

ARCHEOLOGICAL DIG



The **2014 Tyler Bastian Field Session in Maryland Archeology** was held May 23 through June 2. The Field Session is an annual collaboration between the Archeological Society of Maryland and the Maryland Historical Trust. R&W Club Members turned out in great number again – our second volunteer opportunity at the Field Session held at the **Biggs Ford Site**, located in Walkersville, MD.

Quoting the Maryland Historical Trust website (http://mht.maryland.gov/archeology_field.html), “the Field Sessions’ purpose is to train lay persons in archeological methods and teach Maryland’s past through hands-on involvement, while making meaningful contributions to the study of Maryland archeology.”

And that is exactly what over 20 Club Members and their guests experienced this year! The hands-on experience was amazing, the archeologists were amazing and the weather was amazing! It was an *amazing* 11 day journey!

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF AN ARCHEOLOGICAL DIG VOLUNTEER!

Club Members and their guests were invited to contribute personal journal entries sharing their experience at the dig. Our youngest volunteer was 5 year old Isabella Bahrlich who shared her time at the dig with mom, Jessica.

Each morning Dr. Joe Dent, American University professor, welcomed volunteers with a brief talk about the site’s history, tips for the volunteer (such as the proper way to lay a shovel down when not in use), and a reminder of respecting the landowners’ property, as well as, respecting the artifacts found during the session.



The Field Session had three areas, termed "operations", under investigation, which were all an extension of last years’ study. Students from Towson and American University (under the leadership of Dr. Bob Wall) focused their efforts in the northern operation that uncovered what was thought to be the palisade walls (a fence considered to be a privacy fence of sorts, to keep out pests or foes), with evidence for a wigwam, or house, that contained a storage pit. The pit contained charcoal and bones. Many post molds (which are traces of decomposed wood posts) were also found. Post molds were tagged with a plastic marker, as shown to the left. Numerous arrow points were also discovered in this site.

The post molds that surfaced in the middle operation contained evidence of the palisade walls, and were arranged in distinctive and recurring pattern of single, single, double, single, single, double.



This feature pattern and the piece of ceramic smoking pipe artifact found here led to quite a discussion among the archeologists about the overlapping of villages that occupied this land.

As the excavation units were opened, soil was kept separated (by unit) and all artifacts found were sorted into three bags: Lithic, Ceramic and Bone. It was very important to keep the artifacts organized by unit. Artifacts were taken to the on-site laboratory to be washed, dried and bagged. Lots of pottery, quartz

flakes, arrow points and a ceramic trade bead was found!

Located in the southern operation of study, volunteers found charcoal, bone and burnt corn. These artifacts are real treasures and will be sent off for further study using the technique of carbon dating. According to Wikipedia, "**Radiocarbon dating** (or simply **carbon dating**) is a **radiometric dating** technique that uses the decay of **carbon-14** (^{14}C) to estimate the age of **organic materials...**" (To read more on carbon-dating go to: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radiocarbon_dating.)

It was a very exciting 11 day journey for club members and their guest. This was **Angie Mann's** second year volunteering at the Biggs Ford Site.



Angie explained: In this photo, "The conversation is Matt [McKnight] explaining how to record all the pertinent coordinates for the unit that he asked me to open. Yes, I got to "open" a unit by myself(!), which essentially meant I dug within the string guide lines that were already plotted. I did have to ensure that all the artifacts found were recorded as from that unit and there was plenty of oversight from experienced volunteers, but since they knew (and obviously trusted) me from last year, I got to play at being a "real" archeologist for a day!"

Jessica and Isabella Bahrlich: "My daughter, who is 5, and I spent a morning there and had a wonderful time. The folks there were welcoming and organized. The time flew by as we sifted through topsoil with Mr. George Evans. He taught us how to identify bone, pottery and worked stone artifacts! I especially enjoyed the hands-on learning opportunity that I could share with my daughter. We would have returned on other days, but could not fit it into our schedule."



Peter Johnson (son of Randy Johnson), a middle-school student, worked alongside his mother at the dig. He reported that this was his first dig. Peter said, "My mother and I biked out and waited for 15 for the orientation to start. We did some screening at the nearest site, then digging and more screening at the next nearest site. After that, we scrubbed artifacts until lunch. after lunch we did some more scrubbing, then digging and screening at the 2nd nearest site. We finished by sorting. Very fun!"



