VINING PHASE EXCAVATIONS ON THE
CHATTAHOOCHEE-OCONEE NATIONAL
FOREST

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The Vining Phase in central Georgia is an old idea (Kelly 1938) that has new life as a result of more recent excavations in the Oconee National Forest. It was defined as a simple-stamped ceramic complex, an idea that was rejected at the time. Recent excavations suggest that sites with simple stamped pottery and small triangular points located on ridgetops in central Georgia belong to Vining (Elliott and Wynn 1991); it appears to be a Late Woodland-Early Mississippian transitional phase. Four Vining phase sites, Guthrie, Passport, Fant-Davis and Elliott, were excavated between 1988 and 1996. Here we summarize what is known about the Vining phase thus far, describe the results of these modern excavations, and discuss future research directions. This paper is based on the Summary Report (Meyers et al. 1997).

ENVIRONMENT

The four sites discussed here are located in the Piedmont, in the western portion of Putnam County, on the Washington Plateau (Wharton 1989). Putnam County is near the geographical center of the state and along the southern border of the Piedmont Plateau. It is drained by two major streams, the Oconee and the Little River. Soils in the project area belong to the Davidson Association (USDA 1965), found on broad ridgetops and small, severely eroded areas. Much of the lower Piedmont of Georgia, particularly in the Oconee National Forest, has these broad ridges of Davidson soils, and most are heavily eroded.

VINING PHASE ARCHAEOLOGICAL HISTORY

The Vining ceramic complex was first defined by A.R. Kelly in 1938. Based on his excavations in Putnam county at the Vining site near Rock Eagle, as well as at other sites located in the area, Kelly identified a simple stamped ceramic type. This type was not accepted at the time; rather, it was subsumed into the Mossy Oak complex (Fairbanks 1952). Mossy Oak is considered an antecedent to Swift Creek complicated stamped and as such dates to the Middle Woodland period. However, despite analysis and re-analysis (Stroutamire et. al. 1977), the chronology of the Mossy Oak complex and variations in simple stamped ceramics have not been definitively established.

This part of central Georgia was not intensively investigated again until the late 1970s during the Wallace Reservoir project (DePratter 1976). At that time 3,000 sites were identified in the area; of these, 151 contained simple stamped ceramics. It is not possible to determine which, if any, of these sites belong to the Vining phase without reanalyzing the data; however, it is probable that not all of the sites date to Early and/or Middle Woodland, as originally presumed. Of these 151 sites, 115 also contained Mississippian period ceramics; of these, 19 had small triangular points, and 17 contained podal supports. In addition, 16 sites contained major simple stamped components, and 6 of these sites also contained small triangular points (Elliott and Wynn 1991).

In 1988 in the upper Piedmont in the Richard B. Russell Reservoir, plain and simple stamped pottery with small triangular points was noted by David Anderson (1988) and termed "Late Cartersville." Eight radiocarbon dates range from A.D. 910-1180, securing the plain and simple stamped pottery in the Late Woodland to Early Mississippian. Excavations at the Shinholsier Mound near Milledgeville, in the southern Oconee Province (Williams 1990) recovered an abundance of simple stamped pottery with small triangular points from pre-mound Savannah phase levels. Simple
stamped sherds associated with a small triangular point were found in the premound layer at Scull Shoals, on the Oconee River north of Greensboro. Simple stamped ceramics assigned to the Santee Period in South Carolina date to AD 810-1340. Anderson (1985, 1989) has argued for a Late Woodland period in this area marked by plain, simple stamped, and brushed ceramics.

Surveys of the Oconee National Forest conducted from 1988-1990 (Elliott and Wynn 1991) revealed potential Vining phase sites. Of 4,500 acres surveyed, nine sites with simple stamped pottery were located. Characteristics of these sites include locations in upland areas, an average of 1.4 km from a permanent water source, and size of 1-2 acres. The sites are clustered near the corner of Jasper, Jones and Putnam counties and in the Vining Farm area, near Rock Eagle, Putnam County. Ceramic artifacts from these nine sites include 653 sherds, of which 66% were simple stamped and 32% were plain. In addition, very small percentages of incised, simple stamped with incised, check stamped, rectilinear complicated stamped, Navajo and Lamar sherds were also recovered. Curvilinear design elements and podal supports were absent from the sample. Lithic artifacts included small triangular points from several sites (Elliott and Wynn 1991).

