

NYSAA NEWSLETTER



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THE EDITORS ENCOURAGE ANY NYSAA MEMBER WHO WOULD LIKE TO SUBMIT AN ARTICLE, LETTER, EDITORIAL OR NEWS ITEMS TO SUBMIT IT ELECTRONICALLY TO BILL OR LISA AT THE ADDRESSES LISTED ABOVE.

Recent Investigation of Archaic Sites at Hemstreet Park on the Upper Hudson River

By Ed Curtin, Curtin Archaeological Consulting, Inc.
and Van Epps-Hartley Chapter

After decades of investigation, archaeologists continue to ask serious questions about relationships between Archaic site size, formation history, and activity diversity. Were some large Archaic sites large or semi-sedentary settlements? Or are large size and functional diversity related to long occupation histories and changing activities? There may be no single answer to these questions, but recent investigations in the hamlet of Hemstreet Park, Town of Schaghticoke, Rensselaer County provide important insights into this issue.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

Hemstreet Park is located on the Hudson River near two



Hemstreet Park Location in Eastern New York.

notable tributaries, the Hoosic River which flows west from Vermont, and the Anthony Kill, which occupies an abandoned northern course of the Mohawk River. The mouth of the Anthony Kill is directly

opposite Hemstreet Park. Between 2000 and 2008, Curtin Archaeological performed Phase 1 and 2 cultural resource surveys within the hamlet. Nine prehistoric sites were found, 5 of which were considered important enough to avoid or monitor during construction of the sewer lines below the streets. Consequently, careful archaeological monitoring was performed at Hemstreet Park Sites 3, 4, 5, and 6 during the summer of 2008. During 2009, additional data recovery was performed in 3 locations outside the streets as a result of federal assistance of sewer lateral construction. Jon Vidulich of Curtin Archaeological directed the monitoring and data recovery fieldwork.

Bateaux Below, Inc. Gets White House Honor

Earlier this month, Joseph W. Zarzynski, Underwater Archaeologist and Executive Director of Bateaux Below, Inc., received a letter from First Lady Michelle Obama and the White

House recognizing the "Volunteers of Bateaux Below, Inc." as a recipient of a "Preserve America Steward" designation. According to the Preserve America web site, Bateaux Be-

low and its volunteers were one of only two recipients nationwide of this prestigious recognition.

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RECENT INVESTIGATION OF ARCHAIC SITES AT HEMSTREET PARK ON THE UPPER HUDSON RIVER

GEOARCHAEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Dr. Julieann Van Nest of the New York State Museum performed a geoarchaeological assessment as part of the Phase 2 survey. This work, based upon the observation of 5 backhoe trenches, geotechnical soil boring logs, and an evaluation of local topography provided a model of river terrace and floodplain formation: over the course of the Holocene, a progressive sequence of river channel migration, down-cutting, and over-the-bank deposition left a series of ground surfaces at dropping elevations arrayed from east to west. Van Nest also noted that sediment may have accumulated so rapidly while ephemeral ground surfaces were being occupied that archaeological evidence could occur below or between visible, stable occupation horizons. The archaeological value of this information is that evidence associated with short-term occupation could be anticipated to occur in isolation, protected from the palimpsest effect often created by multiple occupations of long-stable ground surfaces.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL DATA

During monitoring, Sites 4 and 5 provided little additional information. Site 3, located on an elevated terrace in the eastern part of Hemstreet Park, had previously yielded a Late Archaic period, Brewerton Side-Notched point (ca. 3,000 BC/5,000 BP). This site proved to be relatively small with low artifact density.

