

ASM Ink

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Newsletter of the Archeological Society of Maryland, Inc.



www.marylandarcheology.org

Biggs Ford Site lives up to its billing

By Joe Dent

American University, principal investigator

The recent excavations at Biggs Ford mark the return of the Archeological Society of Maryland to its roots. Tyler Bastian's excavations there in the late 1960s with his all-volunteer force were the inspiration for the annual field session that now bears his name.

And what a return it was this summer. Even Tyler came back. Over the 11-day session 470 person-days were tabulated, an average of 42 a day. The largest single day had 64 people in the field. Thank you all.

Some of the reasons for our successes, however, were grounded in the distant and not too distant past.

Because of the trench Tyler excavated and mapped around 1969 we knew a great deal about the nature of Biggs Ford and could direct our excavations accordingly. On top of that, Charlie Hall, now Maryland Historical Trust's state terrestrial archeologist, a few years ago directed an exact location surface collection of the site. All that information together allowed us to accurately place the grid directly on top of the site and start excavating in key areas.

One of the first units to be dug came right down on top of one of the Keyser palisade lines. That's doing your homework! I certainly think one high point of this year's field session was certainly how well placed our excavation units consistently turned out to be. People recovered artifacts and exposed features as well as post molds.

Certainly such an artifact high point can be seen in the partially buried and intact Keyser pot (about the bottom two-thirds) recovered in the middle units near the palisade. It was encountered as it had once stood on the ground and was expertly removed by Matt McKnight of the MHT. When I heard applause from the other end of the site I knew the extraction had been successful. The pot is now in the American University lab and I plan to begin soon a very careful micro-excavation of its interior fill. Who knows what we might find?

In addition, a couple of trade beads were recovered nearby. I'm still pondering what that might mean.

The folks at the southern-most units on the site (and in hard clay) were successful in exposing and excavating a couple of Montgomery Complex features. That is the "other" component on the site. I'm sure this will result in a good radiocarbon date or two on that important component in the greater Potomac Valley.

Lastly, Bob Wall's area, peopled mostly by his Towson Field School and Bob's children, also turned up some incredible artifacts and features. Elk antler was not a total surprise, but the quantities in which it was

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Upcoming events

June 29 – 30, July 6 – 7: Field work at Barton Site.

July 26 – 26: Public Archeology Days, Jefferson-Patterson, 10 – 4. Fee. For more information, please call 240-895-4990 or 800-762-1634 or visit www.stmaryscity.org.

October 17-19: Three-day conference focused on the Ice Age colonization of the Americas. Santa Fe. <http://www.paleoamericanodyssey.com>

October 31 – November 3: Eastern States Archeological Federation meeting. South Portland, Maine.

October 30 – November 2, 2014: ESAF meeting, Solomons Island, Maryland

Volunteer opportunities

The following volunteer opportunities are open to CAT participants and other ASM members:

The **Smithsonian Environmental Research Center** seeks participants in its Citizen-Scientist Program in archeology and other environmental research programs in Edgewater. Archeological field and lab work are conducted during the week and on occasional Saturdays. Contact Jim Gibb at jamesgibb@verizon.net

Montgomery County is offering opportunities for lab and field work Wednesdays, 9:30 to 2:30. Call 301-840-5848 or contact heather.bouslog@mncppc-mc.org. CAT opportunity.

ASM field session collection: Volunteers have turned their attention to material from Chapel Point and Heaters Island. The lab in Crownsville will be open Tuesdays from 9:30 until 4. Contact Louise Akerson at lakerson1@verizon.net or Charlie Hall chall@mdp.state.md.us.

The Lost Towns Project of Anne Arundel County welcomes volunteers for its prolific Pig Point prehistoric site. Fridays. Call Jasmine Gollup at 410-222-1318.

Mount Calvert. Lab work and field work. 301-627-1286.

Jefferson Patterson Park invites volunteers to take part in its activities, including archeology, historical research and conservation. Contact Ed Chaney at echaney@mdp.state.md.us or 410-586-8554.

The Archaeological Institute of America provides an online listing of fieldwork opportunities worldwide, Call up www.archaeological.org/fieldwork/ to get started. Remember to add the extra A in archaeological.

CAT corner

For information on the CAT program, and updates, visit the ASM website.

