

Architecture and Landscape in Late Prehistoric and Protohistoric Western North Carolina

Christopher B. Rodning

Many native people in seventeenth-century southwestern North Carolina lived within towns. Each town was symbolically centered around a plaza and a communal council house or earthen mound (Polhemus 1990:134-38; Sullivan 1987:26-28, 1995:115-20). Council houses were sometimes built on the summits of pyramidal mounds (Anderson 1994a:308; Moore 1990b; Schroedl 1998:90-91). Dwellings were commonly built in village areas beside these communal architectural spaces (Hally and Kelly 1998), and farmsteads, farther from council houses and plazas, were likely where other members of any given town community lived (Schroedl 1998:86-89; Waselkov 1997:183-87). Archaeological studies of native towns have revealed spatial patterns in the architecture and layout of towns that reflect widely shared ideas about the social structure and dynamics of Late Prehistoric and Protohistoric communities across much of southeastern North America (Lewis and Stout 1998:240-41). Many of these patterns are visible at Late Prehistoric sites in western North Carolina (Ward and Davis 1999:158-78). As yet there has been relatively little treatment of seventeenth-century towns in southwestern North Carolina in the archaeological literature.

The anthropological premise underlying archaeological interest in the ways towns in eastern North America were built and rebuilt is that these spatial patterns are significant clues about social dynamics. Communal council houses and plazas served not only as prominently visible landmarks but also as venues for many different public activities. Households within towns were linked to specific houses and surrounding spaces within their communities, a relationship confirmed by archaeological evidence of rebuilding hearths and the houses themselves, indicating spatial continuity in household architecture. Graves of significant household members meanwhile are often

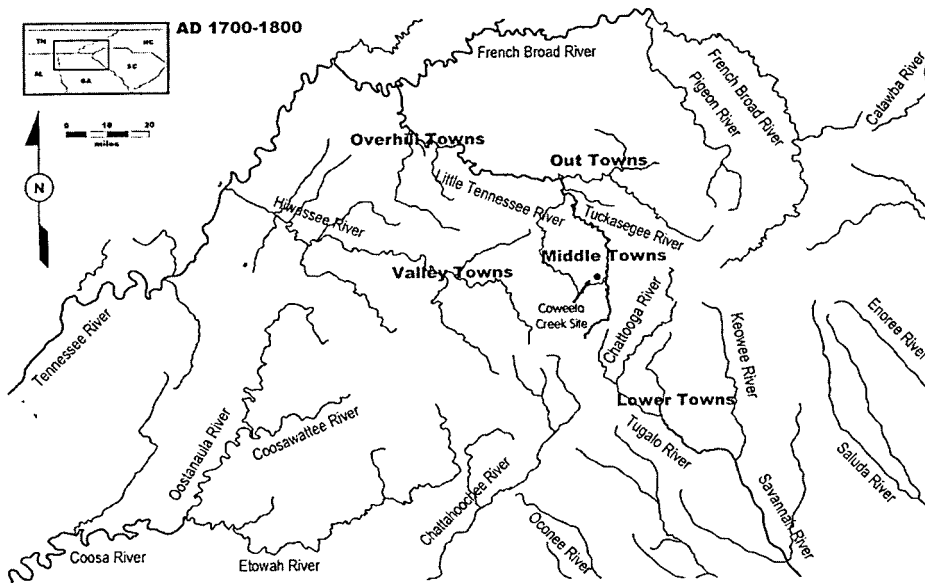
found within and beside houses, and in some cases close to or even underneath the hearths that formed the focal points of houses and the household groups associated with them. Unfortunately, there are relatively few native towns in western North Carolina where archaeologists have conducted spatially extensive excavations that might reveal these kinds of patterns.

This chapter describes the architecture at one of these ancient towns in south-western North Carolina and the landscape surrounding it. I offer some background about the natural environment and archaeological record in this part of North Carolina, then outline what archaeologists know about the built environment of one Pro-historic native town along the Upper Little Tennessee River. These patterns are comparable to archaeological clues about architecture and landscape in western North Carolina during the Late Prehistoric period.