(Photos submitted by Peter Johnson)

Donna Rothlauf – Guest of Susie Culler –



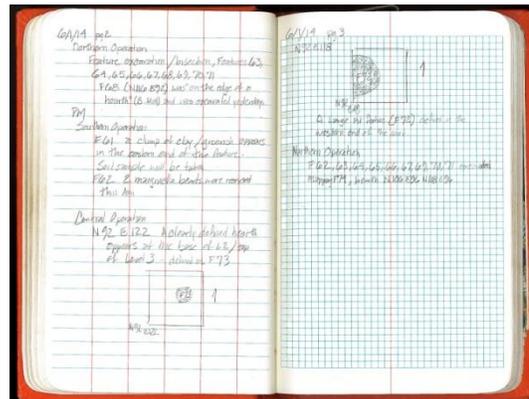
Donna (shown with Susie Culler) explained, “I was so excited to have the opportunity to participate in the archeological dig on the Biggs Ford Site that I had goose bumps....I felt so privileged to work with such dedicated archeologists who were so patient and kind in teaching and answering my questions. I learned so much and have an appreciation for the details and hard work they lovingly perform. The respect they showed those who came before us was humbling. They capture much more than the history books ever tell us.”



Mark and Karen Gunnell at the on-site Laboratory cleaning artifacts.

“My wife Karen and I enjoyed our day on the dig, searching through excavated soil and cleaning artifacts. The research is interesting and the chance to meet and learn from others with experience in the field was rewarding. We really appreciated the opportunity to participate.”

Kathy Higinbotham - “Loved it! Working with other experienced “diggers” who could identify/explain our findings was great.”



Dr. Charlie Hall provided copies of his Field Journal.



Austin Zimmerman (Pam Noble's son)- “Upon first visiting the archaeological dig at the Crum farm, I was enthusiastic after hearing about what had been found at the site in the previous year. I had some experience with archaeology from my undergraduate degree, but I did not know what to expect to see when visiting this site, as they can vary wildly between different regions. The site itself was located in a farm field that was bordered on one side by a small creek. The site had been the location for successive Native American settlements from the 900’s CE to the 1600’s. In the field, three different areas were laid out for excavation, with a large tent set up for the cleaning of artifacts. After an orientation meeting, we were allowed to pick where on the site we wanted to work, either in the field or at the tent cleaning. I spent the majority of the day in the field, working on the artifact screens. The screens are used to thoroughly search the soil from the excavations for small artifacts. Over the course of the day, we found innumerable bits of pottery, and other small artifacts. The physics professor manning the screen next to me found several arrowheads, and an intact pipe stem became one of the largest draws from the site on that day. The work was dirty and tiring, but overall rewarding as it granted the opportunity to experience some of the unique archaeology that this site offered.”



Kathy Norris shown at the on-site laboratory

“Leaving the house at 6:30 in the morning I headed West with a quick stop to pick up my sister than back on the road heading toward the Biggs Ford Site for the 2014 Tyler Bastian Field Session my first ever Dig. Today my sister and I were going to check off an item on our Bucket List. We were going to become Archeologists for the day. As the Sr. Business Development Rep. for Nymeo I have enjoyed building relationships with various SEG’s in the Frederick Community. So when the opportunity came up with R&W Club Frederick, I knew I wanted to be part of an event where I could give back to a community that is so rich in history and at the same time be part of an organization that has welcomed Nymeo.

Arriving with coolers in hand and suited for a day of adventure we selected our site and were given our designated work station and dug in for the 4 hours. Our first stop, the sieve station, the soil was wet from the damp rains of the previous day; with no experience we saved everything that was not dirt much to the dismay of the residing archeologist. That was okay because we did not want to be responsible for throwing anything away that would be the “missing link”.

The hours melted away as the sun scorched down on our canopy and by lunch time it looked as if we may have found the “great find”. Sitting down to eat lunch I could not get my mind off what was just below the surface of the dirt. In all honesty I just want to scoop it up blow the dirt off and hold it up to the sky. I am sure that would have caused quite a few fainting spells and jaws to drop. Three hours passed and after many disputes as to whether it was a snapping turtle or plain turtle, it was finally determined by yet another field expert that this was just an ordinary turtle and the rib bones laying next to it could be from someone’s dinner over 500 years ago. The sun started to set and my day was coming to a close. My sister and I took our raggedy weary bodies to the shuttle driven by Dr. Hall, looking forward that evening to a nice relaxing bath to soak our aching knees. As I reflect back on my day, I did not uncover the great find of some distant civil war battle not even close and yes I did check off that something on my bucket list and there was great pride in knowing I gave a little back to the community but if I was asked what was my biggest find hands down the friends I met that day. To the group at R&W Club Frederick, count me in for next year.”



