

**A SUMMARY REPORT OF 2005 ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS AT
CATAWBA NEW TOWN, LANCASTER COUNTY, SOUTH CAROLINA**

by

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(NGS Grant # 7812-05)

February 1, 2006

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 (Weyane 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. Investigations at New Town continued in 2005 with a second grant from the National Geographic Society (Grant # 7812-05), and the resulting excavations at Cabin Loci 5, 6, and 7 effected a much more complete record of the entire Federal period community.

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 opposite side of Catawba River 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 (designated SoC 632 [north half] and SoC 635 [south half] 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, seven cabin loci in three separate hamlets have been identified. 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 Locus 4 and a portion of Locus 5 were metal detected, mapped, and excavated in 2004 with support from the National Geographic Society. The remainder of Locus 5, along with Loci 6 and 7, were metal detected, mapped, and excavated in 2005 with support from the National Geographic Society.

2005 Investigations at Cabin Locus 5

Cabin Locus 5 is located about 400 meters south of Locus 3 and approximately 60 meters north of Locus 4 on a low wooded ridge near the southern edge of the New Town settlement (Figures 3 and 4). This early 19th century component 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; investigations in 2004 identified a low mound of dirt thought to represent a collapsed stick-and-clay chimney associated with the primary domicile. Survey in 2004 also identified a Federal period wagon trace just east of the cabin seats and an eroded footpath that leads down slope past Locus 4 to an improved springhead. The majority of Cabin Locus 5 was subjected to mechanized logging and replanting as a pine plantation in 1969, but site deposits have not been disturbed by plowing.

Locus 5 is estimated to cover about 1,800 m², as determined by the spatial distributions of 1,191 artifacts recovered through metal detector survey in 2004 and 2005. These materials include wrought nails, buttons, scissors, a nose bangle, thimbles, a knife blade, a spoon, bottle glass, and English and Catawba pottery. The 2004 excavations at Locus 5 exposed three small blocks, totaling 26 one-meter squares (104 50-cm units), that revealed two shallow midden deposits (designated Features 7 and 8). These contained ash, large quantities of Catawba pottery, and other artifacts, including English pottery, buttons, beads, gunflints, wrought nails, Catawba pipe fragments, a coin, and a snaffle bit.

Additional excavations at Locus 5 in 2005 were undertaken as an archaeological field school of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Fieldwork began on May 17, 2005 and continued uninterrupted for three weeks. The field crew consisted of two project co-directors (Davis and Riggs), three graduate assistants, two undergraduate assistants, 12 field school students, and one volunteer. The crew worked five days a week from 8 am until 5 pm.

The 2005 excavations at Locus 5 totaled 107 m², and focused on the cabin seat and chimney base and peripheral refuse deposits (Figures 5 to 9). 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).

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.

These excavations completed recovery from Feature 8, an irregular, refuse-filled basin located south of the cabin seat and adjacent to the probable wagon road (Figure 8). Feature 9, located south of the cabin

near the footpath, proved to be a deposit of ash and hearth cleanings that included animal bone, eggshell, Catawba pottery, and English pottery (Figure 9). Immediately north of Feature 9 was Feature 11, a tree tip-up cavity filled with large portions of Catawba vessels. The most complex archaeological feature at Locus 5 was a collapsed chimney pile (designated Feature 10) that specifically demarcated the position and orientation of the Locus 5 domicile (Figure 7). This low mound represents the eroded remains of an earth-filled, cribbed log chimney base that elevated the hearth surface to the level of the wooden cabin floor, a common construction technique. Such wooden chimney bases were cribbed as closed, earth-filled boxes from ground level 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. As was the case with similar features at Locus 4, the hearth appears to have been trapezoidal in shape at the base, with the hearth width increasing away from the cabin wall. Pearlware sherds recovered from the basal levels of the chimney pile indicate occupation or use of Locus 5 immediately prior to the construction of the chimney and associated cabin.

The final feature excavated at Locus 5 was Feature 12, a large patch of fired clay located less than 10 meters northeast of the cabin seat. It apparently represents an exterior prepared clay hearth.

