

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS FOR THE
OCONALUFTEE VISITOR CENTER EXPANSION, GREAT SMOKY
MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK, SWAIN COUNTY, NORTH
CAROLINA**

MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

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July 2007

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From July 9 to 12, 2007, personnel from the Archaeological Research Laboratory (ARL) at The University of Tennessee-Knoxville conducted limited excavations adjacent to the Oconaluftee Visitor Center in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park (GSMNP), Swain County, North Carolina (Figure 1). The field work consisted of mechanically stripping plowzone and fill dirt in an effort to document any undisturbed and potentially significant archaeological deposits. The field work was conducted at the request of Erik Kreusch, GSMNP Archaeologist, prior to the construction of a new visitor center and comfort station.

Three trenches were excavated in the study area. Trench 1 covered much of the footprint of the proposed visitor center, while Trenches 2 and 3 were excavated in the footprint of the proposed comfort station. Mechanical stripping utilized a backhoe with a smooth bucket, a front end loader and a bulldozer, supplied and operated by GSMNP personnel. Use of the front end loader and bulldozer was justified by the unanticipated depth of fill in the study area. Depths of fill ranged from as little as 30 cm to as much as 100 cm over plowzone and subsoil.

Two cultural features were identified during the study (Figure 2). Feature 1 is a large, circular (ca. 1.75 m diameter) anomaly filled with very dark loamy soil and rock. The rock, all unburned river cobbles, appears to have been mounded up on top of the feature and was common in the soil zone above the feature in the nearby vicinity. The feature was sampled using an Oakfield probe with a 2.1 cm (13/16") diameter push tube. Apparent subsoil was encountered at approximately 50 cm below the surface of the feature. A single piece of clear container glass was recovered among the rock when personnel were cleaning off the top of the feature. Fragmented pieces of large mammal bone were also noted on the edge of the feature. The clear glass at the top of the feature tentatively suggests that it dates to no earlier than the late nineteenth century. If the glass is diagnostic for the feature, it should either be associated with a nineteenth/twentieth century farmstead or with the construction of the visitor center and/or parking lot. Feature excavation would likely determine the age and possibly the function of the feature.

Feature 2 was a rectangular post in the northwest corner of Trench 1 (Figure 2). The post was very shallow and was unintentionally excavated while cleaning the surface of the feature with a trowel. Maximum depth of the post was less than 1 cm. The age of the feature is unknown.

Beyond the two features, a light scatter of historic and prehistoric artifacts was recovered from disturbed contexts in Trench 1. Historic artifacts appear to be late nineteenth to mid twentieth century in age. Prehistoric artifacts include Woodland and Cherokee pottery and non-diagnostic chipped stone artifacts. No artifacts or intact deposits were observed in Trenches 2 and 3.

No site number has yet been assigned to the study area, but it is considered part of the Oconaluftee Archaeological District (Beditz 1981; Webb 2002). As such, Feature 1 should be treated as a significant cultural resource. ARL recommends that damage to the

area should be mitigated via the excavation of Feature 1 prior to construction of the new visitor center.

REFERENCES CITED

Beditz, Lindsay M.

1981 Oconaluftee Archaeological District. National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form. On file, Office of State Archaeology, Raleigh, North Carolina.

Webb, Paul A.

2002 *Cultural and Historical Resource Investigations of the Ravensford Land Exchange Tract, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Swain County, North Carolina*. TRC Garrow Associates, Inc., Durham. Submitted to the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, Cherokee, North Carolina.

