



THE DATUM POINT

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

Chapter Website – www.nvcasv.org

June 2012

FROM THE PRESIDENT – JOHN KELSEY

Nineteen Chapter members and guests visited the Maryland Archaeological Conservation Laboratory on Friday, May 18th. It is a very impressive facility, with the ability to X-ray, freeze dry, and otherwise investigate and conserve archaeological artifacts on an industrial scale. One of its strengths is the ability to support maritime archaeology. The lab supports Maryland archaeology, and its extensive capabilities are also used on a fee basis by other states and the federal government.

Our excellent guide, Kathy Concannon, talked about the conservation role that the lab played for the 18th Century ship discovered in the foundations of the World Trade Center and the role it will be playing in the curation of artifacts from Commodore Barney's flagship, burned and sunk in the Patuxent River during the War of 1812.

The lab is on a beautiful point of land at the confluence of St. Leonard's Creek and the Patuxent River. The property also contains a visitors center, a War of 1812 display, a reconstructed Indian village, and an on-going dig at an early 18th century domestic structure. In other words, there's a lot to see and do, and the site is well worth a visit.

Below are some photos from our lab tour. The large machine on the left is the industrial-strength freeze dryer, which was able to accommodate a 2000-year old canoe found in the northeast. The cannon in the photograph on the right was recovered from the CSS Alabama off the coast of France in a joint U.S.-French recovery effort.

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June 13th presentation

CRACKING COLCHESTER & UNEARTHING OLD COLCHESTER

By
Kathleen Lowe & Christopher Sperling

Kathleen Lowe is the Prehistoric Field Director at Old Colchester. She has a B.A. in Anthropology from James Madison University. Kathleen had eight years of archaeological experience prior to joining the Colchester team in 2010, and has supervised excavations at the highest levels of investigation throughout the United States. Her research interests focus on prehistoric settlement patterns, trade and material culture, and the application of technology for archaeological analysis and interpretation.

Christopher Sperling started his work with Fairfax County as the Historical Field Director for Old Colchester in 2010. He was hired on to the permanent staff in 2012. He has an MA in American History from George Mason University. Chris had over 15 years experience when he joined the Colchester team, including the direction of field and laboratory work for all levels of archaeological investigation, primarily in the Middle Atlantic Region. Research interests include the archaeology of slavery in the early colonial Chesapeake.

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Mark your calendars for the annual Chapter picnic on August 25th. This year, we'll be back at Cox Farms, thanks to the kindness of **CD Cox** and his family. More information will follow later.

We still don't have email addresses for some Chapter members. You will know that we don't have your email address if you don't get my periodic notices about history and archaeology related happenings and other information. Some of you may be just fine with not being bothered by me. But, if you'd like to be on the Chapter's email list, please let me know at jkelsey@cox.net. If you're getting the *Datum Point* by snail mail, please consider getting it by email, which saves the Chapter money. Again, let me know.

Finally, I'd like to welcome **Charlie Grymes**, **Sean Ellis**, and **Sandra Shiver** as new Chapter members.



COLCHESTER UPDATE

Whenever weather permitted, excavations continued on Old Colchester Park and Preserve throughout the month of May. It was action-packed with the arrival of summer interns and the departure of a beloved staff member, so it seemed as though the weeks flew by. It's hard to believe the end date for this phase of the project is fast approaching, but September is just around the corner and the CART team is looking ahead to June with that end goal in mind.

The Total Station was serviced, cleaned, and calibrated last month and is once again in good working order, so the prehistoric crew is back on the Finger Ridges chasing out the boundaries of the sites. Due to the limited amount of field work that remains, both Jon Mayes and Alisa Pettitt have reduced their hours to a

Monday through Thursday schedule. As a result, the prehistoric team will generally only be accepting field volunteers on Thursdays. While this is surely melancholy news to some, take heart in the knowledge that there is always more to do in the lab and volunteer opportunities at JLC are ever increasing.

On the Town site, Feature 87 (red rocky fill), continues deeper in excavation. Currently over a meter deep and filled with small rounded and angular quartz pebbles and cobbles, Feature 87 has yielded few large artifacts. Large pieces of dark olive wine bottle bases and stoneware were recovered; however, window screen picking in the lab has found many small pieces of clear and aqua glass and ceramic types ranging from Buckley-like to pearlware to porcelain. We are still trying to figure the exact width of the feature, but recent rains have impeded excavations as the ground water floods the bottom of the units.

Feature 85 (linear trench) directly south of Feature 25 (large stone foundation) is fully excavated and Test Unit 22 in the southwest corner of the foundation is also fully excavated. Feature 85 was discovered below the interior cultural surfaces in TU 22, and there was no evidence for disturbance in the corner of the stone foundation (seen in the picture to the top right). This indicates that Feature 85 pre-dates Feature 25 construction. A new test unit has been opened in the middle of Feature 25 that has yielded many artifacts in the first strata including a brass spigot, dark olive wine bottle fragments, and a large iron hoe.



At 44FX0704, Feature 86 is yielding more questions than answers. TU 149 exposed a corner of the feature, and it showed two distinct layers of bricks with a heavy mortar deposit between the layers. This large brick feature could be a bottom base for a chimney, though no bricks or soil was burnt. We will not be digging into this feature at this stage, but are attempting to determine its full size. About 15 meters south of TU 149 an anomaly was noted during the GPR survey in March and we have opened a new unit to expose and test this anomaly. Hopefully this will be another corner of the structure.



Also at 44FX0704, we are using the laser Total Station to lay in MTUs around the boundaries that were noted in the STP survey done by Thunderbird/WWSI in 2006. We hope to get a better understanding of the cultural boundaries and the land use of the time.

