

### III. PREHISTORIC OVERVIEW

#### A. RECORDS CHECK

Archaeological site records were reviewed at the Bureau of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Delaware Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs in Dover. No sites have been recorded within the project area. The distribution of recorded sites in the project area vicinity shows that the favored aboriginal locations appear to be along the margins of high-order stream floodplains such as Ellendale Swamp and Maple Marsh. Existing information suggests that the project area was unlikely to contain prehistoric occupation sites such as base camps or hunting sites, nor was there any likelihood that quarry-related sites would be present. The nearest known site, 7S-F-3, is located at the headwaters of a unnamed tributary stream, and it reportedly contains a Paleo-Indian component, as well as a Woodland component.

#### B. PREVIOUS INVESTIGATIONS

There has been relatively little systematic archaeological survey in the Eskridge property vicinity, and the present study is the first archaeological examination of the project area. The survey of U.S. Route 113 between Georgetown and Milford sponsored by DelDOT represents the most recent cultural archaeological activity in the vicinity. That survey resulted in the identification of seven previously unrecorded sites within the Route 113 right-of-way, including five prehistoric components and four historic components. The prehistoric sites all appear to represent small resource procurement sites or seasonal camps occupied by small groups. Diagnostic artifacts recovered from the sites indicate prehistoric use of the project area throughout the Archaic and Woodland periods. Site 7S-F-68, identified during a survey along U.S. Route 113 (LeeDecker et al. 1992), appears to typify the procurement site or micro-band base camp common in this area. Located on a small knoll adjacent to a large wetland area, this site was repeatedly used during the Archaic and Woodland periods. The historic archaeological sites in the vicinity represent rural residences or farmsteads, occupied primarily during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries (LeeDecker et al. 1992).

One other cultural resource management study of Warren's Tax Ditch was sponsored by the Soil Conservation Service for a project near the southern portion of the Route 113 corridor. This study (Delmarva Clearinghouse for Archaeology 1975) resulted in the identification of three prehistoric sites (7S-C-22, 7S-C-23 and 7S-F-10), together with a possible brick kiln and a number of nineteenth- and twentieth-century refuse deposits. The survey results suggested that prehistoric sites were strongly correlated with well-drained versus poorly drained soils, although the number of identified sites was small and field survey conditions were generally poor.

#### C. REGIONAL PREHISTORY

The prehistory of Delaware has been divided into four periods (1) The Paleo-Indian Period (ca. 12,000 BC - 6500 BC), the Archaic Period (ca. 6500 BC - 3000 BC), the Woodland I Period (ca. 3000 BC - AD 1000), and the Woodland II Period (AD 1000 - AD 1650). The time frame between AD 1600 to approximately AD 1750 marks the final years of Native American occupation of the area during early European colonization of the state (Custer 1984, 1986). These prehistoric cultural units are defined as study units in the Delaware's management plan for prehistoric resources (Custer 1986).

The Paleo-Indian Period (ca. 12,000 BC - 6500 BC) marks the initial occupation of the state by small groups of nomadic Native American hunters and gatherers. Their presence coincided with

the amelioration of late Pleistocene glacial environmental conditions throughout eastern North America and the beginning of early Holocene conditions; that is, cold temperatures and alternating periods of wet and dry conditions. The economic system of the Paleo-Indians was largely based upon the hunting of large, cold-adapted animals including both migratory and non-migratory species. Although direct evidence of Paleo-Indian use of non-mammalian food resources is lacking in the archaeological record of Delaware, paleoenvironmental data indicate that their exploitative territories include habitats in which plant foods and other edible resources were available. Palynological and geomorphological data suggest that the vegetation in Delaware during the Paleo-Indian Period consisted of a mosaic that included deciduous and boreal forests and grasslands which would have provided graze, browse and shelter for a variety of small and large mammals. In conjunction with various surface water settings, these habitats would have been focal points for Paleo-Indian foragers.

The stone tool kit of the Paleo-Indians was characterized by a limited number of bifacial and unifacial implements that suggest a heavy emphasis on the procurement and processing of animal resources. These include projectile points, hafted and unhafted knives, scrapers, and less formalized flake tools. Of these, the fluted point is the diagnostic hallmark of the Paleo-Indian Period. Other point styles indicative of the later part of this cultural period include both unfluted triangular forms and notched and stemmed points. The distributions and environmental settings of Paleo-Indian sites and isolated point finds suggest that these people maintained a lifestyle that consisted of relatively frequent movements of single or multiple family groups to and from resource-rich habitats. It appears that this basic subsistence/settlement strategy persisted with only minor variations for approximately 5,500 years.

Custer has identified a concentration of Paleo-Indian sites along the Mid-Peninsular Drainage Divide of the Delmarva Peninsula, a physiographic unit that encompasses the present study area. Using modern LANDSAT imagery, Paleo-Indian site loci were found to be strongly correlated with poorly drained or swampy areas. The Hughes complex in Kent County exemplifies this Paleo-Indian site distributional pattern. This complex includes a series of six surface finds located on low, well-drained knolls within or adjacent to a large freshwater swamp and other poorly drained areas (Custer 1986:49-51).