Environment in the Appalachian Summit

The cultural and geographic province known as the Appalachian Summit encompasses many crisscrossing mountain ranges in northeastern Georgia, southeastern Tennessee, and the western parts of the Carolinas (see map 15.1; Dickens 1976:4-6; Dickens 1978:117-18; Goodwin 1977:6-9; Keel 1976:1-3; Purrington 1983:83-85). The heart of this region lies within western North Carolina—its rugged mountains are blanketed with mast forests, although conifers and unforested meadows cover the

Map 15.1. | The Appalachian Summit region and groups of historic Cherokee towns, A.D. 1700-1800.



tallest peaks. Several of these mountain ranges include some of the tallest peaks in eastern North America; many mountains reach heights greater than six thousand feet, and there are often elevation differences of as much as three thousand feet between summits and neighboring river valleys. The region is watered by countless springs and streams, although even the major river valleys are relatively narrow and bounded by steep slopes on all sides. Significant natural resources accessible to ancient native peoples in the region include water and rich farmland, soapstone, cane, mica, clay, wood and other architectural materials, as well as natural resources such as plants used as medicines, nuts, grasses, deer, bear, and turkey.

Hardwoods such as oak, poplar, hickory, and the now-extinct chestnut abounded in ancient forests of western North Carolina (Hill 1997:1-16; Hudson 1997:190-91). Native people most likely burned sections of these woodlands to enhance mast harvests and to create environments favorable for hunting deer and turkey (Hill 1997:60; Silver 1990:59-64). Ancient settlement patterns created edge habitats where nut trees and grasses would thrive within gardens and the remnants of abandoned settlements (Hatley 1991:38-41; Hill 1997:61).

Mountain waterways were fed by abundant rainfall, and this region encompasses some of the wettest areas in eastern North America (Goodwin 1977:26-27; Purring-ton 1983:92-93). Annual precipitation varies from forty to more than eighty inches in the region, and there is often significant variation in precipitation from one river valley to the next. Growing seasons generally range from 130 to 190 days per year, depending upon elevation and other factors.

The regional environment certainly would have been conducive to sedentary farming and foraging lifeways, characteristic of Late Prehistoric and Early Historic period native groups in western North Carolina (Dickens 1986). People likely had to move from one valley to another or otherwise rearrange themselves across the landscape at least once every generation due to the impact of local communities on local resources such as farmland and firewood (Schroedl 1998:89-91). It nevertheless was a rich environment in which native subsistence regimes would have been a sustainable strategy, given estimated population levels for the eleventh through sixteenth centuries (Goodwin 1977:46-47). Mountain terrain concentrated settlement within river valleys ranging from less than one to as much as fifteen miles wide. Some river valleys were narrow enough to prevent the development of towns and mound centers on the scale of Etowah or other Mississippian paramount centers in neighboring parts of Tennessee (Schroedl 1998) and Georgia (King 1999) during the Late Prehistoric period.

Archaeology in the Appalachian Summit

During the eighteenth century the Appalachian Summit was home to the Middle, Out, and Valley Towns of the Cherokees (see map 15.1; Dickens 1976:213-14; Dickens 1979:10; Dickens 1986:84; Goodwin 1977:38-40; Greene 1996:29-37; Hally

1986:118-19; Hally 1994a:172-73; Hatley 1993:3-6; Hudson 1990:97-99; Hudson 1997:196-99; Keel 1976:214-16; Smith 1979:48-50). Residents of these towns spoke a dialect of Cherokee different from that of people living in the Overhill and Lower Towns (Hudson 1976:237-38). The relationship between historic Cherokee groups and prehistoric residents in these different areas is a much debated issue that is explored at greater length by other authors (Dickens 1986; Hally 1986; Schroedl 1986a). By the late eighteenth century, the lifeways and social dynamics of Cherokee communities had changed dramatically due to the slave and deerskin trades, but during the seventeenth century, native settlement patterns and community structure in southern Appalachia seem to have been comparable to native towns dating to the late historic period.

Several sites at the confluence of Garden Creek and the Pigeon River have given archaeologists one glimpse of the built environment of a native town dating to the late historic period (Dickens 1976:69-93; Dickens 1978:127-31; Keel 1976:65-101; Ward and Davis 1999:171-78). One pyramidal mound was built atop the earlier earth lodge found within Garden Creek Mound 1, and the mound summit served as the platform for exclusive elite architectural space enclosed within a log stockade (Crouch 1974; Rudolph 1984). Archaeologists found remnants of village areas underneath and beside Garden Creek Mound 1, including one burned wattle-and-daub, single-set-post house similar to those described later in this chapter (Dickens 1976:89).