After over a year of working with CART, countless test units, artifacts and tick bites, staff member Robin K. has left us to return to school to earn her Masters from George Washington University. Best of luck to her in her new adventures!!



The newest additions to our crew are summer interns. They are joining us from various schools. Depending on their internship, they have begun mainly in the field or mainly in the lab. Everyone however is spending some time in the lab. As the project moves forward with less focus on the field, the field interns will transition more fully to the JLC lab. Everyone pays their dues in the Colchester lab with washing, ¼” screening of feature fill and rebagging. Rather quickly, interns are beginning to identify details of specific artifact types.

The CART lab is running as usual. With only some necessary minor adjustments, the prehistoric digital artifact catalog is mainly ready for analysis. Now one of the major areas for the lab staff to focus on is historic data entry. The lab is also preparing more for special analysis. Our light fraction floatation provenience and information is being recorded before sending it on to an archeobotanical consultant.

To discover some information about more recent features we have encountered, we will most likely return to processing a sample of feature soils by floatation this summer. Some faunal artifacts recovered from historic feature context have already been sent out and are currently being analyzed. Yet more faunal remains are being recorded for tracking purposes and will be sent to the faunal specialist.

The team is working on creating a glossary to accompany the catalog. This will be especially useful for terms that have more than one meaning or are used in Datum Point

different ways depending on the group who refers to them. Defining our terms will reduce confusion for those who read our catalog later, but also help to keep consistency for future cataloging. We are discussing eventually creating a glossary for our methodological terms as well.



WESTBROOK (44FX2660)

By Mike Johnson

The last three 1x10-foot transects (30 proveniences) from Block B are in the process of being catalogued in the lab. This block has been particularly rich in both quantity and quality. Most recently we have catalogued three, Middle Woodland, Selby Bay, side notched points. This association with the site could be inferred possibly from the Middle Woodland Culpeper pottery, which appears to date to ca. AD 600. Additionally, the northwest corner of the block, which we are cataloguing now, shows a distinct drop in flakes and debitage but a similar increase in fire cracked rocks and formal tools. They are mostly unifacial, side and end scraper-like tools. Sadly, that is the part of the block we were working on when our permit ended.

Unless otherwise announced, regular labs in June will continue to be on Tuesdays (9 am – whenever) and Sundays (9am – 12 noon).

Cactus Hill (44SX202) – We are in the final stages of cataloguing the artifacts from the 1993-2002 excavations. We are also in the final stages of 1/16-inch mesh water screening level samples. Hopefully, we can move to the analysis stage by the end of this year.

Unless otherwise announced, regular labs will continue through June on Tuesday evenings (7-9).

Thoroughfare Gap/Chapman's Mill – Kay McCarron and her crew of volunteers have started testing the Chapman's Mill site in Thoroughfare Gap (TG) along I-66 west of Gainesville. Although the main purpose of the testing was to locate historic features associated with the mill complex, they surprisingly discovered prehistoric artifacts from below the historic component. The prehistoric artifacts are unique for the area in that they are mostly made of jasper, chert, quartz and even one or two flakes of meta-volcanic stone probably from the Uwharries Mountains of North Carolina.

The crew also recently recovered the edge of a fine grained, patinated hornfels biface from the upper stratum (Figure). It appears to be from a large, flat bifacial core. Since it came from the top A soil stratum, it is likely later, assuming a relatively undisturbed context, which is still problematic.



Since the main stone types found on prehistoric sites east of the Blue Ridge Mountains are quartz, quartzite, hornfels and rhyolite, the predominance of jasper and chert from the deepest cultural levels is highly unusual. The jasper, which is the most common material, may be significant if it can be tied to the Thunderbird Paleo site in the nearby Shenandoah Valley or to the Early Archaic Brook Run site near Culpeper.

Later in the year we plan to start investigating sites in Smith Mountain Gap (SMG) on the Roanoke River in Pittsylvania County. These sites have produced a similar array of exotic raw materials to that found at TG. At SMG the strata producing the exotic raw materials date mostly from the Early Archaic back through Clovis-age levels to possible pre-Clovis levels. The models we are using for SMG are that the sites are there because they are logical camping areas at a transportation “funnel,” where it is easier to go through a water gap than over a mountain, and/or the gaps are such prominent landforms on the landscape that prehistoric people from far and wide use them as meeting/trading places.

At TG the exotic raw material seem to be coming from immediately below the historic in what is called a Bt soil horizon. The fact that the A soil is right on top of the B soil and that the first indication of prehistoric artifacts are dominated by exotic materials suggest that the upper soil layers have been stripped off. The lack of the normal quartz, quartzite, hornfels, and rhyolite dominated assemblages and pottery supports that preliminary assessment. The only point form recovered so far is an large, unusually long stem fragment made of rhyolite.

In talking with Bill Childress, Co-Director of the SMG project, we agree that the TG discoveries may represent a parallel pattern to SMG. Although it is still early, it offers a chance to find supporting evidence for the SMG model and an opportunity to test the methods we plan to use at SMG

OTHER UP-COMING EVENTS

- *Samurai: The Warrior Transformed*, an exhibit at the Explorers Hall, National Geographic Society, Washington, opened on March 7th and runs through September 3rd 2012. It explores the history of the samurai and their role in the modernization of Japan.
- See the enclosed flyer for upcoming City of Fairfax historic programs.
- Baltimore will be celebrating the 200th anniversary of the War of 1812 with a number of events. For further information, check out the website of the bicentennial commission at <http://starspangled200.org/Pages/Home.aspx>.

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

The Chapter meets at 7:30p.m. on the 2nd Wed. of each month at the James Lee Center, 2855-A Annandale Road, Falls Church, VA.

EVERYONE IS WELCOME!!!!

THE DATUM POINT

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