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The McCraney Cache

Grenada County, Mississippi

James E. Starnes, RPG, Samuel
O. Brookes, Jonathan R. Leard,
RPG, and Winford McCraney



James E. Starnes



Jonathan R. Leard



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The McCraney cache is a find from Grenada County, Mississippi. The cache was discovered by Winford McCraney while surface hunting artifacts in 2008. Mr. McCraney discovered the cache eroding from a cut bank above a small feeder creek. Many artifacts were tangled in roots and some had fallen into the creek. The cache was approximately 50 cm below the modern surface. The cache consists of 61 lithic artifacts. 59 of the artifacts are made from Tuscaloosa gravel and the remaining 2 are made from Tallahatta Quartzite. The McCraney cache was found outside of the natural occurrence of these materials (Map 1). The artifacts are classified as follows: 8 projectile points, 1 drill, and 52 preforms. The 2 artifacts made from Tallahatta Quartzite are both projectile points.

The 52 preforms are all made from Tuscaloosa gravel that has been heat-treated. It was noted that 10 of the preforms were made from large flakes that were heat-treated and then flaked. The large surface of the original flake usually has a dull texture, while later flake scars show a glossy texture due to thermal alteration. Also, the largest preform in the collection (No. 13; Plate C) is made from a flake. Further, it was noted that 14 of the preforms exhibit basal thinning on one side only. The preforms all seem to have been produced by one individual.

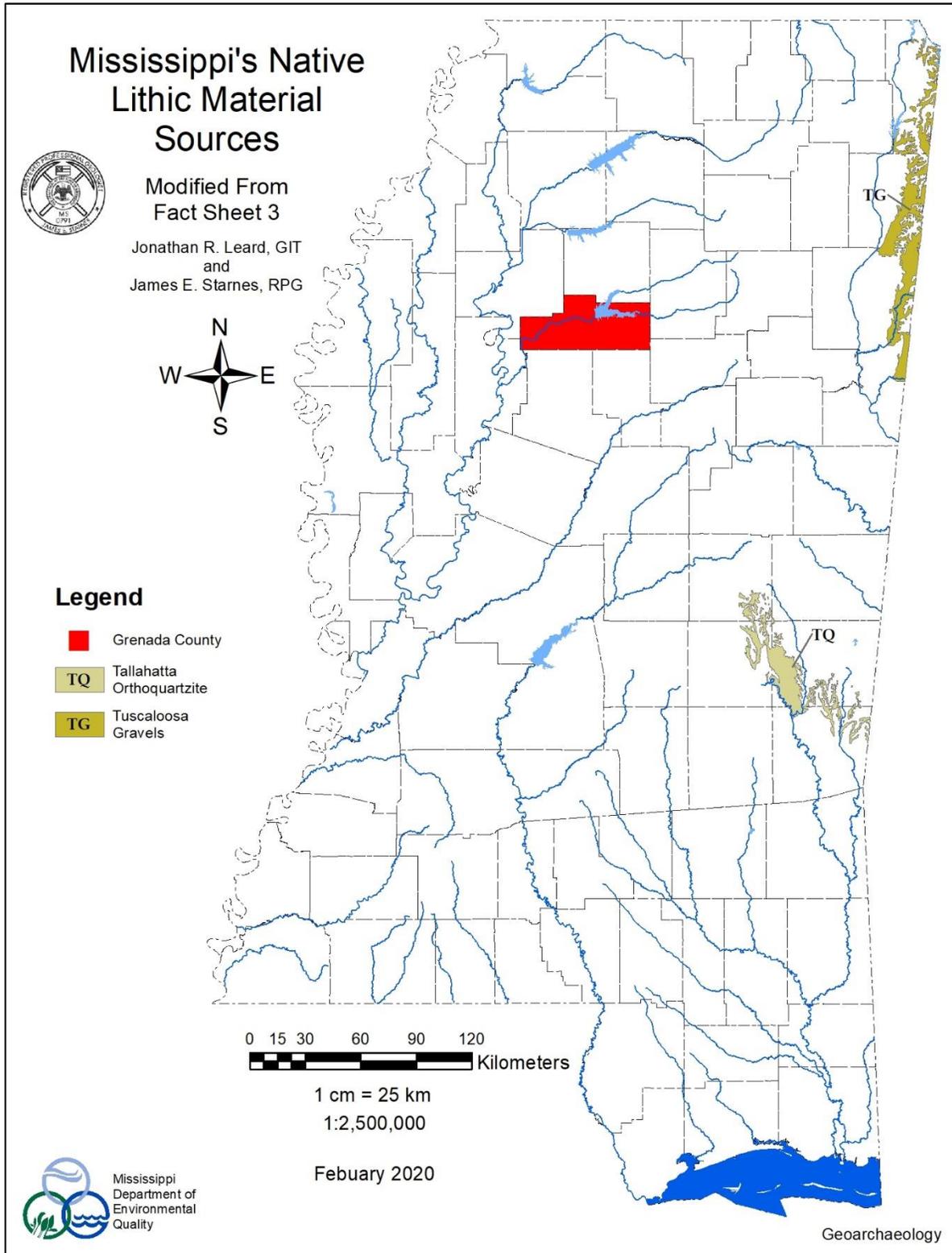
Of the 8 projectile points in the cache, 7 have been classified as Sykes points. Sykes points are stemmed points with short rectangular stems. Some Sykes points have beveled bases similar to Benton points. Three of the Sykes points in the McCraney cache have beveled bases (Nos. 2 and 4, Plate A; No. 8, Plate B). Sykes predate Benton and the well-known Benton point type seems to evolve out of the earlier Sykes form. McGahey (2000:100-106) suggests the type as found in north Mississippi was designed primarily for use as a spear. Examples from south Mississippi appear to have been made for primary use as large cutting tools. One point in the McCraney cache shows use as a knife and has been resharpened repeatedly (No. 6; Plate B). Point No. 45 (Plate H) has a fractured base. This type of basal treatment occurs in the Early and Middle Archaic periods, but to date had not been noted on Sykes points. That this was a deliberate treatment is indicated by the fact that in striking the burin-style blow to the base, the maker took off one of the barbs. Thus the fracture was the result of a blow struck from one side of the artifact to create a dulled base. The points from the McCraney cache could be lost in the collection of Sykes points from 22-MO-876 as form, size, and raw material are nearly identical. The Sykes point type dates from 7000 – 6500 BP.

