Introduction

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The Cumberland River flows nearly 700 miles from its headwaters near Harlan, Kentucky, through northern Middle Tennessee before turning north and emptying into the Ohio River near Paducah, Kentucky. Along this length the Cumberland is fed by over 22,000 miles of tributary rivers and streams draining a total area of nearly 18,000 square miles. Human occupation of river levees, terraces, rockshelters, caves, and other landforms along the Cumberland and its tributaries since the late Pleistocene has resulted in the formation more than 12,000 archaeological sites spanning the entire prehistoric and historic sequence, from Paleoindian campsites to historic industrial complexes. The density of ancient Native American (pre-550 BP) settlement in the Cumberland River Basin is particularly notable, with 75% of recorded archaeological sites (5,618 of 7,432 recorded sites in Tennessee; 3,474 of 4,585 in Kentucky) exhibiting at least one prehistoric component.

One archaeological site type that formed along the Cumberland and its tributaries during the Middle and Late Archaic periods of regional prehistory (ca. 8900–5800 and 5800–3200 cal BP, respectively) are areas exhibiting prominent accumulations of dense, anthropogenically deposited freshwater shellfish remains, which we herein refer to as *Archaic shell-bearing sites*.[1] These sites are typically located along the natural river levees and lower terraces, although they occasionally also appear in caves and rockshelters (Peres et al. 2016). Although many of these locations have been frequented for decades by artifact collectors and individuals intent on illicitly obtaining mortuary items from Native American graves, few professional archaeological studies have taken place at Archaic shell-bearing sites in the Cumberland River Basin until recently.

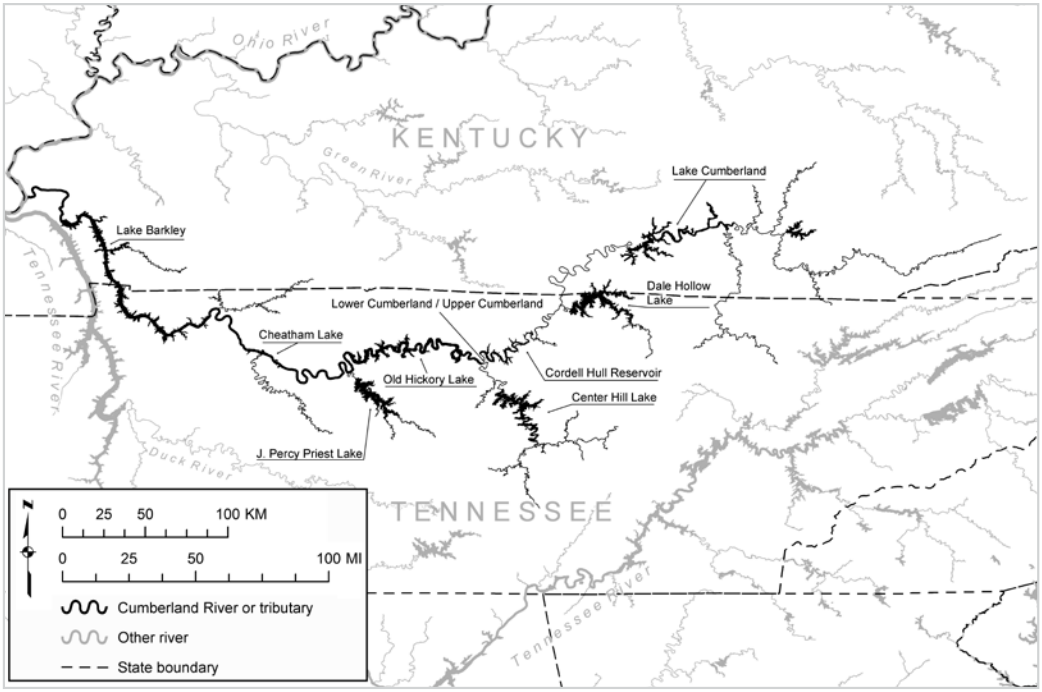
Prior to 2010, the only accessible literature on Archaic shell-bearing sites in the Cumberland River Basin consisted of four sources: Dan Morse's (1967)

unpublished dissertation on the Robinson Shell Mound (40SM4); a technical report on excavations at Penitentiary Branch (40JK25) (Cridlebaugh 2017 [1986]); and discussions of work along the Harpeth River at the Anderson site (40WM9) (Dowd 1989; Moore et al. 1990). Consequently, understanding of the density, nature, and specific chronologies of Archaic shell-bearing sites in the Middle Cumberland River Valley (MCRV) has been extremely limited. This is perhaps exemplified in Cheryl Claassen's seminal (2010) volume *Feasting with Shellfish in the Southern Ohio Valley*, which includes mention of only three Archaic shell-bearing sites in the Cumberland River Basin beyond those referenced above: Hart (40DV434), Hermitage Springs (40DV551), and 40SM1.

