ARCHAEOLOGICAL SCIENCE

SCIENTIFIC EXCAVATION

Archaeological sites consist of layers of soil and trash, each layer containing information on the past like pages in a very old book. Archaeologists, however, cannot ‘read’ a site without removing the layers of soil and collecting artifacts. A scientific excavation, therefore, must involve careful recording of each artifact and its location relative to other artifacts. Even slight changes in soil color or texture could mark the locations of storage pits, fireplaces, or other evidence of unrecorded human activity.

Indiscriminate digging by collectors, or ‘pothunters,’ has destroyed many important archaeological sites in Anne Arundel County. Destroying these sites is like tearing pages out of unique books, the content forever lost. A trained, qualified archaeologist should oversee the excavation of archaeological sites to insure that the greatest amount of information can be recovered and used to increase our knowledge of the county and its people.

PREHISTORIC ANNE ARUNDEL

Archaeologists piece together Anne Arundel County's prehistoric past through scientific excavation, artifact analysis, study of Native American oral history, and careful reading of early historic documents. Combined, these sources of information reveal a rich cultural history extending at least 12,000 years into the past. Archaeologists divide the prehistoric past—the thousands of years prior to written evidence—into three periods, each representing a different technology and way of life: the Paleo–Indian (10,000–8,000 B.C.), Archaic (8,000–2,000 B.C.), and Woodland (2,000 B.C.–A.D. 1600) periods.

Paleo–Indian (10,000–8,000 B.C.)

Anne Arundel County's earliest human inhabitants were descendants of immigrants who had entered North America from Asia more than 12,000 years ago. Ice sheets at the time extended to within 200 miles of present day Annapolis, the environment very much cooler and the land covered by spruce forests. The Susquehanna River extended all the way to the Atlantic Ocean since the Chesapeake Bay had not yet formed. This was the age of the mastodon and the woolly mammoth.

Paleo–Indians (we don't know what they called themselves) lived in small, semi–nomadic groups, leaving few traces other than large stone blades, flakes of stone from stone toolmaking and bones from their meals. The bones have been a source of controversy among scholars: did Paleo–Indians rely on meat from mammoths and mastodons? Or did they use a wide range of plants and small animals?

Archaic (8,000–2,000 B.C.)

As the climate warmed, the ice sheets retreated. Rising sea levels flooded the ancestral Susquehanna River, creating the modern Chesapeake Bay. Modern plant and animal communities replaced those of the tundra.

Archaic period peoples lived in small groups, similar to those of the Paleo–Indian period, but occasionally congregating in larger, short–term camp. They collected and hunted a wide range of foods, including oysters, hickory nuts, and deer.

Unlike the preceding period, which was characterized by the distinctive Clovis point, Archaic period peoples made their dart and spear points in a wide variety of styles suggesting different groups, possibly speaking different languages.

Woodland (2,000B.C.–A.D. 1600)

The environment and landforms of Anne Arundel County, and of the Northern Hemisphere in general, attained their current forms by the beginning of the Woodland period. The Chesapeake Bay had fully formed, becoming one of the richest ecosystems in the world.

The hallmarks of the Woodland period include the first appearance and gradual widespread use of pottery and the probably adoption of the bow, with arrows replacing the throwing spear.

Woodland peoples adopted, and eventually relied on, the cultivation of corn (maize), beans, and squash, storing their produce in underground pits and above ground granaries in permanent villages. European explorers described and illustrated these settlements as early as the 1500s.

The Algonquians (al–gonk–e–ans)

Europeans visiting the shores of what we now call Anne Arundel County met many groups of Native Americans. These people spoke related languages which linguists call Algonquian.

Captain John Smith of the Virginia recorded the names and customs of these people on a map of the Chesapeake Bay and in his published history. Theirs was a rich, vibrant culture, determined to survive in the face of English guns and Western diseases.

And survive they did, through oral traditions and through their descendants who are on the verge of legal recognition by the State of Maryland as the Piscataway Nation and the Piscataway–Conoy Federation.

