiated through resources, either human or nonhuman. Nonhuman resources may include “objects animate or inanimate, naturally occurring or manufactured, which can be used to enhance or maintain power” (Sewell 1992: 8). On the other hand, human resources are “physical strength, dexterity, knowledge and emotional commitments that can be used to enhance or maintain power, including knowledge of the means of gaining, retaining, controlling, and propagating either human or natural resources” (Sewell 1992:9). However, as I have previously stated, one might assume from Giddens description of resources is that powerful or elite members are the only ones who may gain access. The opposite is true. While a majority of the resources may be available to only those who have mastered the management thereof, some resources are available to all members of society, “no matter how destitute or impoverished” (Sewell 1992: 10). Therefore, while structure may be virtual, resources, both human and nonhuman, can be manipulated by either elite members, a commonwealth, or small, impoverished groups. Likewise, unintended consequences may affect any or all of the aforementioned, as well.

Bourdieu (1977) calls the virtual structure and resources available to society “Mental Structures” and “World Objects.” Bourdieu describes it this way:

The mental structures, which construct the world of objects are constructed in the practice of a world of objects constructed according to the same structures. The mind born of a world of objects does not rise as a subjectivity confronting objectivity: the objective universe is made up of objects which are the product of



objectifying operations structured according to the very structures which the mind applied to it. The mind is a metaphor of the world of objects which is itself but an endless circle of mutually reflecting metaphors [Bourdieu 1977: 91].

Here, Bourdieu's concept of structure and "Habitus" removes the agent, making him or her totally powerless to the world of objectification and placing them in an "endless circle of mutually reflecting metaphors" This approach begs the question of mode of change. It assumes a homogenous model of culture and ignores social experience (Sewell 1992).

Sewell (1992:17) suggests we take a "fractured conception of society," formulating a theoretical concept that envisions cultural change as taking place within particular societies. Structures are multiple and intersecting, and practices are transposable. Therefore, we should take that into consideration when reconstructing and understanding historical cultural change (Sewell 1992:18). Lopiparo (2005: 16) suggest that we follow a "Practice Theory Light" stance where we take into account the possibility for "improvisation and innovation" rather than a "constraint over free will, stasis over change, [or] structure over agency" approach, which is termed "Practice Theory Dark". "Practice Theory Light" takes into account "ramifications [or] unintended consequences," which may have a wider use of application when we, as archaeologists, are trying to understand far-reaching implications of structures and agents (Lopiparo 2005). But how am I to take these concepts and apply them to the Oak Level Mound and its landscape?

## CONCLUSION

"Historical events are profoundly spatial processes in that the actions that transform social structures are inextricably bound to the specificities of place (Sewell

2005: 259-260). Whether we realize it or not, as archaeologists and people in general, we all theorize about people, circumstances, historical landscapes, material remains, and political ambitions. Therefore, I will use the basic theoretical concept of Practice Theory as established by Bourdeiu (1992) and Giddens (1984). However, I will follow the revised concepts of Cobb (2005), Pauketat (2000, 2007), and Sewell (2005), among others, to understand the emergence and dissipation of the Oak Level Mound people as understood through artifacts and landscape.

### **3 NATURAL AND CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter provides a general overview of the natural and cultural environments of the Georgia coast. This includes a description of the physiographic location, flora, fauna, and other natural resources that may have been available to prehistoric site occupants. In addition, I discuss the prehistoric cultural chronology of the Georgia coastal region, both spatially and temporally, and where needed, compare those coastal cultures to interior cultures of the same period.

#### **PHYSIOGRAPHIC SETTING AND TOPOGRAPHY**

Oak Level Mound is located in the Outer Coastal Plains Mixed Province (Bailey 1980). This coastal region contains relic beach ridges, islands, hammocks, and former marshes, all of which were formed during the Pleistocene epoch (Crook 1986). Fluctuating Pleistocene sea level deposited sediments throughout the Georgia coastal area and formed step-like terraces that decrease in altitude from inland to sea level. Low-lying terraces in this region form marshes and swamps and are subject to flooding (Clarke and Zisa 1976; Crook 1986; Espenshade 2012).

#### **HYDROLOGY**

Rivers emptying into the Atlantic near Oak Level Mound begin in two separate physiographic regions. The Savannah River flows from the Blue Ridge Province and the Ogeechee begins in the Piedmont Province. The Altamaha, which does not affect the Oak Level Mound area, begins in the Piedmont as well, and all other rivers draining into the Atlantic by way of the Georgia coast originate within the coastal region. The Ogeechee

River, which flows to the north of Oak Level Mound, is slow to drain and is characterized by extensive floodplain wetlands along its path to the sea (Crook 1986; Espenshade 2012).

## ENVIRONMENT

The Georgia coastal zone can be divided into four environmental areas: lagoon and marsh, delta, strand, and interior coastal zone. The interior coastal zone begins at marsh edge on the Georgia mainland and extends westward 80 km. This environment is characterized by dispersed highland areas and low lying swamps and river flood plains (Crook 1986). The strand environment includes the beaches and dunes and has few natural resources other than the sea turtle. The strand separates the lagoon and marsh area from the ocean and consists of high ground, tidal streams, marshes, and lagoons.

The highland, hammock, and barrier island regions are dominated by live oaks, mixed pines, palmettos, and tree ferns and are considered by Bailey (1980) to be temperate evergreen forests. A lower growth stratum exists on the floor of Oak Level Mound that includes tree ferns, small palms, shrubs, herbaceous plants, and palmettos. Whitetail deer is the largest indigenous mammal living in this region. Smaller animals include raccoons, opossums, rabbit, and flying squirrels. Bobwhite quail and wild turkey are common indigenous birds (Bailey 1980).

The marsh environment supplied a great deal of resources to the Native Americans living at Oak Level Mound. These environments are rich in natural resources and are ideal for human and animal subsistence. Cordgrass, needlerush, and giant cutgrass grow throughout the saltwater marsh region. The western boundary of the marsh where mainland meets marsh, grasswort, saltgrass, and sea lavender grow in

abundance. Smooth cordgrass, mud algae, and phytoplankton feed the fiddler crab and molluscs found in the marsh areas, both of which would have been a major resource for the Native Americans along the coast and at Oak Level Mound. Marsh Mink, Marsh Rabbit and Raccoon, all possible resources for the Native Americans, feed on the estuarine fish, crab, and mussels, as well (Crook 1986).

The Swamp area immediately adjacent to Oak Level Mound may have been a lagoon or marsh during the Native American occupation between A.D. 1000 – 1350. However, the swamp environment today is created by rainwater, or in some conditions when secluded from river deltas, freshwater. Along river deltas, rivers and streams collide with saltwater, creating brackish water. These swamp areas are inhabited by wading birds, reptiles, and amphibians. Highland oak forests, which are areas with known Native American settlements, occur throughout the swamps, which may have impeded movement of the indigenous populations (Crook 1986).

## SOIL

Soils include Ultisols, Spodosols, and Entisols, which tend to be wet, acidic, and low in major plant nutrients. These soils are derived from coastal plain sediments ranging from heavy clay to gravel, with a predominance of sandy materials (Bailey 1980: 47). At Oak Level Mound 38% of the soil composition area where the shovel tests were performed is Chipley fine sand and 45% is Ellabelle loamy sand. The sand size here ranges from .05 to 2 mm in diameter (Web Soil Survey 2013). The first 10-20 cm of shovel test stratigraphy was generally dark grey sand and humus mix. Beyond this, yellowish brown sand occurred in more than 90 percent of the shovel tests down to a

depth of 70 cm. At 70 cm the sand transitioned to white and was somewhat cemented with very little clay content.

## CLIMATE

While much change has taken place within the Georgia Coastal region over the years, an approximation of the prehistoric climate can be made using modern ecological measurements and predictions (Crook 1986). The coastal climate is generally hot and humid during the summer months, with temperatures ranging between 80 and 90 degrees. Winter temperatures can drop into the mid-30s, but low and upper 40s is the norm. Annual rainfall averages around 120 cm, with half of that occurring between June and September. Snow is rare within the Coastal Plains Province (Crook 1986; Espenshade 2012).

## OAK LEVEL MOUND (9BN67)

Oak Level Mound (9BN67) is located 4 km southwest of Fort McAllister Historic Park on Richmond Hill Wildlife Management land and at the intersection of Carver School Road and Oak Level Road (Figure 3.1). It is 2.4 km south of the Ogeechee River and 5.7 km west of Red Bird Creek. Located 17 km inland from the marsh region of Ossabaw Island, the site is in an area that borders the coastal estuarine environment of tributaries that flow into the Atlantic (Cook 1989). Larson (1980) calls this area the lagoon and marsh area, and it is abundant in marine and freshwater fish and oysters (Cook 1989). The site is located along the southern edge of a river swamp (Figure 3.1) amongst a live oak hammock dominated by palmettos. Generally, the topography gently slopes downward toward the northern edge of the site where it rapidly drops over 2 m

into the swamp. The swamp was always wet when I was there between August 2012 and January 2013.



Figure 3.1: Oak Level Mound (ESRI World Topographical Map)

## CULTURAL CHRONOLOGY

We begin to see human activity in the Southeast United States as far back 10,500 B.C. (Anderson 2004: 87). These Late Pleistocene people were still experiencing cold climate in some regions, relying solely on megafauna for subsistence (Anderson 2004: 87). But at the beginning of the Holocene epoch (c. 9500 B.C.) in the Southeast United States, we see a noticeable change in human population habits. By the end of the Younger Dryas, temperatures rose 7 degrees Fahrenheit globally, and plant and animal populations were on the rise. No longer were the hunter-gatherers dependent on regional hunting only.

Because of the noticeable changes in cultural traditions and practices temporally, we can, with some degree of accuracy, divide prehistoric cultures into time periods (Table 3.1), and, within those time periods, into sub periods. Each period represents varied changes in subsistence approaches, lithic and ceramic technologies, sociopolitical activities, and settlement approaches, to name a few. However, while all cultures may exhibit some of the same traits, it is a combination of traits, expressed in the material record and understood through stratified site superposition and associated with C14 and other absolute dating methods that allow archaeologists to group cultures into periods. In addition, there also exist transitional periods where cultural traits overlap during socio-politically, technologically, and ideologically transformations. While it is unfair to pigeonhole cultures as more or less advanced based on technological or political evolution, it is quite necessary to place cultures into a spatial and temporal proximity for the sake of organization and for the sake of comparing cultural transitions and habits within a region.



Table 3.1: Southeast United States Cultural Chronology (Anderson 2004; Jefferies 2004)

<i>Paleo-Indian</i>	11000–9500 B.C.
<i>Early Archaic</i>	9500–6950 B.C.
<i>Middle Archaic</i>	6950–3000 B.C.
<i>Late Archaic</i>	3000–1000 B.C.
<i>Early Woodland</i>	1000–300 B.C.
<i>Middle Woodland</i>	300 B.C.–A.D. 600
<i>Late Woodland</i>	A.D. 600–1000
<i>Early Mississippian</i>	A.D. 1000–1150
<i>Middle Mississippian</i>	A.D. 1150–1350
<i>Late Mississippian</i>	A.D. 1350–1600

#### *PALEO-INDIAN PERIOD (11,000–9,500 B.C.)*

The PaleoIndians of the Southeast probably arrived in the region 14,000 years B.P. Evidence for these early people have been found throughout the Southeast in association with megafaunal bones. A speared giant tortoise was recovered at Little Salt Springs in Florida, and a *Bison antiquus* skull with an embedded projectile point was discovered in the Wacissa River, also in Florida (Anderson et al. 1996). PaleoIndian sites in the Southeast are often found in context with the fluted lanceolate called the Clovis point (Anderson et al. 1996). These projectile points are large and would have been affixed to the end of a spear rather than an arrow. They also produced more specialized tools such as drills, gravers, and hammerstones (Anderson et al. 1996) The PaleoIndians were highly mobile hunter-gathers who followed migrating megafauna. Traveling in small nomadic groups, they lived in temporary open-air camps. Therefore, sites are difficult to locate.

*ARCHAIC PERIOD (9,500–1000 B.C.)*

By the time of the Holocene epoch, the Southeastern United States had transcended the major cold of the Pleistocene (Anderson and Sassaman 2004). The megafauna were gone, and modern flora and fauna were present. Wild plant and animals were collected and hunted, but none were domesticated except for the dog, which may have arrived during the PaleoIndian period (Anderson and Sassaman 2004; Swartz 1997). Cultural change was taking place, and group interactions can be seen throughout the Southeast (Anderson and Sassaman 2004). At Early Archaic sites, we begin to see notched and resharpened points, a decline in formal, well-made stone tools, and an increase in number of sites. The Early Archaic groups, although still mobile, operated from a centralized base camp, which remained in place for a very short period of time (Anderson and Sassaman 2004)

By the Middle Archaic period, warfare was on the rise, ceremonial use of shell and earthen mound construction became more prominent, and long distance trade networks were established (Anderson 2004:95). While the Middle Archaic people were still egalitarian, social order is evident (Anderson and Sassaman 2004). Complex earthen and shell mounds of various sizes at Watson Brake indicate collective ceremonial rituals and band level stratification (Bender 1985). Projectile points are the primary means of identifying Middle Archaic sites. Notched and bifurcate points were replaced by square and contracting stemmed Kirk, Stanly, and Morrow Mountain Type I and II. During the Late Archaic period (3000-1000 B.C.) the first pottery production took place at Stallings Island and St. Simons Island (Anderson 2002). Coastal sites dominated the region of the Southeast. As estuarine habitats multiplied during the Late Holocene and sea levels dropped, freshwater wetlands became the primary settlement

locations along the coast (Anderson and Sassaman 2004). One such culture taking advantage of the rich riverine and estuarine environment on the Georgia coast is the Stallings Culture. They inhabited both the interior and coastal regions of the Savannah River and were divided into smaller communities (Sassaman 1993). Stallings pottery is some of the first known pottery produced in the Southeast United States (Anderson and Sassaman 2004) Linear Punctate, Drag and Jab surface decorations, and fiber temper are hallmarks of the Stallings Culture pottery. At Stallings Island, the Late Archaic inhabitants built a community of small households in a 30-meter circular arrangement, utilizing the central plaza created by the arrangement for mortuary practice (Anderson and Sassaman 2004). Finally, shell rings and mounds created along the south Atlantic coast during the Late Archaic period have been contested by some as mere refuse piles, while others conclude that these features were constructed intentionally for ceremonial purposes (Saunders 1999). Sassaman (2010) believes that these mounds may represent a tradition that continued into the Woodland period. However, one thing is for sure. By the end of the second millennium B.C., we see a dramatic shift to regionalism and increased pottery production (Jefferies 2004:115).

*WOODLAND PERIOD (1000 B.C.–A.D. 1000)*

The Woodland period was a time when the indigenous people of North America became less reliant on hunting and gathering and began to settle into seasonal camps (Anderson et al. 2002: 189). Technological advances in tools and household goods are seen in the archaeological record from this time period. Knives and projectile points became smaller due to continued decrease in hunting large animals (Anderson et al. 2002:210). In addition, pottery, a technology not readily used in the Archaic period, became necessary in order to store horticultural goods and gathered nuts, and small settlements were evenly dispersed across the land to further employ collective resource gathering (Anderson et al. 2002:97).

While the Woodland period cultures across the Southeast were mostly egalitarian hunter-gatherers practicing horticulture, the cultural tradition encompasses several traits that include an increased importance on seed collection and cultivation, semi-sedintarianism, and increased mortuary ceremonialism (Smith 1986; Stephanaitis 1986). It is perhaps the increases in ceremony and seed cultivation that brought on the use of widespread pottery, which was needed for storage and sometimes used for burials (Jefferies 2004:114). The distinction between different Woodland groups was marked by manufactured and decorated ceramics and by the diverse subsistence strategies along interior and coastal riverine systems (Jefferies 2004:114; Smith 1986:35). The Woodland ceramics were no longer tempered with fiber as were those dating to the Late Archaic (Jefferies 2004:114). Pastes were mixed with grit, sand or grog (crushed pottery), and paddle-stamping designs were placed along the exterior of the surface of the vessel (Caldwell 1941). Caldwell (1958) designated four major ceramic traditions in

the Southeast, all based on pottery design: Gulf Coastal Plains, Interior Midsouth, Middle Atlantic Seaboard, and South Appalachian.

The ceramics in the Midsouth and Midatlantic areas were decorated with cord or fabric wrapped paddles. Meanwhile, the potters in the South Appalachian region carved elaborate designs into wooden paddles and used those paddles to stamp the surface of pots. The groups along the Gulf decorated pottery with dentate, rocker stamping and incising (Anderson 1995). To further differentiate local cultural variants within each region, Caldwell (1958), followed by Depratter (1979), identified variations in pottery types, which may include differences in temper, paste, pottery form, or surface decoration. However, for the purpose of chronology of Southeastern cultures here, I will limit my discussion of pottery type and variety, saving them for a later chapter. Instead, I briefly describe the cultural phases associated with the Woodland period Native Americans along the coast of Georgia and at Oak Level Mound. See Chapter 4 for a discussion of ceramic type sequencing and cultural phases as traits.