This house is comparable to those found in the stockaded village located at the Warren Wilson site in the French Broad watershed sometime between A.D. 1300 and 1500 (Dickens 1976:19-68; Dickens 1978:127-29; Ward 1985, 1986; Ward and Davis 1999:160-71). This village was probably built and abandoned within a brief interval, perhaps even less than fifty years. At this point excavations have uncovered roughly a half of the village itself, and the continuing study of materials recovered from this site stands to contribute much to archaeological knowledge of architecture and the everyday lives of its residents. Houses in the Warren Wilson village were roughly twenty feet square, represented archaeologically by wall postholes, parallel trenches that were foundations for vestibule entryways, central clay hearths, postholes from interior roof supports, and graves placed within and beside houses themselves. All the known houses at Warren Wilson show signs of rebuilding, in the form of overlapping hearths, multiple pairs of entrance trenches, numerous examples of wall-post replacements, and cases in which houses were built where earlier stockades had once stood.

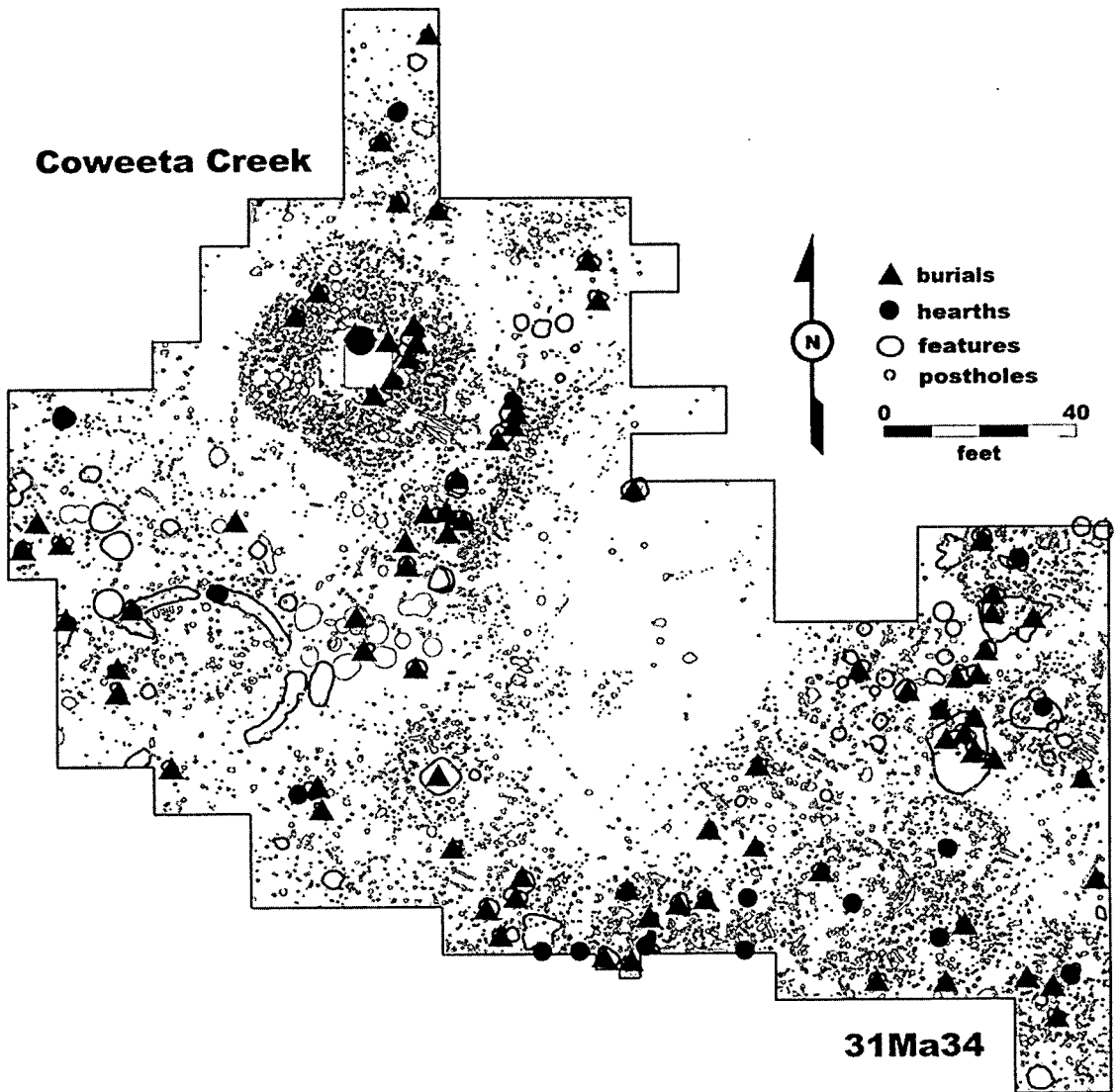
Both the Garden Creek and Warren Wilson sites are attributed to the Pisgah archaeological phase, one set of material culture associated with Mississippian groups in western North Carolina (Beck 1997b; Ferguson 1971; Holden 1966; Moore 1981, 1986, 1987, 1997, 1999). The primary distinctions between this and the presumably later Qualla phase are differences in the rims of globular jars and a much greater frequency of carinated bowls at Qualla than at Pisgah sites. Archaeological materials categorized with either the Pisgah or Qualla phase are widely thought to represent a long