Site 6 is large, covering approximately 2-3 acres. It is located on the lower alluvial

terraces close to the Hudson River. Abundant, important information was obtained here during the 2008-2009 field-work. Site 6 contained several loci of Late Archaic period occupation. One of these was a combined lithic workshop and multiple-activity area associated with Otter Creek points (ca. 3,000-4,000 BC/5,000-6,000 BP). A rather full range of lithic reduction stages was represented in this area. Another location nearby (examined along the path of a sewer lateral) was more fully dominated by earlier stage debitage, indicating variation in lithic reduction activity in close proximity to the lithic workshop area. On the next lower terrace toward the river, another area also produced an Otter Creek point, while in this general vicinity a Brewerton Eared Triangle point was recovered associated with a complex of shallow pit and fire cracked rock features. This activity area is interpreted as having been associated with rock heating and the stone-boiling process. The shallow pit has been interpreted as an earth oven based upon internal stratigraphy. Archaeobotanical analysis by Justine Woodard McKnight, however, found only wood charcoal without evidence of foods in this feature. While this may not be anomalous in terms of cooking food, it is possible that the pit feature was used to heat stones to boil water, and that the fire cracked rock piles nearby were discarded from wooden or bark cooking or nut-oil rendering vessels.

The apparent Brewerton-

associated feature complex seems to have been close to the river-bank, because some 21 meters (70 feet) to the southwest, younger, ephemeral former ground surfaces-- referred to as Features 8 and 12-- were found buried at and well-below the near-surface levels that had yielded the Brewerton point and its associated features. Features 8 and 12 appeared to be suspended at different levels in the sandy subsoil, with Feature 8 at approximately the same level as the Brewerton feature complex, and Feature 12 significantly deeper. These contexts plus other, deep strata containing gravel and pebbles in this part of the site indicate a period of rapid floodplain formation characterized by unstable or quickly buried surfaces. Feature 8, 47-77 cm below the current ground surface, has been dated to 3840 +/- 40 radiocarbon years BP (ca. 1890 BC). Feature 12, buried from 100-140 cm deep, was dated to 4050 radiocarbon years BP (ca. 2100 BC). Thus, Feature 12 is much deeper but also much younger than the Brewerton and Otter Creek point contexts some 21 meters away.

A loose cluster of fire cracked rocks, chert debitage, and charcoal, Feature 8 probably wasn't a facility per se, but may represent a disturbed feature and surrounding activity area. Extending over a horizontal distance of 1 meter and a vertical increment of 30

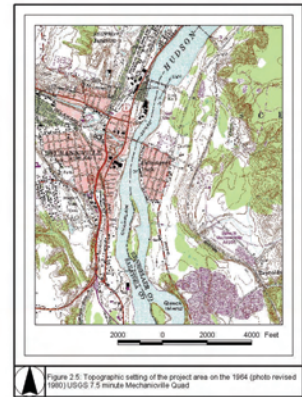


Figure 2-5: Topographic setting of the project area on the 1984 (photo revised 1990) USGS 7.5 minute Mechanicville Quad

Environmental Setting of Hemstreet Park. The mouth of the Anthony Kill ancient outlet of the Mohawk Valley is shown opposite Hemstreet Park

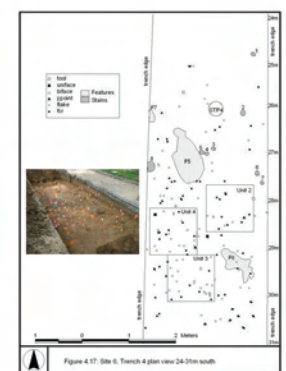


Figure A-17: Site 6, Trench 4 plan view (24.01m north)

Hemstreet Park Site 6, flagged and mapped artifacts within Otter Creek-age lithic workshop and activity area.

RECENT INVESTIGATION OF ARCHAIC SITES AT HEMSTREET PARK ON THE UPPER HUDSON RIVER

cm, Feature 8 did not exhibit soil discoloration. This appears to be the phenomenon suggested by Van Nest, a distribution of artifacts seemingly suspended in subsoil within a rapidly building section of floodplain. Feature 12, only 5 cm thick, seems to provide another example of this phenomenon, but with dark soil coloration. Feature 12 was a thin band of dark soil infused with charcoal, fire cracked rocks, and debitage observed over a distance of about 5 meters. Feature 12 dipped to the south in seeming conformance to an underlying slope. McKnight's analysis found wood charcoal and charred hickory nutshell associated with both Features 8 and 12, indicating a recurrence of gathering and food processing activities. These activities probably occurred during the fall harvest season.