#### *Deptford Phase (300 B.C.–A.D. 600)*

One regional culture living along the Atlantic coast during the Middle Woodland period from northeastern Florida to southern South Carolina was called the Deptford culture. These people lived in semi-sedintary settlements in oak/magnolia hammocks where riverine and estuarine environments collided and where shell fish and other marine and freshwater resources were plentiful (Milianich 1979). These hammocks also provided ideal subsistence resources such as nuts and berries and were good habitat for white-tailed deer, which were an important food source (Jefferies 2004:115; Milianich 1979). Most Deptford sites have large shell middens, and it was during the Deptford

phase along the southeast Atlantic coast that burial mounds began to be constructed (Milianich 1994:141).

*St. Catherine's Island Phase (A.D. 600–1000)*

During the St. Catherine's Island phase there was an increase in population and farmstead along the Georgia coast (Jefferies 2004: 124; Nassaney and Cobb 1991: 296-300). Although the St. Catherine's Island phase is considered Late Woodland, it is perhaps a transitional phase where emergent Mississippian cultural lifeway's began to clash with Woodland groups as farmsteads were more nucleated and increased in number (Blitz 2005; Jefferies 2004: 115). However, little had changed in these coastal peoples subsistence strategies as they continued to exploit the estuarine environment of the Georgia coast. The marked difference between St. Catherine's Island phase and the earlier Deptford phase from the same area is the pottery style and tempering agents (Milianich 2004: 235).

*MISSISSIPPIAN PERIOD (A.D. 1000–1600)*

Across the Southeast, Mississippian Indian occupation is marked by “increased importance of maize agriculture, appearance of technology related to maize cultivation and storage, and the occurrence of incipient ranking” (Cobb and Garrow 1996: 27). The Mississippian cultural traits are prominent along the many tributaries of the Mississippi River Valley (Muller 1997). However, Muller (1997) warns that the term “Mississippian” should be used more loosely since various groups within the temporal “Mississippian” period (AD 900 - 1600) exhibit some, but in most cases, not all traits identified as “Mississippian.” While an increased dependence on agriculture varied among

Southeastern complexes during the Mississippian period<sup>1</sup>, other traits were universal throughout. Political hierarchy, ranging from simple to paramount chiefdoms, is common during this time period (Anderson 1994). Fortifications such as palisaded walls were also built, perhaps as a means of protecting maize surplus or other values, including the chiefly compound (Anderson 1994; Muller 1997). In addition, monumental earthen architecture such as platform and conical mounds mark an important cultural separation between elite rulers and commoners among the Mississippian groups of the Southeast. This spatial separation and construction may also have cosmological meanings as well (Wesson 1998). But all of these definitions began in the anthropological literature, where “Mississippian” was created by the objective observer who saw common traits across a region as a means to an end in identifying homogeneous cultures (Yoffee 2005:23).

The point here, however, is that a homogeneous model of Mississippian life does not exist (Pauketat 2007). Those “Mississippian” peoples living on the coast of Georgia exhibit some but not all cultural traits connected to the Mississippian complex of the Southeast between A.D. 900 and 1600. Furthermore, even on the coast, there are variations in settlement patterns among the Mississippians living there, perhaps due to resource variability (Anderson 1994).

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<sup>1</sup> The coastal Mississippian cultures relied less on maize, perhaps because of poor soils (Anderson 1994), and Muller (1997: 42) warns that “each southeastern locality had its own distinct course of development.”

### *Savannah Phase (A.D. 1150–1350)*

The Savannah phase was named for the Mississippian Indians who settled along the Savannah River (Anderson 1994), and it is sometimes divided into Savannah I and Savannah II periods, with the distinguishing difference being complicated stamped and check stamped pottery occurring no earlier than A.D. 1200 and the remaining cord marked and plain spanning the entire series from A.D. 1150 to 1350 (Depratter 1991). The Savannah Middle Mississippian settlements are distinguished from the earlier Woodland settlements in that they are no longer semi-sedentary groups living in small dispersed settlements. The Middle Mississippian communities of the Savannah River basin were large and nucleated, located along the flood plains, and part of a complex political formation (Anderson et al. 1996).

The coastal Savannah Mississippians of Georgia displayed some but not all Mississippian traits. Agriculture was limited on the coast, focused more on riverine settings, and subsistence strategies continued to focus on marine and riverine food sources (Stephenson et al. 1990). One thing that did change sometime around A.D. 1200 was political stratification, platform mounds, and elite or specialized goods such as decorated pottery and engraved gorgets (Milianich 2004: 235). Still, in terms of description of Mississippian people living on the coast of Georgia, the Savannah phase (A.D. 1150-1350) represents the height of visual social stratification between commoners and rulers (Anderson 1994).

Finally, the Savannah Phase landscape very much resembled the interior chiefdoms with palisaded walls, trench housing, and platform mounds with smaller associated conical burial mounds (Milianich 2004: 235). The Irene site is perhaps the best example of a complex Mississippian settlement on the coast. It was a chiefly



compound during the Middle Mississippian Savannah phase. Later during the Late Mississippian period (A.D. 1350-1600), social stratification is less noticeable in the distribution of elite goods at Irene, with more commoners living in the village (Anderson 1994; Caldwell 1941 and McCann). This expansion and contraction, or chiefly cycling, is noted by Anderson (1994) as the result of competition for office and lineage disputes over land and burial connections. In general, though, Mississippians living on the Georgia coast from A.D. 1150-1350 displayed specific cultural traits, identified mostly in ceramic traditions and built environments.

## CONCLUSION

Although natural environments played a role in the daily lives of all Native American cultures along the coast and interior, from Paleo-Indians to Mississippians and into the historic period, we must understand more about how and why daily practices took place in the first place. Therefore, the development of a cultural chronology, based predominately on changing pottery styles, does not allow us to answer all of our questions about past people's lives but it does provide a spatio-temporal framework for more detailed and nuanced investigations.

## 4 METHODOLOGY

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of the various methods used during my fieldwork at Oak Level Mound field. I describe field survey methods and the process of laying out the site at Oak Level Mound into a grid system for systematic recovery of artifacts and mapping. Next, I describe excavation methods, cataloging and recording methods, and mapping procedures for the site and individual artifacts and artifact locations. Then, I discuss methods for analyzing artifacts, adding past research from seminal works in archaeology to support my approach. Finally, I discuss the computer software and methods used to analyze artifact distribution and create predictive site use pattern maps for site reconstruction.

### RECONNAISSANCE AND SUBSURFACE SURVEY

I conducted the mapping and shovel testing on site, and Dr. Jeffrey Glover, my adviser at Georgia State University, monitored my progress and provided direction throughout the project. In August 2012, I began systematic reconnaissance and subsurface testing of Oak Level Mound to determine possible cultural and natural features beyond the already visible mound, hereafter called Mound A, and to recover artifacts associated with the site. To assist in my survey of the site, I laid out a 20 m grid with the use of a Leica Total Station. I arbitrarily placed a datum, with the coordinates 1000N 1000E, 7 m to the northwest of Mound A. I then established a magnetic north ground stake 5 m from the datum using a Brunton pocket transit and tripod. Once a magnetic north line was determined, I established the four cardinal directions using the total station and proceeded to layout the 20 m grid with a tape measurer. From the

datum the grid runs 80 m to the south, 100 m to the east, 140 m to the west until the WMA site boundary at Carver School Road (Figure 4.1), and 120 m north to the edge of the swamp. In all, 157 shovel tests were executed to a depth of between 40 cm and 100 cm. However, I was not able to terminate shovel test transect lines at the north and west extent of the site with at least two negative shovel tests due to swamp conditions. All sediments were screened through 6mm screen and artifacts were recorded on shovel test forms, bagged, and labeled according to shovel test grid number, site number and name.

#### MATERIAL ANALYSIS

All cultural material was analyzed at Georgia State University and stored in the Georgia State University lab. Ceramics were identified using The University of Georgia's pottery identification site (Williams and Thompson 1999). Ceramics were identified and classified according to a strict standard of identification criteria, such as ceramic temper, sherd thickness, and surface decoration. I compared Oak Level Mound potsherds to sketches, photographs, and descriptions given by Williams and Thompson (1999), Depratter (1991), and Caldwell and McCann (1941). The artifacts recovered were entered into a spreadsheet that was imported into ArcGIS for analysis of spatial distribution of artifacts at Oak Level Mound.

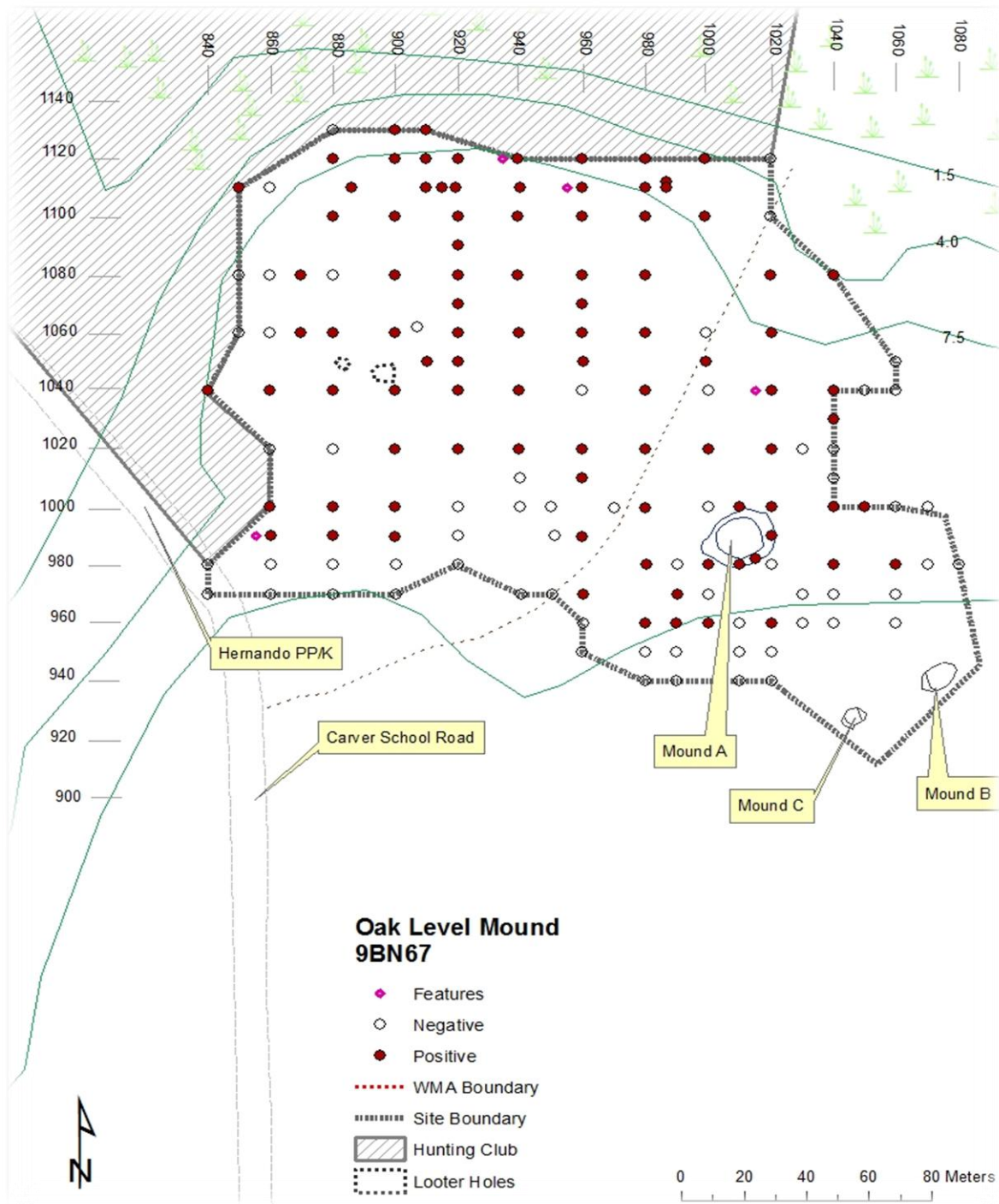


Figure 4.1: Shovel tests at Oak Level Mound

## STANDARD FOR CERAMIC ANALYSIS ON THE GEORGIA COAST

Ceramic type sequencing can often be difficult to understand since there are many types with similar decorations found on the coast of Georgia. An archaeological type should represent a unit of cultural practice equivalent to the cultural trait (Krieger 1944), and that “practice” is called a cultural phase in the Southeast United States. This “phase” occurs within certain cultural time periods, such as Archaic, Woodland, or Mississippian. Thus, the Deptford Phase represents a cultural tradition of ceramic production that occurred along the Georgia coast and into Florida during the Woodland period. Likewise, the Savannah Phase represents a subperiod within the Middle Mississippian time period when cultures living on the coast of Georgia and along the Savannah River made specific ceramic decorations such as complicated stamped pottery with concentric circles filled in with a cross ( see Figure 5.19). The widespread use of this pottery type by the Savannah culture indicates that it was most likely a ceramic tradition or phase. Seminal works by Caldwell and McCann (1941) and Depratter (1991) have established ceramic type sequencing along the Georgia coast that allows archaeologists to classify Georgia coastal cultures into spatial and temporal groups based on ceramic decorations occurring contemporaneously throughout the region.

Caldwell and McCann (1941) established boundaries and identification methods along the Georgia coast that help us group cultural phases. At the Irene site, Caldwell divided ceramics into groups of surface decorations that were “most likely to be culturally sensitive” (Caldwell and McCann 1941: 44). Later, he realized that the same surface decorations found at Irene were also discovered at other sites in the region, so he gave site names to all of the types of a single complex. He describes a complex as a “group of separate types exhibiting the total attributes of pottery manufacture at a site

or group of closely related sites at a given time” (Caldwell and McCann 1941:1). Later Williams (1978) and then Depratter (1991) improved this system by suggesting a type-variety sequence may benefit the region. For example, Savannah Fine Cord Marked is considered a type of Savannah pottery. However, at the Haven Home site just south of the Irene site, a variant of Savannah Fine Cord Marked was found and identified by Caldwell as Haven Home type. This ceramic had identical surface decorations as Savannah Fine Cord Marked, but it had a different rim form than Savannah Fine Cord Marked type. Depratter (1991) suggested that the Haven Home pottery be classified as Savannah Fine Cord Marked type of Haven Home variety. Nonetheless, type sequencing continues to be used in Georgia rather than type-variety.

#### GIS ANALYSIS AND INTRASITE USE PATTERN PREDICTION

Geostatistical Analyst is an ArcMap tool used to predict probability of things such as soil type, groundwater distribution, and artifact distribution across a site or region (ESRI 2001). By entering a measured sample of the total number of, say, ceramics from several test units, or by entering ceramic types found in the unit into ArcMap’s attribute table and attaching those numbers and types to a UTM location on a map (which represents one shovel test), one can interpolate a continuous predictive model or estimation of site use phenomena (ESRI 2001). This model ideally corresponds to the everyday activities of past people as they went about using pottery at various locations on the site; however post-depositional factors must be considered as well as the fact that, our predictive model is only as good as the underlying data. Within the Geostatistical Analyst tool, the user must choose a deterministic method of interpolation, such as Kriging or IDW (Inverse Distance Weighted). Different variants

are used by the different methods, such as distance between measured data points, degree of similarity of data across the site, or degree of smoothing of the final model (ESRI 2001). In addition, different surfaces can yield different data. A predictive map will yield inaccurate results were data has not been collected, and a probability surface yields a map based on a threshold of values, perhaps high and lows, that should not be exceeded (ESRI 2001). I used ordinary Kriging in my analysis of the Oak Level Mound ceramic distribution to produce a predictive map of the site surface based on data from the 156 shovel test pits.

## CONCLUSION

At Oak Level Mound (9BN67) a systematic approach to field and lab work was employed to understand cultural occupation and sequencing, both spatially and temporally. Ten and 20-meter grids were used in order to establish survey integrity and aid in accurate map production of specific artifact and feature locations, and ArcGIS (ArcInfo/Geostatistical analysis) was used as an aid in the interpretation of household locations and intrasite activity.

## 5 ANALYSIS

### INTRODUCTION

The data at Oak Level Mound represents a pattern of emergence occupation that began sometime around A.D 600 and reached an apex between A.D. 1150 and A.D. 1350. In this chapter, I present the data from the field and offer an interpretation of intrasite use and cultural change at Oak Level Mound. While I am combining empirical research with theoretical logic to form a reasonable reconstruction of the site history, there is still data that remains to be discovered and synthesized at Oak Level Mound.

