The route 301 project in Delaware is a rare opportunity to look into the past and identify archaeological sites from the 17th and 18th centuries. The Delaware Department of Transportation (DelDOT) is in the throes of its largest public works project in over 20 years. DelDOT will be constructing 17 miles of new grade-separated highway across the state to move traffic safely and efficiently from Maryland’s route 301 onto the existing Delaware route 1 corridor. The route 301 project is federally funded, thus necessitating the need to comply with federal laws and regulations. The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (as amended) and the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (as amended) are the primary instruments for addressing archaeology on the project. An archaeological program has been established, via a memorandum of agreement, between the Delaware Department of Transportation, The Delaware Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs, and the Federal Highway Administration. Background research and archaeological surveys are currently taking place along the project corridor, as a result of numerous early historic archaeological sites we are finding and what we already know about them from our preliminary phase I survey, as well as their potential eligibility to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Also as part of the phase I survey, specific locations within the route 301 project corridor will be tested to determine the presence, or archaeological signature, of these early cart roads. When attempting to define the signature of early historic cart roads, one must look to the relationship of cultural landscape from the 17th and 18th centuries. Archaeological sites from this time period are very rare in Delaware and across the Mid-Atlantic region, thus making this project all the more important to our collective knowledge about the culture of the American Colonies prior to being the United States of America. Most of the route 301 project corridor has been used as agricultural land for the past 300 years. This factor is a very important reason why the potential exists to have buried archaeological deposits beneath the plow zone soils that date to the 17th and 18th centuries. A plow zone is the upper layer of organic soil in an agricultural field that is continually renewed by the plow. In the Middle-Atlantic region this is about 12 inches thick. Part of the phase I survey was to test for early historic archaeological sites associated with early historic cart roads. Preliminary results from these archaeological sites associated with the cart roads depicted on the 1740 map.

As archaeological sites are being identified for the route 301 project their locations are being mapped to determine their relationship to each other and early historic cart roads. The route 301 project has provided us with a more accurate model for identifying archaeological sites from the 17th and 18th centuries. Our preliminary phase I results are nothing less than astounding and will continue to fuel our research needs for this project as we move forward with additional archaeological work.

One of the first tasks of the U.S. route 301 archaeology program was to complete a detailed history of the project corridor, as well as an archaeological predictive model. The Geographic Information System (GIS) based predictive model, detailed background research, and an intensive archaeological testing strategy, to identifying archaeological sites. This methodological approach to the route 301 archaeology program, in the end, will show how ‘front loading’ the work has saved the Federal Highway Administration money and time by having a more accurate prescribed notion of where archaeological sites are located. This project has the potential to alter our viewpoint about the economic and cultural landscape from the 17th and 18th centuries in Delaware. In the future, all of this new information from the route 301 archaeology program will be synthesized to see how it may revision our collective knowledge about the history of Delaware, Maryland, and the entire Mid-Atlantic region. These preliminary results are nothing less than astonishing and will continue to fuel our research needs for this project as we move forward with additional archaeological work.

The next step in the archaeology program is to finish phase I archaeological survey work and begin phase II work, which will determine the boundaries of the identified archaeological sites from the phase I survey, as well as their potential eligibility to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Also as part of the phase II program, archaeological survey specific locations within the route 301 project corridor will be tested to determine the presence, or archaeological signature, of these early cart roads. When attempting to define the signature of early historic cart roads, one must look to the relationship of cultural landscape from the 17th and 18th centuries. Early historic cart roads were utilized by horse or even drawn carts / carriages that leave a distinct archaeological signature, which can be preserved intact for hundreds of years beneath a plow zone. Once the early historic cart's signature is identified, they fill in with silt and eventually become part of an agricultural landscape for farming over a 300 year period.