

**Cracked Pots,
An Update on Swift Creek in
West-central Georgia and East-central Alabama**



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The Swift Creek culture is one of the more interesting societies that graced the landscape of southeastern North America in prehistoric times. West-central Georgia and east-central Alabama lie at the core of the Swift Creek culture. Ironically, this locale remains one of the least explained areas for the Swift Creek people. This paper reviews Swift Creek archaeology in this area of Georgia and Alabama. Datasets from the Chattahoochee and Flint River watersheds form the basis for this discussion. The horizontal boundaries for this assessment are loosely defined to include the middle and lower portions of the Chattahoochee and Flint River watersheds. Perhaps more appropriately, this presentation addresses areas where I have first hand knowledge as a result of archaeological fieldwork over the past 17 years. This venue also provides an opportunity to clean house on my Swift Creek related research, which is primarily survey or limited testing data.

Archaeological research in the study area began about 1850 with the exploration of Kolomoki mounds, an important site of the Swift Creek culture. Pluckhahn summarized the early history of archaeology at Kolomoki. Charles C. Jones, Jr. described the mound group in Early County later known as Kolomoki in his classic work, *Antiquities of the Southern Indians*. While Jones provided some information on the mounds themselves, he did not elaborate on the material culture, nor did he illustrate any Swift Creek items. Preliminary review of Jones' relic collections at the Smithsonian Institution and the American Museum of Natural History

did not reveal any obvious Swift Creek cultural items.

The Swift Creek culture also was not recognized in the study area by Clarence B. Moore and the crew of the steamboat *Gopher*. Moore explored several mound sites in the area, but no Swift Creek wares were described. Had he located any decorated Swift Creek pots in his adventures, Moore would undoubtedly have illustrated them, or mentioned them in his published monograph on the aboriginal mounds along the Chattahoochee River.

Early Middle through Late Middle 20th century Swift Creek research in the study area included efforts by numerous researchers including: Margaret Ashley, Wesley Hurt, A.R. Kelly, William Sears, David Chase, David DeJarnette, Harold Huscher, Frank Schnell, Karl Steinen, Bettye Broyles, Betty Smith, and Frankie Snow. Documentation of these studies varies in quality and completeness. Many of these USCOE sponsored surveys and excavations in reservoirs, including Lakes Seminole and Walter F. George/aka Lake Eufaula, remain to be adequately reported, including several explorations of Swift Creek sites. The best described Swift Creek sites from this era are Kolomoki and Mandeville. What was lacking in all of this research was regional survey data that would enable these obviously important sites to be placed in their proper context.

Late 20th/21st centuries, Ft. Benning surveys, Nancy White's survey of Lake Seminole, Worth's Survey and testing on the middle Flint River, Lake Blackshear

surveys, the LAMAR Institute's Southwest Georgia and Flint River surveys, Thomas Pluckhahn's Kolomoki study, John Chamblee and Jamie Waggoner's survey and testing, and publication of the first Swift Creek volume by Williams and Elliott in 1998. Since that publication, we have William Sear's "Mea Culpa", in which attempted to straighten out his previous mistakes in the Kolomoki cultural sequence.

Of the early research on Swift Creek, the work of David Chase has the best potential to advance our understanding of Swift Creek settlement in the region. Sergeant Chase was assigned to duty at Fort Benning Military Reservation in the late 1950s, lasting through the early 1960s. While at Fort Benning, Chase took advantage of his access to many dozens of archaeological sites that were being actively disturbed by Army training exercises. Chase worked to sample and record the cultural components on these sites. The result was that Chase located numerous important Swift Creek sites in the three counties covered by the Army installation. His work on these sites ranged from exceedingly brief reconnaissance level surface collections to medium-sized excavations. CRM archaeologists have made strides (or more like baby steps) since the early 1990s in salvaging and reassessing the results of Chase's early work in the region.