The drill is bifacially worked and was included in the cache along with the points and preforms. It and 3 of the Sykes points show use and resharpening and/or breakage. It is of interest to note that the 8 projectile points were hafted at some time. Most caches in Mississippi contain either preforms or initial stage, unused bifaces that were not hafted. Some heavily curated points were contained in caches of Benton points observed by Johnson and Brookes (1989). Why used artifacts were included with unused preforms in the McCraney cache is unknown. And the question of whether the finished tools were unhafted to better fit in the cache, will remain unanswered.

The large point (No. 1; Plate A) of Tallahatta Quartzite is a conundrum. It is certainly the highlight of the cache. It stands out from every other artifact in the cache. As one examines it, the differences between it and the other pieces grow even more acute. The point is nearly twice as long as most other artifacts in the cache. Also, the distal end is missing. Thus, Point 1 was originally even longer. Further, unlike the other points, it will not fit in the Sykes classification. The obvious solution was to call it a Benton and compare it to oversize Bentons as described by Johnson and Brookes (1989). That does not work either as Bentons are by definition stemmed points. However, this large point in this cache is corner notched. Point 1 is long and broad and it does exhibit the serial flaking technique used to thin large broad bifaces. True this technique has been noted on many oversize Benton points, but Point 1 possesses no Benton characteristics. It is not only corner notched but exhibits heavy basal grinding on the basal ears. This is a trait found on Early Archaic points. The blade edges exhibit fine pressure flaking on both sides and it is very likely the point was finely serrated. It is difficult to determine this now due to the eroded nature of the raw material, but the edgework on Point 1 is unlike anything else in the cache. To paraphrase William Blake, "he who made the McCraney cache did not make thee". It is the opinion of this writer (Brookes) that Point 1 is a form made at the transition of what we call the Early Archaic to the Middle Archaic. The point was somehow obtained by the maker of the McCraney cache and was included with it. Caches of unfinished pieces, like the preforms in this cache, are a fairly common occurrence in Mississippi, especially near suitable lithic sources. The inclusion of finished workaday tools is unusual, but not unknown. The inclusion of a large, possibly earlier artifact is a rarity. The purpose of the McCraney cache is unknown at this time. James Starnes and Sam Brookes both wish to thank Winford McCraney for recovering the cache, bringing it to our attention, and being gracious and trustful enough to allow us to study it.