continuum of cultural development through which historic Cherokee culture and communities took shape. This developmental relationship between the Pisgah and Qualla phases is not necessarily applicable to all parts of the Appalachian Summit. There are both Pisgah and Qualla materials present at and around Garden Creek. Northeast of this central part of the Appalachian Summit, Qualla ceramics are rare. In the southwestern part of the Appalachian Summit, Pisgah pottery is rare. The exact time frames of these phases are not clear, and they may even overlap to some extent (Griffin 1978:xx-xxi; Hudson 1990:100-101; Hudson 1997:198-99; Levy, May, and Moore 1990; Ward and Rodning 1997). Similarities between Pisgah and Qualla pottery notwithstanding, the similarities between Qualla ceramics and those of the Tugalo and Estatoe phases along the headwaters of the Savannah are more striking (Anderson 1994a:302-7; Anderson, Hally, and Rudolph 1986; Dickens 1979:24-27; Hally 1986:98-111; Hally 1994a:147-54; Ward and Davis 1999:178-83). Debates about archaeological phase designations aside, it is clear that many native people in the Appalachian Summit lived in nucleated towns and villages from the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries. Given the presence of pyramidal mounds in every major river valley, it is evident that these native groups formed chiefdoms that were comparable to other chiefdoms in the Mississippian Southeast from the eleventh through sixteenth centuries, albeit smaller in spatial and social scale.

The Coweeta Creek Site

Between 1965 and 1971, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill archaeologists excavated a council house and village north of the confluence of Coweeta Creek and the Little Tennessee River (see map 15.2; Egloff 1967:9-10; Egloff 1971:42-71; Keel and Egloff 1999; Rodning 1996a; Ward and Davis 1999). Excavations first concentrated on the mound, a tell with thin layers laid down during the building of each stage of the council house atop its predecessor. Fieldwork then moved to the village, a nucleated pattern of houses very similar in architectural form and layout to that at the Warren Wilson and Garden Creek sites. This fieldwork uncovered roughly half an acre, although the site probably covers an area of some three acres (Dickens 1978:131; Keel 1976:14). Given the kinds of Qualla pottery and European glass beads and kaolin pipes found at the site, it likely dates to the seventeenth century (Dickens 1978:124; Keel 1976:234).

The council house resembles other archaeologically known public buildings in the greater southern Appalachian region. It is visible as the dense concentration of postholes in the northwestern corner of the archaeological map of Coweeta Creek, and it measures slightly more than forty feet across. Amid these postholes are the remnants of a hearth and several pairs of parallel entrance trenches that formed a foundation for the vestibule entryway to the Coweeta Creek council house, leading people through



Map 15.2. | Coweeta Creek site in the Upper Little Tennessee Valley.

the earthen embankment that probably surrounded the whole perimeter of the building except for the doorway. Inside the council house was one central hearth as much as five feet in diameter. The abundant postholes within the walls probably represent posts for benches. Four interior roof supports were placed around the central space, surrounding the hearth, and they probably helped support log rafters and roof beams that supported the bark roof (Ward and Davis 1999:183–87). Outside the vestibule doorway was a rectangular pavilion, comparable to the summer council houses

described by European visitors to the southern Appalachians in the eighteenth century (Waselkov and Braund 1995:183–84). Northeast of this arbor were several pits chock full of ash and charcoal, probably debris scooped out of the council house hearth during rituals devoted to that practice.

