

7. FORD FARM PREHISTORIC SITE, LOCUS E

DURING EARLIER SURVEYS, two large prehistoric sites were identified on the west side of St. Jones River, atop steep bluffs overlooking the valley. These sites, Ford Farm locus D (7K-C-386d) and Blueberry Hill (7K-C-107), were judged potentially eligible for listing in the National Register (Heite and Blume 1992).

Ford Farm and Blueberry Hill lay on small sandy hillocks on the bluffs, about 40 feet above sea level and about 25 feet above the river.

The proposed river crossing prompted Phase I investigations between Ford Farm locus D and Blueberry Hill. At this crossing point, the natural elevation was lower (FIGURE 1).

Because the proposed route lay between two known sites, there was a high likelihood that prehistoric artifacts would be found in a similarly deeply-stratified situation, if deep deposits should be found. Artifacts had been observed in the dirt bike track disturbance (ER 198, FIGURE 17A).

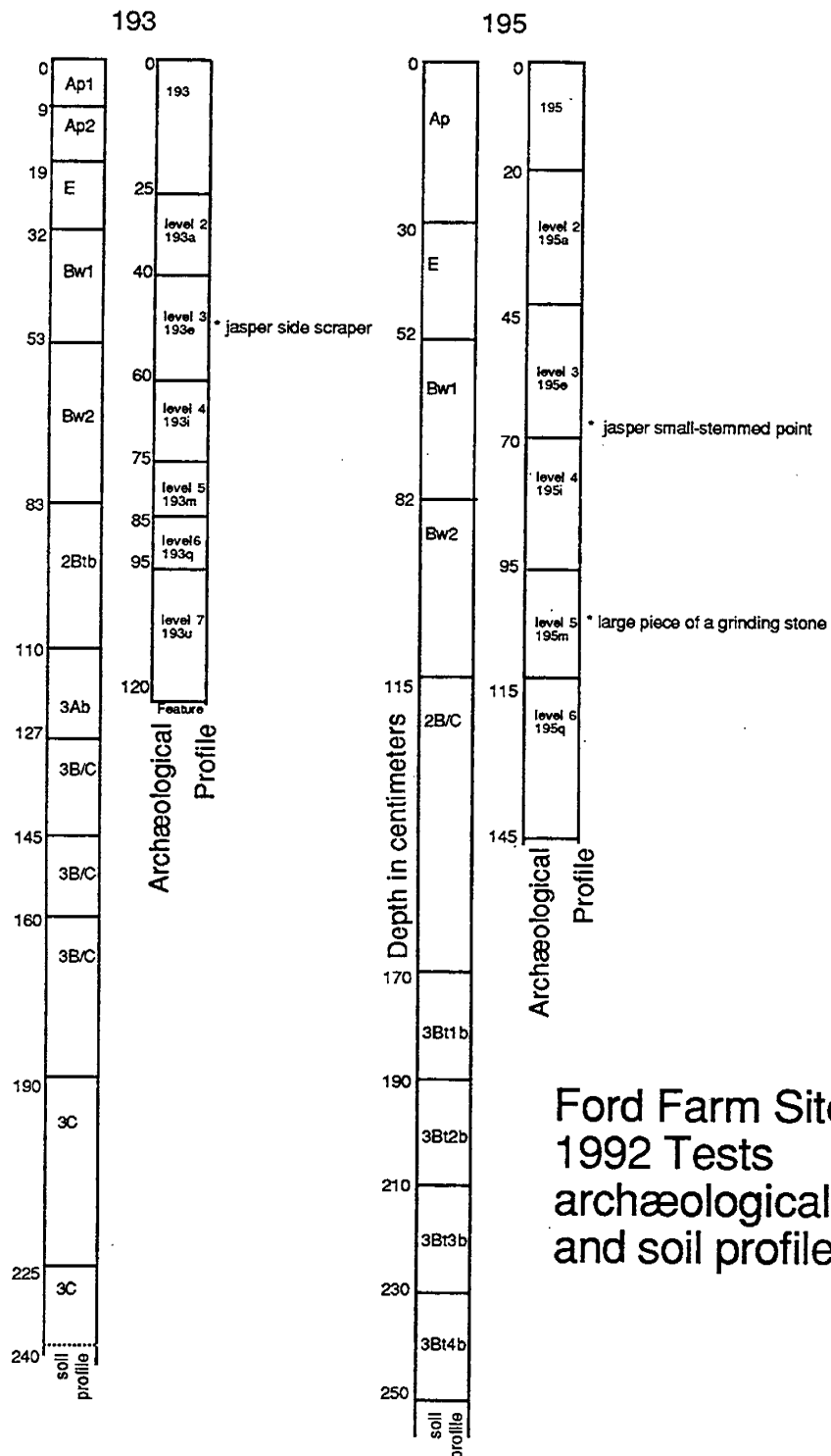
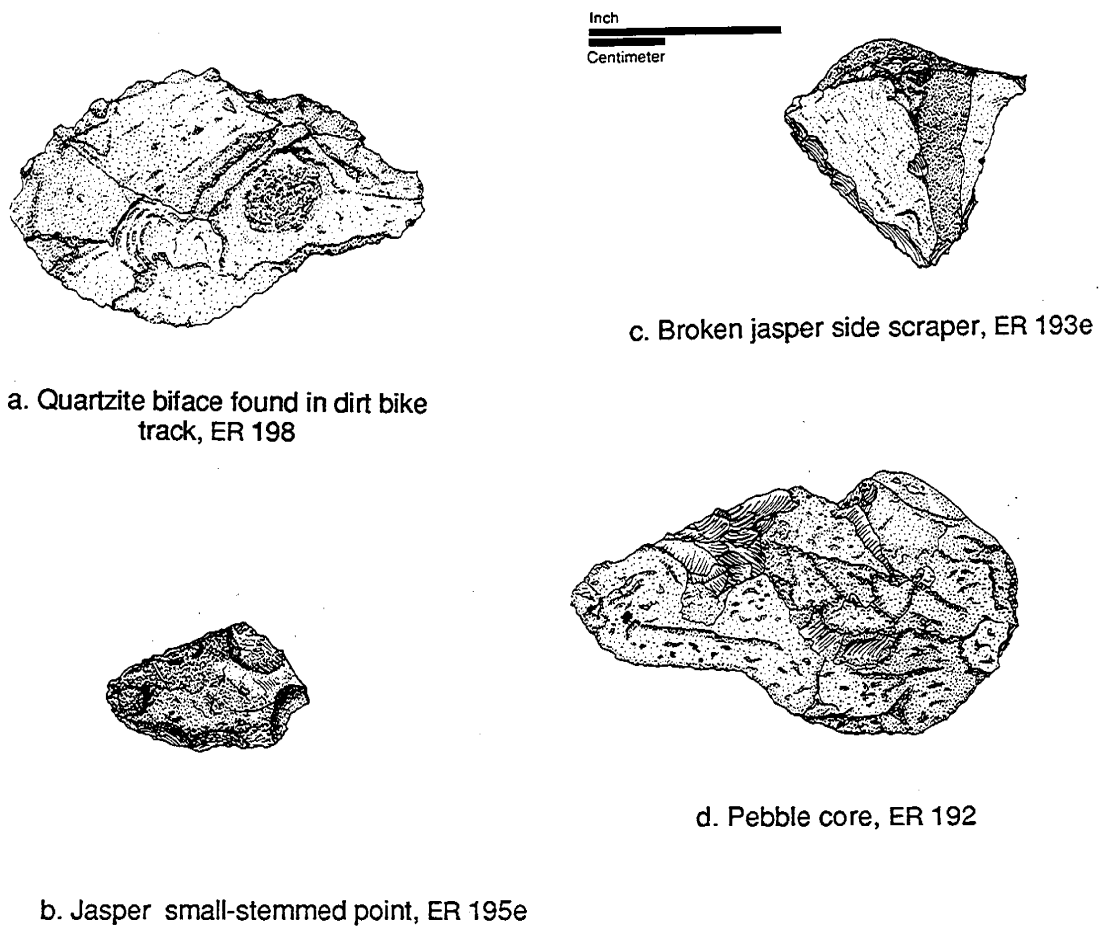