The most extensive excavations are those by Worth and Duke (1991) and Worth (1996). Hogcraw Creek (9DY15) is on the modern floodplain of the Middle Flint River, at the mouth of Hogcraw Creek. This site was tested in 1988 and results indicated that a midden deposit extended over 70 m along the length of the levee, at a depth of 60 cm. No pits or other features were identified. Diagnostic artifacts included plain, simple stamped, and incised sherds, and small triangular projectile points. According to Worth and Duke, "it is clear that these triangulars occur in direct association with the plain, simple stamped and incised ceramic complex" (1991:32). The authors noted the similarity of the collection to the Averett phase, on the Chattahoochee River south of the Fall Line, and to the Vining phase. Overall, Hogcraw is closer to Vining than to Averett, due to the incised decoration overstamping; however, the site appears to be a combination of ceramics from both sides of the Flint River. It is neither purely Vining nor purely Averett.

In 1996, Worth reported on excavations at Raccoon Ridge, one of the northernmost large Vining sites in the Oconee area, and the only one close to mound centers. Most importantly, Worth found the remains of a small residential Vining structure. Although no Vining pottery was found in any of the structure's postholes, Vining sherds were the only sherds other than Lamar recovered in the plowzone above the structure. Radiocarbon and OCR dates were obtained for the structure, and indicate AD 950-1150 as the period of occupation. Worth suggests that Raccoon Ridge was a village with a comparatively large population, and it was possibly a sociopolitical boundary for this area (Worth 1996).

In 1988 Dea Mozingo studied subsistence data from Vining and Lamar features at the Raccoon Ridge site. Mozingo found a small quantity of maize in one Vining feature, compared to a substantial quantity from the Lamar features. The Vining storage pits were small and shallow compared to the Lamar pits. Mozingo suggests that the small size and low number of Vining pits, coupled with the small quantity of maize recovered from them, is a result of a heavy reliance on wild taxa.

During 1990-1993, cultural resource surveys in the Oconee National Forest isolated seven additional potential Vining sites in Putnam and Jasper counties. On the basis of these Oconee National Forest surveys, as well as extensive Phase II testing on four sites in the survey area, Elliott and Wynn (1991) proposed a revival of Kelly's 1938 Vining Simple Stamped ceramic type, dating to the transitional Late Woodland/Early Mississippian period.

Vining Characteristics

Vining's area of concentration is the central Georgia Piedmont's Oconee and Ocmulgee River drainages (Elliott and Wynn 1991). It is likely not limited to this area, however, and may occur as far northeast as Camden, Mattassee Lake, and Tyger Village in South Carolina, Rucker's Bottom at Lake Russell, and west to the Flint River (Elliott, personal communication 1995). Simple stamped pottery alone does not indicate a Vining site. Cane Island (9PM209) has simple stamped ceramics that date to the Woodland period (Wood 1981). Vining sites have simple stamped and plain pottery with small Mississippian triangular points. Sites are large, dense, and located on ridgetops near springs but distant from permanent water sources.
Vining pottery is primarily simple stamped, often overstamped (stamping over the original decoration with a different orientation). Alternately, the decoration could be a simple stamping with cords wrapped first horizontally around a paddle, then crossed over to hold the other in place (Williams, personal communication 1990). Stamped lines include narrow and wide-band with overlapping sub-types. Distances between grooves range from 2 mm-5 mm (Wynn, Bruce, and Certain 1990). Most of the vessel surface is decorated, excluding the bases. Rims are nearly straight to slightly everted and not specifically decorated, though some rims show notching on the vessel lip. A few vessels have a single, broad incised line below the rim. Podal supports are generally not present. Small (0.5-1.5 cm) Mississippian triangular points are found on 20-30% of the Vining sites (Elliott and Wynn 1991).