The council house at Coweeta Creek was almost certainly built of wattle and daub, with bark for roofing material and an earthen embankment placed against the outer edge of the walls. Vertical log posts would have been set in the ground, with sticks and mud woven around them to create the walls. There is not direct archaeological evidence of an earthen embankment, but the presence of vestibule entryways may suggest there was such an embankment. Wall posts and interior roof supports would have held rafters and roof beams, atop which rested the bark or thatch roof. Daub may have been placed around the smokehole to protect the roof, but the council house was not entirely covered by earth. The floor sloped downward toward the centrally placed hearth. Several clusters of graves were placed within the council house and its covered arbor. These architectural characteristics make the Coweeta Creek council house comparable to archaeologically and ethnohistorically known council houses elsewhere in southern Appalachia (Anderson 1994a:308–9; Moore 1990a,b; Schroedl 1991, 1993; Schroedl and Riggs 1989, 1990, 1992).

The council house at Coweeta Creek was built and rebuilt at the same spot at least six times, and this architectural history is the reason the low mound formed at this site. The hearth was rebuilt more than once in its original spot. Several pairs of parallel entrance trenches mark the consistent placement of the doorway in the southeastern corner of each stage of the council house. It is difficult to imagine assigning postholes to one stage of the council house or another, given their varying depths and the difficulty of relating subsoil posthole stains to specific levels within the mound (Egloff 1971:65–67; Rodning 1999b). At least six stages nevertheless are visible in profile views of the mound, as are earthen embankments (Egloff 1971:56–57; Rodning 1999b). At the end of its tenure as the symbolic center of the local town, each stage of the council house would have been dismantled or burned, perhaps in a communal ritual or a series of planned events (Egloff 1971:61). The leftover rubble, feasting debris, and probably some material from other areas within the town would have been spread across this space to create the surface for its successor, and the sixth council house was capped with white clay (Egloff 1971:58). The kind of architectural continuity visible in the Coweeta Creek mound is similar to successive stages of public buildings preserved in other mounds in the southern Appalachians (Anderson 1994a:205–18; Hally 1993b, 1994, 1996).

East of the council house was the town plaza, covering some seven hundred square feet (Egloff 1971:70). It was paved with river sand and pebbles (Egloff, personal communication, 1999). This space was probably the venue for communal rituals and many other public activities (Rodning 1999b; VanDerwarker 1999; VanDerwarker and Detwiler 1999, 2000; Wilson et al. 1999).

Southeast of these communal architectural spaces was the village area. Several houses are visible archaeologically as constellations of postholes, pairs of parallel entrance trenches, clay hearths, and adjacent clusters of burials (see also Dickens 1978:131). These houses measure some twenty to twenty-five feet across, and they are similar to the council house in architectural form and materials, although domestic houses are much smaller (see also Schroedl 1978:213). Several houses were rebuilt in ways that preserved the spatial layout of the village, as evident from overlapping hearths, multiple sets of entrance trenches, and multiple sets of wall posts (Rodning 1999a, 1999b).

These different architectural spaces represent the symbolic center of a native town. Many members of this town lived within the Coweeta Creek village; other members of this community probably lived in farmsteads outside the formally planned town. Events that took place within and beside the Coweeta Creek council house would have created opportunities for all the members of this town, and probably in some cases people from other towns, to build and reaffirm social bonds. Reconstructing the significance of the town center at Coweeta Creek itself is best done with reference to the regional cultural landscape of the seventeenth century. Archaeological surveys have yielded a considerable amount of material relevant to placing this town within its regional landscape setting.