The 2004 and 2005 excavations at Locus 5 recovered almost 16,000 artifacts, including more than 11,800 sherds of Catawba pottery and nearly 2200 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. Catawba pottery from Locus 5, 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 5, as compared with a dozen whole or fragmented burnishers from limited excavations at Loci 2 and 3.

Catawba ceramic vessels represented at Locus 5 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.

Cabin Locus 6

Cabin Locus 6 is situated on a broad, wooded knoll approximately 170 meters north of Locus 5 and 235 meters south of Locus 3 at the center of New Town. This early 19th century domestic component was first identified by metal detector reconnaissance in 2005, in which survey documented a cluster of 416 metal artifacts (and coincident Catawba and pearlware sherds) that define a domestic area approximately 2100 m² in extent. Approximately half of this area was disturbed by mechanized logging and surface grading in 1969, but none of the site deposits have been subject to plowing or other deep disturbance. Initial survey located a low earthen mound identified as a chimney ruin that included ash deposits and fired clay.

Excavations conducted at Locus 6, also undertaken as part of the UNC archaeological field school, followed the same field protocols as those for Locus 5. These investigations exposed a total of 209.5 m² that documented the chimney ruin and presumed associated cabin seat as well as a swept yard area, peripheral middens, and a large hearth debris dump that capped a natural quartz outcrop (Figures 10 to 14). The chimney ruin (designated SoC 632, Feature 12), which revealed a similar construction to that documented at Loci 4 and 5, was considerably lower, with remnants of the hearth surface near surrounding ground elevation (Figures 11 and 12). This probably indicates that the cabin situated at Locus 6 was an earthen floored structure built at ground level, as contrasted with the elevated floored cabins documented at Loci 4 and 5.

A probable yard area is situated immediately east of the chimney ruin. This presumed yard area is bounded by low-density refuse deposits that reflect both primary refuse dumping and secondary sweeping of household refuse. Another similar arrangement, with a very low density core surrounded by a periphery with much higher artifact densities, is situated immediately west of the chimney ruin, and may represent a second cabin yard area associated with an otherwise undefined building. At the highest point on the knoll, a low but rugged quartz outcrop probably hampered occupation; this outcrop was covered,

and perhaps masked, by a 20 m² deposit of ash, pottery, and other hearth debris. This deposit yielded kitchen refuse, including eggshell and fish bones, subsistence materials otherwise absent in Locus 6 deposits. In all, excavations yielded more than 28,000 artifacts associated with the Federal-period cabin at Locus 6.

Cabin Locus 7

Locus 7 is a small cluster of domestic debris located approximately 75 meters northeast of Locus 5, probably along the former wagon road through New Town. This relatively level bench on a wooded ridgeline appears to have been slightly disturbed during the mechanized logging of the property in 1969. Metal detector survey of this locality during the 2005 summer field season recovered 32 metal artifacts, as well as 32 Catawba sherds and three pieces of pearlware, distributed over a 300 m² area. About 300 additional artifacts were recovered during a limited excavation of five one-meter square units. These units revealed relatively deep soils but scant artifact content. The array of materials recovered from metal detector survey and testing at Locus 7 closely resembles that documented at other residential loci, and Locus 7 may represent another domicile. However, the small spatial extent and low artifact density represented at Locus 7 may simply reflect off-site dumping activities.

Conclusion

The 2005 investigations at Cabin Loci 5, 6, and 7 complete the field examination of the New Town settlement and provide community-wide data for characterizing Catawba material life and economic adaptations in the novel environments presented by the new American republic. Because these cabin areas are spatially discrete, they also present an opportunity for interhousehold comparisons and assessment of socioeconomic variation among Catawba families. Locus 5 (together with Locus 4) may correspond to the hamlet described by Calvin Jones in 1815 as the location of the Sally New River and General Jacob Ayers homes. 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 the remainder of the New Town houses had dirt floors. Loci 4 and 5 include evidence of cabins with elevated floors that were occupied as late as Jones’ visit, and they 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.