Of the 157 shovel tests, 60 percent (n=89) were positive for ceramics. There was an abundance of shell middens to the northwest of the site where the swamp begins (Figure 4.1). Other artifacts and features include, lithics, one fish vertebrae, and a fragment of human remains, which was recovered from shovel test 990N 1020E directly to the east of Mound A (Figure 4.1) and promptly reburied in keeping with the established protocol. In addition, I discovered two more possible mounds to the south of Mound A (Figure 4.1). I discuss the artifacts in detail below.

### *BONE*

I recovered one orbital socket from a location just east of Mound A at the edge of the mound mantle where natural ground surface began. The bone was identified by Dr. Bethany Turner (personal communication, 2012), a bioarchaeologist at Georgia State University, as belonging to a young adult male. However, given the bone size and condition, she could not make a definitive conclusion. This recovery was not surprising since the type of mound(s) found at Oak Level Mound is often associated with burials along the Georgia coast. I returned to the mound on January 26, 2013 and replaced the



bone in the original shovel test pit at 900N 1020E according to the protocol established by Dr. Bryan Tucker

### *LITHICS*

I recovered a small amount of lithics, including 22 Coastal Plains tertiary flakes, one Ridge and Valley tertiary flake, six quartz flakes, one Coastal Plains core flake and one distal tip of a pp/k made from Coastal Plains chert (Figure 5.2). In addition, one Hernando PP/K (Whatley 2002) was recovered off site on Carver School Road just beyond the WMA boundary (Figure 5.3).



Figure 5.2: Coastal Plains Chert



Figure 5.3: Hernando PP/K

## SHELL

The site has abundant shell middens that are located in the north and northwest portions of the site. At shovel test 1100N 890E, I recovered 1 kg of American Oyster (*Crassostrea virginica*) (Figure 5.4) and marine snails (Figure 5.5), known as Salt Marsh Periwinkle (*Littorina irrorata*) (Reitz et al. 2012) However, the Salt Marsh Periwinkle (*Littorina irrorata*) should not be confused with the Common Periwinkle (*Littorina littorea*), which was introduced into North America from the Western Atlantic coast of Europe during the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Fierstien and Rollins 1987). At other locations, heaped shell mounds/middens are present. However looting or bioturbation is present. Nevertheless, I tested one such mound at 1100N 916E to determine whether any artifacts remained and recovered a small amount of ceramic sherds (n=3) and what might be a shell tool (Figure 5.6) and a possible modified shell necklace ornament (Figure 5.7).



Figure 5.4: American Oyster (*Crassostrea virginica*)



Figure 5.5: Salt Marsh Periwinkle (*Littorina irrorata*)



Figure 5.6: Shell at Oak Level Mound



Figure 5.7: Shell with holes

## *FEATURES*

I discovered four shovel test features at Oak Level Mound (Figure 5.24). Two of them are located 110 m to the north of Mound A along the swamp edge, one is located 100 m west of Mound A near Carver School Road along the Wildlife Management Area land border, and the other is located 50 m northeast of Mound A. The two features along the swamp edge are associated with St. Catherine's Island and Savannah pottery. Each of these features showed up in the shovel test stratigraphy between 40 and 60 cmbs. A distinct discoloration in the brownish yellow equal to black on the Muncell soil color chart appeared in the southeast profile of each of the shovel tests. These features were concaved from the top of the shovel test down, and had some nuts in association. Therefore, I surmised that they appeared to be nut storage or processing pits of some type.

The Feature to the west of Mound A along Carver School Road occurred between 30 and 50 cmbs. The entire shovel test between 30 and 50 cmbs was filled with charcoal. Therefore, I assumed that it was either a fire pit or hearth. The feature occurring to the northeast of Mound A was associated with shell. It appeared between 40 and 60 cmbs as a dark brown stain on the north, east, and west profiles of the shovel test. Plain and cord marked pottery was recovered from the shovel test pit, as well. This feature appears to be associated with food processing or household feasting.

## *CERAMICS*

The ceramics (Figure 5.8) at Oak Level Mound include sherds that date to the Late Archaic (3000-1000 B.C.), Early Woodland (1000-300 B.C.), Middle Woodland (300 B.C.-A.D. 600), Late Woodland/Early Mississippian (A.D. 600-1000), Middle Mississippian (A.D. 1100-1350), and Late Mississippian (A.D. 1350-1600) periods.

There were a total of 434 sherds by count. Of the 434 sherds, .01% (n=6) are Archaic, 5% (n=35) are Woodland, 22% (n=94) are Middle Mississippian (Savannah), .004% (n=2) are Late Mississippian (Irene), and 70% (n=297), are unidentifiable. Of the unidentifiable, (n=20) have complicated stamping, (n=5) have check stamping, (4=) are cord marked, (n=1) has a simple stamp, and (n=30) are plain. The remaining are eroded to the point that a diagnosis of surface treatment is not possible. All unidentified sherds are either sand or grit tempered. I list and discuss the ceramic types and identification criteria below.

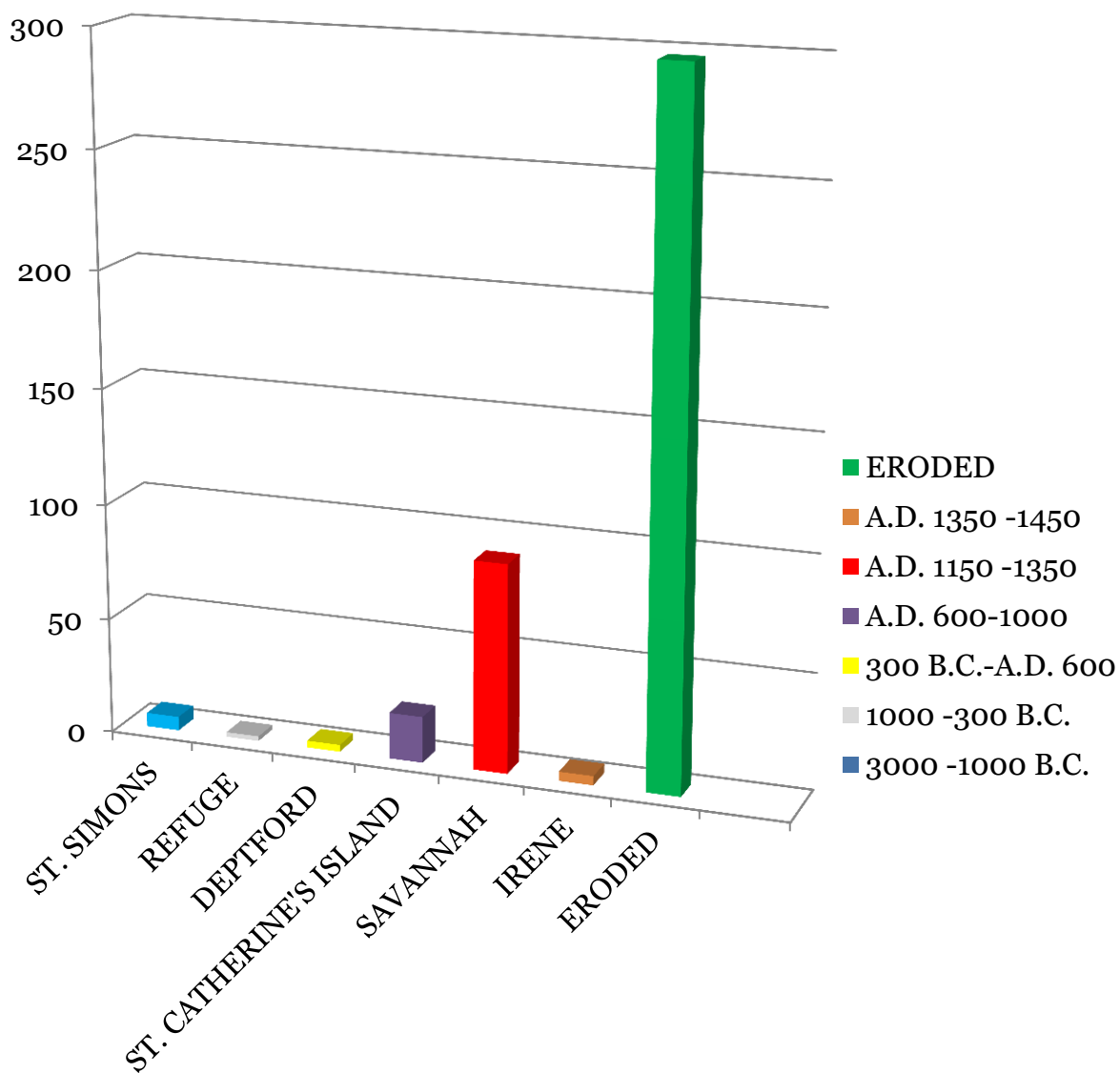


Figure 5.8: Ceramic sequences at Oak Level Mound

*Late Archaic (3000–1000 B.C.)*

The St. Simon's ceramics originate from the lower Georgia coast and are sometimes identified with Stallings Island pottery (Williams and Thompson 1998: 118). This is a fiber-tempered ceramic, which is key in its identification. It is plain or has punctate or incised surface decorations (Williams and Thompson 1998: 118). The sherd found at Oak Level Mound is plain with fiber temper (Figure 5.9).



Figure 5.9: St. Simon's Plain



*Early Woodland (1000–300 B.C.)*

The Refuge ceramic type is named for the Refuge site north of Savannah (Williams and Thompson 1998:100). This is a sand/grit tempered pottery that continues into the Deptford Phase. Surface decorations include simple stamped, dentate, punctate, and incised. At Oak Level Mound, punctate and incised decorations were found in small amounts (n=2). However, the punctate is barely noticeable and is not suitable for a photographic representation. Nonetheless, one diagnostic Simple Stamped sherd was recovered (Figure 5.10).



Figure 5.10: Refuge Simple Stamp



Figure 5.11: Refuge Simple Stamped (after Williams and Thompson 1998)

*Middle Woodland (300 B.C.–A.D. 600)*

A small amount of Deptford ceramics were found at Oak Level Mound. The geographic range for this type spans from the St. Johns River in northeast Florida into South Carolina (Williams and Thompson 1998: 37). Deptford ceramics co-occur with the nearby Cartersville variety to the west. At Oak Level Mound, I recovered two Deptford types: Chatham County Cord Marked and Deptford Check Stamped. (Figures 5.12, 5.13, 5.14, and 5.15).



Figure 5.12: Chatham County/Deptford Cord Marked



Figure 5.13: Deptford Check Stamp



Figure 5.14: Deptford Check Stamped (after Williams and Thompson 1998)

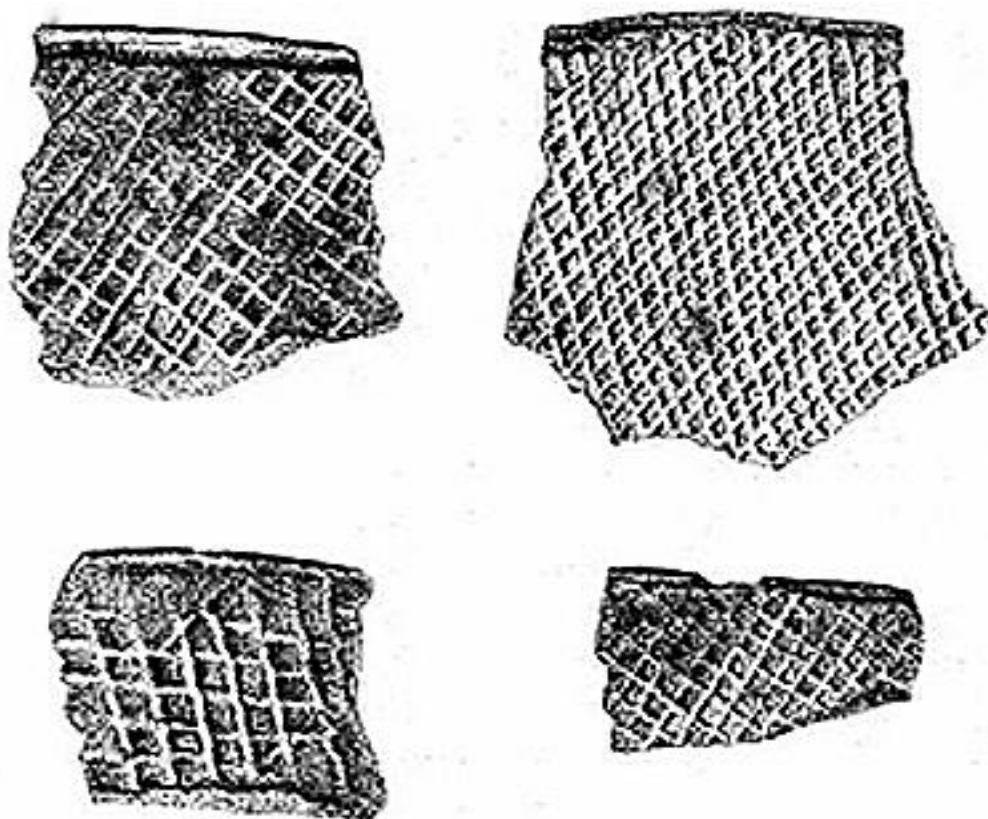


Figure 5.15: Savannah Check Stamped (after Williams and Thompson 1998)

*Late Woodland/Early Mississippian (A.D. 600-1000)*

The Late Woodland ceramics found at Oak Level Mound are minimal. A total of 17 St. Catherine's Burnished Plain/Plain sherds (Figure 5.16) were recovered from the shovel tests. Found all along the Georgia coast, these Late Woodland ceramics are unique from others because they are grog tempered. But in some cases the paste may have sand or small grit visible on the surface (Williams and Thompson 1998: 112; Caldwell and McCann 1941:50).



Figure 5.16: St. Catherine's Island Plain

*Middle Mississippian (A.D. 1150–1350)*

The Middle Mississippian period appears to be the beginning of a major occupation at Oak Level Mound. The site is dominated by Savannah phase ceramics, including plain, cord marked, and complicated stamped. At Irene, Caldwell identified several characteristics of the Savannah phase ceramics (Caldwell and McCann 1941:44; Williams and Thompson 1998: 106). The Savannah pottery is tempered with large grit and constructed through segmental fillet and coiling (Caldwell 1941: 40). Colors range from light buff to red and dark grey (Caldwell 1941:40). The plain surfaces range from finely polished to “careless smoothing” (Caldwell and McCann 1941:40; Williams and Thompson 1998). Stamping ranges from careful stamping to malleating, a technique where the potter lightly hammers the pot surface with the paddle (Caldwell 1941:40). In drawing a distinction between Savannah and the later Irene phase complicated stamping, Caldwell (1941:40) notes that the Savannah pottery is more carefully decorated than Irene.

*Savannah Fine Cord Marked (Savannah I & II, A.D. 1150–1350)*

The exterior of the cord marked vessel is often lighter in color than the interior, with the interior sometimes burnished. Caldwell (1941: 40) notes that the Savannah potter sometimes beveled the rims of the vessels with the cord wrapped paddle by rolling the paddle up onto the rim edge. The twisted cord impressions are closely spaced and fine. Cross stamping is common on Savannah Fine Cord Marked pots (Figures 5.17, 5.18, and 5.19).



