



THE DATUM POINT

Newsletter of the
NORTHERN VIRGINIA CHAPTER OF THE
ARCHEOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF VIRGINIA

Chapter Website – www.nvcasv.org

May 2011

MIKE JOHNSON – DOING WHAT HE LIKES TO DO BEST!



No Chapter Meeting on Weds. May 11th. Instead, the monthly meeting will be Mike Johnson's retirement party on May 18th at Anthony's in Falls Church!

NVC PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

During the last week of March, nine chapter members under the leadership of Mike Johnson traveled to the Gault site outside of Austin, Texas to dig for a week at one of the premiere prehistoric sites in North America. Some of us worked in the relatively mundane but rich Archaic levels while others were down at or near Clovis. Dr. Mike Collins, the lead archaeologist at Gault, updated the group on recent discoveries that take the site back to at least 15,500 years ago with features that are very similar to ones associated with the Magdalenian culture in France.



Reconstructed Chapel

If you caught Dr. Dennis Stanford's talk at the April 16th archaeological symposium, you will know that there is fascinating evidence along the coast of the Middle Atlantic of a very early European (Salutrean) connection that appears to extend North American prehistory back some 22,000 to 24,000 years. In brief, a lot of old assumptions about American prehistory are being challenged and overturned. This is a great time to be involved in American archaeology. If you have a chance to visit or work at the Gault site, I cannot recommend it too highly.



Turning the clock forward quite a few thousand years, 38 Chapter members and guests took a tour of Historic St. Mary's City on April 30th. The weather cooperated magnificently. Silas Hurry, the Curator of artifacts at St. Mary's, gave us a perfect introduction to the site and its archaeology. We were guided around the site by Ray and Pete, two very knowledgeable and agreeable guides. If you've not been there recently, as I had not, you will be amazed at the work that's been done in the last twenty years and how much there is to see. I strongly recommend a visit.



Great tour guide!



Great NVC turnout!!



Building outlines dotted the landscape



Historic foundations kept intact under reconstructed buildings

Looking ahead to May and June, let me remind you that we will not have our usual monthly meeting in May because of the dinner celebrating Mike Johnson's retirement on May 18th. On the 7th and Datum Point

8th of May, the Oregon Ridge Nature Center's Primitive Technology Weekend will be held. A flyer was included in last month's Datum Point, but I have since received a new flyer with detailed schedule and other information. Rather than burdening this edition with three more pages, I have a pdf version of the new flyer which I'll be happy to email to any of you who are interested.

Our next meeting will be on June 8th, when **Kathleen Lowe** of the Colchester Archaeological Research Team will be discussing her team's work on the prehistoric portion of that site.

I'd like to welcome two new members to the Chapter: **Danielle Labbate** and **Walter Cate** and family.

John

COLCHESTER UPDATE

By the
Colchester Archaeological Research Team

Through seemingly endless rains, archaeological investigations on the Old Colchester Park and Preserve remain ongoing. Both the historic and prehistoric crews have had notable moments and discoveries both cultural and natural. As spring begins to bloom into summer, we are constantly reminded that this is a natural as well as a cultural resource preserve, and are how fortunate we are to spend our days in this beautiful place.



From mid -March through mid-April, the prehistoric crew shifted focus away from the main, Late Woodland site and tested finger ridges along the eastern park boundary. These areas had not

been intensively investigated in the past. Our efforts identified several new cultural deposits and refined our knowledge of previously identified resources. We recovered artifacts indicative of Archaic Period occupations, likely representing the oldest land use of the park property yet discovered. Additionally, Mike Johnson classified some prehistoric pottery recovered from the ridges as Seldon Island, which adds an Early Woodland component for the park.

Since the middle of the month, the prehistoric crew returned focus to the Late Woodland site. We laid out a cruciform of test units across the core of the site and excavation has begun. As expected, this area is yielding considerably higher artifact densities than experienced during testing along the periphery.



On the historic side, we have also been plowing along, splitting our priorities. We have conducted limited testing on some of the satellite sites, not outside the town boundaries. Within the town, we have nearly exposed the entire stone foundation first identified by George Mason University in the 1980s. While removing the sand fill placed by GMU, we found an interesting “archaeo-fact,” a time capsule. The Mason excavators left behind a hand written note with their names and date inside a film canister. Other excavations within the town site have produced high artifact yields, primarily of materials dating to the period of the colonial port town.



We have been hosting some very important guests. Linwood Gorham of the Fairfax Park Authority Board visited the site to have a look at our latest finds. We appreciate all the attention and support; thank for making us happen. We also received a media visit. Be on the lookout for video about us on the Lorton Patch.