Based on these artifacts and the dates from Raccoon Ridge, Vining is a Late Woodland/Early Mississippian transitional phase, perhaps contemporaneous with Late Napier, Woodstock, and Etowah. Elliott and Wynn (1991) have suggested a probable range of AD 800-1200, and possibly AD 950-1150 for Vining.

Settlement patterns, subsistence strategies, and mortuary behavior are largely unknown. No mounds are associated with Vining sites. Though likely influenced by the Etowah chiefdom in northwestern Georgia, Vining sites do not appear to have been under the political control of Etowah. Etowah outposts in the Vining area do exist and include Cold Springs and Bull Tongue Island (Wood 1981). Sites such as these likely acted as controls of floodplains and shoals, leaving other areas such as ridgetops available for Vining settlements.

If Vining is separate from the Etowah chiefdom, it is unclear what happened to it. The simple stamped pottery disappears from the archaeological record during the Savannah phase.

FOREST SERVICE Vining excavations

The Forest Service undertook excavation of four previously identified Vining sites. These four sites include the Guthrie site, 9PM1043, tested in 1988 by the Georgia Mountains Archaeological Society; the Passport site, 9PM830, investigated by Passport in Time in 1990; the Fant-Davis site, 9PM847, investigated by Passport in Time in 1991; and the Elliott site, 9PM755, investigated by Passport in Time in 1995 and 1996.
point. Two 1x1 m units were excavated at this time. Feature 1, a pit, was located in one of the units. It contained a large number of sherds, apparently from multiple vessels that appeared to have been broken prior to deposition. The pit was small, and measured approximately 13 cm wide, 25 cm long, and 20 cm deep. The second test unit contained sherds and quartz flakes, but no features.

The Guthrie site has been heavily damaged through the years, making temporal and cultural identification difficult. The lack of multiple discernible features added to this difficulty. However, the excavations did recover diagnostic elements of Vining, that is, simple stamped pottery, small Mississippian triangular points, and location on a broad level ridge more than 100 m from water. The one feature suggests that others may be present. Large sherds were recovered from possibly multiple vessels, which appear to have been broken before deposition. The feature and artifacts suggest a semi-permanent campsite. The Guthrie site should be reexamined and more extensively excavated.

PASSPORT SITE (9PM830)

The Passport site is located in Putnam County in the central Piedmont. It was identified during a cultural resource survey conducted by Steve Webb and Beth Gantt in 1989 (Webb 1990). The site encompassed a surface and plowzone scatter 260 m long and 40 m wide. Artifacts from the initial survey included simple stamped sand-tempered sherds and lithic materials. It was identified by Webb and Gantt as a Late Woodland semi-permanent camp or farmstead, and further testing was recommended. The site is 1 ha, located on a broad ridgetop, near two intermittent streams, but more than one km from a permanent stream.

The site was chosen for the first PIT project in Georgia. PIT is run by the National Forest Service and allows the public to participate in archaeological excavations in national forests across the country. A 25-m interval grid was cut across the northern half of the site. Thirty-one 50-cm test units were dug at the grid intersections. Preliminary artifact counts showed high density areas in the center and northeastern sections, and a possible third high density area located between the north and center areas. These determined the placement of larger test units.

In the central high density area five contiguous 2x2 m test units were excavated (TU 101, 102, 103, 104, and 105). Four features were located, one in TU 101, and three in TU 102. A second locus was examined with two units in the northeastern portion, located 25 m apart. A 1x1 m unit was placed between the north and central units.

A total area of 18 sq. m was opened in the central locus. Test units contained between 200 and 400 artifacts. No features were found in this area. One 2x2-m unit was placed nearby, and over 150 artifacts were recovered, including four small Mississippian triangular points.

Five features were found, all probably post molds detected just below the plow zone. When plotted they indicate a possible house structure. If circular, such a house would have a diameter of 3.5 m, and a floor area of about 95 sq. m. The projected center of the arc was unable to be investigated further because it was disturbed by a large pine tree. Overall, this area contained a large quantity of pottery and other artifacts and indicates an activity area.