Mortar and pestle. Recovered together from the Katcef site next to the Patuxent River. Archaic period peoples used these quartzite tools to grind nuts and seeds around 4,000 years ago.

Pottery. This portion of a large clay pot was recovered from the shore of the Severn River. It dates to approximately A.D. 1200 and may have been used to store or prepare corn.

Axe. This stone axe was found near Laurel, Anne Arundel County. Since we do not know what other artifacts occurred around the axe, we cannot date it. Such tools were used for work, not warfare.

Quartzite blade. Although possibly used as a cutting tool, large blades such as these were convenient sources of smaller, more task–specific tools. One simply chipped away unwanted material, forming the required shape and size.

Hammer and anvil. Found together on a site near the Patuxent River, these quartzite objects were used to break stones into smaller pieces for tool manufacture.

The Lost Towns of Anne Arundel Project

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The Lost Towns of Anne Arundel is a long term research and education project sponsored by Anne Arundel County and the London Town Foundation. The people of Anne Arundel County are invited to work alongside archaeologists and historians, exploring the county's rich Colonial period past through scientific excavation, archival research, and artifact analysis.

The team of professional archaeologists and volunteers explores two early town sites in the county: Providence (1649–1680) and London (1684–1784).

Funding for the project has been provided by: Anne Arundel County, the Maryland Historical Trust, the London Town Foundation, the J.M. Kaplan Fund, the Anne Arundel House & Garden Pilgrimage, the Maryland Humanities Council, and the Anne Arundel County Trust for Preservation. Without the help of our many dedicated volunteers, however, *The Lost Towns of Anne Arundel Project* would not be possible.

Providence (1649–1680)

In 1649, at the invitation of Lord Baltimore (owner of the Maryland colony), a group of Puritans moved from Virginia to Anne Arundel County, establishing a small hamlet north of present day Annapolis. They called their settlement Providence.

They settled close to one another, initially, to defend themselves against Native Americans and against the Catholic Lord Baltimore. By the end of the 1600s, the Native American threat had abated (largely through warfare and disease) and the Protestants had wrested control over Maryland's government from the Calvert family.

Secure from outside threats, the Providence settlers spread out, establishing tobacco plantations along the South, Severn, and Magothy rivers. They primarily produced tobacco for markets back in Europe, trading large barrels of tobacco leaf for manufactured goods such as pottery, cloth, and—of course—tobacco pipes. *The Lost Towns* staff has found and explored several of the 17th century Providence sites.

London (1684–1783)

Maryland's General Assembly, at the insistence of Lord Baltimore, established a series of town sites along the Chesapeake Bay in 1684. In doing so, they tried to encourage commercial development and control trade for purposes of taxation. At the time, Maryland was decidedly rural, most planters owning their own wharves and trading directly with shipboard merchants.

London succeeded where virtually all of the other towns failed. Residents built as many as 50 dwellings, taverns, stores, warehouses, and artisan shops within the 100 acre town. Prohibited from exporting tobacco by the General Assembly in 1747, London rapidly declined, virtually disappearing by the end of the Revolutionary War, the houses, shops, and taverns abandoned and eventually dismantled.

The Lost Towns staff has located and excavated several of these sites to date, recovering thousands of artifacts critical to the reconstruction of the town and of the lives of its residents.

Join in the Rediscovery of Anne Arundel's Lost Towns

Volunteers are welcome to participate in the exciting rediscovery of Anne Arundel County's 'Lost Towns.' Opportunities are available for work in the archives, field, and laboratory. Call 410/222–7441 or 222–7328 for additional information.

Tobacco Culture

Marylanders and Virginians raised one principal cash crop—tobacco. Settlers could gain a great deal of wealth, very quickly, through the cultivation and sale of tobacco during the Colonial period.

The abundance of broken clay tobacco pipes on archaeological sites suggests that almost everyone—men, women, and children—smoked. Recent excavation of a family cemetery in Calvert County demonstrated that children often smoked regularly by the age of ten or eleven. Along with disease and poor medical care, smoking undoubtedly contributed to the low average life span of 17th century Maryland colonists—about 40 years.