Archaeological discrimination of the southern New River/Ayers hamlet from the rest of 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. Future comparison of material assemblages derived from Loci 4 and 5 with those from the more northerly loci is expected to yield evidence of economic and perhaps cultural variation at New Town. These assemblages also provide a basis for anticipated comparisons with contemporaneous Anglo-American and African American assemblages from the immediate area, and such an analysis will help to construct an essential cross-cultural and interracial perspective on material life during America's infancy.

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

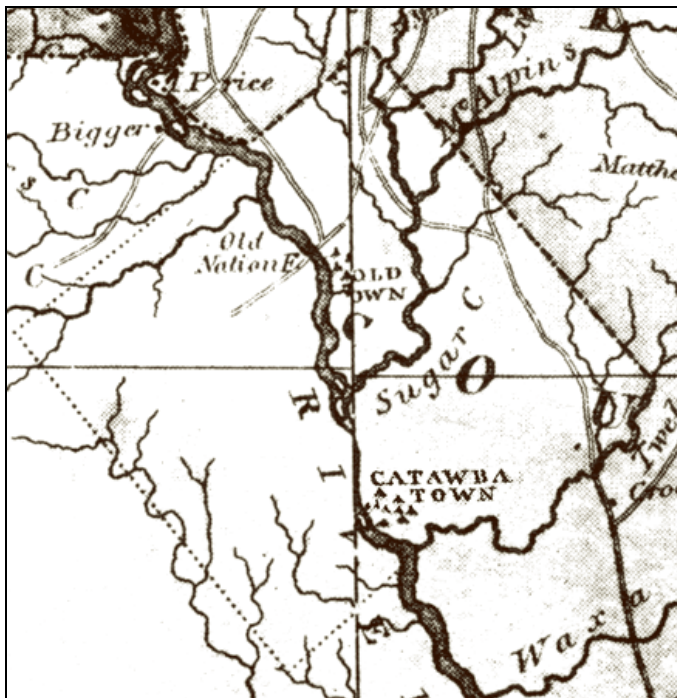


Figure 2. Map of the Catawba Nation, drawn by Jonathan Price and John Strother in 1808, showing New Town as “Catawba Town.”

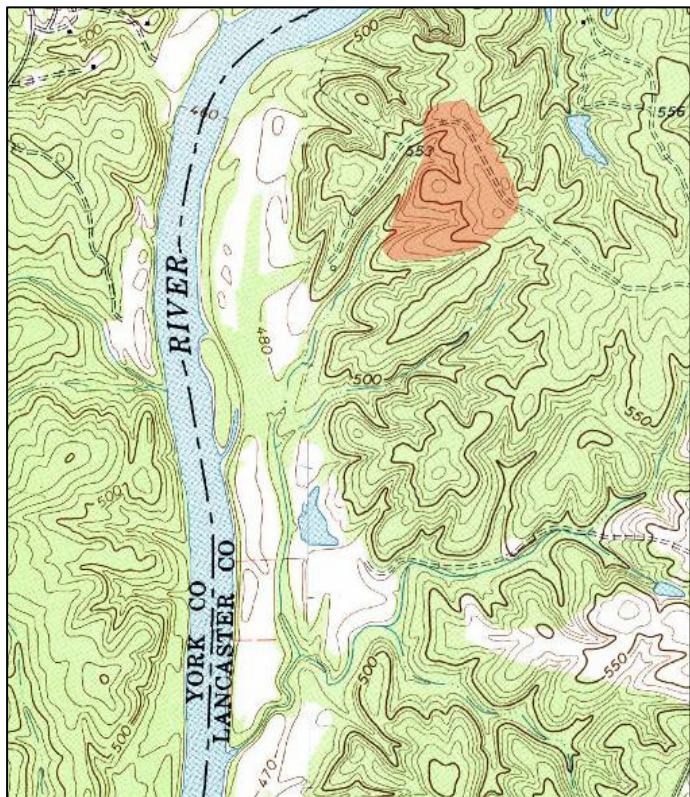


Figure 3. Portions of Rock Hill East and Catawba NE topographic quadrangles showing the location of New Town on an upland ridge flanking Catawba River.