Approximately how many Swift Creek sites are located in the study area? We have no idea! Unfortunately the archaeological files of Alabama and Georgia cannot be readily searched using the keyword "Swift Creek". Woodland sites can be tallied, but the

various sub-periods of Early, Middle and Late Woodland, also may include components other than Swift Creek and these data are not readily parsed.

Chattahoochee River Watershed

Site 9Ce42, also known as the Quartermaster Site, was located in the vicinity of the U.S. Army Quartermaster warehouses on the northwestern edge of Fort Benning's Main Post. David Chase learned of the site in 1957 or 1958. Construction workers found prehistoric features in a pipeline trench prompting a visit by David Chase and Ed McMichael. Chase recovered a human burial and eight pits in an area that was being graded for a landscaping project. The burial contained a flexed male interment. Associated ceramics included: Kolomoki Complicated Stamped, Swift Creek Complicated Stamped and plain pottery. Ceramics from the pit features included: Swift Creek Complicated Stamped (Early, Middle and Late), Carabelle Incised, Carabelle Punctate, Weeden Island Plain, Weeden Island Red Filmed, Kolomoki Complicated Stamped, Lamar, and plain pottery.

David Chase and colleagues excavated eight pits at the Quartermaster site. Since no plan map for his excavations was located, locations for these features are approximate or missing. Pit 1 was a large pit with large decorated Late Swift Creek-Weeden Island sherds; 2 Etowah complicated stamped sherds, cracked pebbles, charcoal, 2 bone tools, and deer bone. A photograph of the trench shows the feature in profile north of Building Number 1737. Building 1737 has since been destroyed, although its concrete foundation remains. Pit 2, a large pit with freshwater clam shell lenses, bone,

and pottery (probably Late Swift Creek), was exposed by the pipe line trench, but not explored because of its close proximity to an active access road. Pit 4 was a small pit feature of “Kolomoki time range”, whose location is unknown. No other details of this feature are recorded. Pit 6 is known only from two photograph captions: one that shows six large Swift Creek complicated stamped pottery sherds from several distinct vessels attributed to Pit 6 and the other depicting the excavation of the large feature in progress. The other features mentioned by Chase were not described. Chase characterized the Swift Creek occupation at Quartermaster as a “big village”, but it is not clear how he arrived at that interpretation in the absence of any site plan or clear understanding of the absolute extent of this site.

Recent excavations have been conducted at Quartermaster by the firms of Southern Research and Panamerican Consultants. Southern Research’s revisit to the site yielded a Historic Indian burial and only a smattering of Swift Creek material culture. My assessment of the Quartermaster site, as leader of the Southern Research exploration, is that the topsoil (and any associated midden) was completely removed during construction of the U.S. Army warehouse complex located there in the early 20th century. While the removal of these soils removed most of the site’s Swift Creek occupational debris, pit features remain. Chase explored several such features. Panamerican Consultants’ test excavations at Quartermaster were limited but yielded more meager evidence of Swift Creek occupation. All three researchers recovered evidence to

support a Late Swift Creek occupation date.

Swift Creek paddle designs derived from complicated stamped sherds from the Quartermaster site have been illustrated by archaeologist Bettye Broyles, as part of her broader study of Swift Creek ceramics. One particular design motif is discussed later in this presentation. The LAMAR Institute retrieved collections of Swift Creek pottery from Broyles from Quartermaster and other sites in Fort Benning in the Bettye Broyles Repatriation Project. Those sherds are currently stored at the Georgia Museum of Natural History.

Site 9Me41, or the Sand Hill site, was originally recorded by David Chase, who wrote a brief manuscript on its Late Swift Creek component. Chase noted the presence of a human burial at this site, which was possibly associated with the Swift Creek component. Chase’s collection from this site was briefly examined for this presentation. The site was revisited and systematically shovel tested by Southern Research. Black organic soils containing bone, charcoal, nutshells, debitage, and ceramics, were noted to a depth of 90 cm. Artifacts were recovered from a maximum depth of 160 cm below ground surface. Among the artifacts recovered from 9Me41 were Swift Creek Plain, Swift Creek Complicated Stamped, Cartersville Check Stamped, burnished plain, plain fiber tempered sherds; animal bone, chert, petrified wood, quartz, and ridge and valley chert chipped stone; fire cracked rocks, and broken cobbles.