MHS needs lab volunteers for special project

The Maryland Historical Society is urgently looking for volunteers to help rehouse all its archeological material which was damaged when a steam pipe burst last winter (remember winter?). All its 500,000 items need to be bagged, tagged and boxed. The collection, which was the property of the Baltimore City Life Museum before it closed, includes items from many Baltimore digs over the years.

The work is being done at the MHS's Baltimore office, 201 W. Monument Street, weekdays between 8:30 and 4, and is a good way for CAT candidates to get their lab hours in. Non-CAT candidates also are welcome.

Volunteers will have to commit to at least 40 hours of work over the course of the project.

If you are interested, contact collections manager Kate Gallagher at kgallagher@mdhs.org anytime or midweek at 410-685-3750, extension 342.

Who's your candidate for Marye Award?

Each year ASM presents the William B. Marye Award to someone for outstanding contributions to Maryland archeology. This year is the 30th year the presentation will be made. Candidates need not be members of ASM, Marylanders or even archeologists. They just have to have left their mark on this state's program.

Nominations are not carried over from year to year. If your candidate hasn't won in the past, try again. A list of previous winners is with the nomination form accompanying this newsletter. Deadline for nominations is September 8. The winner will be announced at the annual meeting in the fall.

Two focus areas at Barton dig this year

By Robert Wall

Towson University

This year at the Barton Site we will be testing two specific locations. One showed some interesting anomalies in Tim Horsley's magnetometer survey in 2009. This is on the southern edge of the site, on the lower terrace, where small test excavations in the past two years have revealed what appears to be a buried Early to Middle Woodland component. A burned surface located about a meter deep will be further investigated with a test unit. This buried surface is consistent with a large, dark anomaly that was detected in the magnetometer survey.

The other location to be tested is just north of the deep test block, an area which has seen excavations taken to the depth of Ice Age river gravels since 2004. We are hoping that this excavation block also produces evidence of Early Archaic and Paleoindian occupations. Late Woodland features already have been excavated in this unit and excavations will continue to depths of 2.5 meters below surface.

The archeological excavations will initially run from June 28-30 (Friday to Monday) and from July 6-7. There will also be ongoing work on the deep test unit throughout the summer and likely into the fall on selected weekends.

Our main goal for the site remains the same: defining boundaries of the various occupations across the site and addressing specific research questions on each component of the site from Paleoindian to Contact.

Non-campers can stay at area motels or at rooms being made available at nearby Frostburg State University. Those interested should reserve a room by contacting Dave Treber at 301 687 4020 or DTreber@frostburg.edu

All ASM members and friends are welcome to visit or participate. For more information or directions, contact me at rdwall@towson.edu

Biggs Ford Site lives up to its billing

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recovered were startling. I suspect since those animals were likely hunted in the mountains to the west the location of Biggs Ford afforded the village's hunters increased opportunity to pursue such large creatures.

In the same area much of a crushed Keyser ware pot was recovered with more than enough associated charcoal for dating. We might also have recovered a portion of an antler headdress nearby, similar to those found earlier in the last century at the Keyser Farm site.

About the only desired feature that remained elusive at Biggs Ford was a Keyser house pattern. But I suspect one is buried near the units where much of a Keyser ware pit was recovered. We just need to zero in on that area a bit more through a larger block excavation.

As for me, the artifacts are now all lined up in the lab for necessary washing and labeling. Much of the former was completed in the field lab. We also have a large number of flotation samples from features waiting for processing and microanalysis. And then that pot awaits. Look for pictures in a future newsletter. Thank you to all of you that came out and made this field session such a success. Your kindnesses and hard work is greatly appreciated.

Profiles in Maryland Archeology

An interview with . . . Stephen Potter

Stephen Potter is regional archeologist for the National Park Service. The interview is condensed.

Q: How did you get started in archeology?