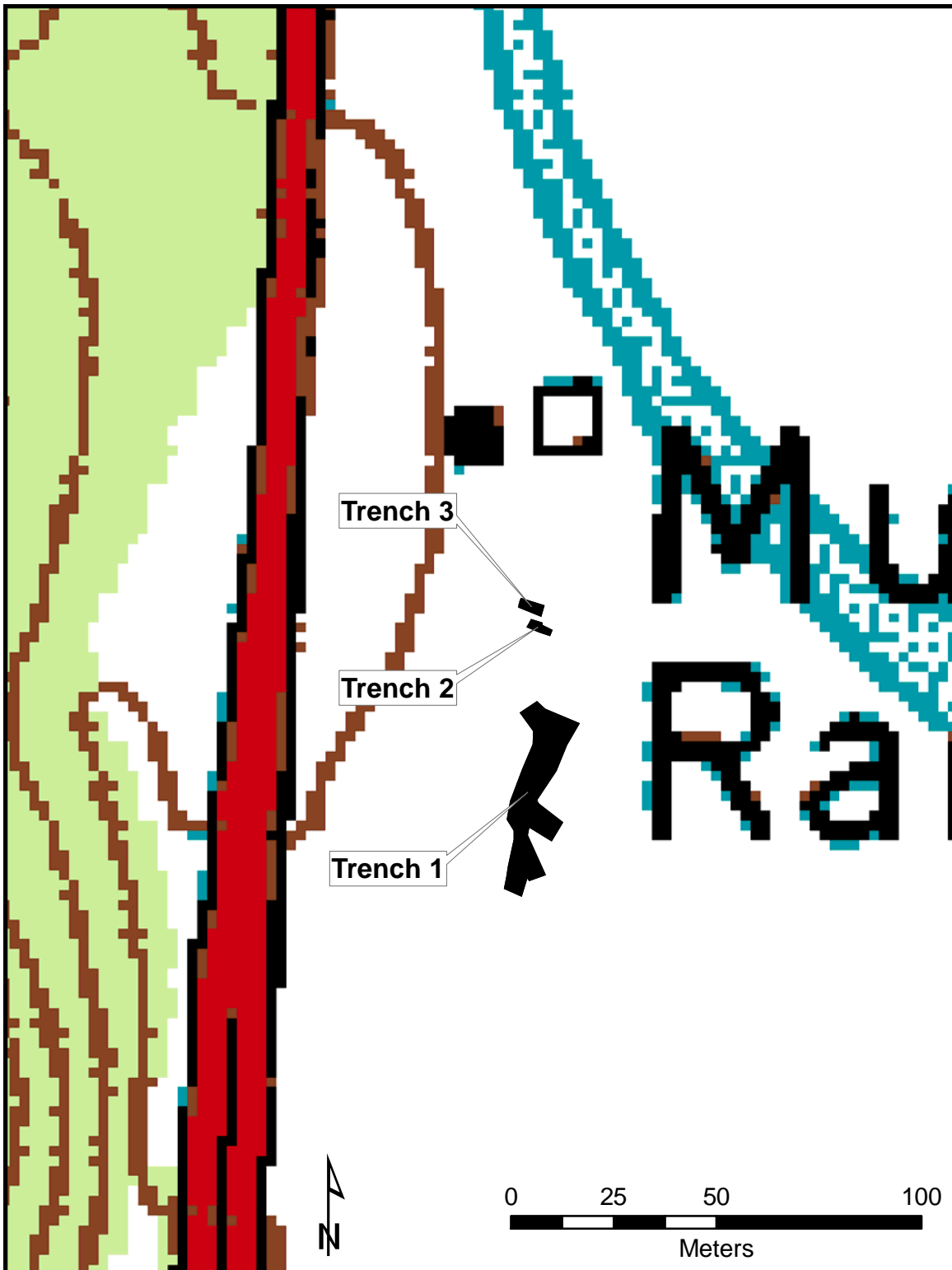


Figure 1. Portion of the USGS 7.5' Smokemont, NC/TN quadrangle map showing the study area just south of the Oconaluftee Visitor Center.

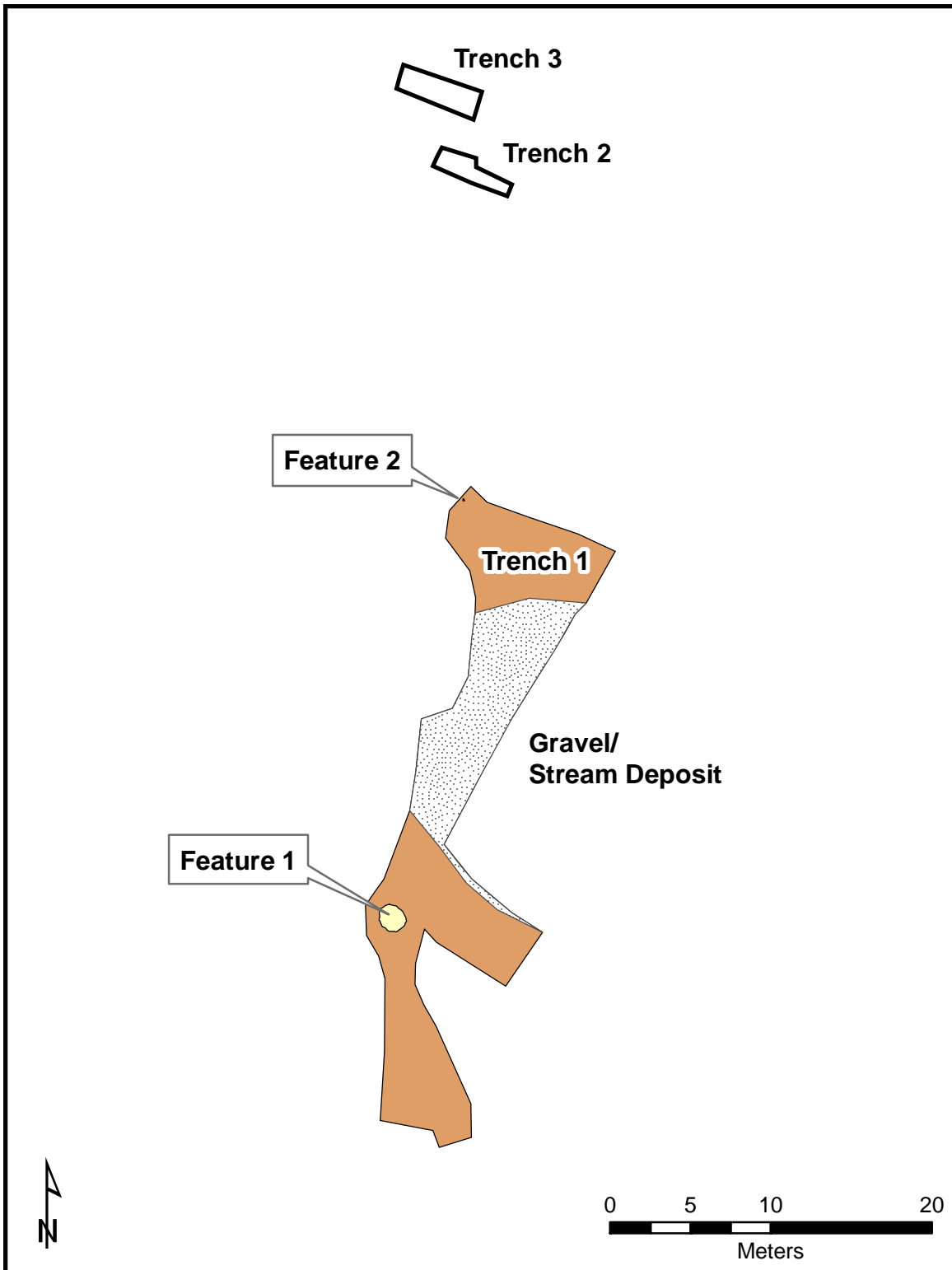


Figure 2. Areas of excavation and results.