References:

- Johnson, J.K., and Brookes, S.O. 1989. Benton points, Turkey Tails and cache blades: Middle Archaic exchange in the Midsouth. *Southeastern Archaeology* 8 (2):134-145.
- Leard, J.R., and Starnes, J.E. 2020. Mississippi's Native Lithic Material Sources. Mississippi Office of Geology. Jackson, MS. Fact Sheet 3. Sheet 1. Scale 1:2,500,000.
- McGahey, S. O. 2000. Mississippi Projectile Point Guide. Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Archaeological Report No. 31.



Map 1. The generalized natural outcrop occurrences of Tallahatta Orthoquartzite and Tuscaloosa Gravel. Modified from Leard & Starnes, 2020.



1A



1B



2A



2B



3A



3B



4A



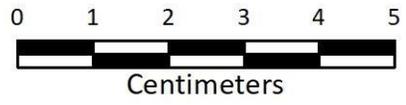
4B



5A



5B





6A



6B



7A



7B



8A



8B



9A



9B



10A



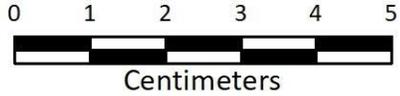
10B



11A



11B





12A



12B



13A



13B



14A



14B



15A



15B

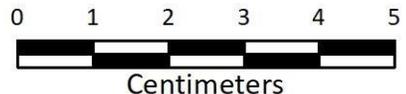


16A



16B

7



Centimeters



17A



17B



18A



18B



19A



19B



20A



20B



21A



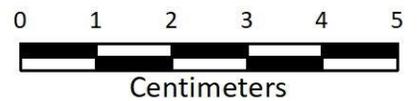
21B



22A



22B





23A



23B



24A



24B



25A



25B



26A



26B



27A



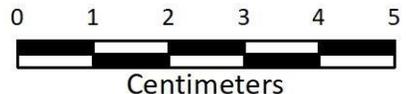
27B



28A



28B





29A



29B



30A



30B



31A



31B



32A



32B



33A



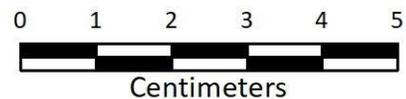
33B



34A



34B





35A



35B



36A



36B



37A



37B



38A



38B



39A



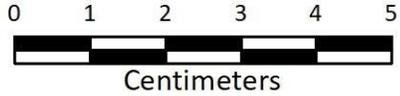
39B



40A



40B





41A



41B



42A



42B



43A



43B



44A



44B



45A



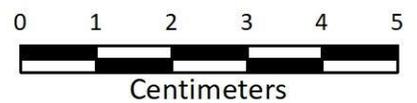
45B



46A



46B





47A



47B



48A



48B



49A



49B



50A



50B



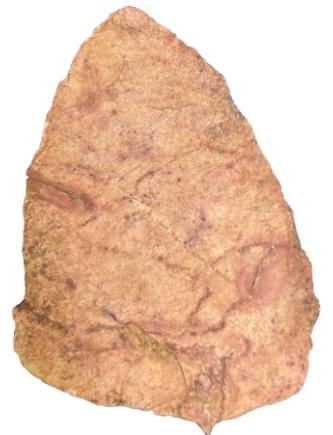
51A



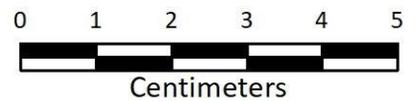
51B



52A



52B





53A



53B



54A



54B



55A



55B



56A



56B



57A



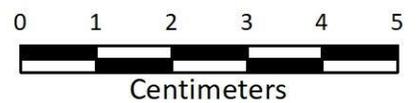
57B



58A



58B





59A



59B



60A



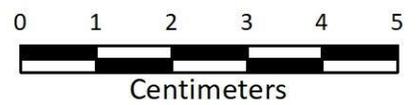
60B



61A



61B



The McCraney Cache				
Specimen	Material	Length (mm)	Width (mm)	Thickness (mm)
1	Tallahatta Quartzite	140.12	62.34	9.86
2	Tallahatta Quartzite	63.55	35.9	11.98
3	Tuscaloosa Gravel	53.36	33.19	9.46
4	Tuscaloosa Gravel	30.46	39.94	8.37