The Archaic Period (ca. 6500 BC - 3000 BC) is characterized by a series of changes in prehistoric Native American technologies, subsistence, and settlement. These shifts are interpreted as gradual human responses to the emergence of full Holocene environmental conditions. The landscape was dominated by mesic oak and hemlock forests. Reductions in open grasslands brought about by warm and wet conditions resulted in the extinction of certain cold-adapted grazing animal species (i.e., caribou and bison) that were the favored prey of Paleo-Indian groups. Alternatively, these vegetational changes were favorable to browsing animals such as deer who flourish in such settings (Custer 1984, 1986).

A rise in the sea level and an increase in precipitation at the beginning of the Holocene would have facilitated the development of inland swamps within the Mid-Peninsular Drainage Divide. At this time, Native American populations in these locales shifted from the more hunting-oriented foraging pattern of the Paleo-Indian Period to one in which plant foods became a more important part of their economies. In southern Delaware, large swamp habitats such as Cedar Swamp and Burnt Swamp would have served as locations for the first large residential base camps possibly occupied by several different family groups. Associated with these larger group camps are more numerous and smaller procurement sites situated in various settings that would have been favorable for hunting and gathering activities during different seasons of the year.

Archaic tool kits differ from those of the Paleo-Indian Period in that they include a number of artifacts indicative of plant food processing (i.e., grinding implements and stone mortars). Although Archaic groups in Delaware appear to have been less mobile than the preceding Paleo-

Indian populations, they were more mobile than later Woodland Period groups. The size of Archaic exploitative groups seem to have fluctuated seasonally with the availability of food resources.

Based upon palynological and geomorphological data from the Middle Atlantic region, the Woodland I Period (ca. 3000 BC - AD 1000) has been described as a time of "dramatic change in local climates and environments" in which "a pronounced warm and dry period" (i.e., a mid-postglacial xerothermic) began at approximately 3000 BC and persisted to approximately 1000 BC (Custer and Bachman 1984). During that period, the mesic oak hemlock forests of the Archaic were replaced by more drought-resistant (xeric) oak and hickory forests and more abundant grasslands. Although these conditions led to the drying up of some interior streams, continued sea level rise resulted in the creation of highly productive and large brackish water marshes. In essence, the xerothermic is hypothesized to have produced shifts in the distributions of plant and animal species and the establishment of new resource-rich settings in some areas of the state.

In turn, these proposed shifts in climate, environmental conditions, and resource distributions are believed to have resulted in radical changes among resident prehistoric Native American populations in the study area including a trend toward greater sedentism and more complex systems of social organization and interactions. For example, major river floodplains and estuarine swamp habitats became the primary resource zones and the locations of large residential base camps occupied on a multi-seasonal or year-round basis. Such sites are particularly prominent in northern Delaware; these include the Delaware Park Site, the Clyde Farm Site, the Crane Hook Site, and the Naamans Creek Site. Artifact assemblages and features from these sites suggest intensive utilization by prehistoric populations and a trend toward more sedentary lifeways. In southern Delaware, there was an increase in the utilization of shellfish in the coastal areas, concurrent with an inland shift in the locations of macro-band base camps along the tidal drainages. Within the Mid-Peninsular Drainage Divide zone, there is little evidence that site distribution patterns changed from the preceding Archaic Period (Custer 1986).

The tool kits of Woodland I groups are generally similar to those of the Archaic, but with the addition of such items as heavy woodworking tools, soapstone and ceramic containers, broad-bladed points, and netsinkers. The increased abundance of plant processing tools over the preceding period suggests more intensive utilization of plant foods which by the end of Woodland I times, may have approached the level of productive intensification. The presence of non-local lithic materials such as argillite, rhyolite, and soapstone are interpreted as indicators of incipient regional trade and exchange networks. The presence of soapstone and ceramic vessels are viewed as items that facilitated more efficient food preparation and storage of surplus foods. Pit features employed for food storage and the remains of prehistoric dwellings have been documented at the Delaware Park and Clyde Farm Sites in northern Delaware.

The inferred reduction in overall group mobility, the presence of certain artifact types indicative of intensified resource processing, the possible generation of food surpluses, the presence of artifact caches and the possible existence of increased inter-regional exchange networks as inferred from the presence of non-local lithic raw materials are interpreted as indicators of the initial development of ranked social organization as opposed to earlier egalitarian systems.

The Woodland II Period (ca. AD 1000 - AD 1650) within the Middle Atlantic region is marked primarily by the development of horticulture and increased sedentism. During this period, villages became larger and more permanent and tended to be located adjacent to areas with easily worked floodplain soils. This period is also characterized by an attenuation in the inter-regional trade and exchange systems.

Two Woodland II complexes have been defined for Delaware. In Southern Delaware, the Slaughter Creek complex is characterized by the presence of Townsend ceramics, triangular

projectile points, large macro-band base camps and possibly fully sedentary villages with numerous food storage features. Most major sites assigned to the Slaughter Creek complex have been identified in the Delaware Shore, Mid-Drainage and Coastal/Bay physiographic zones of southern Delaware. Current Slaughter Creek complex settlement models indicate that the Mid-Peninsular Divide Zone would have been used for special resource procurement sites (Custer 1986).

The Contact Period (ca. AD 1600 - AD 1750) is marked by the initial contact between the Native American inhabitants of Delaware and European colonists and the total collapse of traditional native lifeways and sociopolitical organization. The picture is further complicated by the paucity of sites dating to this important period within the state. However, historical sources indicate that resident Native American populations had minimal interaction with European settlers and were subjugated by the Susquehannock Indians of southeastern Pennsylvania. A small number of descendants of the original Native American inhabitants of Delaware still reside in the state today.