Site 9Ce11, near Lawson Field on Fort Benning was excavated by Chase in the 1950s. He discovered Early and Middle

Swift Creek ceramics and rock hearth features. Chase's collection from this site was briefly examined by the author in 2005.

Site 9Me60, the Walker Street site, which is in downtown Columbus, Georgia, was excavated by Chase. It contained an Early Swift Creek component. Recently, Ledbetter published a summary article on Chase's excavations there.

Interestingly, despite more recent extensive survey in the Lawson Field vicinity by various CRM-firms, Swift Creek occupation has proven elusive. A few Swift Creek sites have been found near the Chattahoochee River since David Chase, however, and examples are now described.

Site 9Ce2017 consisted of a low frequency buried deposit of fire cracked rock, Swift Creek Complicated Stamped and other unidentified plain aboriginal wares were recovered by the author from two backhoe trenches on an elevated area in the Chattahoochee River floodplain. Backhoe trenches (5 and 6) both contained cultural material and are described below. Trench 6 contained aboriginal ceramics from Zone VI (104-124 cm).

Site 9Ce2013 consisted of a Swift Creek pottery and lithic scatter on the eroded Chattahoochee River bank. This site was reported by 1st Sergeant Richau, who gave archaeologists the artifacts that he had collected from the site, along with a crude sketch of the site location. A survey team, led by archaeologist George Price, visited the location specified by Richau and carefully inspected the shoreline and eroding

riverbank. Fewer than 10 sherds were collected and no evidence of a midden was observed. Richau apparently made his collection when the lake level was lower and more of the site was exposed than was apparent at the time of the present study. Artifacts were restricted to the surface and included: daub, plain sherds, Swift Creek Complicated Stamped sherds, chert debitage, fire cracked rock, and one Bradley Spike PPK. Two straight rims and one folded rim were noted on the ceramics, which may indicate a Late Swift Creek component.

Swift Creek sites are also found along the tributary streams of the Chattahoochee River, extending upstream several kilometers from the river. Block excavations have been excavated at several of these sites, including Halloca Creek, Carmouche, and 9Ce75. Halloca Creek is a minor tributary of the Chattahoochee River in Chattahoochee County, Georgia. David Chase and University of Georgia archaeologist A.R. Kelly conducted excavations at Halloca Creek after the site was discovered by soldiers at Fort Benning. The work at Halloca Creek was an important collaboration between David Chase and the University of Georgia, although no formal report was ever produced describing these efforts and this important site has not been explored in recent decades. What we know about the Swift Creek presence at Halloca Creek is quite limited. In their 20 foot by 20 foot square, Chase's team unearthed and restored two Early Swift Creek vessels. He briefly described presence of buried deposits and features from the site. One radiocarbon date of 2020 BP was obtained from an Early Swift Creek feature context. The Halloca

Creek material was recently reexamined by University of Kentucky graduate student Karen Smith. Certainly, a study of this important site is long overdue.

Site 9Me42 is an Early Swift Creek site on Upatoi Creek, which was first recorded by David Chase and later surveyed and tested by Southern Research. Artifacts from this site included an appendage from a ceramic figurine, Swift Creek Complicated Stamped, and Alligator Bayou Stamped ceramics. Chase's collection was reexamined for this presentation but appears to be greatly reduced from its original.

