Potential Site Tests

To Headline '73 Digs

Identification and test digging of potential sites throughout the Shepaug River valley headlines the 1973 SVAS digging program. In addition, three existing sites will be further explored.

This charting of potential sites will be thorough throughout this large and specific area. "It is undertaken," SVAS President Ned Swigart says, "because a meaningful archaeological program can't be conducted trying to keep one jump ahead of the bulldozers. We must have a long-term plan.

This research is being done at once, however, because of proposals which might sooner or later put much Shepaug valley acreage under water. (Army Engineers feasibility surveys seeking water for New York City envision two Shepaug dams in Roxbury and one in Washington; and a current Connecticut "Plan for Conservation and Development" proposes at least one Roxbury dam "in the near future" to meet water needs of lower Connecticut cities.)

Farmers Queried

The first site-testing step -- already informally taken -- is to talk to farmers and longtime residents in the area. They are the best source of knowledge about artifacts. They know what their plows may have turned up -- and, usually, what their fathers' and grandfathers' plows turned up too. A farmer can say: "Here's a field where quite a few 'arrowheads' have been plowed up. Here's one where none have ever been found." Where plow-deep materials have shown up is a good place to see what more digging will unearth.

Next step is to spot, on a topographical map, areas that farmers haven't talked about. SVAS searchers will look on this map for the highest ground on the flood plains. That is where the Indian villages usually were: near to a waterway which served as a transportation route; near also to some sort of fresh-water.

Then formal permission is sought of farmers or other owners to dig a few test holes. By this test digging the farmers' recollections can be verified or the site-spotting guesses verified. Before going all out on a new site, SVAS hopes to be sure that the Indians really lived there; that they didn't just drop a few points or tools while out hunting.

To select specific spots for test-digging, a map of the selected field is made. Then on it is superimposed a layover of 5-ft grids. Then a scattering of these 5-ft grids is spotted arbitrarily to provide the best chance of discovering Indian material if it is there.

Formal Dig Agreement

But before any test digs actually are made, SVAS and the owner sign an agreement which provides mutual protection. SVAS is obligated to carry insurance to protect against injuries or accident to participants or watchers -- and to restore the area to its original condition after digging. The site owner agrees that SVAS is entitled to keep artifacts it finds.

Before digging begins, either on a test-site project or on an established site, the 15-20 volunteers needed at a particular site are divided into working groups. A working group usually has five members. Digging at each site is in charge of one experienced archaeologist, who is assisted by two or three experienced aides. These aides are likely to spend much of their time just making the rounds of the working groups. They answer questions, give special guidance and help in any way possible. Also they mark artifacts, check on depths and record work results.

Other-than-Test Digs

Early summer results of the test digs will determine how many different sites actually will be dug this year. Chances are not more than one or two will be added to the three sure to be in full operation. These three are: Nettleton Hollow Site in Washington, which yielded so many finds in 1972, its first summer. Ned Swigart and Sid Hessel will be in charge here. Swigart will also plan and execute the entire program of spotting and digging all Shepaug valley test sites.

An additional New Milford Site will be in charge of John Pawlowski, who already has reported successful results from four previous New Milford sites.

A Southern Connecticut site, in charge of Bernard Powell of Wilton, is being opened for the first time. Continued on page 4
"Why is it important to discover the pre-Colonial history of this area?"

This question, often asked of me, usually is followed by a skeptical: "What can we possibly learn from their history anyway? Life is different now. We cannot live as they did, even if we wanted to."

True, in this technological age, we cannot return to the life of a hunting-gathering society. But these Indians who lived here in prehistoric times were human beings like us. They shared all the human attributes that we cherish today. They lived and loved and suffered. They felt the grandness of joy and the responsibility of being parents. They had to learn to live in harmony with nature, as we do.

Our modern society has its good and bad points. But we who comprise it are learning valuable lessons. Just look at the tremendous growth of interest in our environment during the last 10 years! Look also at our faltering strides to overcome long-standing intolerance; intolerance of minority groups ethically, economically, politically and racially different from the mainstream of American life.

I would feel it a tragedy of epic proportions if somehow our civilization were to be wiped out; if future generations could have no opportunity to see where we made progress and where we went wrong.