Over 3,100 artifacts were recovered at Passport. Of the 2,892 sherds, 57% were plain, 30% were simple stamped, and 13% were simple overstamped. Lithics included seven small Mississippian triangular projectile points, scrapers, and unifacial blades.

Passport, though not as thoroughly excavated as the Fant-Davis and Elliott sites (see below) due to time and labor constraints, appears to be a single component Vining site. It has many simple stamped sherds and triangular projectile points. This site has one of the highest sherd counts of any Vining site excavated thus far: over 2,800 sherds and almost 200 lithic artifacts were recovered. Five postmolds suggest a possible round or oval structure, but without more data, this can only be conjecture. Given the findings by Worth (1996) at nearby Raccoon Ridge though, it seems likely. The site appears to be a single-component household or small village. No information was gained on Vining subsistence or broad settlement patterns.

Compared to the Guthrie site, Passport appears to be a much smaller settlement and possibly was not even occupied year-round, but zooarchaeological and botanical evidence is lacking.

FANT-DAVIS SITE (9PM847)

The Fant-Davis site was discovered by seasonal archaeological contractors David Fant and Dave Davis during a cultural resources survey (Fant and Davis 1989). It is located on a broad ridgetop in
northern Putnam County, near the original Vining site, and measures 91x137 m. The ridge is drained by two ephemeral streams. The survey by Fant and Davis included shovel testing and surface collection of a fire break on the northwest side of the site. Artifacts included 33 plain sherds, 26 indeterminate sherds, 11 simple stamped sherds, one indeterminate stamped sherd, and one incised sherd. In addition, one quartz Madison point, chert and quartz secondary flakes, and quartzite chunk/shatter were also recovered.

This site was the location of the 1991 Passport in Time project. A 10-m grid was laid out across the site and a backhoe was used to dig a series of trenches through the plow zone. Trench location was based on 1989 artifact information. Eighteen trenches were excavated. All units were approximately 10 m long and 2-3 m wide, with the exception of the first unit, which was 20 m long. Units were shovel skimmed for excavation, in three or four 2.5 x 2 m quadrants. Two additional units were located near original units after backhoe operations had ceased.

Ten cultural features were uncovered at this site (Table 1). In particular, Excavation Unit 15 contained two pits, three postmolds, and two small rock clusters. The depths and shapes among the postmolds differ, suggesting different functions. Features 4 and 7 may represent structural posts, while Feature 1 may represent the base of a shallow post. The nearby rock clusters did not show any evidence of firing or cultural modification.

Table 1. Features Uncovered at the Fant-Davis Site (9PMB847).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature Type</th>
<th>Diameter</th>
<th>Depth</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 pit</td>
<td>25 cm</td>
<td>10 cm</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 pit</td>
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<td>5 cm</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 postmold</td>
<td>18 cm</td>
<td>51 cm</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 postmold</td>
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<td>33 cm</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 rock cluster</td>
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<td>30 cm</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 rock cluster</td>
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<td>29 cm</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 rock cluster</td>
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<td>12 cm</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 postmold</td>
<td>12 cm</td>
<td>33 cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 postmold</td>
<td>12 cm</td>
<td>30 cm</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 possible hearth</td>
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<td>6 cm</td>
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<tr>
<td>11 possible hearth</td>
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<td>12 dark stain</td>
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Although no features were located in other units, XU 21 merits discussion. During excavation, proton magnetometer readings were taken of several portions of the site. In the north central portion of the site, near XU-13, a subsurface anomaly was detected which measured 80 cm long and 40 cm wide. A 3x3 m unit, labeled XU21, was opened here. Level 1 contained approximately 1,085 sherds, of which 20% were simple stamped and 80% were plain. In addition, nine daub fragments, 65 flakes, and six points or point fragments were recovered as well. Artifact counts decreased in Level 2; 262 sherds and two points were recovered from this level. Level 3 contained 261 sherds, including 17 pieces of a single pot, and three points. The majority of sherds recovered from this unit were small and weathered. The high frequency of sherds may have been the result of post depositional erosion. This unit may have also been the location of a trash pit, indicated by the subsurface anomaly. In addition, it is worth noting that a small, triangular Mississippian point was recovered in association with a simple stamped sherd from XU 7.

