

**A SUMMARY REPORT OF 2004 ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS AT
CATAWBA NEW TOWN, LANCASTER COUNTY, SOUTH CAROLINA**

by

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In 2001, the University of North Carolina's Research Laboratories of Archaeology launched the Catawba Project, which aims to illuminate the emergence of the modern Catawba Nation in the early eighteenth century and to document the creative adaptations that have enabled the endurance of the Catawba people in their ancient homeland. During the first two years of the project, archaeological surveys were undertaken in York and Lancaster counties, South Carolina, to identify town sites of the historic Catawba and affiliated groups (Figure 1).

Using historical maps, archaeological evidence was found for two (Weyanne and Cherraw) of five towns shown on John Evans' map of 1756, one (Twelvemile Creek) of two towns shown on Samuel Wyly's 1763 map, the Catawba Town (New Town) shown on the Price-Strother map of 1808 (Figure 2), and the community of Turkeyhead shown on Robert Mills' 1820 map. We also found another site (Old Town) that dates to the early 1770s. In 2002 a Catawba cabin cellar (Bowers site) was excavated at Turkeyhead, and in 2003 cabin cellars and associated archaeological deposits were excavated at Old Town and New Town (Cabin Loci 2 and 3) (see Davis and Riggs 2004).

In 2004, with financial support of the National Geographic Society (Grant # 7648-04), more extensive excavations were undertaken at two additional cabin sites (designated Cabin Loci 4 and 5) at New Town.

Historical Overview

At the outset of the Revolutionary War the Catawba Nation, which then numbered only about 600 individuals, resided in a single community near Twelve Mile Creek. In 1775, the Catawbas broke their long alliance with Britain and cast their lot with the Americans. Catawba soldiers served with South Carolina troops throughout the war, and their reservation provided sanctuary for harried American forces in the Carolina backcountry. As "the Patriot Indians," the Catawbas guaranteed their continued rights and privileges in post-colonial South Carolina, and the newly constituted state recognized the Catawba reservation lands.

In the post-Revolutionary Federal period (1781–1820), the remnants of the Catawba Nation formed a single community, known as New Town, in the uplands above the Waxhaw Old Fields. Here, Catawba families survived through a mix of subsistence farming and hunting, supplemented with cash income from cottage industries and land rents. John Smyth, who visited the community in 1784, noted:

The Indian women...cultivate the soil, as well as perform the common menial domestic services; the sole occupation of the men being war, hunting, fishing, fowling, and smoaking tobacco. [Smyth 1784:193]

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Catawbas had leased most of their reserved lands (comprising 144,000 acres) to white planters, and rent payments became an essential part of the Catawba economy. In 1791 Rev. Thomas Coke noted that:

They possess a quantity of land, fifteen miles square, on the river Catawba. A very small part of this land they cultivate themselves: a much larger part they let out in long leases to the white people. [Coke 1792:11–12]

Robert Mills later observed:

The remains of this nation now occupy a territory 15 miles square. These lands are almost all leased out to white settlers, for 99 years, renewable, at the rate of from 15 to \$20 per annum for each plantation, of about 300 acres. The annual income from these lands is estimated to amount to about \$5000. This sum prudently managed, would suffice to support the whole nation, (now composed of about 30 families) comfortably. Yet these wretched Indians live in a state of abject poverty.... [Mills 1826: 114–115]

While at New Town, Catawba potters supplemented their lease incomes with commercial sales of handmade pottery to Anglo-American and African-American customers. Itinerant Catawba potters had peddled their wares in the backcountry as early as 1772 (Merrell 1989:211), and Gilmore Simms (1856) notes a well-developed pottery trade during the early nineteenth century in which Catawbas took their wares as far away as Charleston.

