



# Middleford Mills Archaeological District: Investigations at Bridge 238



Historic photograph of  
Cabbage Mills near Milford, DE.

**D**id you know that your yard may contain significant information about Delaware's history? Archaeologists working with the **Delaware Department of Transportation** (DelDOT) identified remains of a 100- to 200-year-old mill complex underneath Bridge 238, which carries Route 46 over the Gravelly Fork of the Nanticoke River. DelDOT plans to replace the bridge with a wider, safer structure. The wooden remains were once part of a large mill complex—known

today as the **Middleford Mills Archaeological District**—that at one time included a grist mill, saw mill, and an iron furnace located along present-day SR 46.

Even though your property will not be affected by the bridge replacement, it still may contain elements of the historic mill complex. In order for archaeologists to understand how this complex worked 200 years ago, they need to identify all of its remaining elements. Each of

these features contributes to an understanding of the complex as a whole.

The **National Historic Preservation Act** requires DelDOT to determine whether road projects may inadvertently destroy resources valuable to Delaware's historical heritage. With the technical assistance of archaeological consultants, DelDOT works with the **State Historic Preservation Office** in Delaware, to identify and evaluate

archaeological sites that may be eligible for listing in the **National Register of Historic Places**. Through archaeological and historical studies, DelDOT helps to document and preserve the past, at the same time allowing important transportation projects to proceed.

**T**o better understand the portion of the mill complex that will be affected by the replacement of Bridge 238, archaeologists with Parsons Engineering Science will prepare a map of the entire Middleford Mills Archaeological District. Many of the elements of the district are located outside of the footprint of Bridge 238. Archaeologists will plot the location of mill-related features using the **Global Positioning System**, or GPS. GPS equipment uses satellite signals to determine precise locations of objects on the earth's surface.

GPS equipment fits into a small backpack, with a small antenna. The surveyor walks to the feature to be mapped, and within about 5 minutes, has a reading and records the necessary data. A computer program then translates the information to a map. If you are home, the archaeologists would welcome the opportunity to demonstrate how this works.

Below ground archaeology will only be conducted in the area immediately impacted by the bridge replacement. These excavations are intended to identify whether





GPS equipment in use.

the early 19<sup>th</sup>-century forge was located here, or whether timbers found under the bridge are remains of sluice gates designed to control water levels in the mill pond. The excavations should take about 2 weeks, and will be completed prior to bridge construction. Currently, construction is scheduled to begin on or around June 15, 1999. Once the fieldwork is finished, the archaeologists will prepare a detailed report that evaluates what was discovered, and makes a public record of the findings.

**T**he Nanticoke Forge was built in the 1760s on the west side of Northwest Fork of the Nanticoke, at the head of the tide water. The original forge was likely situated on a dam upstream from Bridge 238. This Forge endured at least until the Revolutionary War, and may have been operated into the 1790s.

In 1805, a new dam was built approximately 300 yards below the old one. The road that ran along the top of the dam exists today as SR 46. Races through the new dam powered a forge, a saw mill, and a grist mill. The forge was no longer standing by the mid-1820s, and though the complex was immediately rebuilt, fire destroyed the structures in 1846. In 1857, the grist mill and saw mill were rebuilt on the east side of the dam. The location of the forge built after 1805 isn't known, but the race below Bridge 238 was known in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as "Forge Run" or "Forge Race."

**W**ith the cooperation of the public, information can be recorded about historic resources that might otherwise go undocumented. Efforts of historians, archaeologists, transportation officials, and the public together contribute to a more complete understanding of our shared cultural history. Your interest in these efforts is greatly appreciated. Your cooperation will help ensure that fragile remains of Delaware's history will be recorded and preserved for future generations.

For more information, please contact the following:

- Kevin Cunningham (DelDOT) 302-760-2125
- Brian Crane (Parsons ES) 703-218-1486
- Diane Halsall (Parsons ES) 703-934-2339