Further upstream on Upatoi Creek at the northeastern corner of Fort Benning is Site 9Ce1207. It is another site surveyed and tested by Southern Research. Russell Weisman classified this Middle Woodland site as Mandeville phase, although he noted the presence of both early and late Swift Creek pottery types. The artifacts included a small rim sherd with a scalloped lip, which is an early variety of Swift Creek Complicated Stamped and an appendage from an anthropomorphic ceramic figurine, both recovered from buried contexts. A piece of muscovite sheet mica from a similar depth is another artifact type usually found in Middle Woodland context, and it is likely associated with this component. Late Swift Creek Complicated stamped pottery sherds with folded rims were found at 9Ce1207. Weisman noted that this folded rim mode is diagnostic of the later Middle Woodland Kolomoki Phase and the Late Woodland Quartermaster Phase, and also appears in early Weeden Island assemblages in areas south of Fort Benning.

Only nine complicated stamped sherds were recovered in the shovel tests and test units at 9Ce1207, and these represent less than two percent of the total ceramic assemblage. Complicated stamped ceramics were present in 10 percent of the shovel tests. Site 9Ce1207 is a fairly large site but when one examines the spatial distribution of Swift Creek-related artifacts the size of the occupation is substantially smaller. This trend for Swift Creek components to occupy a small portion of a larger, multi-component habitation site is common at Fort Benning. It suggests that these occupations were single or small multiple family farmsteads rather than villages.

The Swift Creek survey and testing data from the East Central Alabama is less extensive than for the Georgia dataset. Chase and Huscher explored several Swift Creek sites in the Chattahoochee River floodplain and its terraces of Russell County, Alabama. Site 1Ru48 on Yuchi Creek contained Late Swift Creek component, Site 1Ru78 contained Middle to Late Swift Creek material. Chase published descriptions of some of this work in the *Journal of Alabama Archaeology*, but most of the research by Chase and Huscher remains undescribed. Most of their sites have since been revisited by CRM surveys. Survey at one of these sites (9Ru115) yielded an exciting find. Site 9Ru115 contains a dense surface deposit of Swift Creek pottery around a spring that feeds into Lake Walter F. George. One Swift Creek Complicated Stamped sherd from this site, which is shown in Figure 1, was a paddle match with another Swift Creek sherd from the Quartermaster Site, which was illustrated by Bettye Broyles. Although these two sites are only a few

miles apart, this evidence attests to a direct connection between the people who lived at each of these sites.

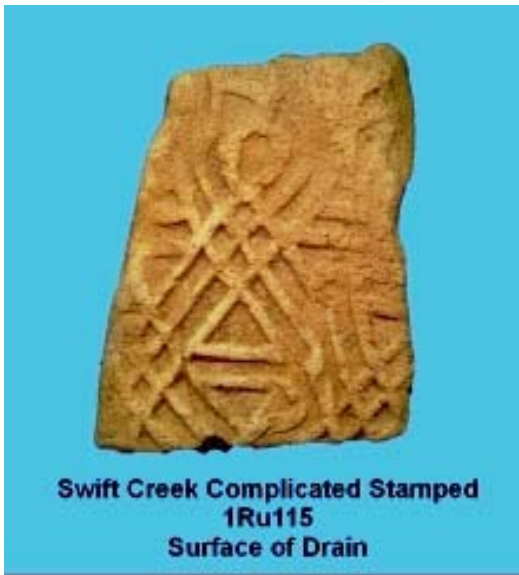


Figure 1. Swift Creek Complicated Stamped Sherd from 1Ru115, Whose Design Matches Broyles' Illustrated Example from the Quartermaster Site.

Again, a few Swift Creek sites have been located in Russell County, Alabama since David Chase. One example is Site 9Ru481, which is a medium sized Swift Creek site that was erroneously tested by Panamerican Consultants, who thought they were testing Site 9Ru114. Their mistaken identify for this site, nearly 1 kilometer from the actual Site 9Ru114, escaped the reviews by State and Federal archaeologists. This error was discovered by Southern Research surveyors, who stumbled onto the previous test excavations during a survey of a previously unsurveyed tract. Ironically, Panamerican Consultants archaeologists recognized that site 9Ru481 contained important buried Swift Creek components and the site was recommended for preservation.