A: When I was six and was walking with grandmother and grandfather Biar in their farmyard at Culpeper, Virginia. It was morning, and there had been a big storm the night before and we were walking to check on the cattle before we went back and had breakfast and then got ready to go to church. We were walking along and he sees something and kicks it up with the left toe of his boot and says, "Reach down and pick that up, boy." And so I reached down and picked this thing and it was interesting to me because it seemed so much heavier than it should have been. And it looked like nothing to me except a gray glob. I said, "Granddaddy,



what is it?" "Well that's a bullet from the wah, boy," war pronounced w-a-h as any true Virginian would call the Civil War. And what it turned out to be was a 58-calibre three-ring conical bullet, one of the most common kind that you find from the war. When he said it was a bullet from the war I asked him if it was the same war that grandmother tells me the stories about that great-granddaddy was in. He said, "Yes." And that's when the light bulb went on between events that involved my ancestors and the fact that I could, as a young person, pick up things, tangible expressions of their past lives.

And I was hooked. So it just became a question: Was I interested in history and did I want to go into dusty archives and get dust up my nostrils doing history or did I want to get dirt under my fingernails and become an archeologist. Well, I tried to do both. And I then discovered, shortly after that, that if I didn't want to pick up Civil War artifacts in a barnyard or strawberry patch, where I would usually wind up eating more

strawberries than putting them in a basket, and then when I discovered that I could pick up bullets out there I would be picking up more bullets than I did picking strawberries. But in the back fields of their farm there were all these Archaic Indian Period campsites, prehistoric stuff. They were all the way from Early Archaic, all the way up to Late Archaic. And so that was my introduction to prehistoric archeology. I would go back there and I would just pick up projectile points hand over fist. And then the real turning point came when my mother learned that you could call the Natural History Museum of the Smithsonian Institution, tell them that you had found something and they would put you in touch with the appropriate specialist to look at what it whatever it was that you had just found or wanted to bring in for identification.

Q: You're still a kid then?

A: Oh, very much so. I'll tell you exactly how old I was. I was 11 years old. So she calls up, makes an appointment. I go there and meet Dr. Clifford Evans, who was internationally renown as an archeologist, as was his wife, Dr. Betty Jane Meggers. He was incredibly kind and I'll never forget, he gave me a paperback copy of a bulletin that was published in the Bureau of American Ethnography and his bulletin of "A Ceramic Study of Virginia Archaeology," a bottle of India ink and a quill pen. Now he said, "Don't be like every farm boy does in Virginia and throw everything into one cigar box or one container. Keep everything separate that you find from

the different locations where you might discover things. That's very important." That was my first introduction to provenience. I kept going back. My junior year of high school and my mother makes an appointment to talk to Dr. Evans about preparing for college and places that he would recommend to pursue a degree in anthropology/archeology. I still never forget it. I go in there and the first question he asked me was, "How would you like to work here this summer?" I thought I was going to fall through the floor. I of course said yes and so I began the first of three consecutive summer interns at the Smithsonian Institution.

Q: Where did you end up going to college?

A: I applied to three different institutions and the one I finally wound up going to was the University of Missouri. And that was because one of the professors there had actually done his dissertation research on collections at the Smithsonian from the central plains, Dr. Richard Krause. So Cliff knew him and he also knew Dr. Carl H. Chapman. And Dr. Chapman was well-known in middle Missouri archeology, had published a number of books and because the Society for American Archaeology, which was a much smaller professional organization at that time - everybody knew everybody. So Cliff knew these two professors and they were really impressed with my background. I wound up being able to do as an undergraduate things that I couldn't have done elsewhere.

The third summer of affiliation with the Smithsonian came when Cliff saw me when I was back for Christmas holidays in my freshman year of college and he introduced me to Dr. Waldo Wedel, a very famous plains anthropologist and archeologist. Cliff said, "You got to get some more field work and I think it would be good for you to get field work from someone here. And Dr. Wedel's going to be mounting an excavation out in south central Kansas next summer." So he took me down and introduced me to Dr. Wedel, who, like Cliff, was an incredible gentleman and international scholar, just a wonderful human being. I wound up being hired to be on his excavation at this huge prehistoric Wichita Indian village site. It was an amazing experience. The last hour of the last day of the excavation we found a section of linked Spanish chain mail from the Juan Pardo expedition, of 1542.