Figure 5.17: Savannah Fine Cord Marked



Figure 5.18: Savanna Fine Cord Marked

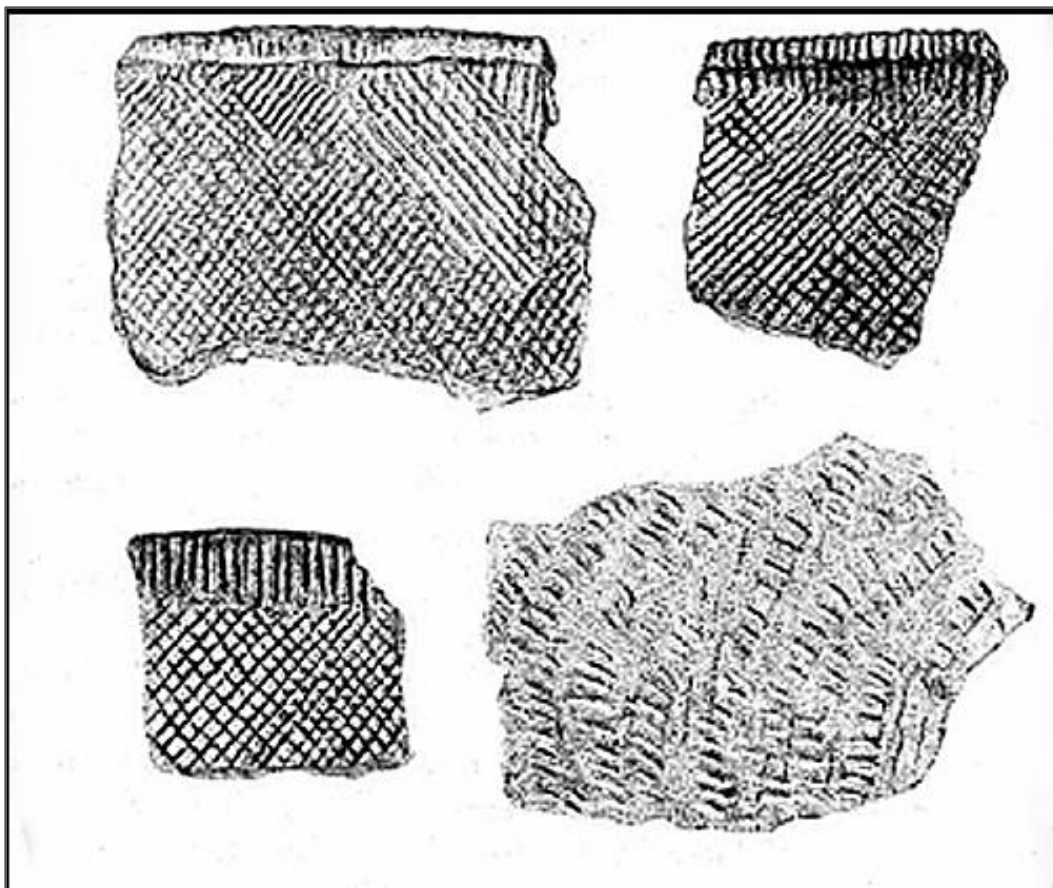


Figure 5.19: Savannah Fine Cord Marked (after Williams and Thompson 1998)



*Savannah Complicated Stamped (Savannah II, A.D. 1200–1350)*

The Savannah Complicated Stamped pottery at Oak Level Mound displays the recognizable figure 9 and concentric circles with parallel lines forming a cross inside the circles. Caldwell and McCann (1941:45) note that the stamping is generally careful and clear, although over-stamping occurs at times. (Figure 5.20 and 5.21).



Figure 5.20: Savannah Complicated Stamped

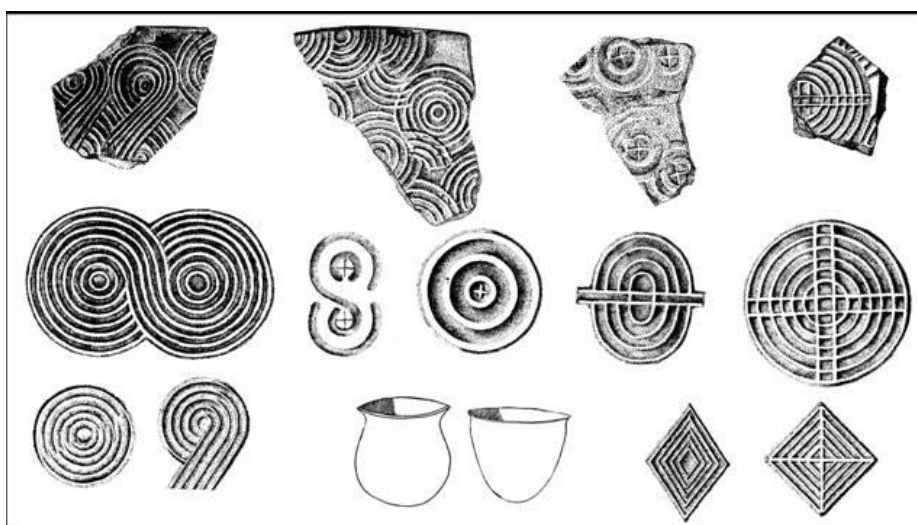


Figure 5.21: Savannah Complicated Stamped (after Williams and Thompson 1998)

*Savannah Plain (Savannah I & II, A.D. 1150–1350)*

Caldwell and McCann (1941:46) calls this burnished plain because of the burnished surface. The exteriors may be, but are not always, smooth and burnished, with burnishing occurring on the exterior and smoothing on the interior (Caldwell 1941:46). Surface colors for the plain range from yellow thru red tones, but paste will vary from site to site (Figure 5.22).



Figure 5.22: Savannah Burnished Plain

*PREDICTING A PATTERN AT OAK LEVEL MOUND (9BN67)*

The predictive map (Figure 5.24) of the St. Catherine's Island Period (A.D. 600–1000) ceramic distribution indicates that site occupation between A.D. 600 and A.D. 1000 was limited to the north of the site, and, therefore, not associated with Mound A. However, as a note of caution, these ceramics may be a product of cultural transformation where new settlements move and discard older depositions of sherds. However, as discussed (see figure 5.8), the ceramic associations suggest, then, that mound construction did not begin until the Savannah Phase (A.D. 1150–1350). Data

(Figure 5.8) suggest that, although the height of occupation at Oak Level Mound began no earlier than A.D. 1150, there were occupants at Oak Level Mound as early as A.D. 600.

During the Savannah Phase of the site occupation, there is definitive association with Mound A (Figure 5.25). It must be noted, however, that there is an abundance of shell middens to the north and northwest of the site where density maps suggest increased use. When the ceramic types are separated (Figure 5.26, 5.27, and 5.28), a pattern of hot spots emerge. Savannah Complicated Stamped pottery is most dense at shovel tests, perhaps no more than four, in the center of the site, which may suggest an elite household. Savannah Plain is associated with the area that is rich in shell midden deposits. Savannah Cord Marked is located along the periphery of the site, does not occur in the center, and has a greater distribution than either plain or complicated stamped.