Flint River Watershed

Swift Creek sites are far less common in the Flint River watershed than in the Chattahoochee River watershed. The most extensively investigated site in the watershed, of which I have only recently learned, was the Macon County landfill near Montezuma, Georgia. Frank Schnell's excavations at the Macon County Landfill revealed an extensive Swift Creek occupation. The component included mussel shell and a dog burial. Unfortunately, the work done at this site was limited, no report is available, and the site is poorly understood.

A recently discovered site in Talbot County, Georgia was documented by the LAMAR Institute's Flint River Basin Archaeological Survey (FRBAS). The Buckner site is located on Patsiliga Creek in the upland sand hills of Talbot County. At present our knowledge of this site is limited to collector information but this information is indeed tantalizing. Large specimens of Swift Creek complicated stamped ware show a potential for design studies (Figure 2). The site also has a Swift Creek lithic component, which may have broad regional implications.



Figure 2. Swift Creek Complicated Stamped Sherd, Buckner Site, Talbot County, Georgia (Courtesy of Mike Buchner).

The Flint River Survey recorded one Swift Creek site in Marion County. The Powell Field site on Kinchafoonee Creek provides more food for thought on Swift Creek settlement in the region. This surface site in plowed field yielded plain and complicated stamped Swift Creek pottery, Baker Creek projectile points, and numerous ferruginous sandstone geode fragments. These geodes may have been selected by the Swift Creek people for use as pigment.

Archaeological survey along the Flint River and Ichauway-Nochaway Creek in Baker and Mitchell counties has revealed a few Swift Creek settlements. Collector interviews about collections obtained from the sites on the Joseph Jones Ecological Center include several pottery deposits found in submerged contexts. One surface site located by the LAMAR Institute from a large hunting plantation near the Flint River in Mitchell County, Georgia yielded a few Swift Creek complicated stamped sherds and river mussels. This site probably represents a relatively small encampment but it is mentioned because of the possible evidence for use of local shellfish by Swift Creek people, as was observed at the Macon County Landfill. Elsewhere in the Southeast a reliance on freshwater shellfish has been interpreted as a response to the stress of population pressures. Swift Creek sites are not so abundant in the region, however, to suggest that the area was overpopulated in Swift Creek times. It should be noted that freshwater shellfish use is relatively uncommon throughout the Flint and Chattahoochee River watersheds for all time periods.

So, how common are Swift Creek sites in the region? The answer is not very common, but they are somewhat more common in the Chattahoochee River and its tributaries than in the Flint River watershed. Certainly Swift Creek sites are not as prolific as David Chase's early work suggests. Systematic surveys over the past several decades often encounter Swift Creek wares but nearly all of these finds are restricted to a few sherds. Sites that could be classified as villages, or even large hamlets, are not the norm. This was recognized by Chase in the early 1960s when he wrote, "Only one site, the Quartermaster, has shown indication of a big village tradition. The other cited sites are of the large campsite variety".

Survey conducted thus far in the Kolomoki hinterlands by Steinen, Pluckhahn, Chamblee, Waggoner and the LAMAR Institute;s FRBAS team have revealed few Swift Creek sites. Of approximately 640 sites located in recent survey by the LAMAR Institute of the Flint River watershed, for example, fewer than five Swift Creek sites were identified. These data stand in contrast to the seeming abundance of Swift Creek sites in the Fort Benning vicinity encountered by Chase, where Swift Creek components were present on at least 10 percent of the 100 or so sites he visited. Extensive CRM-survey of Fort Benning has identified 4,106 archaeological sites and these include 293 Early Woodland, 59 Middle Woodland, and 13 Late Woodland sites. At present, these cannot be described by their presence or absence of a Swift Creek component, but they demonstrate that Woodland sites are somewhat limited in number.