I graduated and was instantly drafted in the Army for two years, two months and 22 days at the tail end of Vietnam. The reason I am so precise about the time: The same week that I got my notice to report to the draft board back in Fairfax, Virginia, I got my acceptance to graduate studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill under Joffre Lanning Coe, one of the great deans of southeastern archeology. And I had to hurry because I hadn't even taken my final exams yet. The next several weeks were just absolute madness. I had to go to the draft board office there, that was on campus, the Selective Service officer, to get him to correspond to the folks back in Fairfax, tell them to get off my back until I was at least graduated. Luckily it all worked out. They had a program at that time called Volunteer for the Draft. I signed up. It gave one up to 90 days to defer reporting before you actually began active duty. That gave me time to complete my requirements to graduate. Let's just put it this way: I had to work very hard for the grades that I made in college. I was not born a brain. North Carolina agreed to hold my acceptance for two years. If I wasn't back to start the fall semester after a period of a little more than two years, I'd have to reapply and go through the whole rigmarole again. So that's why I chose to do what I did. I did my stint in the Army and got out with two weeks to spare.

I got my master's and then my PhD. A quarter of my dissertation served as the core for my first book, "Commoners, Tribute, and Chiefs: The Development of Algonquian Culture in the Potomac Valley." Only about 20 percent of that book is based on the dissertation and the rest of it was a lot of primary and additional research that I did. The book is what I wanted my dissertation to be. I was fortunate as I was finishing a doctoral dissertation improvement grant at the Smithsonian Institution. So after I completed all my exams for the doctoral dissertation, I had applied for a couple of grants and was very blessed to get both of them. One of them was a doctoral dissertation improvement grant from the National Science Foundation and concurrent with that I also got a predoctoral fellowship at the Smithsonian. So it gave me the opportunity to continue to study the collections from this area, in particular the Chesapeake Bay and Maryland, West Virginia, D.C. and Virginia and to use some of that data to incorporate in my dissertation. And then the NSF grant also gave me the opportunity to conduct field work for my dissertation. And so in the bicentennial summer of 1976 is when this stuff sort of came to pass.

Q: You've worked on a lot of interesting excavations. Which stand out in your mind?

A: I've been involved in excavations in Missouri, Kansas, and North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, West Virginia, D.C., and I suppose there are two that stand out. One is I was privileged to work on the famous Hardaway Site as one of Geoffrey Coe's graduate students, which also serves as the name for the type of projectile point that was defined by Geoffrey Coe. That was an incredibly interesting experience. The other one was also under Coe and it was on a contact period Siouxian Indian village site on the Dan River in Stokes County, North Carolina. This was a village site that was Contact Period from the late 17th Century. So I find both of those sites interesting because those are the two periods in prehistory I'm most fascinated with, always have been. Here you had the Hardaway site with Late Paleo all the way up through the Archaic sequence.

Q: What's the biggest surprise you've come across in your digs?

A: Oh boy. It has absolutely nothing to do with prehistoric archeology. It's been in my capacity as the regional archeologist for the National Park Service. In excavations that we did at a plantation site at Manassas National Battlefield Park. We found irrefutable archeological evidence of an African heirloom artifact that had been worn on the finger of a woman who had been sold into slavery, survived the Middle Passage and come to work at Portici plantation. And it's carved from ebony, which is a wood that only grows in Africa and Asia. It's a hand-carved ebony woman's finger ring that was lost on the dirt floor of a detached kitchen to Portici plantation. That has to be the rarest of all the rarest objects of material culture that I as an archeologist have ever had anything to do with. I should have played Powerball that night. And the effect that that object has had when we've done public presentations, particularly to Park Service employees, especially of African-American descent, and we've had these things available for viewing, it's like we're seeing a piece of the true cross.

Q: What advice do you have for people interested in going into archeology?