A short distance to the west of Features 8 and 12, investigation of a sewer lateral found a deeply-buried Lamoka point, and in a level slightly above, a projectile point blade consistent in form with the Normanskill type. These point types are well-correlated elsewhere with the time frames indicated by the Features 8 and 12 radiocarbon dates. The stratigraphic, radiocarbon, and projectile point evidence indicate that this part of the site was occupied while the floodplain was building rapidly west of the Brewerton and Otter Creek-

associated occupations. Most of these later (Lamoka-Normanskill age) contexts are associated with lithic assemblages dominated by late stage debitage, as though the site occupants arrived for brief stays with already-manufactured, portable tool kits. The sense of mobility and short-term occupation suggested by these lithic assemblages may indicate a fundamental aspect of occupying relatively unstable shoreline environments.

CONCLUSIONS

Hemstreet Park has provided evidence of repeated occupation during the Late Archaic period. The earlier occupations associated with Otter Creek and Brewerton points show a diversity of activities occurring in different places, although it is not known whether these locations represent functionally different parts of a large, contemporaneous settlement, or small camps established in different places over time. While it is possible that many small camps may be represented, it may well be that these data actually illustrate the form of a large settlement shifting over time. Minimally, an intensely used activity area associated with Otter Creek points, another possible activity area with large flakes, and a spatially distinct complex of features associated with a Brewerton Eared Triangle point have been identified, but much more could be learned by exploring other locations within Hemstreet

Park Site 6.

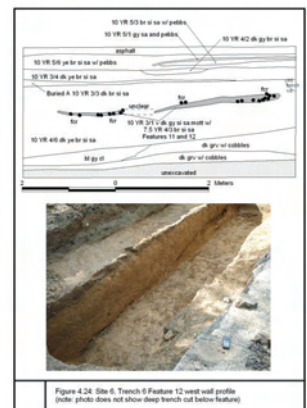
The concept of site size progressively increasing over time is well-illustrated by the evidence of Features 8 and 12, and the area slightly to the west containing Lamoka and possible Normanskill points. Stratigraphic and chronometric data indicate that this area was occupied comparatively late during the Archaic period, at a time when the floodplain was building rapidly toward the west. Artifactual and archaeobotanical data indicate that the strategy used to exploit this unstable floodplain environment involved basic subsistence and technology-maintenance activities performed during brief, seasonal visits. At least part of the answer to the question of site size is that this large Archaic site did indeed expand into new areas of occupation over time (with older areas perhaps being abandoned). In this particular case, however, the pattern and timing of floodplain development closely conditioned the process of human occupation.



Otter Creek points from the lithic workshop area.



Late stage bifaces from the lithic workshop area.



Hemstreet Park Site 6, west wall of Trench 6, showing Feature 12 and various strata, including a buried A horizon above, and the basal clay and cobble layers.

CONFERENCES:



Ontario Archaeological Society,

Oct. 16-18, Waterloo, Ontario, contact Robert Park,
<http://oas2009.uwaterloo.ca/>



NYSAA Executive Committee Meeting,

Nov. 14, 1:00 P.M. Ste. Marie-among-the Iroquois, Liverpool, NY
 off Onondaga Lake Parkway.

Council for Northeast Historical Archaeology, Oct. 16-18, Quebec City, contact Allison Bain, CNEHA2009@celat.ulaval.ca.

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2009**



INDIAN TRAIL TREES:

Kathy Brewer describes these trees: "Indian trail trees were formed by bending hardwood saplings over a forked branch in the desired direction and securing it to a stake with a piece of rawhide, sinew or vine. The tie-downs would eventually rot, but the tree would stay in its horizontal position. Trees naturally seek light, however; so sometimes vertical trunks would grow up from the horizontal trunk." Brewer continues, "A unique characteristic of Indian trail trees is the 'nose' at the end of the horizontal trunk, which formed where the top of the sapling was cut off. Many still show scars where they were tied down. These marks distinguish Indian trail trees from those accidentally misshapen by nature." As Brewer notes, indigenous peoples formed them to mark trail directions or to indicate locations of water sources or burial grounds.