Figure 16

Ford Farm Site, comparison of soil profiles and archæological profiles

Figure 17

Ford Farm Site, artifacts from the tests at locus E



The soil type is Evesboro sandy loam (EsB), the type mapped at Blueberry Hill and on the original test locus on the Ford Farm site. These are acidic soils that may include Holocene æolian deposits

Phase I testing at locus E was designed to determine if a buried site with integrity actually existed. To fulfill this purpose, the field strategy called for a line of five meter-square test units, spaced to test all the different surviving environments along the bank within the right-of-way. The tests were catalogued as part of the Ford Farm site, which is contiguous. The line of tests crossed the boundary line between the Beiser and Ford properties.

Excavated levels were selected by natural layers. The plowzone was taken off first and segregated. Below this depth, levels were recorded whenever an apparent soil change occurred. If changes were not obvious, a new level was started after 20 centimeters (FIGURE 16).

The middle of the line of tests was the low point, in an apparent natural swale leading down to the creek. The two northerly tests (ER 191-192) were on rising ground. Two tests on the south (ER 193-194) were sunk into the slope that rises toward the center of the Ford Farm site. Each test was a meter square, dug to apparent sterile soil. All excavated soil was sifted through quarter-inch hardware cloth.

Unit 190 lay at the lowest point in the traverse; level 1 was a grey humic plowsoil 20 centimeters deep. It contained a quartz chunk and two fire-cracked rock fragments. The test was taken to a depth of 40 centimeters, with no artifacts below the Ap. Soil scientist John Foss visited the site and examined the profiles. He interpreted the soil to 60 centimeters as a Bw horizon. He augered below that depth to 195 centimeters and found two soil horizons, the upper of which is a B/C horizon with lamellae which change color and thickness below 85 cm. The lower horizon is a medium sand C horizon.

The Ap horizon of unit 191, at a slightly higher elevation, contained chert and quartz flakes as well as heat-reddened pebbles and fire-cracked rocks. All the artifacts were in this top 25-centimeter layer.

The underlying yellow soil was dug to a depth of 40 centimeters without encountering any artifacts.

After the unit was excavated to this level, it was examined by the soil scientist, who probed to 130 centimeters with an auger.

Unit 192, nearer the edge of the bluff and slightly higher, contained more evidence of human activity. The plowzone contained a body sherd of Woodland I period Dames Quarter pottery, a pebble core, and a chert non-cortex flake, as well as four fire-cracked rock fragments.

Below the darker plowzone was a mottled transitional layer that contained two iron nails lying together and a sherd of refined white earthenware. These historic artifacts were unequivocal evidence of agricultural disturbance, lying at the bottom of the A horizon. The next level, between 35 and 45 centimeters, contained no artifacts; Foss identified it as the EB horizon. Below 45 centimeters, Foss identified argillic Bt horizons with moderate development.

Nonetheless, Foss concluded that human occupation of units 190-192 was confined to the upper part of the profile. Two or more episodes of deposition are present in each of these units. No pit features were observed in these limited tests.

Turning southward, the first test up the slope, 193, yielded completely different results; the locus clearly was complexly stratified and contained cultural material separated by periods of surface stability in which soil formation processes proceeded. It is situated on the south edge of the proposed 1992 version of the southern alternative right-of-way.