Despite a secure economic base, Catawba population spiraled downward during the early nineteenth century due to disease and chronic alcohol abuse. In 1815, Calvin Jones observed:

Nation declining. During the war had 40 or 50 warriors in service. Now not more than 30 in the nation.... Women have but few children, many none. Children die – all suffer from too much whisky and too little bread. In 40 years probably extinct. [Jones 1815]

By 1820, the Catawbas abandoned New Town in favor of a site on the west bank where the present Catawba reservation is located. For the next two decades, the Catawba Nation maintained a measure of political, economic, and cultural independence in their native territory, but whites interpreted their waning

numbers and declining economy as evidence of impending extinction. In 1840, a few Catawba leaders were cajoled into ceding their reserved lands to South Carolina for a small cash payment and the promise of a new reserve near or among the Eastern Cherokees. This planned resettlement failed, and by 1845 the Catawbas were denationalized and dispossessed of their lands, reduced from “the Patriot Indians” to landless “free persons of color” who were forced to wander as itinerant potters and day-laborers through an increasingly race conscious and strident South. Their persistence and ultimate florescence as the Catawba Nation during the twentieth century confounded predictions of their inevitable disappearance, and is testament to the strength of this community and its inexorable connection to place.

Catawba New Town

The site of New Town was originally documented in 1935 by Isabelle Baker, a Charlotte college student who interviewed former Catawba chief Samuel Blue. Blue conducted Baker to the site and described the community as follows:

Most of the village was on a hillside sloping toward the river.... The houses were something like log cabins. In size they were about twelve by sixteen feet. The walls were shoulder high and built of logs. The roofs, also of logs, were gabled. The logs were covered with rough boards and the cracks daubed with mud. The huts had dirt floors. Very few had either fireplace or chimney. In those which did the fireplace was made with rocks and the chimney of wood. [Baker 1935]

Early travelers’ accounts offer similar perspectives on the character of New Town. In 1791, Methodist Bishop Thomas Coke (1792:11) preached at New Town, and observed “Their Nation is reduced to a very small number, and [they] chiefly live in a little town, which in England would be only called a village.” Elkanah Watson (Watson 1856), who visited the community in 1785, noted that Catawba families lived in log houses and cabins, which Coke (1792:12) found “not uncomfortable—far superior to the mud-houses in which the poorest of the people in Ireland dwell.” Calvin Jones (1815) described New Town as “6 or 8 houses facing an oblong square.” George Blackburn, a visitor in 1816, described one of the New Town hamlets as “a little village consisting of four families” (Mills 1826:112).

Using Baker’s description, an accompanying sketch map, and modern topographic maps, New Town was relocated during a 2002 reconnaissance survey. To date, six cabin loci in three separate hamlets have been identified (Figure 3). Each of these cabin loci represents one or more cribbed log dwellings, associated structures, peripheral middens, and discrete trash dumps. These cabin seats are

archaeologically manifest as scatters of Catawba and English pottery, cut and wrought nails, and numerous commercially manufactured items such as buttons, thimbles, and kettle fragments. These artifact clusters have been identified through a combination of pedestrian reconnaissance and metal detector survey, a low-tech remote sensing technique that is exceptionally effective due to the ubiquity of Federal period metal artifacts in these contexts. Point provenience assigned to metal artifacts has assured close spatial control with high-resolution definition of site boundaries and internal site structure.

Cabin Locus 1 has been sampled only by metal detecting and surface collecting, while Cabin Loci 2 and 3, which appear to represent a single hamlet, were sampled by metal detecting and partially excavated in 2003. Cabin Loci 4 and 5 were metal detected, mapped, and excavated in 2004 with support from the National Geographic Society.

Investigations at Cabin Locus 4

Cabin Locus 4 is located about 400 meters south of Locus 3 and, along with Locus 5, comprises a single hamlet of at least two households dating to the late 1700s and early 1800s. This area, on a low wooded ridge surrounded by numerous springheads, was first identified by metal detector reconnaissance in early 2003. This survey identified a cluster of metal artifacts, as well as Catawba and pearlware sherds, around a group of fieldstone piers and two low mounds of dirt thought to represent collapsed stick-and-clay chimneys. More subtle surface features include a Federal period wagon trace just east of the cabin seats and an eroded footpath that leads down slope from the two cabins to an improved springhead. These two adjacent cabin seats and the surrounding area are designated Locus 4. This area is covered in mature hardwoods and has not been disturbed by plowing.