In 2017 we completed a multiyear review of archaeological site files and primary data housed at the Tennessee Division of Archaeology (TDOA) in Nashville in an effort to understand the quantity and distribution of Archaic shell-bearing sites in the Cumberland River Basin. That records search (preliminarily reported in Peres and Deter-Wolf 2016) resulted in examinations of site file data for 2,146 ancient Native American sites located within a 1-km radius of the Cumberland River and its mid- to large-size tributaries in Tennessee.[2] The results of the site files were supplemented with examinations of unpublished field notes and data, gray literature reports, and information provided by Middle Tennessee's avocational archaeological community. As a result of this effort, we are able to identify 51 sites within the Cumberland River Basin in Tennessee that exhibit dense concentrations of freshwater mollusks. Forty-one of these sites include shell-bearing components originating during the Archaic period, ca. 8000–3000 cal BP; of those, all but one are situated within the portion of the Cumberland watershed that drains into Tennessee's Central Basin: the Middle Cumberland River Valley.

The Middle Cumberland River Valley of Tennessee, Defined

The United States Geological Survey divides the Cumberland River Basin into Upper and Lower segments at its confluence with the Caney Fork River (impounded as Center Hill Lake) at Cumberland River Mile (CRM) 309.2 in Smith County, Tennessee (Seaber et al. 1994) (Map I.1). However, this geographic demarcation does not account for archaeological and biological patterns found along the length of the basin. Over the past half century, both archaeological and biological studies (e.g., Bentz 1986; Dillehay et al. 1984; Page and Beckham 1987; Parmalee and Klippel 1982; Parmalee et al. 1980)



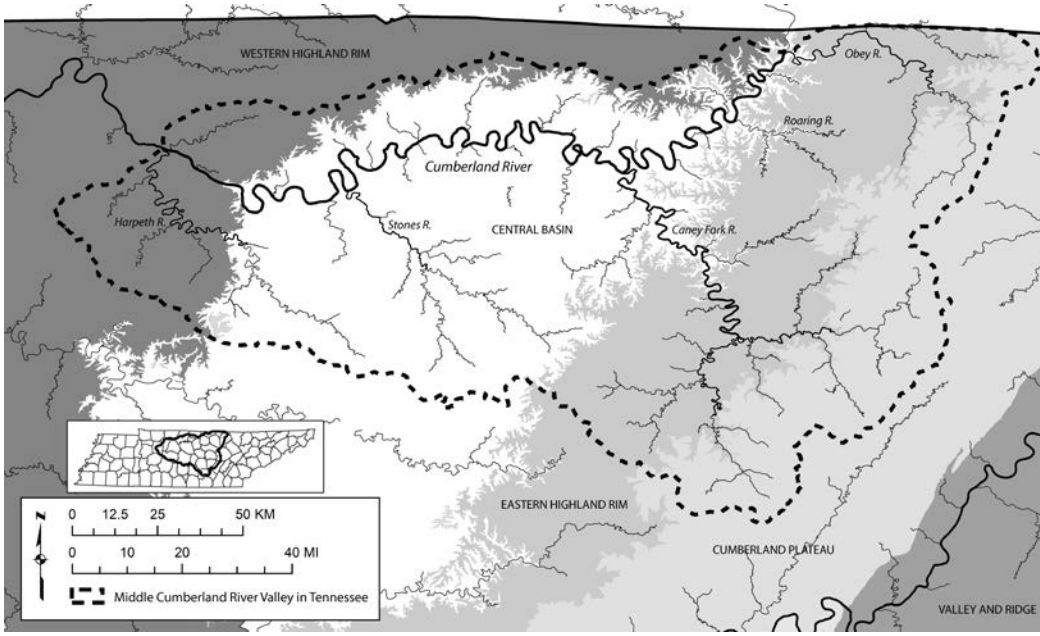
Map I.1. Map of the Cumberland River and major tributaries in Tennessee and Kentucky, showing modern impoundments and the Upper/Lower Cumberland geologic river division at the confluence with the Caney Fork. Map by Aaron Deter-Wolf and Andrew Gillreath-Brown.

have recognized that the portion of the Cumberland River Basin that drains into Tennessee's Central Basin physiographic province comprises a unique cultural and environmental region that we have previously identified as the Middle Cumberland River Valley (MCRV) (Deter-Wolf and Peres 2012; Peres and Deter-Wolf 2016).