5	Tuscaloosa Gravel	80.65	16.7	10.83
6	Tuscaloosa Gravel	46.74	34.96	10.29
7	Tuscaloosa Gravel	53.02	31.75	11.16
8	Tuscaloosa Gravel	41.73	31.63	10.01
9	Tuscaloosa Gravel	55.97	47.44	10.4
10	Tuscaloosa Gravel	59.16	49.27	12.46
11	Tuscaloosa Gravel	60.33	41.75	11.18
12	Tuscaloosa Gravel	77.69	46.06	14.21
13	Tuscaloosa Gravel	97.84	51.01	13.94
14	Tuscaloosa Gravel	74.58	51.41	10.78
15	Tuscaloosa Gravel	77.25	46.47	11.64
16	Tuscaloosa Gravel	61.07	46.68	9.52
17	Tuscaloosa Gravel	76.22	37.07	11.18
18	Tuscaloosa Gravel	78.59	49.66	11.73
19	Tuscaloosa Gravel	58.61	36.9	8.46
20	Tuscaloosa Gravel	53.61	41.03	7.88
21	Tuscaloosa Gravel	78.67	49.91	14.37
22	Tuscaloosa Gravel	70.47	42	9.49
23	Tuscaloosa Gravel	74.55	44.22	10.35
24	Tuscaloosa Gravel	69.94	44.72	14.3
25	Tuscaloosa Gravel	63.69	59.05	10.91
26	Tuscaloosa Gravel	57.79	42.8	11.82
27	Tuscaloosa Gravel	59.34	46.77	11.04
28	Tuscaloosa Gravel	62.15	43.25	10.17
29	Tuscaloosa Gravel	54.67	46.76	14.56
30	Tuscaloosa Gravel	57.99	46.41	9.72
31	Tuscaloosa Gravel	70.89	42.35	11.05
32	Tuscaloosa Gravel	67.13	48.3	10.7
33	Tuscaloosa Gravel	53.83	46.15	8.94
34	Tuscaloosa Gravel	52.22	44.71	10
35	Tuscaloosa Gravel	59.55	42.4	11.63
36	Tuscaloosa Gravel	60.36	45.08	9.32
37	Tuscaloosa Gravel	56.52	36.38	9.73
38	Tuscaloosa Gravel	57.8	43.07	9.46
39	Tuscaloosa Gravel	61.77	43.6	13.01
40	Tuscaloosa Gravel	50.36	44.83	13.16
41	Tuscaloosa Gravel	67.4	33.49	12.75
42	Tuscaloosa Gravel	49.99	37.99	9.3
43	Tuscaloosa Gravel	62.65	43.69	12.28
44	Tuscaloosa Gravel	48.06	41.1	13.87
45	Tuscaloosa Gravel	62.95	42.02	12.1

The McCraney Cache				
Specimen	Material	Length (mm)	Width (mm)	Thickness (mm)
46	Tuscaloosa Gravel	59.92	43.86	12.88
47	Tuscaloosa Gravel	57.52	47.25	13.64
48	Tuscaloosa Gravel	60.6	39.6	9.19
49	Tuscaloosa Gravel	52.82	28.27	10.67
50	Tuscaloosa Gravel	55.69	36.48	9.86
51	Tuscaloosa Gravel	56.4	35.56	10.25
52	Tuscaloosa Gravel	57.07	41.9	16.62
53	Tuscaloosa Gravel	57.69	34.21	14.59
54	Tuscaloosa Gravel	56.2	34.7	13.9
55	Tuscaloosa Gravel	56.8	38.71	13.47
56	Tuscaloosa Gravel	50.06	43.72	11.45
57	Tuscaloosa Gravel	57.27	38.55	11.23
58	Tuscaloosa Gravel	55.55	44.1	10.69
59	Tuscaloosa Gravel	52.6	38.89	9.93
60	Tuscaloosa Gravel	51.71	38.84	10.62
61	Tuscaloosa Gravel	55.78	34.87	10.84