More intensive investigations at Locus 4 in 2004 defined a 3,600 m² site area and delineated a number of discrete refuse disposal zones around the two cabin seats. Systematic metal detector survey recovered almost 1,000 Federal period artifacts, with concentrations around the chimney ruins and within toss zones around the periphery of the yard areas (Figure 4).

Excavation of Locus 4 was undertaken as an archaeological field school of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Fieldwork began on May 11, 2004 and continued uninterrupted for five weeks. The field crew consisted of two project co-directors (Davis and Riggs), three graduate assistants, two

undergraduate assistants, eight field school students, and one volunteer. The crew worked five days a week from 8 am until 5 pm.

Excavations focused on the cabin seats and adjacent areas in front (to the east) of the two cabins (Figures 5 and 9 to 14). This area was gridded into one-meter squares, with units being designated by the coordinate of the southeast corner. To obtain fine spatial control for all recovered artifacts, each unit, when excavated, was subdivided into 50-cm units, or quadrants (designated SE, SW, NE, or NW within the larger one-meter unit) (Figure 9).

Because soil was relatively shallow (about 10 cm deep), it was excavated as a single level, and all soil was screened through quarter-inch hardware cloth. Soil recovered from hearth surfaces and refuse-filled pits was bagged and taken back to Chapel Hill, where it was washed through 1/16" hardware cloth or selectively floated to recover very small and fragile artifacts and subsistence remains.

Horizontal and vertical control was maintained using a total station, and all significant artifacts from primary contexts (i.e., hearth surfaces) were piece-plotted. Upon completion, each one-meter excavation unit was troweled, and a digital photograph was taken from a vertical position in order to permit the compilation later of a photographic mosaic of the entire excavation.

Hand excavation of 1,020 50-cm units in eight blocks exposed the hearths of both cabins, most of the cabin floor areas, a surface hearth, and several concentrations of artifacts interpreted as trash dumps and discarded hearth cleanings. Highly patterned artifact distributions were identified around the cabin exteriors and yard edges, and several discrete trash dumps were identified and sampled along the wagon trace. These artifact distributions reflect intentional refuse management by the cabin occupants (Figure 6). Door-front yards, as high activity zones, were apparently swept clean, resulting in elliptical rings of broken pottery and other refuse surrounding relatively clear areas. Broken pottery and other debris also accumulated around chimney bases and corner blocks, but did not accrue beneath the wooden house floors. Larger quantities of refuse were dumped in discrete patches along the nearby wagon road. Broken glass only rarely occurred near the cabin, but was plentiful in some of these peripheral dumps; other dumps consisted exclusively of Catawba pottery. Large, obtrusive objects, such as kettle fragments and heavy iron implements, were tossed even further away, downslope from the rear of the cabins.

Excavations at Locus 4 recovered more than 10,000 sherds of Catawba pottery and nearly 2,800 fragments of commercially made ceramics, as well as glass bottle fragments, Catawba pipes, metal buttons, glass beads and other jewelry, table cutlery, harness hardware, agricultural equipment, gunparts and ammunition, and numerous other categories of household refuse (Figure 15). Catawba pottery from Locus 4, unlike that found at Locus 3, does not appear to represent products for commercial sale. Instead, sherds are from well-made vessels and most display worn and damaged surfaces indicative of domestic use. In addition, only two fragments of pottery burnishers were recovered at Locus 4, as compared with a dozen whole or fragmented burnishers from limited excavations at Loci 2 and 3.