Approximately 2,300 sherds were recovered during this excavation. Of these, 950 were plain and 131 were simple stamped (Figure 1). One check stamped sherd was recovered. Seventeen sherds from the northern portion of the site were cross-mended and appear to be fragments of a single pot. Five rims were identified: three plain, one decorated, and one rolled. Other ceramic artifacts include fired clay and daub fragments. Lithic artifacts include quartz and chert bifaces, quartz and chert flakes, one quartz Mississippian point and one Archaic point.

The trench excavation technique allowed for the first time a view of possible Vining settlement patterns, albeit in a small area. The remains suggest a small farmstead or possibly multiple households. Three postmolds, Features 1, 4 and 7, uncovered in XU-15 suggests a structure. Another postmold, Feature 17, in XU-14 suggests an additional structure. Both XU-14 and XU-15 are located in the north/northwestern portion of the site. In addition, some daub and fired clay fragments were recovered from the south and southwestern portions of the site, suggesting that more structures may have existed there, and subsequent traces of them have eroded away. Excavation trenches located in the center and especially north center of the site produced large amounts of sherds, including seventeen pieces of a single pot.
It appears that multiple households were arranged along a north/south axis. Artifacts from other excavation units, occurring in low quantities, are likely the result of erosion from the center trash pile. One check-stamped sherd and one rolled rim suggest some interaction with other groups outside the immediate region.

These results are quite preliminary. Understanding of Vining settlement patterns requires full-scale excavations of a site like Fant-Davis. The site is potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, but additional excavations are needed.

**ELLIOTT SITE (9PM755): 1995 EXCAVATIONS**

The Elliott site is in southwestern Putnam County. Dan Elliott first recorded it during a routine contract survey of Putnam County for the Forest Service (Elliott 1989). Site 9PM755 was actually just beyond the bounds of the survey; Elliott noted a possible midden apparent from a road cut, and simple stamped pottery. The Georgia Mountain Archaeology Society conducted initial testing in 1994, with shovel tests and surface collecting, and found simple stamped pottery with small, triangular projectile points.

Excavations were initiated to ask if a more precise chronology could be obtained, and if more could be learned about subsistence, settlement patterns, material culture, and archaeological remains. A grid was established for shovel tests and 1x1 m test units; shovel tests were excavated at five-m intervals. Test units were laid out in a checkerboard on the north end of the site. Seventy-four shovel tests and nine 1x1 m units were excavated in 1995. Of the seventy-five shovel tests, almost all (96%) were positive. Of the 774 artifacts recovered, 93% (721) were ceramic and 7% (53) were chipped stone. Shovel tests allowed site boundaries to be defined and revealed a possible midden in the northwestern portion of the tested area, based on the heavy concentration of artifacts.

Units N311/E274, N309/E275, N306/E276 and N306/E274, in the northwestern section of the site, contained artifacts but no features. The midden was discernible from the surface to an approximate depth of 20 cmbs. One diagnostic lithic, a small triangular chert projectile point, was found in Test Unit N314/E279, close to the center of the midden. A hammerstone was found in Test Unit N315/E274.

Units N311/E274, N309/E275, N306/E276 and N306/E274 were located in the north central site area. No features were present...
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in these units, although charcoal and numerous large pieces of fired clay, or daub, were present in all cultural levels in these units. One bifacial tool was located in N300/E275 and one small projectile point was located in Level 2 of N311/E274.

The southernmost portion of the site was located in N301/E275. No features were located in this unit, although a small triangular reddish chert projectile point was recovered here. No architectural remains were encountered in any of the test units, and no pits or other features were identified.