As usual, our ASV volunteers have been generous with their time. Anyone who has not already been out need only attend a brief orientation. These can be conducted on site, Fridays and Saturdays. To schedule an orientation or, for the oriented to let us know you would like to lend a hand, send an email to us at CART.volunteers@gmail.com so we can put you on the calendar. You can always follow our progress on our blog, <http://cartarchaeology.blogspot.com/>. Thanks for the help and support!

WESTBROOK UPDATE

By Mike Johnson

Due to a potential federal Wetlands issue, which we were unaware of, and the fact that the depth of our Phase II methodological audit could be construed as a full data recovery (Phase III) or "anticipatory demolition," our fieldwork at Westbrook has been deferred until the any potential Wetlands-related issues have been resolved. As a result, our focus will shift to processing the backlog of artifacts from our completed work. Prior to stopping work, we completed the last few square feet of Block C and laid out part of Block E.

Here are some photos of some of the items we recovered from block D and the initial shovel test pattern. The **first** is a possible 9,500 ± BP quartz bifurcate point that has been heavily reworked. It also could be a severely reworked 8,000 ± BP lobate. We have several lobates. If it is a bifurcate, it is the oldest artifact positively identified yet on the site.



The **second** is a pitted hornfels fluted biface base, probably of Late Archaic, Savannah River age.



The **third** is a pitted hornfels, contracting stemmed, probable Savannah River-age point fragment.



The **fourth** is the side view of a broken, pitted hornfels, prismatic blade-like flake.



Due to my impending retirement and the disruption of the Westbrook schedule, it is possible that we will not be able to address the final loose ends. Primary among those is the pitted hornfels blade industry question. Prismatic blades are well established in the fluted point tradition.

However, they are not common even in that tradition in the Middle Atlantic Region. Currently, we have a significant number of prismatic blade-like flakes (one pictured here) from Westbrook but have yet to recover any cores from which the blade-like flakes were struck. The cores are critical to understanding if the blade-like flakes are actually blades.

The second part of the blade industry question is its age. Traditional blades are almost exclusively from the fluted point (Clovis) period (and pre-Clovis!). The only pitted hornfels points we have recovered from Westbrook have been two probable Late Archaic, contracting stem, (Savannah River?) points and one typical square-stemmed Savannah River point. If there is a blade industry in the Savannah

River phase, then it will be a totally new time frame for blades.

Ironically, the only other prehistoric technology that I have seen that sometimes flutes the base of its points is also Savannah River. Savannah River lithic technology, which appears to have lasted for almost 700 years (3,700-4,500 BP), was one of the most sophisticated and unusual lithic technologies in Middle Atlantic prehistory. It is unusual because of the almost total preference for coarse grained stone for bifaces.

The level of mastery those people had over coarse grained stone probably rivals any in North America. Therefore, it would not be surprising that they could flute bifaces and produce blades.

The second question that we may not be able to answer is related to the probable Middle Woodland, sandstone-tempered, net and cord-marked Culpeper ceramics. Although we have recovered excellent examples of both net and cord-marked variants, we do not appear to have enough sherds of the large Culpeper net-marked pot to reconstruct vessel form and rim treatment.

We have yet to wash and sort any samples from Block D, so some of the questions could still be addressed. The plan was to refine our grid down to a 5-foot interval infill to isolate additional pottery concentrations. If that produced the center of the pottery concentration or central hearth, which were not clearly detectable at our original 10-foot interval, then we intend(ed) to open a block to explore for intrusive features and internal occupation patterns.

Several other questions that may not get answered are (1) what do the depressions we encountered at the end of our 10-foot interval mean; (2) what is the extent of the site toward the northwest; and (3) what does the fluted biface we recovered from the 10-foot interval sample grid represent? We had also planned to test the second highest quartz concentration to give us a comparison with the extensive testing of the highest quartz concentration.

If nothing else, this work, finished or not, demonstrates the power of more rigorous research designs in cultural resource management (government) archeology. None of the above questions were asked, much less addressed, even using four times the methodological quality acceptable under the Virginia Department of Historic Resources guidelines as Thunderbird did in its initial testing. The guidelines authorize a 50-foot interval, which became standard, and T-Bird used a 25-foot interval at Westbrook. We have demonstrated, at least in quartz, the data recovery problem is magnified up to 37% beyond the mere sample size shortfall by not washing and lab sorting screen residues.

These are problems with government archeology that have become so endemic that they are either not recognized or ignored by the players. Those in government, who review the work, have come to accept the level of work as adequate, possibly because they are powerless to fix the problem.

Likewise, those who actually do the work are confined to scopes of work that mask what is being missed. That perpetuates a fallacy: "The absence of evidence" for CRM has become evidence of absence. Carl Sagan should be rolling in his grave.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

The Chapter's bylaws recognize four standing committees to help conduct the Chapter's business: hospitality, program, nominations, and scholarship. These committees have been moribund for some time, with the result that the Chapter's officers have done these things in addition to their normal duties.