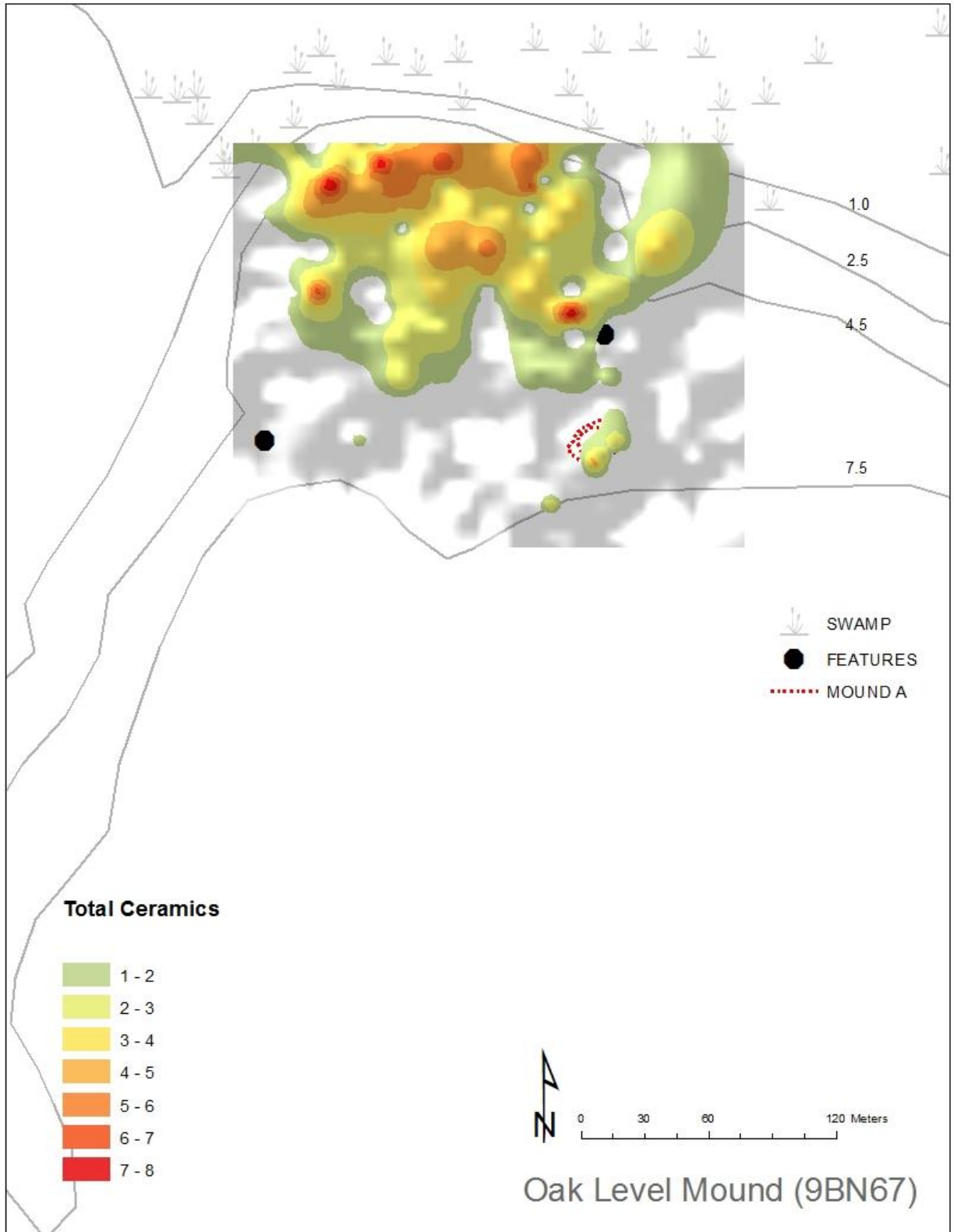


Figure 5.23: Total Ceramic Distribution

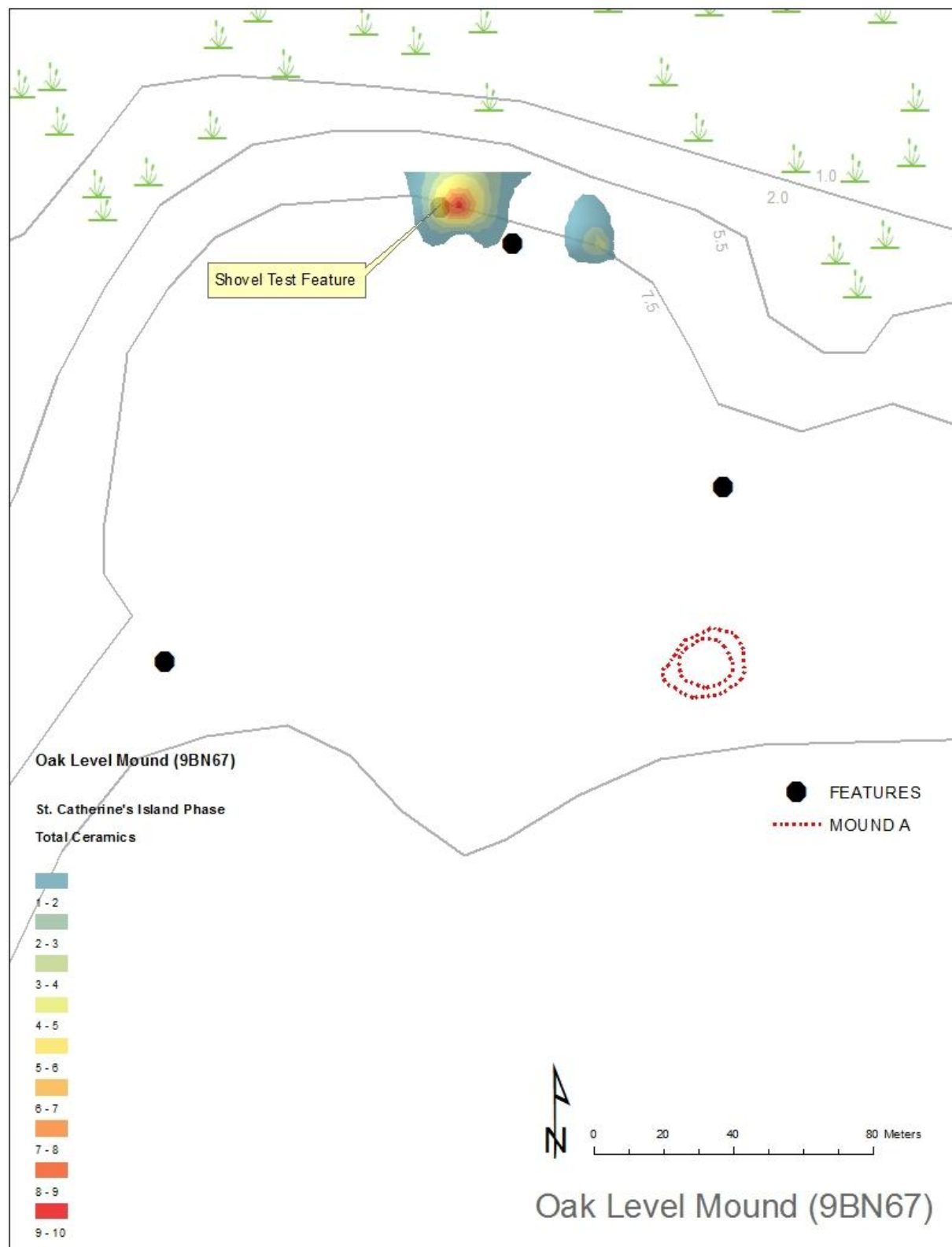


Figure 5.24: Predictive map of St. Catherine's Island ceramics

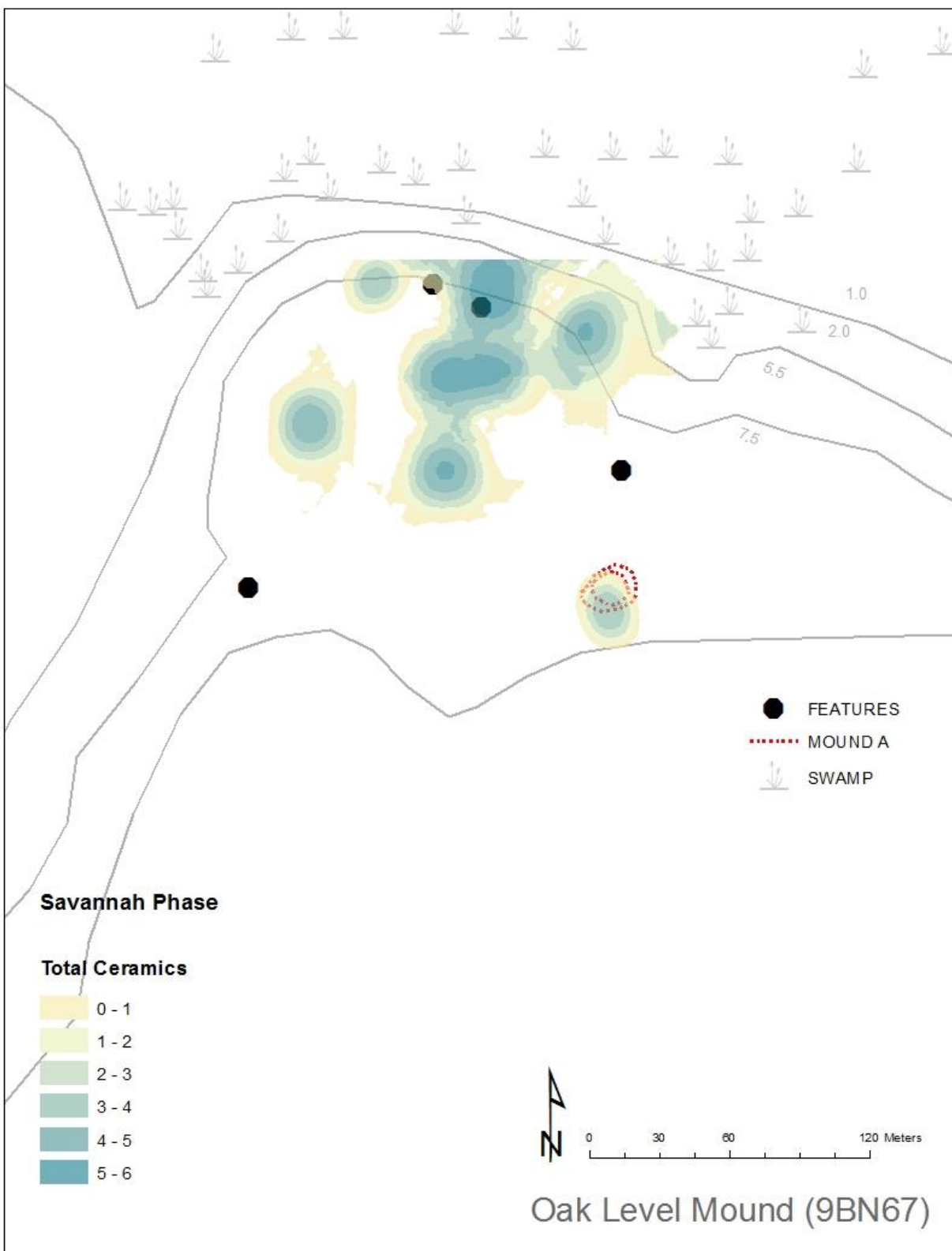


Figure 5.25: Increase in ceramics during Savannah phase

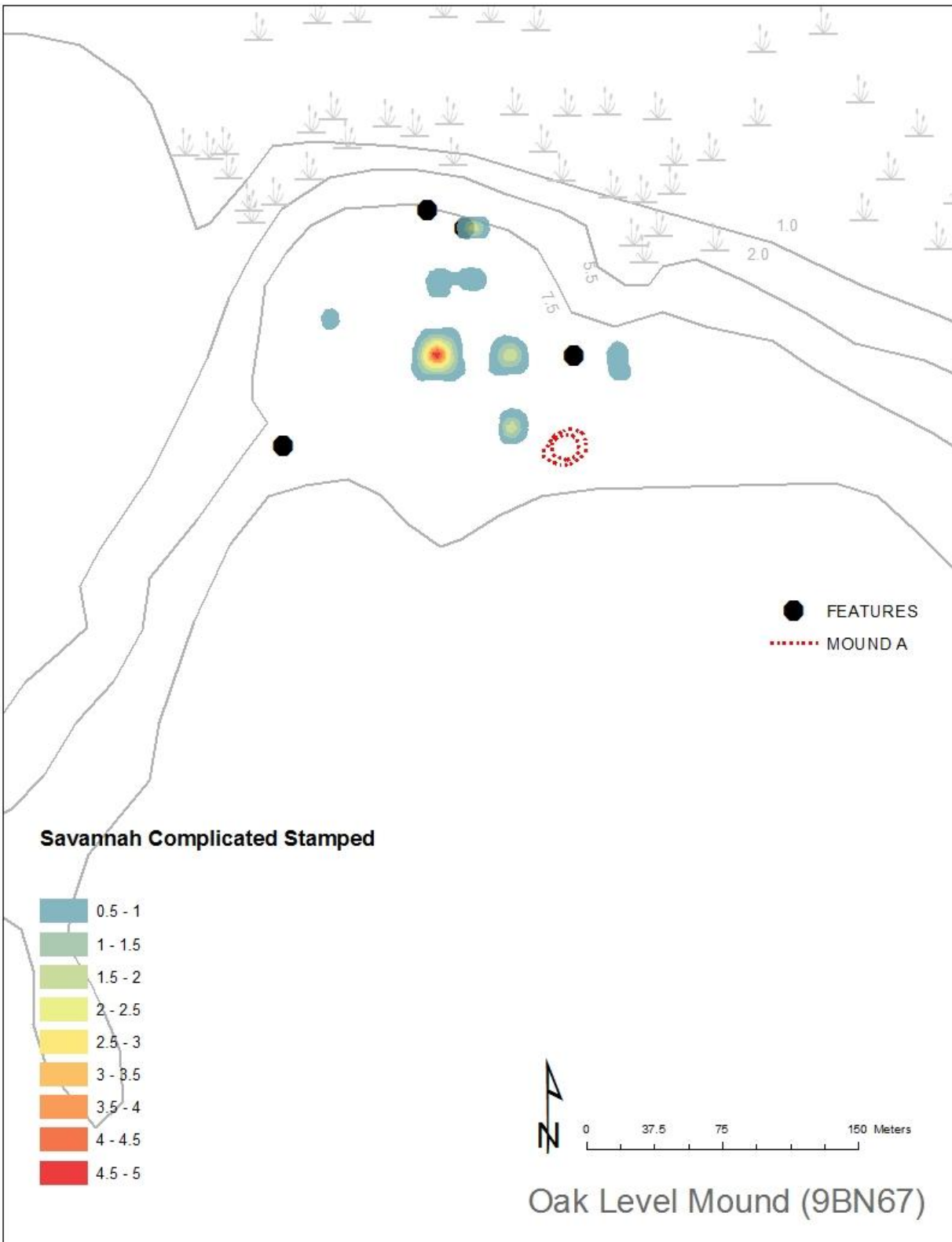


Figure 5.26: Predictive map of Complicated Stamped pottery

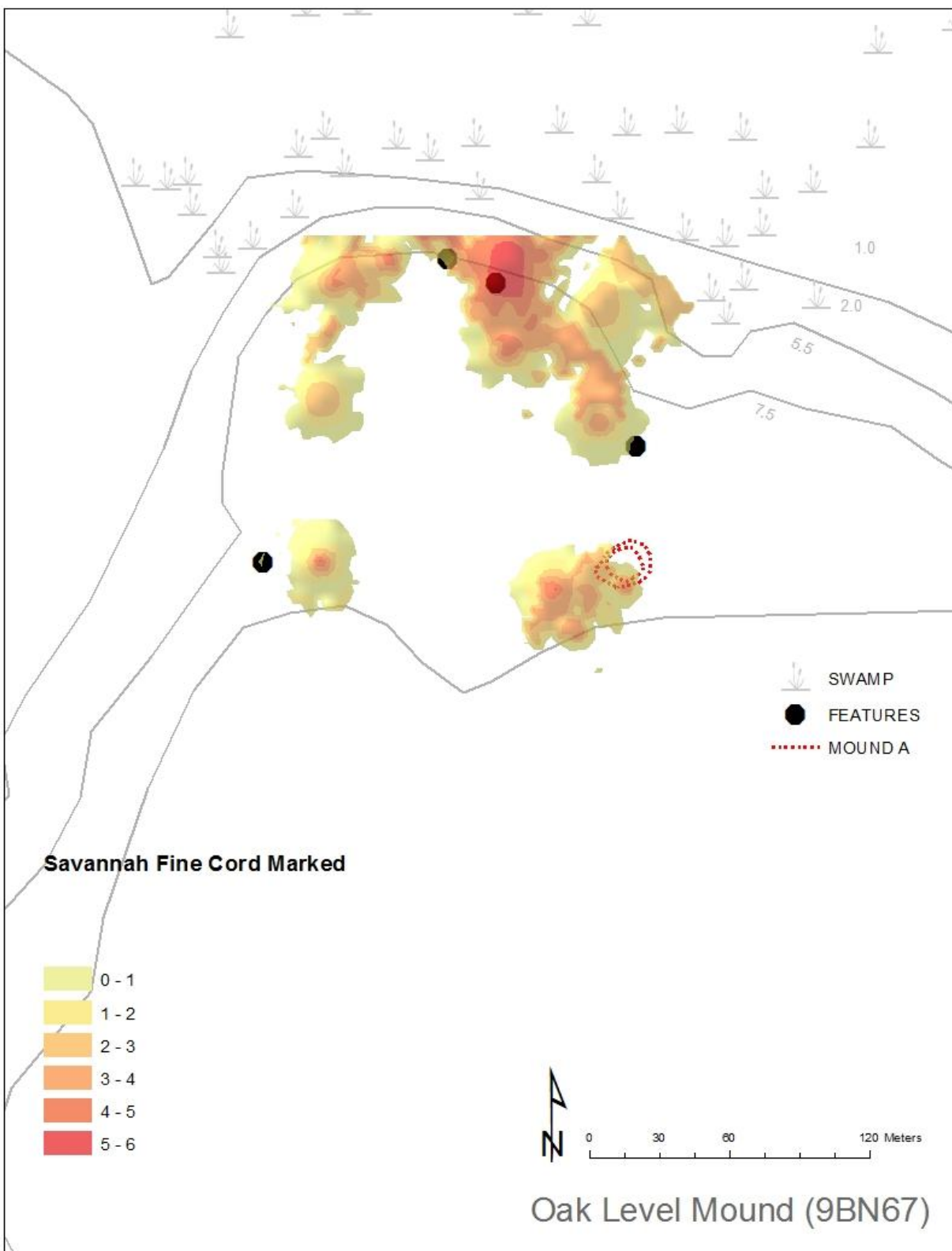


Figure 5.27: Predictive map indicating Savannah Fine Cord Marked distribution



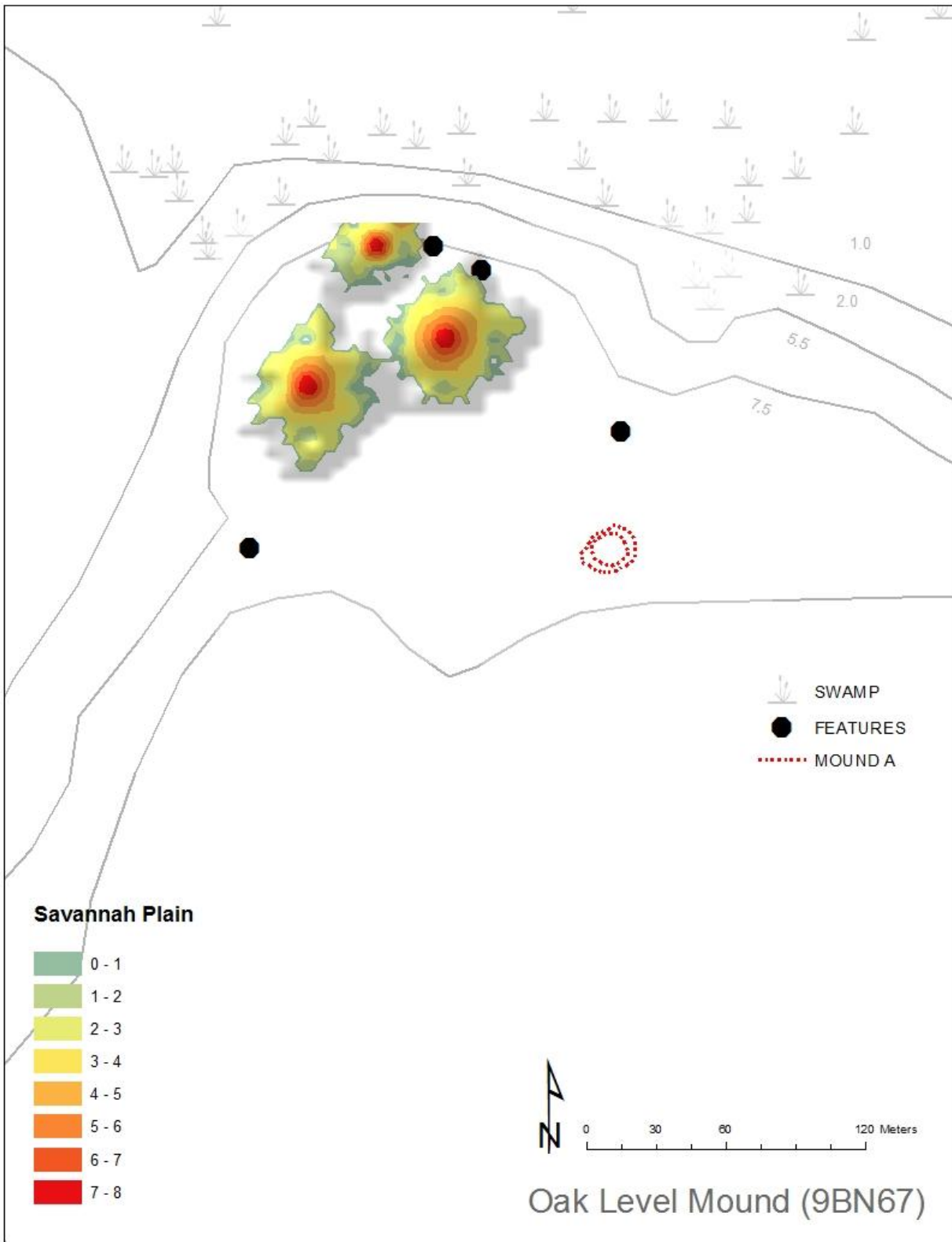


Figure 5.28: Increased density of Savannah Plain pottery around shell middens

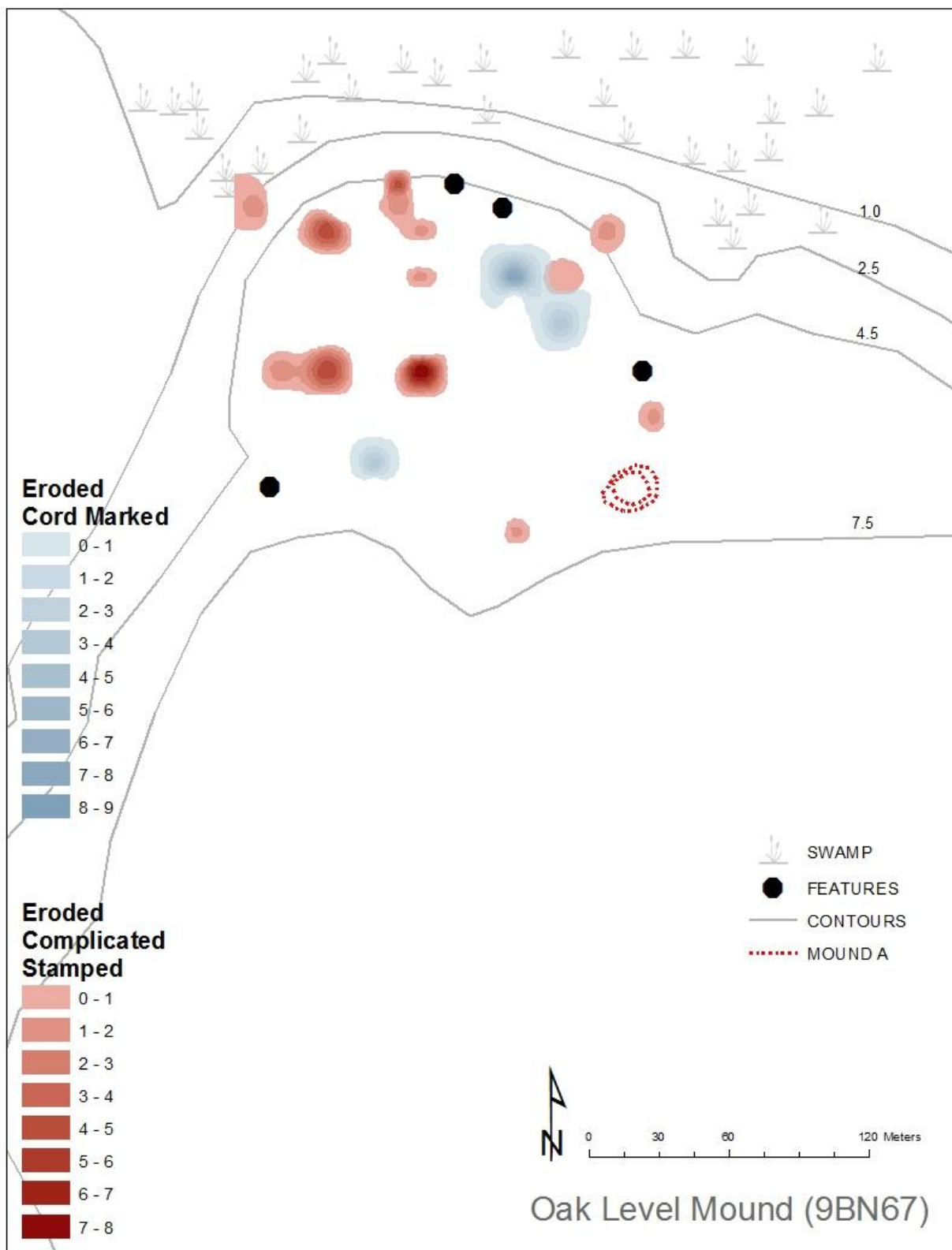


Figure 5.29: Ceramic Distribution of eroded sherds

## MOUNDS

Moss' 2012 report notes only one mound (Mound A) at the site. However, I identified two possible smaller mounds to the south of Mound A ( see Figure 5.1). I labeled these Mound B and Mound C. However, one note of caution is in order. None of the mounds have been excavated nor studied to prove or disprove the hypothesis that they are indeed burial or ceremonial mounds of any kind. The assumption that I make is based on mound morphology at Oak Level Mound and artifacts found at Oak Level Mound in association with artifacts found at other local mound sites identified in peer reviewed literature and site reports found in Georgia's archaeological site file (GNHARGIS).

### *MOUND A*

Mound A is surrounded by a mantle that is 19 m in diameter. The upper surface of the mound is 14 m in diameter and stands 1.5 m high. At some time in the past, looters destroyed the top of the mound by digging a 3 m by 0.5 m hole to expose the interior. However, no cultural remains are visible through the exposed looter's pit. I performed shovel tests at three places around the perimeter of the mantel/apron and recovered a small amount of plain pottery along with the human remains (see bone analysis). The mound was undisturbed during my fieldwork and the bone was returned to the shovel test pit as discussed above (Figure 5.30).



Figure 5.30: North side of Mound A

## MOUND B

Mound B ( see Figure 5.1) is smaller than Mound A and located 65 m south of Mound A. It has a total diameter of 9 m and a height of approximately 1 m. There is a partial mantel/apron on the east side of the mound. No shovel tests were performed on the mound. Nonetheless, it does appear flatter on top and is flanked by two looter holes on the north and south sides. Because of the size of this mound and the surrounding vegetation, a good representational picture was not obtained.