The Upper Little Tennessee River

During the 1960s and 1970s, University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill archaeologists conducted pedestrian surveys in many parts of the Upper Little Tennessee River Valley and surrounding areas in western North Carolina (see map 15.1; Dickens 1976:94–101; Keel 1976:14–16; Keel and Egloff 1999; Rodning 1997; Ward and Davis 1999). These efforts were originally directed toward the study of Cherokee cultural development in western North Carolina. Since then many excavations and surveys have been conducted for the purposes of cultural resource management at and near several known Cherokee towns in southwestern North Carolina. From survey data sets, archaeologists have reconstructed settlement hierarchies in western North Carolina, positing the presence of rural villages and farmsteads scattered across the landscape between mounds that often served as town centers during the Protohistoric period (Ward and Davis 1999:177). Although these patterns are evident in the Upper Little Tennessee River Valley, the archaeological data sets illustrating them have not been comprehensively described in the archaeological literature (Ward and Davis 1999:180).

Ancient pyramidal mounds form the top rung of this settlement hierarchy. The mound at Nequassee in contemporary Franklin formed one of the most prominent landmarks built by native people in the region. Given its height and its steep slope, the Nequassee mound originally must have been built well before the eighteenth century.

The mound at Cowee was built atop a natural prominence beside a bend in the Upper Little Tennessee River just south of where it meets the Great Smoky Mountains and turns west. As was the case with several other mounds, the mound at Cowee probably was first built before the eighteenth century. These and other mounds in southern Appalachia formed the centers of native towns during the eighteenth century. But not every Cherokee town stood at the site of one of these ancient pyramidal mounds. The mound at Coweeta Creek was neither as tall nor as steep as the Nequassee and other of these mounds—it was a layer cake of one council house built atop the collapsed and often burned remnants of its predecessors. Coweeta Creek was, therefore, probably not at the top rung of the regional settlement hierarchy; it would have been a major town, but probably less prominent in the regional cultural landscape than places like the Nequassee mound.

Towns built at places other than ancient mounds likely formed another rung of the regional settlement hierarchy. Coweeta Creek is one example. Coweeta Creek may have been only one of many of these kinds of settlements. Some sites along the Cullusaja and Ellijay Rivers have yielded similar sets of potsherds and other artifacts from the ground surfaces as those collected at Coweeta Creek. Clusters of sites along Iotla and Tessentee Creeks may represent other town centers or perhaps rural villages without the kind of public architecture visible at Coweeta Creek.

Farmsteads represent another level of the settlement hierarchy, many of them perhaps characterized by winter lodges and summer houses with surrounding fields (Faulkner 1978:87). These are probably similar in many respects to the kinds of rural settlements noted by Bartram during his visit to the southern Appalachian region in the late eighteenth century (Waselkov and Braund 1995:78). Recent excavations along Alarka Creek have identified one isolated farmstead in an upland setting (Shumate and Kimball 1997). Archaeologists have identified another rural farmstead located some four miles upstream from the Coweeta Creek site itself (Baker 1982). It is unknown at this point how widespread these farmsteads were during the seventeenth century. Nor is it well understood how these people interacted with household groups living close to the town centers themselves.

Many other kinds of activity areas may or may not have left traces in the archaeological record. Native people must have mined mica and perhaps soapstone in the Upper Little Tennessee Valley area during the seventeenth century and earlier. They must have had preferred locales for hunting and gathering activities along the Upper Little Tennessee River and in upland settings east and west of the floodplain itself. Perhaps there were field houses or scaffolds in gardens and fields outside towns. Trails would have connected towns and villages within this valley with each other and with communities in neighboring regions.

Paths from the Lower Towns may have been especially well traveled during the seventeenth century. Many people abandoned Lower Cherokee Towns along the Tugalo

and Keowee Rivers due to conflicts with Creek and European groups (Hatley 1993:157-58). Areas around the Middle Cherokee settlements may have become more crowded than they had been in earlier centuries (Goodwin 1977:39-40). This situation may explain why major town centers formed at places like Coweeta Creek, because not every seventeenth-century community could claim a mound of its own nor necessarily build a mound comparable in dimensions to mounds like Nequassee. This posited movement from the Lower to Middle Towns fits well with the striking similarities between the Tugalo and Estatoe phase ceramics in northern Georgia with Qualla pottery from Coweeta Creek, reflecting close ties between seventeenth-century and earlier residents of Coweeta Creek with residents of Lower Cherokee Towns if not the actual movement of people back and forth between the western Carolinas and northeastern Georgia.