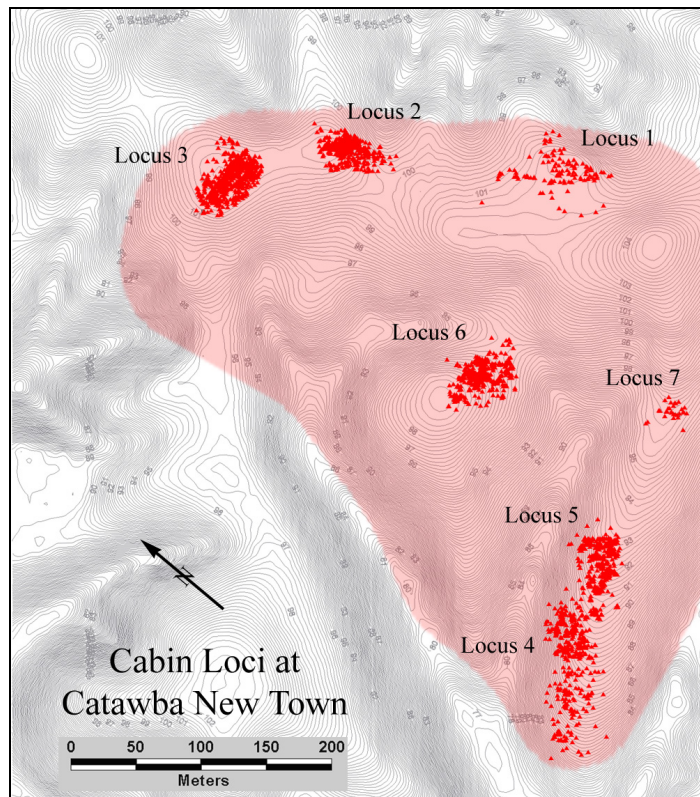


Figure 4. Map of Catawba New Town showing the seven cabin loci identified through archaeological survey and excavation. Each red triangle represents one or more Federal-period artifacts identified by metal detector survey.

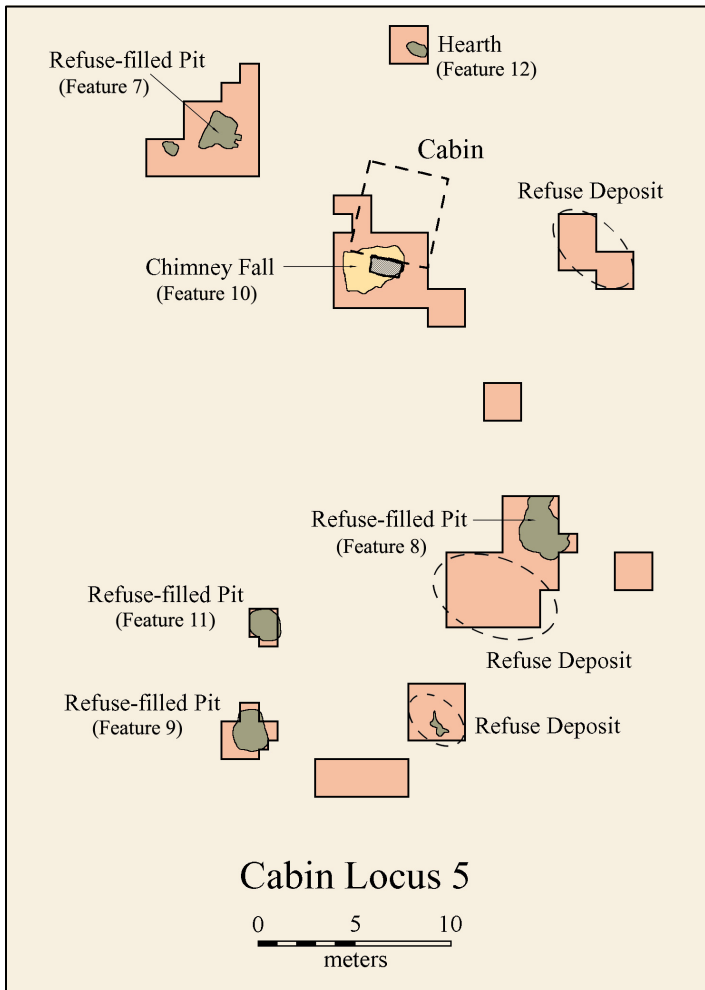


Figure 5. Excavation map of Locus 5, showing the cabin chimney fall and surrounding midden areas. The approximate location of the cabin wall is indicated by a dashed rectangle. Grid north to top of drawing.