## *MOUND C*

Mound C appears to be a funerary mound. It measures 6 m in diameter by 1 m tall and has small mantels on the east and west sides. Originally I thought the mounded earth may be a shell midden heap. I placed one shovel test into the center of the mound

and discovered a large amount of stratified cemented bone, ash, and charcoal. The shovel test pit extended to a depth of 40 cm, at which point I stopped digging and documented the find with photos and sketches (Figures 5.31 and 5.32).



Figure 5.31: Top of Mound C from south facing north

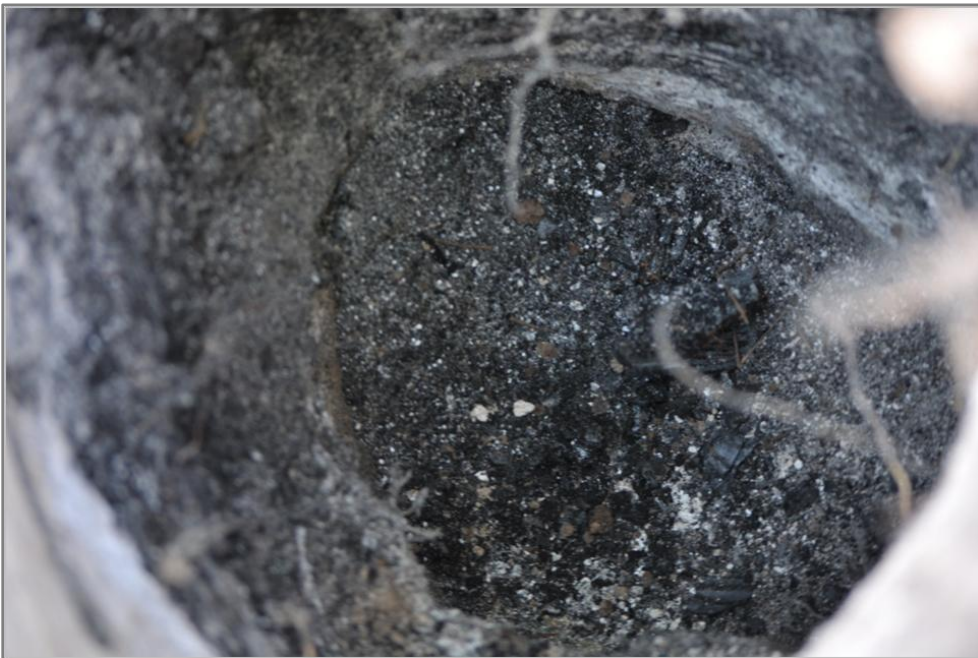


Figure 5.32: Shovel test in Mound C 40 cmbs

## CONTEMPORANEOUS MOUND SITES NEAR OAK LEVEL MOUND

Coastal and Interior Mississippian sites are similar in a few ways, but different in many others. In particular, there are a few major differences worth noting. The wide scale adoption of maize agriculture is evident at major centers in the interior and populations were more likely to be aggregated. In addition, major ceremonial centers are more common on the interior as well (Anderson 1992). Along the coast, however, only one major ceremonial center is known of at Irene. Mississippian groups rely less on maize and more on gathering resources such as nuts and estuarine resources. Additionally, Mississippian sites along the Georgia coast are sparsely populated, resembling ancestral Woodland hunter-gatherers (Anderson 1994; Cook 1986).

David Anderson (1992: 219) notes that Middle Mississippian hamlets along the Savannah River basin were almost always located away from main channels, a phenomenon he attributes to individuals wanting to escape tribute burden or, perhaps, hide from warriors. Since Oak Level Mound is located away from a main channel and appears to have risen to the height of occupation during the Middle Mississippian period, I have identified several local contemporaneous sites that exhibit similar features. Hally (1993) and Pluckhahn (2002), building on the work of Stepanoitis (1978) and Smith (1978), have identified Mississippian settlement patterns, emphasizing distance between administrative centers, and noting that each center, whether secondary or primary, appear to be located less than 18 km or more than 32 km from each other. Those within the 18 km region are considered part of the same polity, while those greater than 32 km are connected to a different polity. Still, within each administrative center there lies a “sparsely inhabited” zone of 10 km. It is this description that I have focused on in identifying similar settlements, and I have followed

Pluckhahn's (2002) model of clustering, taking only those sites within the Savannah/Ogeechee cluster.

*LEWIS MOUND (9BN39)*

The Lewis Mound (Figure 5.33) site is located on the Fort Stewart Military Reservation 16 km northwest of Oak Level Mound, following the natural direction of the Ogeechee River. Like Oak Level Mound, Lewis Mound is located some distance from any major channel on a terrace overlooking a back swamp. The Canoochee River, located 1 km north of Lewis Mound by, flows from west to east and joins the Ogeechee River 2.5 km to the east of Lewis Mound.

At the Lewis Mound site, Savannah ceramics accounted for more than 1/3 of the entire ceramic assemblage (Pluckhahn 1996: 90). Of the Savannah pottery, 483 were plain, 31 were cord marked, and 23 were complicated stamp (Pluckhahn 1996: 90). In addition, Pluckhahn notes that Irene ceramics were found in small amounts. In addition, St. Catherine's ceramics appear to be the beginning of an increase in site occupation, with Savannah phase ceramics representing the height of occupation. The site occupants appear to have disappeared during the Late Mississippian period or Irene phase. The Lewis Mound is 15 m in diameter and 1 m high and is similar to Mound A at Oak Level Mound. Ceramic activity is diminished in the area immediately surrounding the mound. With these descriptions in mind, I have found Lewis Mound to share attributes with Oak Level Mound.

*CEDAR GROVE (9CH19)*

The Cedar Grove site is located 12 km to the north of Oak Level Mound. The site is situated between the Vernon and Forrest Rivers on a terrace overlooking a river swamp. The Vernon River is located 2 km to the east of Cedar Grove and the Forrest River is located 2km to the south (Figure 5.34). A Works Progress crew excavated the site sometime between 1931 and 1941, locating a sand burial mound 16 meters in diameter by 1 meter high. The mound dates to either the St. Catherine's or Savannah period (Depratter 1991).

*HAVEN HOME / INDIAN KING'S TOMB (9CH15)*

The Haven Home site was excavated by Antonio Waring Jr. in 1929 when he was just a boy. The mound was 15 m in diameter and 1.5 m high, containing several burials and Savannah Fine Cord Marked pottery. Although now destroyed, It was located 1.7 km to the north of the Vernon River on a terrace overlooking a river swamp (Waring 1977), 6 km from Oak Grove, and 18 km from Oak Level Mound (Figure 5.35).

*OSSABAW ISLAND (9CH160)*

The Mounds at Ossabaw Island (Figure 5.36) were discovered by Moore in 1896. The Mound site is 12 km to the east of Oak Level Mound. The site is located on a bluff overlooking Cane Patch, Cabbage Garden, and Buckhead Creeks. Buckhead Creek is located to the west of the site and extends to within 0.5 km of the location. Cane Patch Creek is 2 km to the north of the site, and Cabbage Garden Creek is 2 km to the east. Midden heaps are located to the southern and northern fringes of the site. Moore (1897) excavated three mounds on the site. Mound A, located in the central locus of the site, was 16 m in diameter by 0.6 m high. He recovered plain and fine cord marked pottery belonging to the Savannah Phase. Mound B. located to the southwest of the site, was 20



m in diameter and 0.4 m high. Although the pottery was difficult to identify, it is likely from the Savannah phase (Depratter 1991). Mound C was located beyond out beyond the two previous mounds and the dimensions are unclear in previous reports. In addition, only Irene pottery was found in association with this mound. An additional mound was identified southwest of mound B in which 84 human burials and 11 dog burials were discovered (Depratter 1991; Moore 1896). This sand mound was 24 m in diameter by 1.2 m high. Also found in context were Savannah pottery, a bear molar and femur, shell beads, and pierced pearls (Moore 1897).

#### *DEPTFORD (9CH2A)*

Although the Deptford site (Figure 5.37) represents a number of short to long term occupations ranging from 3000 B.C. to A.D. 900, no major occupation can be distinguished through ceramics. However, a mound measuring 23 m in diameter by 1.2 m high was discovered 1/2 mile from the Deptford village and excavated in 1939. However, Depratter (1991) warns that there is no evidence that the mound is associated with the village. The mound was not classified under the same site number as the main Deptford site for two reasons: First, the main Deptford site exhibited several occupation phases and was scattered with nonmound burials. Second, the conical sand mound is associated with the two construction phases of St. Catherine's and Savannah (Depratter 1991). The Deptford site mound is located 28 km northeast of Oak Level Mound, 28 km east of Lewis Mound, 30 km north of Ossabaw Island, 10 km northeast of Haven Home, and 11 km southeast of the Irene site, which is considered a possible chiefly center during the Savannah phase occupation of the site (Anderson 1994; Caldwell and McCann 1941; Pluckhahn 2002).

*IRENE (9CH1)*

The Irene site (Figure 5.38) was located on a bluff overlooking the Savannah River south of what is now downtown Savannah and is considered the largest Mississippian compound on the Georgia coast. Although the Irene site was occupied at various times as evident in the ceramic types found on site, the major occupations occurred during the Savannah and Irene phases during a time period spanning A.D. 1150 to 1350. At Irene, there was one large platform mound surrounded by palisaded walls that was constructed in eight phases and an adjoining conical burial mound 16 m by 0.7 m. Later, during the Irene phase, a rotunda and mortuary compound was added.

Caldwell (1941) establishes the cultural chronology at Irene through ceramic sequencing. The first seven mound construction phases were all associated with Savannah ceramics. It was during the Savannah phase that the platform mound and burial mound was in use. However, the mound was increased in height, rounded on top, and lacked housing features on top during the later Irene phase (A.D. 1350-1450). During the Irene phase, less class stratification existed at the site, with the site experiencing more common household settlements and an increase in nonmound flex burials (Caldwell 1941). Therefore, the site was most likely used as a ceremonial center and chiefly compound during the Savannah phase (A.D. 1150-1350) and later transformed around A.D. 1350 into less stratified settlements, disappearing sometime later around AD1450 (Caldwell 1941).