Catawba ceramic vessels represented at Locus 4 include numerous plates and flat-bottomed, flaring-walled pans, as well as cooking jars with thickened rims and tripodal kettles with loop handles. Many vessel rims are decorated with a reddish orange paint, and at least a few rimsherds were decorated to mimic English shell-edged wares.

The most interesting archaeological features at Locus 4 were the two chimney piles (designated Features 1 and 2), and considerable effort was spent excavating them (Figures 10 to 14). These low mounds represent the eroded remains of earth-filled, cribbed log chimney bases that elevated the hearth surfaces to the levels of the wooden cabin floors, a common construction technique. Such wooden chimney bases were cribbed from ground level as closed, earth-filled boxes to the hearth surface. Above the hearth surface, the firebox jambs, or sides, were integrated into the cribbed cabin wall, leaving the face of the fireplace open. Above the mantle log, the chimney was cribbed of smaller logs or sticks and stepped away from the cabin wall. Both chimney piles were located at the down-slope ends of their respective cabins, with the hearth surfaces elevated 30 cm above the surrounding ground level to accommodate raised cabin floors. This interpretation is supported by the presence of foundation blocks and the absence of artifacts in the floor areas. Interestingly, both chimneys were trapezoidal in shape at the base, with the chimney width increasing away from the cabin wall. Both fireplaces also had prepared clay surfaces and hearths composed of flat, tabular stone. The fireplace surface (Feature 2) associated with Cabin #2 was largely intact and contained deposits of charcoal and ash mixed with fragments of a broken Catawba pan, a Nottingham stoneware bottle, and pearlware vessels (Figure 15).

Investigations at Cabin Locus 5

Immediately north of Locus 4 is Cabin Locus 5, in an area that was logged during the 1960s. Cabin Locus 5 was excavated during a two-week period (June 14–25, 2004) after the end of the archaeological field school and followed a similar work schedule. The crew was somewhat smaller, consisting of the co-directors, three graduate assistants, and six undergraduate assistants.

Locus 5 is estimated to cover about 1,400 m², though survey and metal detecting are not yet completed. Metal detector survey of a 625-m² area, undertaken concurrently with the excavation, recovered more than 350 artifacts, including wrought nails, buttons, scissors, a nose bangle, thimbles, a knife blade, a spoon, bottle glass, and English and Catawba pottery (Figure 7). Excavations in three small blocks, totaling 26 one-meter squares (104 50-cm units) revealed two shallow midden deposits (designated Features 7 and 8) containing ash, large quantities of Catawba pottery, and other artifacts (Figure 8). Nearby was a low mound of dirt from another collapsed chimney. While it was not investigated, auger testing indicates a burned clay hearth surface near the top. More extensive investigations at Locus 5 are planned for the 2005 field season and should permit more precise delineation of the cabin, associated pits, and peripheral middens.

More than 4,500 artifacts were excavated from Features 7 and 8 and overlying deposits, and include Catawba and English pottery, buttons, beads, gunflints, wrought nails, Catawba pipe fragments, a coin, a snaffle bit, and other objects. Together with the metal-detected artifacts, these artifacts indicate probable contemporaneity with the cabins at nearby Locus 4.

Conclusion

The hamlet comprised of Loci 4 and 5 may correspond to the neighborhood described by Calvin Jones in 1815 as where Sally New River and General Jacob Ayers lived. Jones indicated that they maintained households at some distance from the remainder of New Town, and he also noted that the “New Rivers and Airs houses had floors” while those in the large hamlet had dirt floors. Loci 4 and 5 include evidence of cabins with elevated floors that were occupied as late as Jones’ visit, and which may correspond to the New River and Ayers occupations. Jones also observed that Ayers and New River were

particularly industrious farmers, and Loci 4 and 5 have yielded much more agricultural hardware than the other areas.

Distinguishing and attributing the hamlets at New Town provides a basis for future analytic comparisons. Sally New River, a one-quarter Catawba métis reared in an English household, was almost certainly more Westernized in outlook and practice than her Catawba neighbors. Contextual and assemblage configurations of the New River and associated Ayers households probably more closely approximate those of their contemporary American neighbors than do the cabin assemblages from the other hamlets.