Lee and Donna Ryan of Almond, New York are leading a project seeking out these trees formed by

New York's Seneca Indians. Lee tells how they became involved: "We were charter mem-



Indian Trail Tree in the Turnpike State Forest

bers of the Almond Historical Society in 1965. Researching topics and historical information in the archives room located in the Hagadorn House museum, we came upon a black and white photo of an Indian Trail Tree located on Bully Hill in Almond. "We went looking for the tree and finally found it - in very sad shape. Flooding, erosion and bulldozer work had

caused the tree to now sit at a 70° angle, and the tree was dying. In our newsletter, we printed a copy of the original 1960 photo and a photo of the tree in its current state. We began to get phone calls from our readers: 'I know where there is a tree like that,' or 'I have seen trees like that when I hunted in the woods.'" The Ryan's collected the sightings and Lee visited the identified trees with a GPS unit to record their location.

Now the Ryan's have an [Indian Trail Tree website](#). It records over sixty of these trees so far, with the GPS coordinates so that people can see the trees for themselves.

Ryan adds: "Our quest continues as people contact us with 'tree spottings'. We are planning to develop a way to place signs on these trees (doing no harm to them) indicating that they are Indian Trail Trees. We welcome your cooperation and comments." (excerpt from a piece by Gerry Rising in [The Buffalo News](#), August 16, 2009).

Bateaux Below, Inc. Gets White House Honor, continued:

The underwater archaeology and historic preservation not-for-profit corporation is based in Wilton, New York. The honor recognizes Bateaux Below and its volunteers for their exemplary volunteer efforts caring for the historic resources sunk in Lake George, especially Bateaux Below's work as volunteers maintaining a state-administered shipwreck park for scuba divers called "Submerged Heritage Preserves." The shipwreck park opened in 1993 and was the first of its kind in the state. Bateaux Below has spent the last 22 years studying the lake's shipwrecks and implementing programs that promote historic preservation of these finite cultural resources.

Among Bateaux Below's notable achievements are getting several historic shipwrecks listed on the National Register of Historic Places, opening the first shipwreck preserves in the Empire State, providing monitoring divers for the state shipwreck preserves in Lake George, working with a local documentary production company to produce a national award winning documentary, and other public outreach programs.

The "Preserve America Steward" award recognizes the efforts of Bateaux Below's 11 volunteers: Dr. Russell Bellico, Bob Benway, Vince Capone, Terry Crandall, John Farrell, Steven C.

Resler, Peter Pepe, Paul Cornell, Elinor Mossop, Dr. Sam Bowser, and Joseph W. Zarzynski.

Preserve America is "a federal initiative that encourages and supports community efforts to preserve and enjoy" the nation's "priceless cultural and natural heritage."

The First Lady serves as the Honorary Chair for Preserve America. The First Lady's letter thanked Bateaux Below's volunteers for all that they do "to care for our Nation's important historic resources."