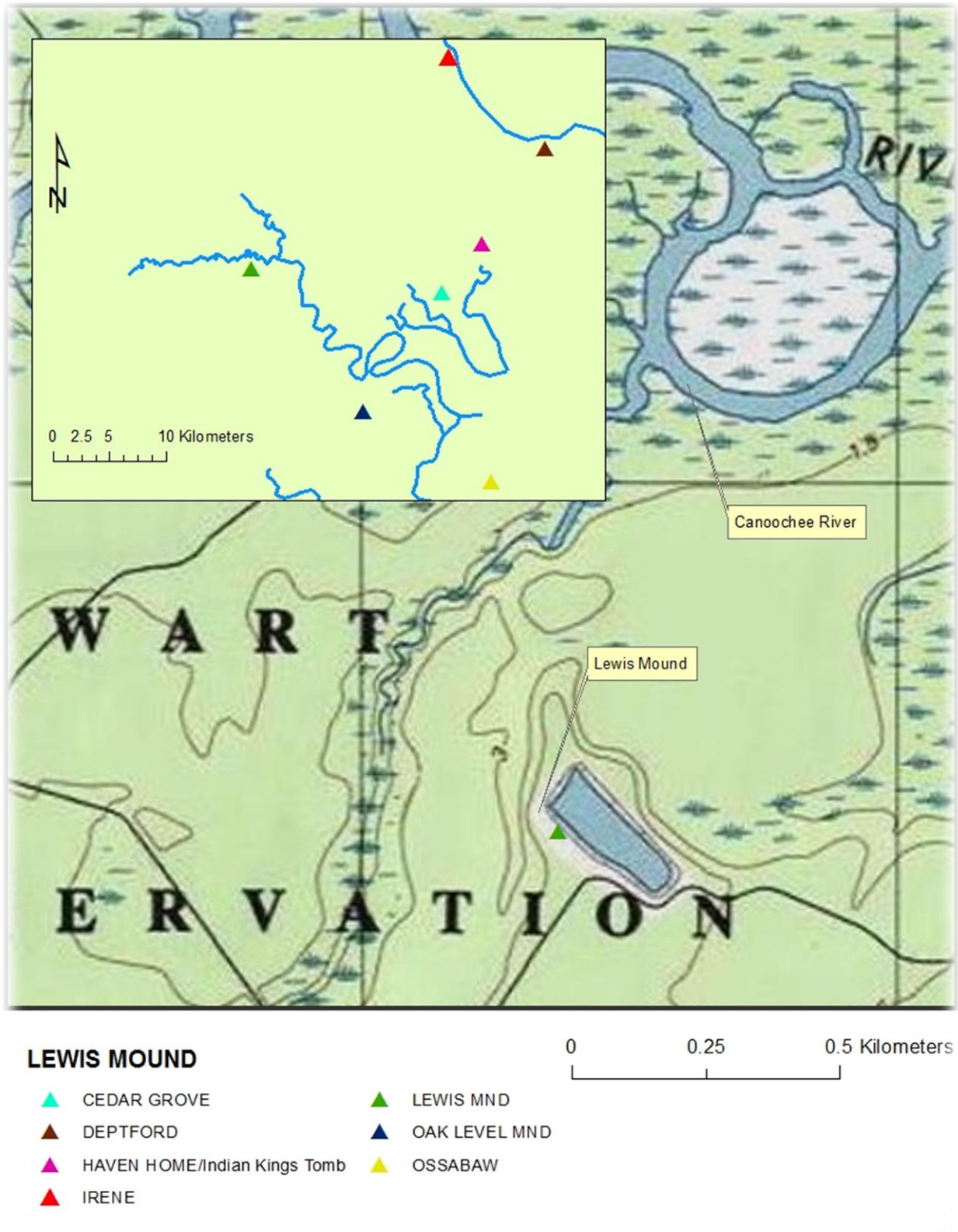


Figure 5.33: Lewis Mound northwest of Oak Level Mound

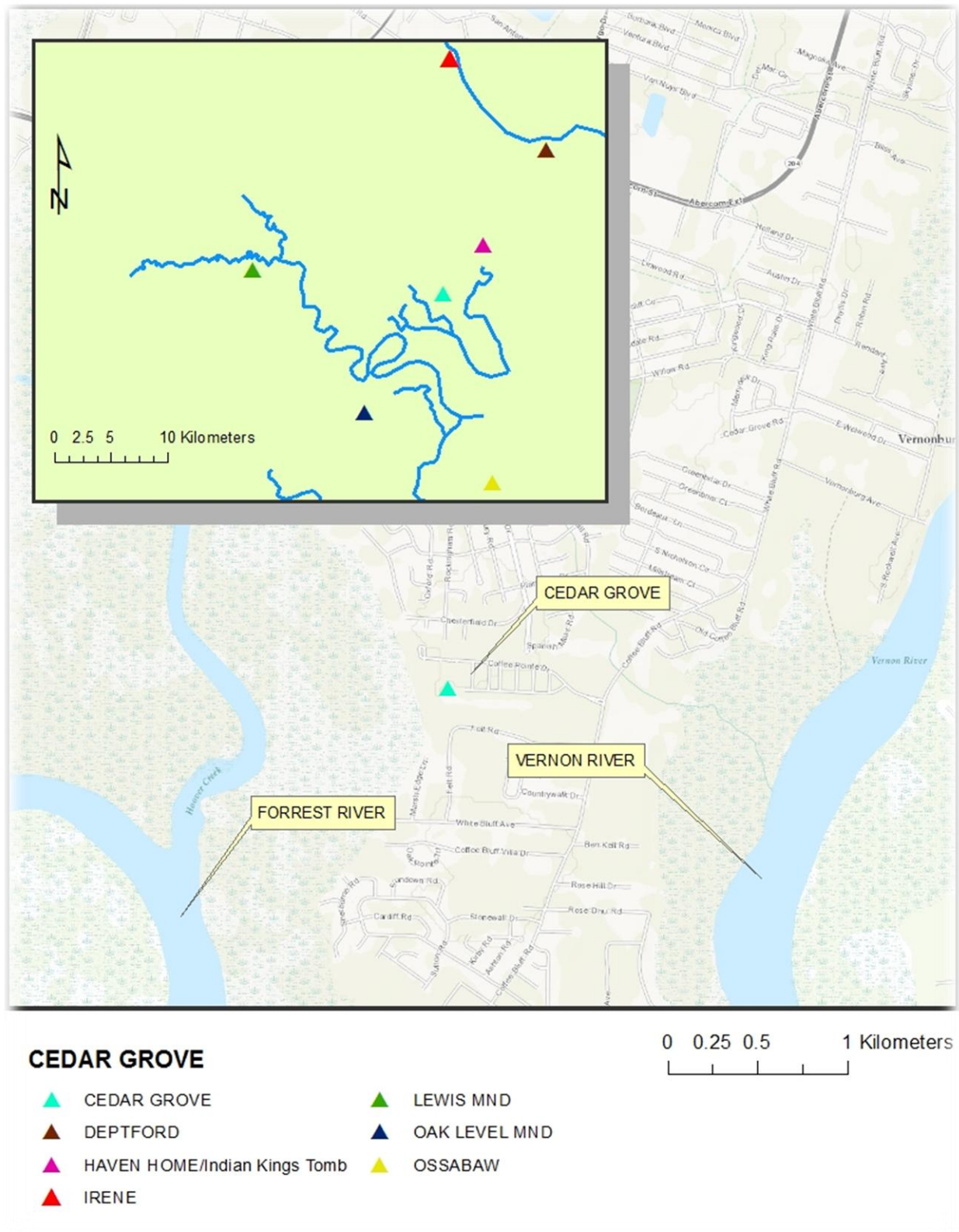


Figure 5.34: Cedar Grove Mound north of Oak Level Mound

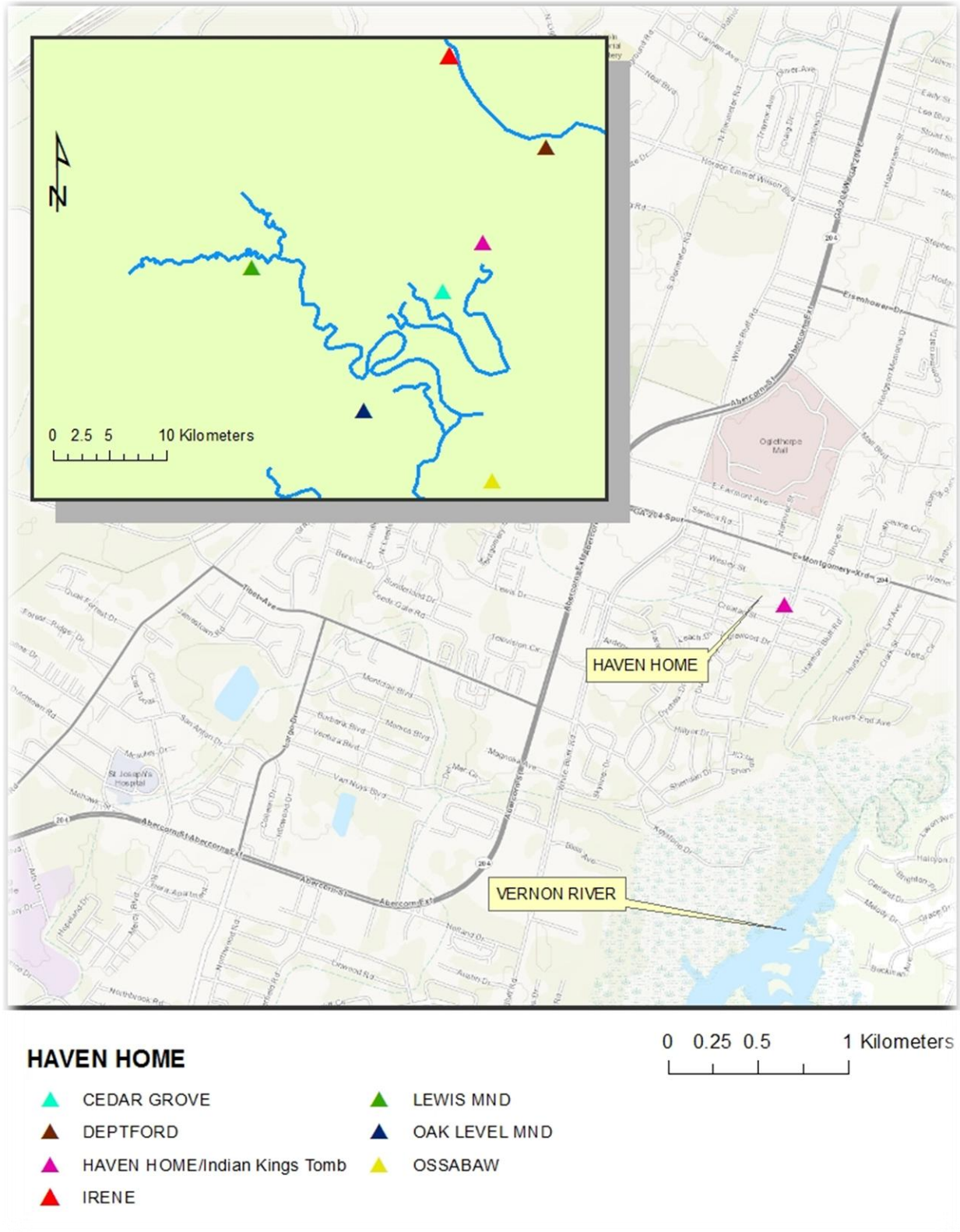


Figure 5.35: Haven Home Mound north of Oak Level Mound

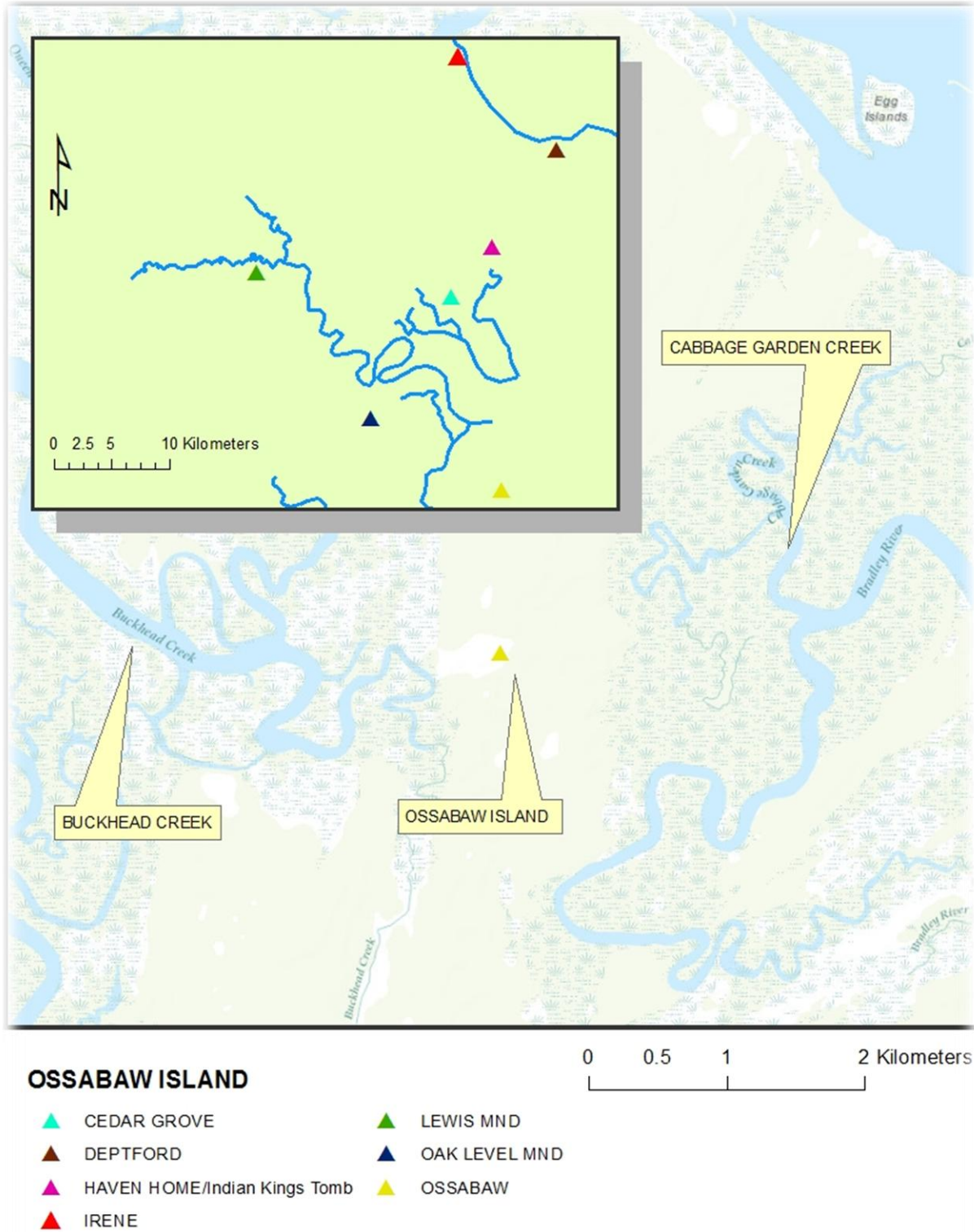


Figure 5.36: Ossabaw Island Mound east of Oak Level Mound

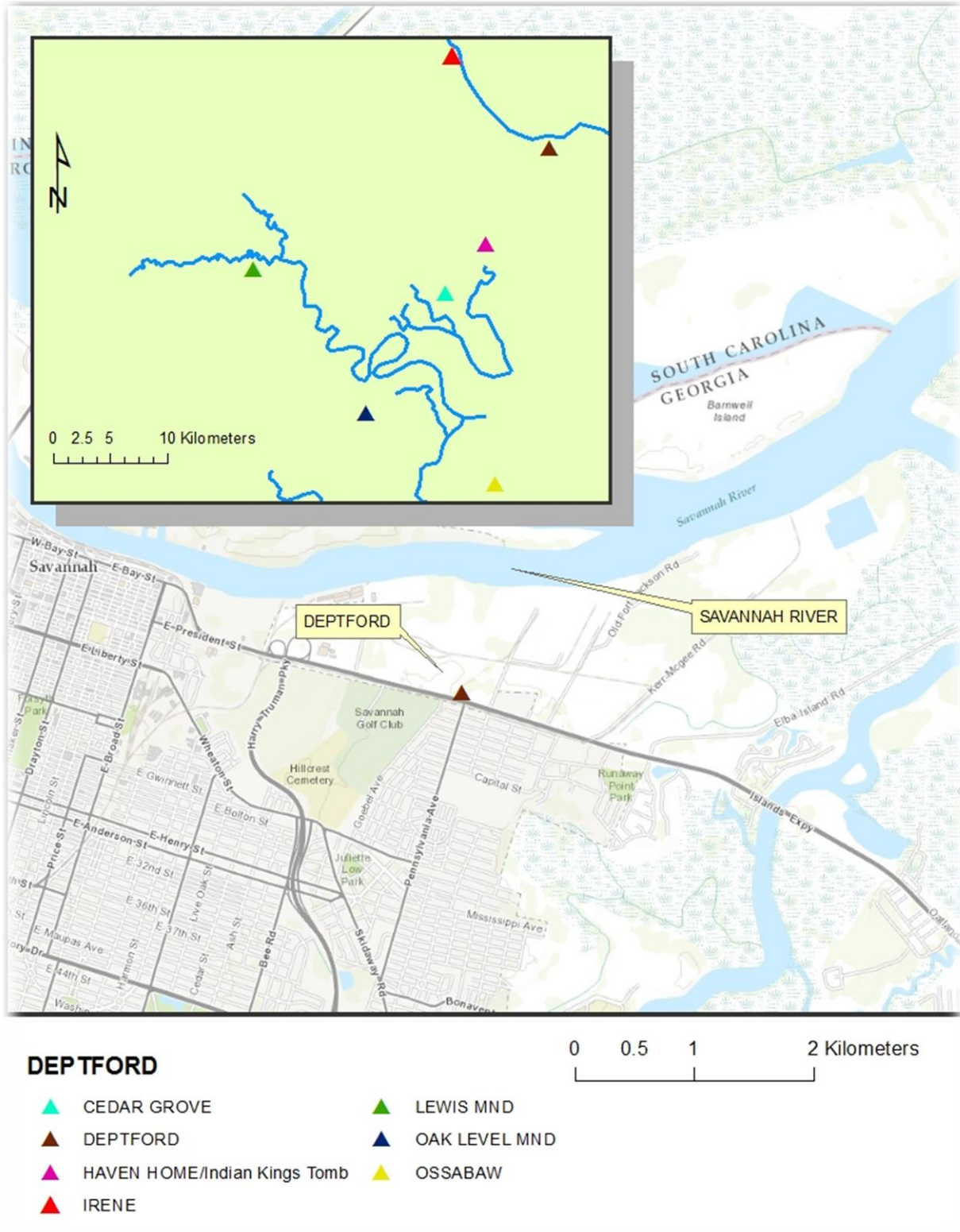


Figure 5.37: Deptford Mound north of Oak Level Mound

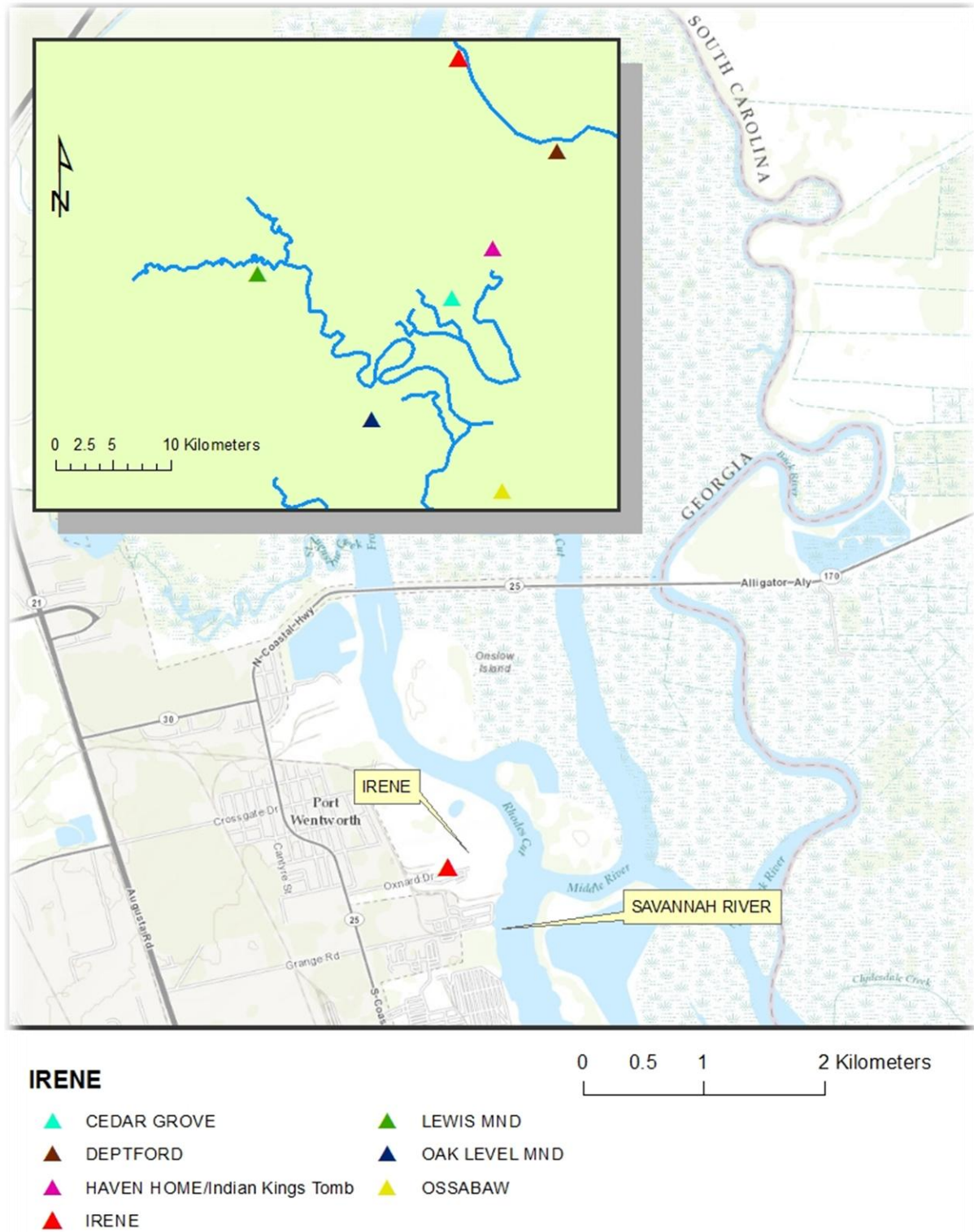


Figure 5.38: Irene Mound north of Oak Level Mound



## DISCUSSION

Reconstructing the past at Oak Level Mound is no easy task. The ceramic distribution there spans a millennium. An emergent pattern can be distinguished based on an increase in ceramic types beginning A.D. 600 and reaching an apex between A.D. 1150-1350. Site location is another interesting phenomenon at Oak Level Mound. The site is located on a back swamp more than 1 km from any major channel. Although assumptions can be made about this anomaly, there is evidence at contemporaneous sites within the region that supports the idea that the people at Oak Level Mound, although loosely connected to other sites in the region through ceramics and mound-building traditions, were not wholly dependent on a single socio-political system. I build my case about Oak Level Mound using ceramic data recovered at the site, computer analysis of intrasite patterns, and comparison with local contemporaneous sites.