The cultural landscape of the Upper Little Tennessee Valley may have looked vastly different by the end of the eighteenth century than it did during the seventeenth. At the end of the eighteenth century, settlement patterns along the Upper Hiwassee River forty miles west had become dispersed arrangements of farmsteads scattered along the river (Riggs 1995, 1997; Wilms 1974, 1991). During the early nineteenth century, this pattern became very common in northern Georgia and perhaps other areas as well (Pillsbury 1983; Riggs 1995).

Landscape Archaeology in the Appalachian Summit

During the seventeenth century, native towns in southwestern North Carolina were built around communal council houses and plazas. Several households lived in villages beside these public architectural spaces. Other members of any given town community may well have lived at farmsteads built in the outskirts of these formally planned towns. The architecture and layout of Coweeta Creek probably resembled closely the towns in surrounding parts of southeastern North America during the Late Prehistoric and Protohistoric periods. The layouts of communal space and household architecture at Coweeta Creek resembles the town plans visible at the sixteenth-century Ledford Island site in southeastern Tennessee and the sixteenth-century King site in western Georgia (Hally and Kelly 1998:51; Schroedl 1998:83-84). The architectural form of buildings at Coweeta Creek resembles the designs of buildings at Ledford Island and King (Hally and Kelly 1998:53; Sullivan 1987:21-22). Native builders placed vertical posts in the ground and wrapped mud and sticks around this framework to create the wattle-and-daub structures common at many sites in the Southeast. Vestibule doorways led through earth-embanked walls similar to those at several sites in the southern Appalachians. Wall posts and interior roof supports held rafters and roof beams, which themselves supported roofs that were probably made out of bark and thatch. Smokeholes in these roofs may have been placed directly above hearths,

which themselves were built of clay. Communal council houses at Coweeta Creek and other sites in this part of eastern North America were built in the same form as dwellings but at grander scales. Late Prehistoric and Protohistoric dwellings in western North Carolina tend to measure some twenty to twenty-five feet across, while council houses are forty to fifty feet square.

Many public rituals and other activities linking town members together would have happened within and beside council houses. At Coweeta Creek, the council house was built and rebuilt in the same spot at least six times, reflecting the symbolic significance of that space within the broader town plan. At Coweeta Creek, the last council house was capped with a thick lens of white clay, probably during ritual events honoring the end of its tenure as a town center. The ritual and symbolic meaning attached to this council house need not have precluded the conduct of everyday activities in this architectural space. Nevertheless it seems reasonable to conclude that this council house and town plaza served as a monument marking a focal point for the town community comprised of rural households in the surrounding area and households in the village at this site itself.

The town at Coweeta Creek was probably not as prominent in the regional cultural landscape as other towns built beside pyramidal mounds. Twelve miles north of Coweeta Creek was Cowee, a mound that formed the landmark for a major Cherokee town in the eighteenth century (Goodwin 1977:154; Waselkov and Braund 1995:84). Seven miles north of Coweeta Creek was Nequassee, a mound whose dimensions were much greater than the mound at Coweeta Creek and were on a par with the Peachtree mound along the Hiwassee River less than forty miles to the west (Dickens 1978:126; Ward and Davis 1999:176). Coweeta Creek was nevertheless a distinct town in its own right, if younger and less monumental than others. Coweeta Creek was home to a dozen or more households, and perhaps farmsteads spread along streams near the town center actively affiliated themselves with this town. Further archaeological study should help identify what the cultural landscape between this and other towns in the Upper Little Tennessee River Valley looked like during the seventeenth century.

This chapter has concentrated on Coweeta Creek and surrounding areas as a model for what the built environments of towns in southwestern North Carolina looked like during the seventeenth century. Further study of other towns in and around the Upper Little Tennessee River Valley may well reveal variation in architecture and town plans in this region during this period. The similarities between the town at Coweeta Creek and towns in surrounding regions dating to the sixteenth century nevertheless suggest that there is broad continuity in the cultural ideals underlying town plans in these areas during the Late Prehistoric and Protohistoric periods. For this reason it is reasonable to conclude that Coweeta Creek is a good model of local community patterns in this part of southeastern North America just before native people became enmeshed in the deerskin trade in the early eighteenth century.