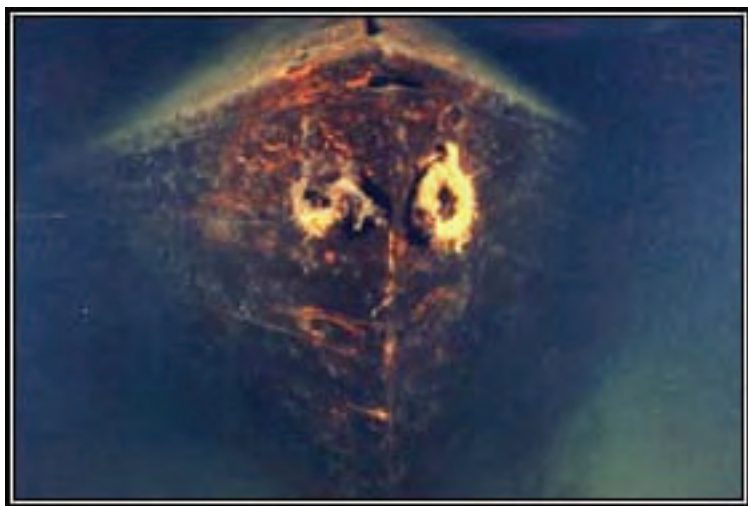


Image of the Bow of the Land Tortoise (above) and available bookmarks delineating details of the wreck (right). Both images from: <http://www.thelostradeau.com/index.html>

The New York Paleoindian Database Project: A Call for Data

By Jonathan C. Lothrop, New York State Museum

Introduction

As part of ongoing research on Late Pleistocene adaptations in New York, the NYSM is renewing its commitment to the statewide fluted point survey begun in the 1950s by Dr. William A. Ritchie. To all NYSAA members and others interested in New York prehistory, please help us systematically record data on Paleoindian projectile points, as part of the New York Paleoindian Database Project (NYPID).



Background

Why are fluted point surveys important? Along with Paleoindian site excavations and collections analysis, these surveys hold great promise for revealing how Native Americans colonized and adapted to New York and other regions at the end of the Ice Age.

Over 50 years ago, Ritchie published *Traces of Early Man in the Northeast* (1957). This landmark study synthesized discoveries of Paleoindian points and sites to interpret the Late Pleistocene occupation of New York and beyond. In 1982, Beth Wellman and Bob Funk updated Ritchie's work with data supplied by professional and avocational archaeologists, providing the only dedicated survey of fluted points for New York (Wellman 1982). In Wellman's study, fluted bifaces clustered in the Hudson and Susquehanna valleys, the Ontario Lake Plain, and other parts of New York, suggesting travel corridors and key resource areas for Paleoindians.

While statewide Paleoindian point surveys are not new, archaeologists are increasingly using these data as another tool for understanding life in the Late Pleistocene. The Paleoindian Database of the Americas (PIDBA) website (<http://pidba.utk.edu/>) shows how fluted point distributions can be used at a continental scale to help address questions on the peopling of the New World (e.g., Anderson and Faught 1998; Andersen et al. 2005). Although data quality for many states on this website is excellent, it is incomplete for some states like New York, handicapping interpretations.

In the last two decades, archaeologists have developed sequences for fluted and lanceolate Paleoindian points on a time-scale of about 13,000 to 10,000 BP (Ellis and Deller 1997; Bradley et al. 2008). With these seriations, we can assign rough ages to undated Paleoindian sites and point finds in the Great Lakes and New England. Coupled with provenience data, this can tell us much about how and when Paleoindians colonized and adapted to these broad regions; the same can be done for New York.

The New York Paleoindian Database Project (NYPID)

Our goal is to compile information and digital photographs of artifacts left behind by the first peoples of New York. How can you contribute? Go to the NYSM website link (<http://www.nysm.nysed.gov/nypid>); there, you can download and complete a standardized form. If you need help filling out the form, or would like us to prepare it, we will be happy to assist you. This link should be active by October 15, 2009.

Jon Lothrop, NYSM Archaeology Curator, will coordinate this effort. He can help with questions or requests for assistance, and completed forms should be sent to him (see contact information below). Of necessity, this will be a collective effort, with many individuals stepping forward to contribute data, and others to help with database-related tasks.

As we receive completed forms (or fill them out at the owner's request), data will be entered into an electronic database, uploaded to the NYPID web link for all to view, and also added to the PIDBA site. (For site security, provenience will only be listed at the county level on these Web links.) We encourage all

NYSAA members and interested persons to contribute to this effort. With your help, we can develop a database that will offer fresh insights on the first peoples of New York and their role in colonizing North America at the end of the Pleistocene.

Contact information:

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