

INTRODUCTION

The spectacular landscape along Sandom Branch has become important for modern settlement, as it was for millennia for the region's American Indian inhabitants. Sandom Branch is a small, spring-fed stream that flows into Blackbird Creek near its headwaters on the eastern edge of the ridge that forms the spine of the Delmarva peninsula. This wide, low ridge separates streams flowing westward to the Chesapeake Bay from those like Sandom Branch and Blackbird Creek that flow eastward to the Delaware Bay. Marshes and estuaries line a network of embayed coastal streams along the Delaware Bay shoreline, and the flanks of the ridge form the first consistently elevated ground above the wetlands. Historically, towns grew up at the foot of the ridge where coastal streams were no longer navigable, and major transportation corridors were established along the comparatively level and raised ground. The upgrading of one of these routes, U.S. Highway 13/State Route 1, occasioned a federally mandated environmental review processes that included an archaeological search for traces of American Indian occupation of this landscape, which were found to date from as early as 10,000 years ago to the early historic period. This report presents the results of these archaeological investigations and emphasizes how these archaeological findings are crucial for reconstructing the lifeways of the Sandom Branch region's past inhabitants, especially American Indians who lived here prior to the earliest written accounts.

1.1 Project Description and History

The archaeological investigations detailed here were conducted by the Cultural Resources division that was associated at the time with Parsons, and has since, as of 2005, been transferred to Versar. To ease potential confusion, these archaeologists are simply referred to in the remainder of this report as the Cultural Resource (CR) Division. Archaeological studies completed prior to the transfer in 2005 are still referred to as having been completed by Parsons, however.

CR Division personnel conducted archaeological site evaluation (Phase II) and data recovery (Phase III) investigations at two sites (7NC-J-227 and 7NC-J-228) located along Sandom Branch as an element of the environmental review process. Together, these two sites are assigned to the Sandom Branch Site Complex, because they are located in close proximity to one another, share a landform and have an overlapping occupational history. The Sandom Branch Site Complex is located within the Smyrna-to-Pine Tree Corners segment of the State Route (SR1) highway upgrade.

SR1 is an Interstate standard relief route for the existing U.S. Highway 13, in New Castle County, Delaware (Figure 1-1). The Delaware Department of Transportation (DelDOT), in coordination with the Federal Highway Administration and the Delaware State Historic Preservation Office (DESHPO), created a planning strategy for cultural resources within the project area beginning in 1984 (Custer et al. 1984; Custer and Cunningham 1986). A predictive model was developed in order to identify high, medium, and low probability areas for the discovery of prehistoric and historical archaeological sites. In 1987, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, DESHPO, and DelDOT developed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for the execution of Section 106 requirements throughout the project area. The MOA provided for the mitigation of adverse effects to historic properties if alternative measures such as avoidance were not feasible.

The Smyrna-to-Pine Tree Corners segment of the SR1 corridor consists of a right-of-way (ROW) approximately 5 miles (8 km) in length and varying from 300 to 500 ft (91–151 m) in width. There have been ten previous archaeological investigations in the SR1 corridor from Smyrna-to-Pine Tree Corners prior to the data recovery investigations. Two initial surveys (Phase I) were conducted by the University of Delaware Center for Archaeological Research (UDCAR), one in 1984 (Custer and Bachman 1986) and the second in 1992 (Bedell and Busby 1997). The remaining eight studies were undertaken by the Cultural Resource Group of Louis Berger & Associates, Inc. (LBA), and included additional survey of portions of the SR1 corridor, and evaluation and data recovery investigations of sites identified as a result of the various surveys (Bedell 1996a, 1996b, 1996c; LeeDecker 1996; Bedell 1997; Bedell et al. 1997a; Bedell et. al 1997b; Bedell and Jacoby 1998).

The sites of the Sandom Branch Site Complex were initially identified in a 1997 survey (Phase I) of portions of the SR1 corridor by LBA (Bedell and Jacoby 1998). As recorded in the LBA survey in 1997, the Sandom Branch sites were originally referred to as the Fenner Swamp Site, 7NC-J-227, and the Wyn's Bet Site, 7NC-J-228 (Bedell and Jacoby 1998). LBA recommended evaluative testing of 7NC-J-227, while no further work was recommended at 7NC-J-228. DelDOT instituted a corridor-wide reassessment of the survey findings along the entire Smyrna-to-Pine Tree Corners ROW, and following that study, the CR Division recommended that, due to similarities in setting and in recovered cultural material, the two archaeological sites at Sandom Branch should be considered together as a complex and that their evaluation should therefore be coordinated (Parsons 1999).

Archaeological site evaluation was undertaken by the CR Division between March and August 1999, to determine the eligibility of the sites for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The prehistoric components comprising the site complex were determined eligible for inclusion in the NRHP under Criterion D, as containing information important to an understanding of Delaware prehistory (Rutherford 1999a). Concurrence was granted by the DESHPO in September, 1999 (Appendix A). Highway construction plans as proposed were to have a direct, adverse effect on the sites. The proposed SR1 ROW passed directly through the Sandom Branch Site Complex. The sites could not be avoided by the planned construction, and thus, in accordance with the MOA, data recovery excavations were recommended. Fieldwork was undertaken by the CR Division between October 1999 and February 2000. The full results of the evaluation and data recovery investigations are reported herein.

In addition to the prehistoric occupations identified at the Sandom Branch sites, historical materials were recovered. These consisted of road trace and a scatter of eighteenth and nineteenth century domestic debris. The historical component was not considered NRHP-eligible at the completion of the evaluation investigations (Appendix C). Additional historical artifacts were encountered during the data recovery investigations. The frequency and type of artifacts did not provide new information on the historical component and thus, did not alter the original eligibility determination for that component. The archival research, artifact descriptions, artifact distributions, and discussion of the historic occupations at Sandom Branch are presented in Appendix C.

Figure 1-1. Location of Sandom Branch Sites along the Proposed SR1 Construction Corridor.

All of the cultural resource investigations at the Sandom Branch sites were conducted in compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended. The archaeological investigations were carried out in accordance with the standards of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the National Park Service (36CFR800; 36CFR60; 36CFR66). All work was conducted under the Secretary of the Interior's *Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation* (48 FR 44716-44742). Fieldwork was conducted in close consultation with the DelDOT and the DESHPO. The work conformed to DESHPO standards as outlined in the *Guidelines for Architectural and Archaeological Surveys in Delaware* (DESHPO 1993). Several reports were used as guides to address prehistoric and historical contexts, including *Delaware Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan* (Ames et al. 1989), *A Management Plan for Delaware's Prehistoric Cultural Resources* (Custer 1986), *A Management Plan for the Prehistoric Archaeological Resources of Northern Delaware* (Custer and DeSantis 1986), and *Management Plan for Delaware's Historical Archaeological Resources* (DeCunzo and Catts 1990).