A total of 3,036 sherds were recovered from seventy-five shovel test and nine test units (Figure 2). Of these, 774 were from shovel tests and 2,262 were from units. In the shovel tests, 71% were plain, 25% were simple stamped, and 4% were simple overstamped. In test units, 40% were plain, 43% were simple stamped, and 17% were simple overstamped. All sherds were grit-tempered, with moderate to abundant large particles and smooth interiors. Because little variation was observed in temper, ceramic artifacts were characterized by surface treatment. The most common surface decoration was a stamped pattern, consisting of parallel to crossing overstamped lines, lightly applied. Rims were either stamped in the same pattern, or were plain. One exception was a sherd with an incised line below a folded rim. Sherds from the test units were generally heavily worn, perhaps from plowing, root action, or the lightly executed surface design. Two undecorated ceramic beads were found in separate test units. These beads were oval, perforated, and both measured 1.5 cm in length.

Lithic artifacts included projectile points, bifacial tools, flakes, and unidentified debris. There were four small chert triangular projectile points. These ranged from 1.5-2.25 cm in length. Three were recovered from units and in levels with plain and simple stamped sherds. A chert Savannah River point came from a shovel test. Other lithics included two bifacial tools (one chert and one quartz), one chert core, and flakes and unidentified debris.

ELLIOTT SITE (9PM755): 1996 EXCAVATIONS

Following the 1995 excavations the Principal Investigator felt that further testing of the Elliott site was warranted. In the 1995 season no features were recorded in the northern quadrant of the site, so the southern half was selected for investigation, to look for features. Recently published data from Raccoon Ridge (discussed
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earlier) were used as a model for possible structural remains. Goals addressed during the 1996 season included: defining the physical boundaries of the unexcavated part of the site, more clearly defining the Vining phase, and generating new information about Vining settlement patterns and subsistence.

Sixty-four shovel tests were excavated on the south side to determine site boundaries and delineate areas of occupation for further investigation. Six 1x2 m test units, three 2x2 m test units, and with the assistance of a bulldozer, one large block measuring roughly 11x13 m were also excavated (Figure 3). The southern site boundaries were defined. Although the midden continued into the southern half of the site, no features were uncovered.

Ceramics were classified primarily by surface decoration, as only two types of temper, sand and grit, were observed. In shovel tests, 77% of sherds were plain and 23% were simple stamped. In test units, 76% were plain and 23% were simple stamped. Four surface treatments were recorded: plain, simple stamped (Figure 4), complicated stamped, and incised. Several plain and simple stamped sherds exhibited incising, but were categorized as plain. Most sherds had been heavily damaged by plowing, erosion, and weathering, making identification difficult.

The 1996 excavations recovered 671 lithic artifacts. Of these, 22 were projectile points, of which 15 were temporally diagnostic. Points varied in size, shape, material, and completeness. Much of this information was incomplete because the points were broken, making identification of seven projectile points impossible, and identification of the remaining fifteen points tenuous.

Three points are Late Woodland, and nine are Mississippian. Six of these are small triangular points with straight to slightly convex sides and straight to slightly convex/concave bases. Two, both red chert, have one face that is the fracture plane of a flake (bifacial retouching has altered the edges of one). Four points are crystal quartz; two are bifacially worked and two have a fracture plane as one face. Points of this style date to the entire Mississippian period, the earliest dates of which correspond to Vining. Two thin bifacially worked points are tentatively assigned to the Mississippian. One black chert point has straight sides and base. A second crystal quartz point has straight sides and a straight to slightly concave base. A final point is tentatively assigned to the Mississippian based on its shape and size. This quartz point is quite small, nearly triangular, with a concave base and convex sides.
It is notable that such a wide range of Woodland and Mississippian points would be found in association with one pottery type assemblage, i.e. simple stamped and plain. Based on the date ranges for the Woodland and Mississippian projectile points, the site has an occupational span of A.D. 300-1600. The earlier Middle Woodland points may represent cultural hold-overs or later adoption of this style in middle Georgia.