### *CERAMICS, EMERGENT CULTURES, AND INTRASITE USE*

#### *Ceramic Patterns*

Although a small amount of Archaic and Woodland ceramics were recovered at Oak Level Mound, an emergent pattern begins in the St. Catherine's Island pottery phase, reaches an apex during the Savannah phase, and almost completely disappears during the Late Mississippian Irene phase. This pattern can be seen in the ceramic densities ( see Figure 5.8), which span four millennia at Oak Level Mound. It is apparent that small amounts of Archaic and Woodland activity took place as early as 3000 B.C. and as late as A.D. 600, but none that resembles extensive site use.

The depositional process at Oak Level Mound seems to have taken a natural course (Figure 5.39). There is not much soil disturbance other than looter holes, one located in the top of Mound A and several others located to the north and northwest of

the site. St. Simon's pottery was recovered from the deepest levels of shovel tests between 70 and 100 cmbs. Woodland pottery occurred between 40 and 70 cmbs, and Mississippian pottery appeared in the top 40 cmbs.

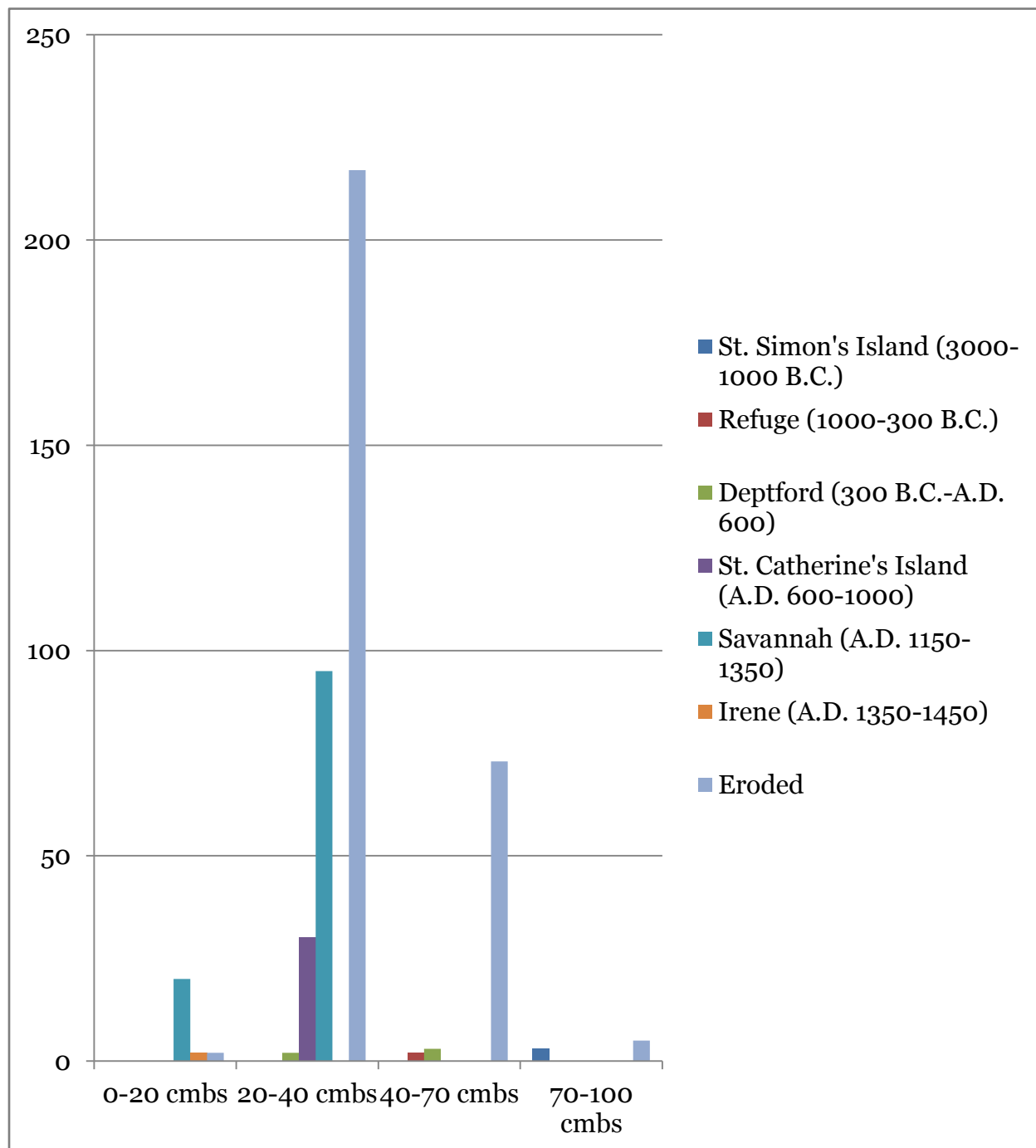


Figure 5.39: Ceramic deposition at Oak Level Mound

Ceramic patterns at Oak Level Mound suggest stratified site use, mostly during the Savannah phase (A.D. 1150-1350). At the site center, Savannah Complicated Stamped pottery is most dense. To be sure that I missed nothing in regards to the Complicated Stamped pottery, I created a ceramic density map of all unidentifiable Complicated Stamped pottery using Inverse Distance Weighting, and a similar pattern emerged. It is clear, then, that most Complicated Stamped pottery, whether Savannah or unidentified, was used in the center of the site. Therefore, I interpret this map reconstruction as indicative of a place at site center, perhaps a house, perhaps a ceremonial area or meeting place, where status goods were used exclusively.

The Savannah Cord Marked pottery, a more utilitarian pottery, is displayed in a circular pattern along the site periphery at Oak Level Mound and not at all in the center. This pattern suggests activities of common people who were going about daily activities that were restricted from the center of the site. This could have included gathering and processing of nuts or even exchange among the commoner households at Oak Level Mound, which may have been located along the periphery of the site. Crook (1986) notes that villages were sometimes nucleated along the Georgia coast. While this certainly applies to larger villages, it could also apply to smaller hamlets or settlements. This nucleated pattern is displayed well in the Oak Level Mound ceramic density maps.

According to the ceramic density maps, the people at Oak Level Mound began using the site as early as A.D. 600 in a location along the swamp edge to the north. This area is no larger than 60 x 40 m and may represent a small gathering camp. By A.D. 1150, there was increased site use. Perhaps shell collection was at an all-time high at Oak Level Mound, or perhaps Red Bird Creek, which is located 5.7 km to the east of Oak Level Mound, extended along the site edge due to rising sea levels. The daily practices of

the people at Oak Level Mound can and are observable through a patterning of the data. The only uncertainty that remains is what were the conditions like there?

### *Mound Use*

While some Middle Woodland burial mounds are found along the coast of Georgia, they are rare (Anderson 2004). At Oak Level Mound, Mound A is similar to mounds found at the local and contemporaneous sites of Haven Home, Lewis Mound, Cedar Grove, Irene, Ossabaw Island, and Deptford (Caldwell and McCann 1941; Depratter 1991; Plackhahn 1997;). At the Deptford site, Depratter (1991) notes that the mound construction there was probably begun and finished in several phases, beginning during the Late Woodland St. Catherine's phase (A.D. 600-1000) and ending during the Middle Mississippian Savannah phase (A.D. 1150-1350).

By observing the predictive maps (Figures 5.25 and 5.26) for Oak Level Mound, a site use pattern can be inferred. The total ceramic distribution map for Savannah phase pottery (Figure 5.25) suggests that the mound was indeed in use only during the Savannah phase. In general, site use was going on to the northwest of the mound along the swamp edge and in an area where the shell middens are located. Figures 5.24, 5.25, 5.26, and 5.27 suggest a segregated pattern of site use. Savannah Plain and Cord Marked pottery were recovered almost exclusively in the northern portion of the site, while Savannah Complicated Stamped pottery, a pottery type that is commonly used by elite members of society (Anderson 1997), is located only in very small amounts to the north of the site, and in higher density in the site center closest to the mound. I am using Caldwell and McCann's (1941) Irene investigation to interpret this pattern. At Irene, the conical burial mound was located very near and almost connected to the platform chiefly mound (Caldwell and McCann 1941). Since the Savannah Complicated Stamped

pottery is assumed to have been exclusively associated with elite members of the Mississippian society along the coast of Georgia (Anderson 1994) and elite households were commonly attached to burial mounds, it is possible that the ceramic distribution (Figures 5.25, 5.26, and 5.27) represents common households to the north of the site and an elite establishment in the central locus.

#### *SITE LOCATION AND LANDSCAPE INTERPRETATION*

From the beginning, I have had one major question that puzzled me throughout my research. Why is Oak Level Mound located on a back swamp so far away from any major river channel? But first, in order to answer this question, I must establish a connection between Oak Level Mound and other regional contemporaneous sites (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1: Regional sites similar to Oak Level Mound

<b>SITE</b>	<b>MOUND SIZE</b>	<b>DIST. FROM RIVER</b>	<b>PERIOD</b>
<b>OAK LEVEL MOUND(9BN67)</b>	19 m x 1.5m	2.4 km	A.D. 1000-1350
<b>LEWIS MOUND (9BN39)</b>	15m x 1m	1.2 km	A.D. 1000-1350
<b>CEDAR GROVE (9CH19)</b>	16m x 1m	1.5 km	A.D. 1000-1350
<b>HAVEN HOME (9CH15)</b>	15m x 1.5m	1.6 km	A.D. 1000-1350
<b>OSSABAW ISLAND (9CH16o)</b>	17m x 0.7m	1.3 km	A.D. 1000-1450
<b>DEPTFORD (9CH2A)</b>	23m x 1.2m	0.9 km	A.D. 1000-1450
<b>IRENE (9CH1)</b>	16m x 0.7m	0.5 km	A.D. 1000-1450

With the exception of the Deptford, Irene, and Ossabaw sites, all other Savannah phase occupied sites are more than 1 km from any major river channel. Oak Level

Mound is the farthest from any major river channel at more than 3 km from the Ogeechee River. While major river channels were used for various modes of transportation and daily activities, they also served as major transportation routes for warriors traveling to and from the region, officials from chiefly centers collecting tribute from surrounding farmsteads and settlements, the back swamp location of Oak Level Mound becomes less an anomaly. Anderson (1992) states that site locations and strategies can be examined in the region by looking at the chiefly center at Irene. When the Irene chiefdom was most socially stratified (based on the period of platform mound usage) during the Savannah Middle Mississippian period, outlying sites appeared farther away from river channels, perhaps, as I believe, as a means of resistance of the Irene burden on the region.

In addition, it is also entirely possible that the elite member or members at Oak Level Mound were permanent residences striving to lead the community in a different direction. This elite class may have been established at Oak Level Mound over several decades or even a century. Other evidence includes the almost exclusive use of utilitarian pottery on the periphery at Oak Level Mound, which may indicate common people going about everyday living.

But to further understand Oak Level Mound, I employ Pauketat's idea of a commonwealth of the people at Oak Level Mound and other regional settlements whose daily activities were forming and reforming the world around them. One idea is that the common people at Lewis Mound, Cedar Grove, Haven Home, and Ossabaw Island were a part of a "commonwealth" or a movement, as early as A.D. 1150, that came into the region well after the Irene polity was established. These people(Irene), who may have transposed a new tradition onto the region that became known as the Irene phase,

practiced resistance daily while continuing to use and exchange Savannah style pottery. Later, sometime after A.D. 1350, a new tradition ( related to the Irene phase occupation at the Irene site) in the region may have taken hold and the people at Oak Level Mound abandoned the old idea of burial mounds and pottery with Savannah decorations. Shortly thereafter, they abandoned the site altogether.

### *Putting It All Together*

Barbara Bender (1999) notes that we look at landscape through a “western gaze.” Our ideas and viewpoints work to objectify the world around us, looking at historical landscapes in a romantic view. But how do we get beyond our subjective perspective to understand the landscape? We must identify community references, employing an emic approach rather than a broad, general etic approach. Understanding meaning is key. Landscape can express conceptions and may be interpreted differently by different people. But the most important conceptual meaning is the one of the builder and creator.

The mound(s) at Oak Level Mound establish something there that makes a statement about the land. Monumental architecture is the material aspect of practice (Pauketat 2000). But if it is as Pauketat (2000:114) says, and practice is the “historical and continuous enactments of people’s ethos and attitudes”, then the attitudes of the people at Oak Level Mound shifted within a span of 300 years. There is, however, a narrative that took place at Oak Level Mound. One such narrative is that at around A.D. 600 people began to inhabit Oak Level Mound in small proportions, perhaps using the northern portion of the site for shell and nut gathering. These people were probably semi-sedintary, moving across the landscape with the seasons. By A.D. 1150, a tradition had emerged at Oak Level Mound. A burial mound and Complicated Stamped and Cord

Marked pottery were a part of the daily experience of the people there. These people, perhaps resisted the “Savannah tradition” over time, exchanging the conical burial mound for a funerary mound and phasing out Savannah traditional pottery. By A.D. 1350, perhaps they had located another site or assimilated into neighboring villages where ideas and traditions, less rooted in the hierarchal dominance of rulers, were easier to substantiate or defend.

Another possible narrative is that Oak Level Mound represents a long standing Savannah tradition, also represented at regional sites and at Irene. The people at Oak Level Mound may have resisted the new Late Mississippian Irene tradition (A.D. 1350-1450) to the point that economic survivability was no longer possible. The unintended consequences of this resistance may have caused the people at Oak Level Mound to become tethered to a new group of people, and, thereafter, forced to assimilate into better economic circumstances. At Irene, the stratified society that rose to prominence during the Savannah period almost completely disappeared from the region by A.D. 1350. Oak Level Mound was no longer occupied and the Irene site had become less stratified, evident by a discontinuation of the platform mound use, and by A.D. 1450, the Mississippian idea was gone completely from the Savannah River valley (Anderson 1992).



## 6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Several questions existed prior to my fieldwork at Oak Level Mound. The first concerned the occupational history of the site. As discussed above, the major occupation at the site appears to correspond to the Middle Mississippian period (A.D. 1100-1350). Future C14 dating is of course needed to refine those general dates. Second, I wanted to know something about the site layout and activities conducted at Oak Level Mound. While the distribution maps display an interesting and notable pattern of site use, further site work is need to confirm this preliminary spatial analysis.

Although artifact distributions may explain much about how the people at Oak Level Mound lived, interacted, celebrated, and communed (Pluckhahn 2010), a complete reconstruction of Oak Level Mound must await more expansive horizontal excavations. Pluckhahn (2010) has noted that a lack of status goods may imply household units of commoners, which may be particular to the Mississippian period since Mississippian people were stratified and Woodland people were more egalitarian. Households and units sizes were still more scattered when compared to Mississippian nucleated settlements. “Households are more discrete and definable units. Communities and ceremonial centers are not as clearly defined by boundaries and landscape” (Pluckhahn 2010: 337). Nonetheless, to determine plaza location, individual household units or even ceremonial locations used by complex Mississippian societies, more data are needed.

While mound size can be an indication of site occupation duration, Plukhahn (1996) states, it could simply be an indication of a secondary center that served as a political connection to inland Mississippian mound centers, or it could be an indication of a shorter period of occupation (DePratter 1991). Nonetheless, as DePratter (1991)

states, conical mounds are more common on the coast than inland and were constructed well into the Mississippian period. Oak Level Mound is located in a cluster identified by Steponaitis (1978) as the Savannah/Ogeechee cluster. There are seven conical mound sites and one platform mound site within this cluster (Pluckhahn et al. 2002). With this in mind, a GIS analysis that includes the Irene, Haven Home, Deptford, Lewis Mound sites, among others, can better help us understand the spatial relationships between the sites along this stretch of the coast.

Finally, the seemingly anomalous site location of Oak Level Mound must still be explained. It is situated on a point overlooking a river swamp and over 0.5 km from Red Bird Creek and 2.4 km from the Ogeechee River. Cook (1998) has noted that many of the Savannah period sites are located along river swamps, and perhaps these swamps are relic marshes or freshwater streams. Further testing could confirm this by taking soil sediment samples from the swamp directly adjacent to Oak Level Mound. Therefore, due to the site findings from my fieldwork at Oak Level Mound, I recommend further fieldwork and lab tests to locate possible settlement features such as trenches, hearths, and postmolds and to determine ceramic age and origin. That might include 2-by-2 unit excavations at features identified in shovel tests (Figure 5.1), midden excavations, mound sectioning, C14 dating, and XRF analysis of pottery to investigate production locales. Regardless of future work at Oak Level Mound, my research to date has established site chronology, both spatially and temporally, to a reasonable degree, site use as it may be determined by predictive maps, and it has helped place Oak Level Mound within a regional context in relation to other contemporaneous sites.

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