It's time for others to become involved!

Where we (the officers) would especially benefit from assistance and a fresh perspective is in the areas of hospitality and program. The hospitality committee arranges for refreshments at meetings and plans special Chapter functions.

The program committee identifies and enlists speakers for our meetings. If you're interested and willing to help in these areas, please get in touch

with the president (John Kelsey) or any of the other officers and let them know.

Another way you can help out your fellow Chapter members is by contributing to the *Datum Point*. Have you read a good book lately or visited an exhibit that other members would probably be interested in? I have a hunch that happens a lot, but we never hear about it. Please share your experiences with other Chapter members, so that all of us can benefit. You can provide your input to John Kelsey or directly to Patrick O'Neill, the *Datum Point* editor.

APPLICATION FOR RUBIS-FULLER RESEARCH GRANT

Paul Inashima has requested a \$900 grant from the Chapter's Rubis-Fuller Research Fund. The officers have reviewed the grant request and unanimously recommend its approval to the Chapter. We will vote on Paul's request at the June 8th Chapter meeting. Here is his proposal:

Rubis-Fuller Research Fund Research Proposal

Applicant: Paul Y. Inashima

Research Associate: Dr. Linda Scott Cummings
PaleoResearch Institute
2675 Youngfield Street
Golden, CO 80401

A total of \$900 is requested to support the analysis of two soil samples from Lexington Plantation (44FX736) for historic landscape pollen.

Studies of the Mason-era cultural landscapes at Gunston Hall and Lexington have been hampered by the lack of historical records which describe or depict the contemporary setting. At George Mason IV's Gunston Hall, archeological research is limited by the extensive sequence of changes to the landscape which occurred after his death in 1792. At George Mason V's Lexington, on the other hand, few changes occurred to the grounds after his demise in 1796. Hence, the potential for the recovery and identification of historic pollen at Lexington is heightened.

In conjunction with the archeological discovery of planting features, pollen data would contribute significantly to reconstructing the appearance of the cultural landscape at Lexington and to informing on the landscape philosophy of the Masons.

The proposed research would (1) assess the feasibility of recovering historic pollen within the Lexington grounds and (2) attempt to preliminarily define the nature of the planting composition in the terraced garden and orchard areas. Successful identification of historic pollen profiles would, in turn, increase the possibility of obtaining additional funding from other sources for further archeological and pollen investigations



Paul surveying at Lexington

IT'S NOT A GOODBYE TO MIKE JOHNSON

Mike, as you end one really long phase of your life, over 30 years with Fairfax County and the Northern Virginia Chapter of the Archeological Society of Virginia, we will celebrate with you at Anthony's on May 18th.

The NVC was only 10-15 years old when you started your tenure at the county, and even though you weren't the only kid on the block over these past 3 ½ decades, you by far have been the most impacting to the members of our chapter.

The lives you have touched, the minds you have enlightened, and the history you have helped us recover, will forever live in our hearts and souls. Your willingness (and your families) to give up your spare time and teach us about this wonderful thing called archaeology has touched us. God's speed in your retirement!

NVC/ASV CHAPTER OFFICERS

President	John Kelsey	jkelsey@cox.net 703-922-8107
Vice-Presidents	Will and Wilke Nelson	wilkenelson@gmail.com
Treasurer	C.K. Gailey	treas@nvcasv.org
Corresponding Sec.	Maggie Johnson	stillmaggie@cox.net 703-455-6902
Recording Sec.	Felicia Glapion	glapfk11@yahoo.com
Editor	Patrick O'Neill	patrickloneill@verizon.net 703-249-9593

Fairfax County Archaeologists (FCPA)

Chapter Sponsors call 703-534-3881

Elizabeth Crowell	elizabeth.crowell@fairfaxcounty.gov
Mike Johnson	michael.johnson@fairfaxcounty.gov

Other Public Archaeological Programs in N. Va.

Mount Vernon	Esther White	ewhite@mountvernon.org
Gunston Hall	Dave Shonyo	archaeology@gunstonhall.org 703-550-0441
Alexandria Museum	Pam Cressey	pamela.cressey@alexandriava.gov 703-838-4399 (information)

NVC/ASV MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

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[] Please send *Datum Point* via e-mail

Individual (\$15) _____

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Family (\$17) _____

New _____

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Return to:

NVC/Archeological Society of Virginia

2855 Annandale Rd.

Falls Church, VA 22042

Chapter members should join our parent organization, the Archeological Society of Virginia.
asv-archeology.org

The Chapter meets at 7:30p.m. on the 2nd Wed. of each month at the James Lee Center at the above address.

EVERYONE IS WELCOME!!!!

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Archeological Society of Virginia
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