The Elliott site contained simple stamped pottery in direct association with small triangular chert projectile points, and appears to be a single-component Vining site. It is located on a ridge top at some distance from water. This site certainly contains a midden; however, no structural features were found. The Elliott site was probably quite small and may be the remains of a single homestead; however, the size and depth of the midden suggests that if it was a homestead site of one or two structures, these structures had been occupied for quite some time. Kowalewski and Williams' (1989) reanalysis of the Carroll site, approximately 30 miles away, suggests that long-term homestead occupation was not uncommon in this area. Although Carroll dates to the Mississippian period, Kowalewski and Williams suggest that it had been occupied for multiple generations. Perhaps this long-term occupation of small sites in the Mississippian period has a precedent in the Late Woodland. It is possible that at some sites this occupation would not have ceased, that is, occupation would have continued uninterrupted into the beginning of the Mississippian period. Such an occurrence should be recognizable in material culture, supporting the idea that Vining was a transitional phase.

The Elliott site was likely occupied into the Early Mississippian and it appears to have been abandoned before intensive Mississippian occupation in the Oconee River Valley. The site's inhabitants may have been pressured to leave their location and relocate within the local chiefdom boundaries. These pressures may have been both internal, such as from the chiefly hierarchy, or external, perhaps for defense. Indeed, the site may be located in what Anderson (1994) terms a buffer zone, a contested area between chiefdoms on the Oconee River and the Ocmulgee River. Whatever the reason, the site was abandoned by the end of the Early Mississippian period, and not reoccupied until historic times.

The Elliott site is another example of the variation exhibited at Vining sites. Although most of the sites excavated thus far are small, they appear to vary in size and number of structures. The site
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is also an example of variability in length of occupation. Perhaps sites like Guthrie, Passport, and Fant-Davis were not occupied for long periods of time, whereas the Elliott site gives an indication that some Vining sites were occupied for extended time periods, possibly into the beginning of the Mississippian period.

CONCLUSIONS

The Vining Phase, as first proposed during the 1930s by Kelly, has never been used by archaeologists in Georgia; the recent excavations discussed in this paper demonstrate that it is present in central Georgia. It is recognized by simple stamped pottery and small Mississippian triangular points. Vining sites tend to be located on ridgetops. They are small, consisting of a few structures at most, located some distance from a permanent water source.

The Guthrie site is heavily damaged and lacks discernible features, but has the remains of a semi-permanent occupation. Guthrie needs to be more fully investigated.

The Passport site has the highest sherd densities of all four sites reported here. A possible structural feature was recovered. It may represent a single-component household, possibly part of a larger settlement. This site is not large, and may not have even been occupied year-round.

Fant-Davis appears to include an occupation of three small households with their associated trash disposal area. The trench excavation technique used at Fant-Davis was ideal for recovering these patterns, and could prove useful at future Vining sites.

Finally, the Elliott site has a midden but lacks structural remains. It is not a large occupational area, but it may have been a homestead whose features have eroded away. The size and depth of the midden indicate that it was occupied for a long period of time. The Elliott site is similar to Carroll, a long-term Mississippian occupation, perhaps suggesting that upland settlement in the Georgia Piedmont began in the Late Woodland and carried over into Early Mississippian times. This site was abandoned after Vining, possibly due to pressures from expanding chiefdoms. The Elliott site suggests variability in size and structure of Vining sites.

These four sites further define Kelly’s original Vining phase. The settlements are small, likely households or a community of households, with little evidence of hierarchical organization. Intensive corn agriculture was not practiced, although some horticulture was probably practiced. Vining populations had some interaction with other groups, as evidenced by the variety of ceramics. Variation in settlement patterns during the Vining phase exists. Some sites appear to be single households, while others are larger, with more of a community evident.

Much research remains to be done. Little is known about subsistence patterns, since few intact deposits of zooarchaeological or botanical remains have been recovered. Although Vining subsistence is probably similar to a Late Woodland type, more specific information could shed light on the transition from horticulture to full-scale agriculture, or the lack of such a transition in some areas during the Mississippian. Although this preliminary work suggests that Vining was transitional between Late Woodland and Mississippian, the remote, ridgetop locations suggest limited interaction with surrounding Mississippian cultures. More radiocarbon dates are needed. It should be noted that some techniques appear more suited for Vining sites, namely trench excavation.

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