Following the excavation in 2005 of additional cabin sites, archaeological and historical data from the New Town investigations will be used to characterize this Federal-period Catawba settlement. As an important part of this study, analyses of the material assemblages associated with the New Town cabins will focus on assessments of inter-household variability and comparison with contemporary non-Catawba contexts to determine the scale and direction of economic and perhaps cultural variation among the households of New Town.

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Figure 1. Map of North and South Carolina showing the location of the 1763-1840 Catawba Reservation and New Town.

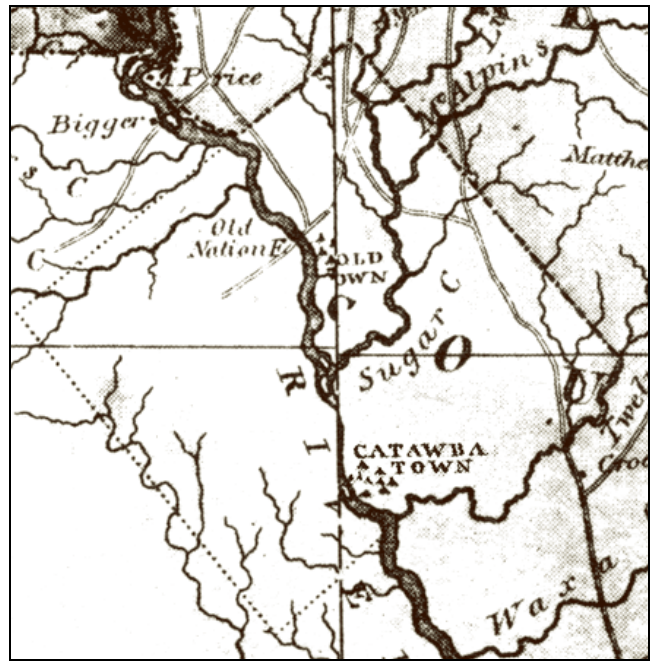


Figure 2. Map of the Catawba Nation, drawn by Jonathan Price and John Strother in 1808, showing New Town as "Catawba Town."