The MCRV is focused along the main channel of the Cumberland River as it flows through the Central Basin, from its confluence with the Obey River (impounded as Dale Hollow Lake) at CRM 380.9, downstream to the mouth of the Harpeth River (impounded as Cheatham Lake) at CRM 152.9 (Map I.2). Along this path, the Cumberland is fed by major tributaries including the Obey, Caney Fork, Stones, and Harpeth Rivers as well as abundant named and unnamed smaller streams and waterways. The maximum boundaries of the MCRV correspond to the watersheds of these various tributar-

ies and, in the case of the Harpeth, Caney Fork, Obey, and Roaring Rivers, extend beyond the Central Basin to incorporate portions of the Eastern and Western Highland Rim and the Cumberland Plateau physiographic provinces. All told, the MCRV drains close to 5 million acres across portions of 32 Tennessee counties, and includes approximately 3,270 recorded ancient Native American archaeological sites.

As described in Chapter 1 of this volume, the majority of archaeological interest in the MCRV to date has focused on Mississippian sites. As a result of that research, the term *Middle Cumberland Mississippian* is used to identify a regional culture phase defined in part by burial modes, ceramic typologies, and artistic styles (e.g., Ferguson 1972; Deter-Wolf and Moore 2016; Moore et al. 2006; Moore and Smith 2009; Smith 1992; Smith and Miller 2009; Smith and Moore 1994). Initial efforts to identify the extent of the Middle Cumberland Mississippian proposed an area stretching along the Cumberland River from its confluence with the Caney Fork downstream to the Ohio River (Ferguson 1972). That boundary has since been refined to include the area



Map I.2. The Middle Cumberland River Valley in Tennessee, with associated major tributary rivers and physiographic provinces. Map by Aaron Deter-Wolf and Andrew Gillreath-Brown.

from the Caney Fork to the confluence of the Cumberland and the Red River at Clarksville (CRM 125.3) (e.g., Moore et al. 2006; Smith and Miller 2009), a region that has in turn been referenced as the *Middle Cumberland Region* (Beahm 2013; Cobb et al. 2015; Moore et al. 2006; Smith 1992).

Although the Middle Cumberland Mississippian culture and the Middle Cumberland Region spatially overlap with the Middle Cumberland River Valley, these terms are not synonymous. Mississippian occupations in the MCRV are conspicuous in terms of their architectural footprints, associated artifacts, and prominence in the regional literature yet comprise only a small portion of the archaeological record. According to the TDOA site file database, 1,727 of the approximately 3,270 prehistoric sites in the MCRV (about 53%) have produced materials diagnostic of one or more culture periods. Approximately 156 sites in the region include artifacts diagnostic of the Paleoindian or transitional Paleoindian periods; 810 have yielded Woodland materials, and just 357 contain Mississippian components. By contrast, the MCRV includes a total of 1,286 sites with Archaic components, of which approximately 1,086 have yielded artifacts diagnostic of a specific subperiod. As described above, 40 of these Archaic sites include shell-bearing occupations originating during the period ca. 8000–3000 cal BP.

Shell-Bearing Sites of the Southeastern United States

Evidence of ancient Native American freshwater shellfish harvesting appears in the archaeological record of the Southeastern United States during both the Archaic and Woodland periods of prehistory. Along the interior waterways of the region, Archaic shell-bearing sites have been intensively investigated along the Green, Tennessee, and Duck Rivers by efforts including those of antiquarian scholar C. B. Moore (1915, 1916), pre-inundation survey and salvage through the Works Progress Administration and Tennessee Valley Authority (e.g., Crites 1987; Klippel and Morey 1986; Lewis and Kneberg 1947, 1959; Lewis and Lewis 1961; Webb 1938, 1939, 1974; Webb and DeJarnette 1942), and the Shell Mound Archaeological Project along the Green River (e.g., Crothers 1999; Marquardt and Watson 1983, 2005; Moore 2011). Recent reanalysis and reconsideration of both site-specific and regional data sets have also contributed new interpretations and understandings of interior riverine sites (e.g., Anderson 2004, 2010; Baerreis 2005; Bissett 2014; Claassen 1991, 1992, 1996, 2010; Marquardt 2010a, 2010b; Moore 2015; Peacock 2002; Sassaman 2010; Thomp-