

ARCHAEOLOGY AT PUNCHEON RUN

DOVER, DELAWARE

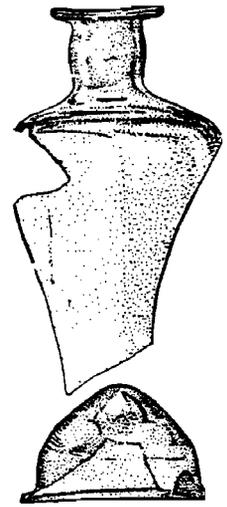
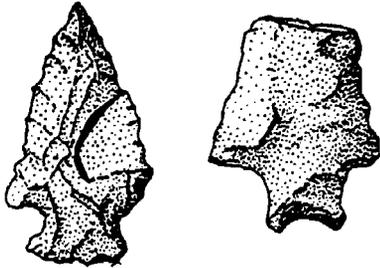
An Invitation

from

The Delaware Department of Transportation

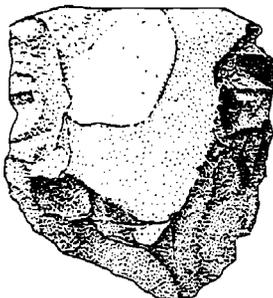
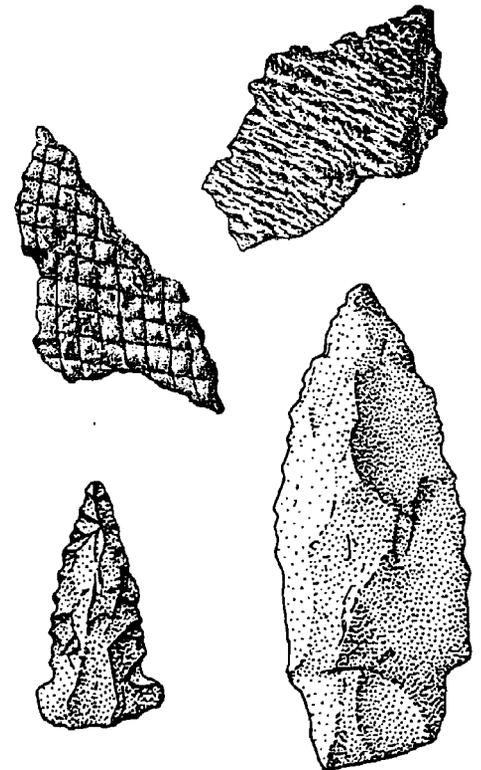
and

Louis Berger & Associates



Archaeological sites are documents. They preserve information about the past, just like the paper documents preserved in archives and museums. If archaeological sites are destroyed without proper excavation, that information is lost forever. In order to prevent such sad losses, the Delaware Department of Transportation, in conjunction with the Cultural Resource Group of Louis Berger and Associates, Inc., has conducted archaeological survey and testing in the path of the proposed Puncheon Run Connector. The Puncheon Run Connector will carry traffic from the new SR 1 to U.S. 13 and SR 8 south of Dover, relieving congestion on local roads. Archaeological testing of the Puncheon Run Connector corridor began in 1995, and a number of archaeological sites have been located.

Prehistoric Indians first lived in the project area at least 5000 years ago, drawn by the marshes along the St. Jones River and Puncheon Run. While they fished, hunted, and gathered wild plants in the wetlands, they camped on the dry ground nearby. Those camp sites are still littered with the things they left behind, including stone tools, waste stone flakes from the manufacture of tools, and sherds of pottery. Stone tools and pottery can be dated by their styles, and finds from the archaeological sites along Puncheon Run show that the area was occupied from 3000 BC until Europeans arrived. Filled-in pits have been found on these sites that could have been storage pits dug by the Indians or even partially-underground "Pit Houses." Along the St. Jones the prehistoric ground surface has been buried by wind-and water-born sand, so by digging carefully we can expose the very ground walked on by prehistoric peoples and see their cooking hearths and artifacts lying right where they were left a thousand years and more ago. A few hundred yards away, along Puncheon Run, is a bank of exposed gravel and cobbles where prehistoric people found stone for making their tools.



By excavating sites like these archaeologists hope to learn many things about the people who lived here, including how many of them lived here at one time, how much of the year they lived in one place, how far they wandered in a year, what they ate, and how sophisticated their technology was. In general, we want to know what life was like for the people who lived along the St. Jones River thousands of years ago.

Europeans have lived in the project area since the early 1700s. Property surveys dating to that time show two boat landings, one on the St. Jones River and one on Puncheon Run. Packet boats from New Castle or Philadelphia called at these landings, and local farmers would have traded the wheat, tobacco, and salted meat they raised for manufactured goods from Philadelphia or Europe. The first house in the project area, so far as we know, was built around 1740 by Thomas Dawson adjacent to what is now U.S. 13. A survey of his property made in 1745 shows his house, a barn, and a malt house. Malting is part of the brewing process, so Dawson may have been operating a commercial brewery, selling his beer in the new town of Dover. Dawson's family seems to have been very ordinary for the time, and by excavating his home we hope to learn more about how ordinary people lived 250 years ago. After Dawson's death in 1754 his property was bought by Thomas Nixon, who assembled a great estate in the area measuring more than 2000 acres. Nixon was also an industrialist, and he built a dam across Puncheon Run to provide power for a fulling mill. (Fulling was part of the process of making wool cloth.) This dam is still standing. Other farms and other industries followed over the next two centuries.

Over the next several months, archaeologists will be digging on both the prehistoric Indian sites and the Dawson House site. We welcome visitors to the sites, especially school groups. For more information about visiting the sites or participating in the excavations, please call Kevin Cunningham, DelDOT archaeologist, at 302-739-3826, or John Bedell of Louis Berger & Associates at 202-331-7775.