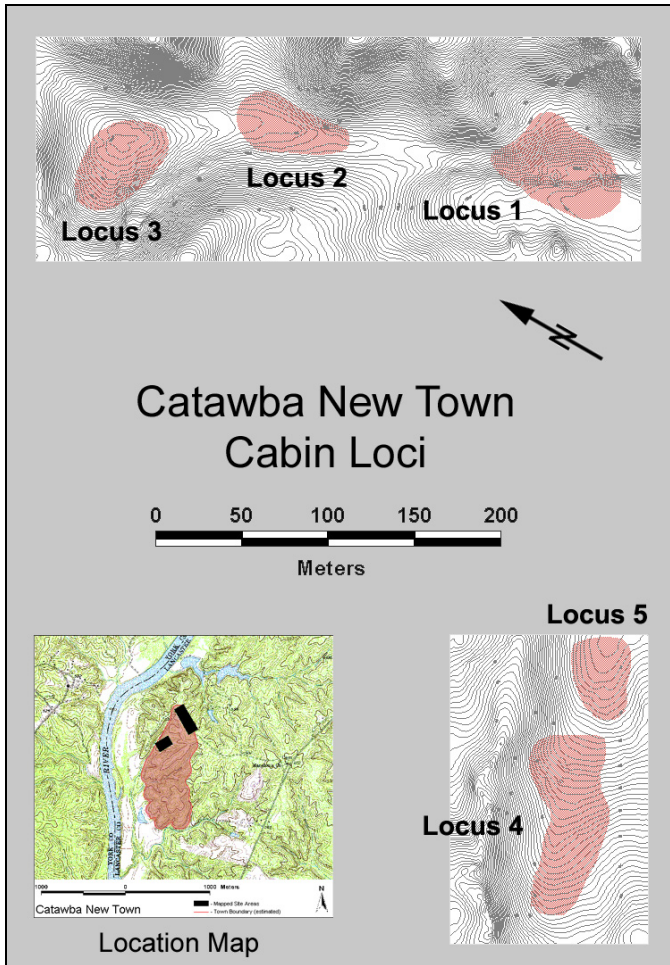


Figure 3. Map of New Town showing identified cabin loci. Locus 6, situated between Locus 1 and Locus 5, was recently located and has not yet been mapped.

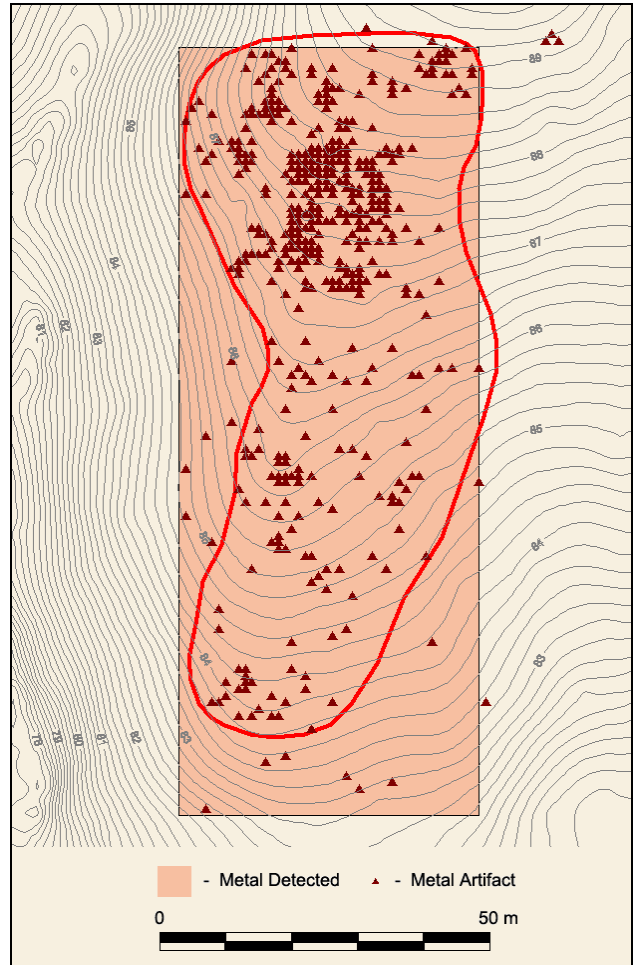


Figure 4. Map of Locus 4 at New Town showing results of the metal detector survey.