Figure 6. Excavating topsoil at Locus 5 in 50 x 50 cm units. All fill was screened through a 1/4-inch mesh.



Figure 7. Cleaning the top of the chimney and hearth remnant (Feature 10) at Locus 5.



Figure 8. Excavating the top of Feature 8, a shallow depression filled with refuse and hearth cleanings from the nearby cabin at Locus 5.



Figure 9. Excavating Feature 9, a shallow depression filled with hearth cleanings from the nearby cabin at Locus 5. All soils from buried contexts were processed by waterscreening and flotation.

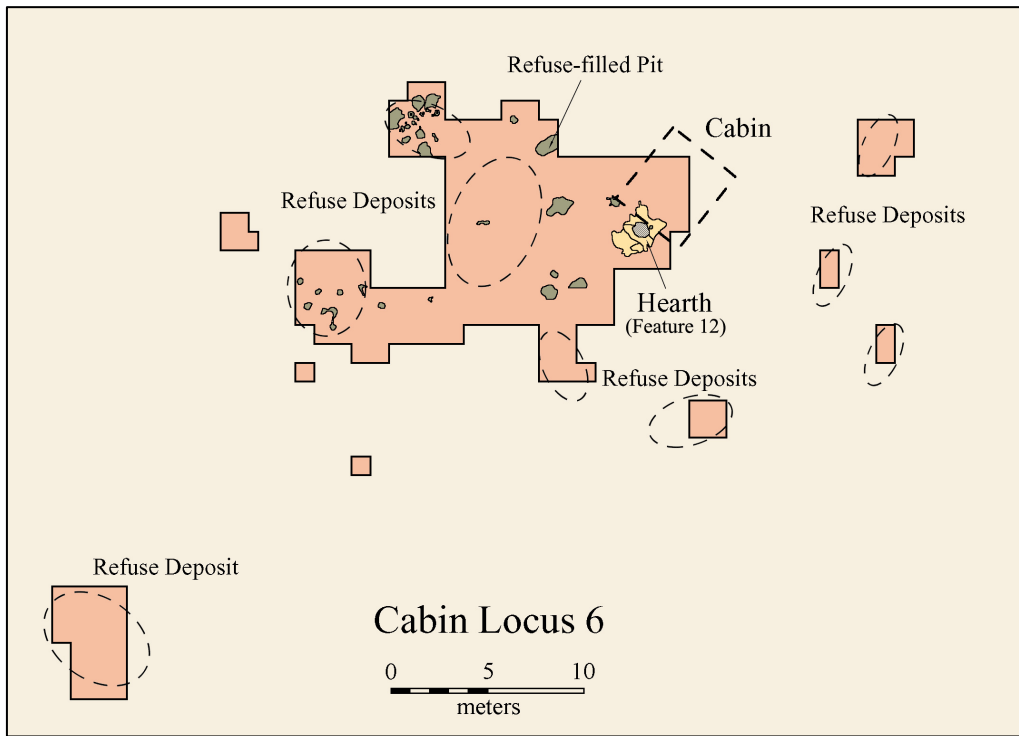


Figure 10. Excavation map of Locus 6, showing the cabin hearth and surrounding midden areas. The approximate location of the cabin wall is indicated by a dashed rectangle. Grid north to top of drawing.



Figure 11. Cleaning the top of the cabin hearth (Feature 12) at Locus 6.



Figure 12. Excavating the cabin hearth (Feature 12) at Locus 6.



Figure 13. General view of the excavation at Locus 6. Students in the foreground are dry-screening topsoil.



Figure 14. Excavating an area of deposited refuse near the Locus 6 cabin.