The A horizon, which was 25 centimeters thick, contained a piece of slate, a heat-fractured pebble fragment, and a jasper cortex flake. The next arbitrary layer, between 25 and 40 centimeters, contained a jasper cortex flake, a chert core fragment, and a fire-cracked rock.

Between 40 and 60 centimeters, this unit yielded five pebbles and a broken jasper side scraper. Between 60 and 75 centimeters, level 4 yielded a quartz core, a quartzite cortex flake, and two heat-fractured pebbles.

By now, it had become apparent that this locus contains some areas that are stratified. Charcoal flecks began appearing in the soil, and other evidence of human activity continued. Level 5, between 75 and 85 centimeters, contained a pebble and a fire-cracked rock. A change from sandy to clayey soil was apparent in this level.

Level 6, between 85 and 95 centimeters, contained only one pebble, and much more clay. When Foss sank an auger test into the bottom of this excavation, he found what he interpreted as a third A horizon beginning at 110 centimeters. His auger tests, to a depth of 240 centimeters below the current surface, yielded evidence of soil development below the putative third A horizon.

At his suggestion, the archaeological test was extended downward. The A horizon was encountered as predicted. Then, at 120 centimeters, the soil color changed dramatically. A distinct line divided the unit diagonally. Southwest of the line the soil was light yellow; northeast, it was a dark brown color. Such a color change, indicative of a feature, is difficult to interpret in a small test at such a depth. The unit was backfilled, pending more accurate interpretation through a larger-size test.

Just twenty meters away, unit 194 was completely different. It lay on a clay hillock just south of the proposed right-of-way line, but the location was chosen as a representative of more upland environments that were covered in heavy brush. Thin forest mold surface layer contained three heat-reddened pebbles and many pieces of charcoal, possibly indicating the presence of a charcoal-making hearth in the vicinity. Such hearths are seldom seen in Delaware, and could be significant in their own right if found. Foss sank an auger test into this unit to a depth of 172 centimeters, and interpreted it as a small ponded area, with recent sediments in the top 145 centimeters.

A sixth test, 195, was located near the edge of the bank, east of 191. Here the sandy soil was deep and contained artifacts.

At about 70 centimeters, this test yielded a jasper small-stemmed point with a broken base. The level between 70 and 95 centimeters contained a large piece of a

grinding stone (FIGURE 17E). The hand-dug test stopped 115 centimeters below surface, where the soil was still sandy, unlike the clay-bearing lower level at Blueberry Hill. The presence of thick lamellae testified to the age of this layer.

Foss examined the profile and drove an auger test to 250 centimeters deep, where he encountered a very old soil lying below a deep and well-developed Pleistocene horizon.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Within the proposed right-of-way location, the site is stratified near the edge of the bluff. Farther inland, the evidence for stratification is less convincing. Woodland-period pottery found in one test could indicate an activity area from this period, which may be located farther to the north.

This group of tests achieved the original Phase I objective of identifying the site as it relates to the proposed alignment. The test also satisfied the Phase II objective of demonstrating the prehistoric site's integrity (defined in terms of stratification), but not the Phase II objectives of defining the site's limits or significance.

Limits of the whole site were not defined, but they can easily be defined through a series of test squares. Beyond the two clearly stratified units, its ultimate limits remain undefined.

Considering the areas already tested along the bluff, it is most likely that the Ford Farm and Blueberry Hill are merely nodes in a continuous network of related sites stretching along the river's west bank below the mouth of Maidstone Branch.

These tests did demonstrate, however, that there are gaps between the nodes or sites. The boundary of the Ford Farm site component (locus D) that was identified during the first survey can now be defined on its upstream (north) end. It consists of a deposit centered at the knoll where the first test was placed.

Evidence for a concentration of historic-period charcoal at the south end of the test area raises speculation that an intact charcoal-making hearth or pit might be encountered elsewhere on the property. When a final alignment is eventually chosen, it should be surveyed for charcoal pits.