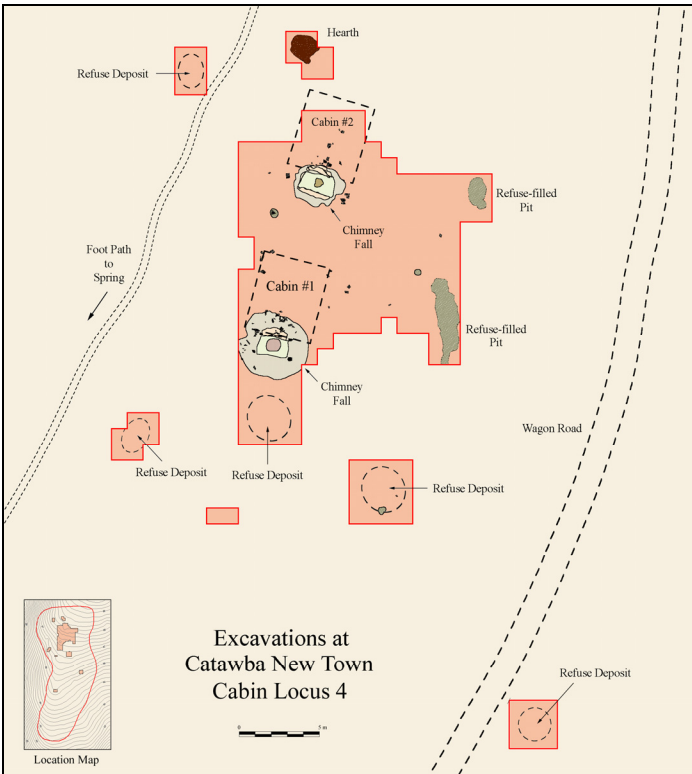


Figure 5. Excavation map of Locus 4 at New Town showing chimney piles, cabin floor areas, peripheral refuse deposits, and surface features.

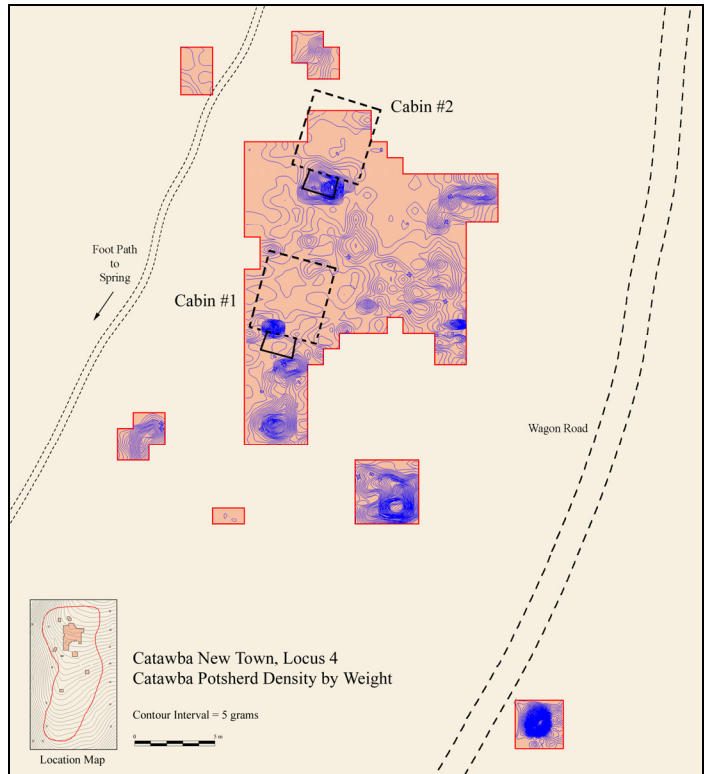


Figure 6. Excavation map of Locus 4 at New Town showing the distribution of Catawba earthenware pottery.

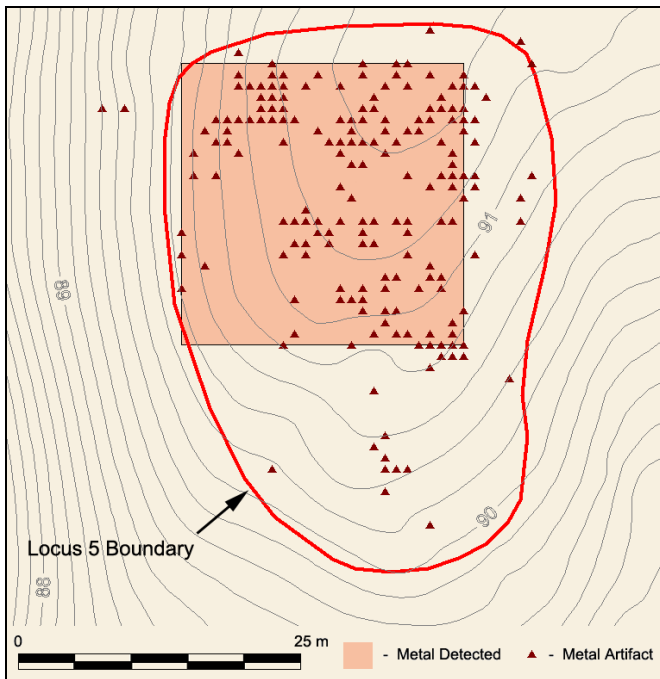


Figure 7. Map of Locus 5 at New Town showing results of metal detector survey.