A: Go see a good therapist and reconsider. At the time that I got into archeology it was my goal to hopefully be able to either become a tenured professor at an institution where I could both teach and do research or to be really, really lucky and get on as a member of a curatorial staff at a museum that also was involved in research and public interpretation, such as the Smithsonian Institution. As I was finishing up my doctoral dissertation the position of Park Service regional archeologist was on the streets. And because it was for a 32-hour-week appointment, it was not for a full 40 hours a week. So the number of people who applied was considerably reduced, because at that time - this is 1980 - the job market is not that bad and people said, "I don't want to take a permanent position just 32 hours a week." But that was perfect for me because I was finishing up my doctoral dissertation. It was great because it would give me three days a week to focus on finishing my dissertation, which I completed in 1982. So I said all that because by the time I finally got my degree in 1982, piled it higher and deeper, got all these academic laurels, yadee yadee yadee, and the job market had started to dry up considerably for opportunities to get in tenure-track positions at institutions of higher learning and for major museums that also do research. The number of those positions opening up is even less than those in the academy. Lo and behold, there's this opening for regional archeologist position with the National Park Service for the national capital region, which is that segment of the National Park Service all the units of which are on pieces of land that drain into the Potomac basin, which had been my backyard because it was my family's backyard. The Potters have been in Northern Virginia since before 1780. So I said, "Holy cow, I'm going to apply for that." Well, when they saw my background, they saw where I had done my research, where I had gotten my degrees, all this good stuff, I wound up being their Number One candidate, I was offered the job and I never left. In part because the job market never really improved in the academy and things weren't opening up in other places that weren't too far afield and my parents were getting older by this point and I didn't want to be across the country from them because I'm a limited edition - they lost their first child and they got me as the booby prize - and so I wanted to not be that far away so that if my folks needed my help I could be there for them just as they had been there for me through all of this.

Chapter notes

Anne Arundel

Meets the second Tuesday of the month at the Severna Park Branch Library, 45 West McKinsey Road, Severna Park. 7:30 p.m. Contact Mechelle Kerns at AAChapASM@hotmail.com or the chapter website <http://www.aachapasm.org/calendar.html>

September 10: TBA

November 12: Julie Schablitsky will speak on the War of 1812 Caulk's Battlefield.

Central Maryland

Central Chapter has no formal meetings planned, but it does engage in field work and related activities. Contact chapter President Stephen Israel, 410-945-5514 or ssisrael@verizon.net

Charles County

Meetings are held 7 on the second Thursday (September-May) in the community room of the LaPlata Police Department. Contact President Carol Cowherd at cowherdcl@gmail.com or 301-375-9489. Chapter website is charlescoasm.org and its blog is ccarchsoc.blogspot.com

Mid-Potomac

The chapter meets the third Thursday of the month at 7:30 p.m. Dinner at a local restaurant at 5:45 p.m. Contact heather.bouslog@mncppc-mc.org or call 301-840-5848 or Don Housley at donhou704@earthlink.net or 301-424-8526. Chapter website: <http://www.asmmidpotomac.org> Email: asmmidpotomac@gmail.com Check our website for information concerning ordering the book, "Montgomery County Mills: A Field Guide," published by the chapter and reviewed in the January edition of the ASM newsletter.

Monocacy

The chapter meets in the C. Burr Artz Library in Frederick the second Wednesday of the month at 6 p.m. For more information, visit the chapter's web page at digfrederick.com or call 301-378-0212.

Northern Chesapeake

Meetings are the second Wednesday of the month. Members and guests assemble at 6:30 for light refreshments. A business meeting at 7 is followed by the presentation at 7:30. Contact Dan Coates at 410-273-9619 or dancoates@comcast.net Website: <http://sites.google.com/site/northernchesapeake>

Upper Patuxent

Programs are the second Monday of the month at 7 p.m. at Mt. Ida in Ellicott City. Potluck suppers are held at 5:45 in September and March. Otherwise, dinner is available at the Diamondback in Ellicott City at 5:30 p.m. Contact Dave Cavey at 410 747-0093 or hoplite1@comcast.net The group now has a Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Upper-Patuxent-Archaeology-Group/464236446964358> or try UPArchaeologygroup@yahoo.com

Western Maryland

Programs are the fourth Friday of the month, at 7:30 p.m. in the LaVale Library, unless noted. Contact Roy Brown, 301-724-7769. Chapter email: wmdasm@yahoo.com Website: <http://sites.google.com/site/wmdasm>

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ASM members receive the monthly newsletter, ASM Ink; the biannual journal, MARYLAND ARCHEOLOGY, reduced admission to ASM events and a 10% discount on items sold by the Society. Contact Membership Secretary Belinda Urquiza for membership rates. For publication sales, contact Dan Coates at ASM Publications, 716 Country Club Rd., Havre de Grace, MD 21078-2104 or 410-273-9619 or dancoates@comcast.net

Submissions welcome. Please send to Myron Beckenstein, 6817 Pineway, University Park, MD. 20782, 301-864-5289 or myronbeck@verizon.net

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