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Preface

Stretching from New England to northern Alabama, the Appalachian mountain chain forms not only a major physiographic province of the eastern United States but also the setting for thousands of years of Native American cultural developments. Like the stalwart, sometimes colorful, and better-known folk cultures of the more recent Euro-American inhabitants of these highlands, ancient native highlanders also developed vibrant and diverse traditions, but this heritage now is mainly accessible only through archaeological research. Bit by bit, and subregion by subregion, careful and persistent study of the Prehistoric and Early Historic archaeological sites that occur on (and below) the ridges, rises, plateaus, valleys, and hollows of Appalachia is making these past peoples known.

Nevertheless, with very few exceptions and for sundry reasons, North American archaeologists have failed to recognize the Appalachians as a notable context for prehistoric peoples. Archaeologists tend to define regional parameters on an east-west axis in the eastern United States, thus obscuring the Appalachians, with their decidedly north-south orientation, as an integrating and integral landscape on which, and with which, past cultures evolved and interacted. Most scholars do not subscribe to the view that the natural environment is a deterministic factor in the development of human cultures, and the sheer diversity of native cultural traditions in the Appalachians is testament to their conviction. One cannot deny, however, that the lay of the land has influences on human behavior. For example, unscalable cliffs, deep gorges, and the trending directions and interconnections of valleys and passes all channel human passage, just as where fertile soils lie constrains agricultural practice. Mountainous terrain is known for tendencies to harbor cultural isolates, to present barriers to social interaction, and to include natural resources that differ from those of surrounding more level lands. How Appalachian peoples throughout prehistory met the challenges of, and were shaped by, such a setting has not been explored beyond the

narrow confines of relatively small subregions. Perhaps archaeologists, too, have functioned as “cultural isolates” in the nooks and crannies of Appalachia that form their individual research areas.

This volume takes a step toward conceptualizing the Appalachian highlands as a region with its own unique cultural “flavor” before and shortly after European contact. It does so by being the first to bring together research on the archaeology of the Prehistoric and Early Historic natives of the Appalachian highlands. This nontraditional perspective of eastern United States prehistory results in a collection of research by scholars whose work otherwise would not appear together. This juxtaposition of the highland portions of traditional archaeological spheres of “the Northeast,” “the Southeast,” and even fringes of “the mid-Atlantic” invites scholarly communication along little-worn intellectual corridors, but (ironically) following a well-worn Native American communication network: the Great Warrior Path, a trail system that extended along the spines of the Appalachian plateau and through the Valley and Ridge province between present-day New York and Pennsylvania to Alabama.

The volume had its genesis in a conference entitled “Integrating Appalachian Highlands Archeology,” organized by Lynne Sullivan and John Hart, and hosted by the New York State Museum in October 1996. A major goal of this conference was to facilitate and encourage communication between archaeologists working along the Appalachian chain. The very positive response from participants about attending a conference at which they met new people, heard new ideas, and learned about new data sets suggested that a publication with an Appalachian focus would be of interest and use to a larger audience. Susan Prezzano, a conference participant, agreed to help take on the task of putting such a publication together with Lynne Sullivan. The original thirty-one papers and discussion section clearly were too much for a single volume. In the spirit of collegial communication, the editors asked authors with related chapters to collaborate so as to produce one coauthored chapter. This process, along with some attrition, reduced the number of chapters sufficiently so that the chapters from Jefferies and Schroedl, who were unable to attend the conference, could be added.

The resulting collection highlights current research on natural environmental contexts characteristic of the Appalachians that either were used by prehistoric peoples or affect archaeological site formation, as well as synopses of cultural developments in Appalachian subregions. The latter are organized into general time periods, and each section includes papers representing northern, southern, and intermediate subregions, a scheme intended to provide the reader with a sense of intraregional trends at different points in time. While the chapters do not cover every time period for every subregion, together they portray the breadth and vitality of research in Appalachia. The authors are scholars engaged in the research they discuss, and their chapters contain original data and/or perspectives that come from hands-on knowledge of this region. As such, the individual chapters are valuable in themselves as reports of state-of-the-art

research. With this send-off, we look forward to archaeological research that specifically will acknowledge the Appalachians as a context for cultural development, that will break across traditional spheres of archaeological communication, and that will develop models tailored to the interior highland context and distinct from those developed for regions with broad, flat floodplains or miles of sandy beaches.

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