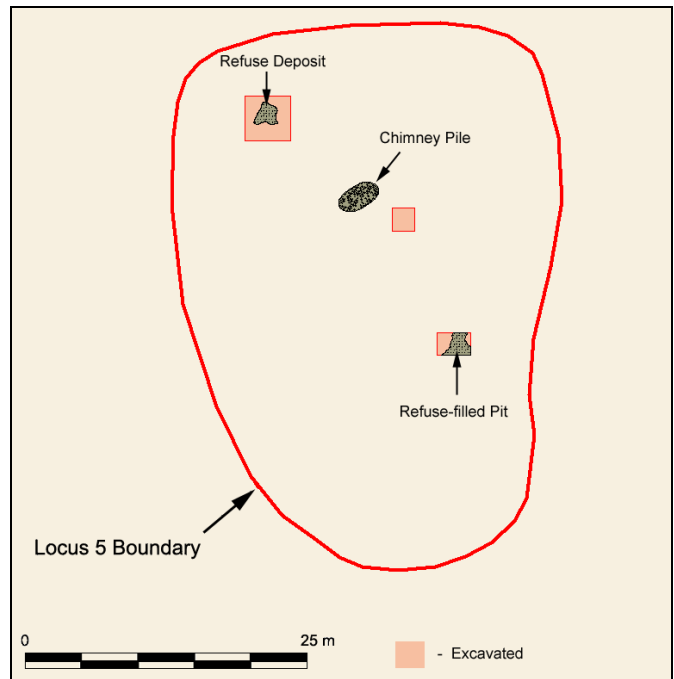


Figure 8. Map of Locus 5 at New Town showing areas of excavation and archaeological features.



Figure 9. Students excavating units at Locus 4 in 50-cm sections.



Figure 10. Removing the topsoil overlying the mounded chimney fall at Cabin #1 (Feature 1). Note the flat, tabular hearth stones flanking the low mound.



Figure 11. Excavated cabin area at Locus 4, showing the Cabin #2 mounded chimney fall (foreground) and the Cabin #1 chimney fall being excavated (background).



Figure 12. Excavating the Cabin #1 chimney fall (Feature 1).



Figure 13. Troweling around the Cabin #2 chimney fall (Feature 2).



Figure 14. The Cabin #2 chimney fall (Feature 2) with the fire-reddened trapezoidal hearth surface and overlying ash and debris deposit fully exposed.



Nottingham Stoneware
Bottle



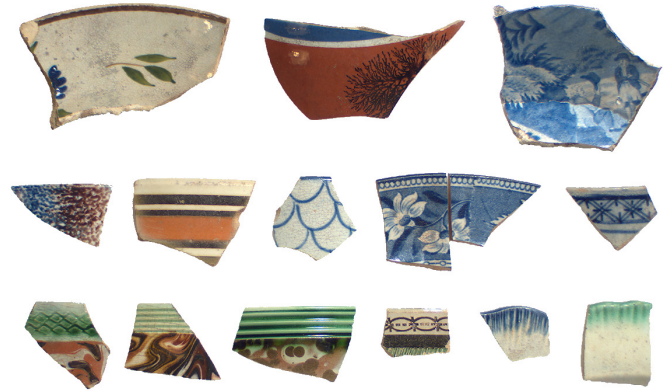
Catawba Painted Rims



Catawba
Handles & Podes



Pearlware
Pitcher Handle



Pearlware Sherds



Catawba Pan Rims



Catawba Plate Rim Interiors



Catawba Jar Rims



Catawba Pan

Figure 15. Catawba and English pottery from Locus 4.