Certainly, the surrounding population of Swift Creek people in Early County surrounding the Kolomoki site was not sufficient to suggest any sort of Chiefdom or settlement concentration as one might expect with an important political center. This observation is true for the Kolomoki hinterlands but a similar relationship of Swift Creek settlement in the areas surrounding the Mandeville site is not well established.

Some of this research on Swift Creek pottery and lithic materials can be accomplished through the study of older collections. Other questions may require additional surveys and new excavations. And, as demonstrated by the pottery match described herein for the Quartermaster site and a newly discovered site in Alabama demonstrates the utility of linking both datasets.

Swift Creek scholars agree that there remains a crying need for a study of non-ceramic Swift Creek material culture. An understanding of the chipped stone, ground stone, and exotic stones possessed by these people is vital for the proper interpretation of Swift Creek settlement patterns, trade relationships, and social organization. The use of crystal quartz, mica, ochre, selected cherts, and possibly other materials such as magnetite and graphite has not been rigorously studied.

Researchers have long known of the importance of certain lithic resources for Swift Creek people. Muscovite, graphite, crystal quartz, and other high quality minerals are often recovered from Swift Creek deposits. Little attention has been given, however, to the effect of the source areas of these raw materials on Swift Creek settlement.

Pluckhahn reviewed the various reasons that have been offered for the settlement choice of Kolomoki mounds, but this question remains problematic. High grade chert resources are available within a few kilometers of Kolomoki, but their exploitation of this resource (or any sort of political control over the resource) has not been explored. Natural resource factors certainly affect human settlement. A few examples come to mind. The Buckner Site on the headwaters of Patsiliga Creek in Talbot County. Why would Swift Creek societies choose to live in the uplands of Talbot County, since that area is quite xeric and not well suited to agriculture? One possible reason for its location is the presence of high quality quartz crystal pebble deposits that are found there. Halloca Creek is positioned near petrified wood deposits, which may have held some attraction to the Swift Creek folks. At the Powell Field site in Marion County, Swift Creek settlement may be linked to outcrops of ferruginous geodes containing ochre or pigment. And as mentioned, the settlement at Kolomoki was established near high grade chert deposits.

The relationship between Swift Creek, Cartersville, Weeden Island, and Napier ceramic series remains a relevant topic that has not been exhaustively explored. Chase's Upatoi Complex, which Chase suggested post-dated Early Swift Creek component, remains problematic. Chase suggested the makers of this pottery were settled in large villages. Their pottery was overwhelmingly plain. It may be a possible antecedent to the later Averett Culture. Subsequent research has given validity to the Averett Culture but his Upatoi Complex has not been verified. Chase identified Upatoi

Complex components from his excavations at Oswichee Bend (9Ce66) on the Chattahoochee River and the Baird Site (9Me14) on Upatoi Creek. In both instances, he noted that the Upatoi Complex sherds were stratigraphically superior to the Swift Creek wares.

One undertaking of the LAMAR Institute, which sheds some light on Swift Creek research in western Georgia, is the Bettye Broyles Repatriation Project. This project involved rescue of approximately one pickup truck load of artifacts from various important archaeological sites in the Southeast, including several Swift Creek sites in this study area. Broyles had maintained temporary possession of these collections for more than four decades. She had prepared hundreds of tracings of pottery designs, and she used several of

these composite motif reconstructions in her published works pertaining to the Swift Creek culture. Among these sherd collections were large specimens of Swift Creek complicated stamped wares from sites in western Georgia, including Halloca Creek and Quartermaster.

The unpublished manuscripts of David Chase are a wealth of information that should be edited and integrated with a reanalysis of his excavated material. These include his writings on excavations on more than a dozen Swift Creek sites in the Fort Benning vicinity. Chase's published writings on the subject are few but his unpublished material is more extensive. In addition, most of Chase's sites have now been revisited and systematically surveyed, which will enable his work to be placed in a firmer context.