Mary Lantz – Sister of Susie Culler

“I volunteered at the first dig located on this farm in 1969. Archaeology is fascinating to me. What we can learn about prior civilizations is remarkable. Of course, a trained archaeologist is necessary to interpret what is uncovered. The people I met were trained and seasoned. This was not their first dig. They were generous with their time and knowledge which made my experience very rewarding. I would do this again :) “

Susie Culler: “The weather for almost all of the Field Session was gorgeous – warm, gentle breeze, mild temperature in the mid ‘70s, and large puffy clouds! I volunteered last year and felt so honored to be in the presents of the delightful, knowledgeable (and patience!) archeologists and special volunteers again! It was so exciting to be a part of helping to uncover history once again!



Troy Nowak, Dr. Charlie Hall and Becca Peixotto

I worked at the shaker screen the first weekend. Lots of quartz flakes, rhyolite fragments, pottery shards and a black trade bead found! There was a nice sized piece of pottery and about a 2 ½ "long piece of smoking pipe found!

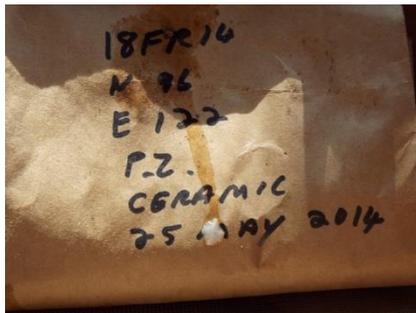
As the week progressed, so did the temperature. Because of this, the group erected tarps to give shelter to those actually shoveling the soil...but no shelter for those at the shaker screens! Thankfully there was still a gentle breeze blowing.



My second day on the site, I was so surprised to find a nice, almost complete, arrow point in the shaker screen! Wow! That was so thrilling!! Another smoking pipe piece was found, too, but not by me! Fire cracked rock turned up in the screens, evidence that cooking of some sort was done in this area.



The second weekend of the dig, I had the opportunity of working in the on-site laboratory. I really enjoyed this aspect of the dig, as this was my first experience washing the artifacts. Once washed, all items were placed in a drying screen and then bagged. To see the clean pieces in greater detail was something to treasure!



Last year two trade beads were found at this dig site. It was so exciting to find another this year! Each day all the artifacts were sorted into three bags - Lithic, Bone and Ceramics - according to the excavation unit. Fire cracked rock were also sorted by unit and kept for study. Each bag noted the date collected, the dig site location 18FR14 (18 stands for Maryland, FR is the County in Maryland and 14 is the archeological site number) and labeled as either Lithic, Bone or Ceramic (as seen in the photo to the left). I spoke with several people and all said this dig site is very well known in the archeology community.

At the end of each day, the units were covered with heavy, black plastic which kept the excavation units protected overnight. Shovels were turned over in a safe position. And, everyone left to get ready for tomorrow's work. "

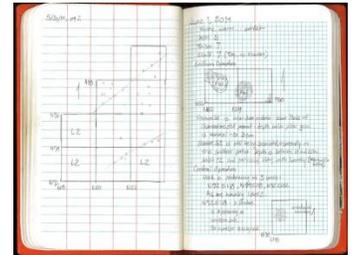


Archeological Dig Recap - Maryland State Terrestrial Archeologist, Dr. Charlie Hall



“This year’s Field Session at the Biggs Ford site was remarkable for many reasons, among them: 130 volunteers contributed 381 days of effort to the investigation; 22 2x2 meter excavation units were fully investigated; and 13 pit features, 3 hearths, and 200 post molds were identified and excavated (see journal pages). Yet our combined two years of effort has resulted in the investigation of less than 1% of this great site, leaving much preserved for the future.

As impressive as they are, however, our two greatest accomplishments cannot be captured by statistics such as these. First, the full team of volunteers, students, and professional staff, were involved in the act of creating new knowledge through discovery. Examples of such new knowledge include the date for occupation for the Keyser village as not earlier than AD 1430 and not later than AD 1640 (the team is directly responsible for recovering the charcoal that, through the C-14 dating method, has fixed this date span), and the realization that there was a Native American presence at the site following European contact (post-1640), as indicated by the presence of European-made glass trade beads. More news was generated by the discovery of Atlantic Ocean marine shell (*Marginella* sp.) modified for use as decorative beads that indicate influence far from the Monocacy River. The second of the great accomplishments of this Field Session was the formation of a community of individuals joined by their shared interest in the human presence in Frederick County prior to European settlement, and by their shared excitement of discovering that past through archeology. While archeology is about the past, it occurs in the present; while it is scientific, it is also labor-intensive, and intensely personal. Archeology doesn’t happen without people, and the people engaged in the effort of discovery enrich the experience for me. With 130 unique individuals engaged at Biggs Ford this past Spring, my experience was nearly overwhelming, and I am deeply grateful to each and every volunteer.”



For more information about the Biggs Ford site go to: http://marylandarcheology.org/2014_FS.ph

Photos Courtesy of Dr. Charlie Hall, Peter Johnson and Susie Culler