I feel the same strong sense of tragedy that 9000 years of Indian history have so far been kept from us. We have been unable to glimpse the way they lived, the lessons they surely learned and the ideas they surely had about how to live with one another and about how to live with nature.

Even the possibility that two peoples with substantially different artifacts could live in apparent peace only two miles apart circa 2400 B.C. is mind-boggling in these troubled times. This event alone could be of great significance to us today -- if continued research confirms that it actually happened.

The Indian's generosity and his deep respect for and awareness of the natural world are prominent among his attributes we need to examine further. We need to know more about his active concern for his fellow tribesmen and his apparent disinterest in materialistic thinking throughout most of recorded history. We may find in these and other prehistoric Indian attitudes some viable alternative for our modern thinking.

How did the Connecticut Indian develop these ways of thinking? Answers to such timeless questions lie still buried in the Connecticut earth. They await discovery by trained archaeologists.

Let our grandchildren never be able to say of us:

"Oh, they were so busy reaching for the stars that they did not have time to learn about human history beneath their feet."

Indian Festival

September 29

Washington, Conn. - An authentic Indian Harvest Festival and Crafts Demonstration will be staged under SVAS auspices on Saturday, September 29 at the Parish House of the Washington Congregational Church.

Led by SVAS Director Adelphena Logan, a group of Onondaga Iriquois will come from the Onodaga Reservation near Syracuse, N.Y. to perform their traditional Iriquois religious festival for SVAS members and guests. All Indian foods will be served in the Indian manner, and ceremonies will be conducted as on their own reservation.

Indian craft demonstrations will be made following the ceremonies and Indian craft items will be available for purchase. The staging of the festival, the food, and its preparation are gifts to SVAS from the Onondagas.

Reservations for the dinner and festival, for which SVAS will make a modest charge, will be limited. But the public is invited. Details will be published in the September ARTIFACTS.
corner of each square, a stake should be driven and numbered. These stakes provide reference for mapping items found.

Having completed carefully these preliminaries, digging can start. But not with a shovel! As noted earlier, a very little overzealous clumsiness can destroy an area as a place for meaningful digging.

A trowel and a short-handled hoe are the best digging tools. With them, the complete surface of one square at a time should be sifted through a mesh screen.

Be Calm!

When an amateur encounters an artifact or a rock, excitement about his discovery may impel him to pick it up immediately. But he shouldn't. With a paint brush or trowel, he should carefully clean away all soil from the object. Then, if it is an artifact, he should measure it from two stakes of that square. The measurement should be recorded to identify the location; also the depth and the soil layer in which it was found. Only after recording should the artifact be removed. A number should then be assigned to it, and a duplicate of the date recorded should be written on an envelope in which the artifact should be placed.

If a pit, hearth, postmold or other "feature" is unearthed, a similar recording process should preceed its removal. Details recorded should include shape, size, soil layer, associated artifacts and similar data. All chips, bones, and charred plant remains should be saved. These materials, or any other unusual element, can provide leads to important information. The feature itself should also be plotted on the map and, if possible, be photographed or drawn in detail.

Any feature containing charcoal is particularly worth special attention. It should be saved regardless!

Handle Carbon Carefully

Only a carbon-containing substance can be so tested (carbon-dated) as to tell accurately its age. Since the tests are expensive, the sample must be saved without contamination of the carbon. Carbon should be handled only with clean metal tools and should be placed for storage in clean aluminum foil. Then the foil-wrapped sample should be stored in a sterilized baby-food jar. Carbon should never be handled by human fingers, because body oil will ruin the sample.

Always remember:

Once an artifact is removed, it looses its history unless associated information is recorded and kept with it as a permanent record.

— John A. Pawloski

Productive archaeological digging requires the kind of patience and care being shown by these young SVAS diggers. The trowel (upper left, top picture), the short-handled hoe (lower center, top picture) and the paint brush (right in bottom picture) are among the tools most suitable for meaningful digging.
News Shorts

MEMBERSHIP for the 1972-1973 year is well over 300—more than double last year’s total. . . . FUND RAISING goes on apace. The $200,000 mark is in sight, leaving six months to achieve the $300,000 needed by 1973 year-end. . . . THE FIREPIT SAMPLE from the Nettleton Hollow Site, latest SVAS test submission, has been C-14 dated at 1230 B.C. (3180 220 C-14 years B.P.Gx 2909). This feature appears to be a recessed pit from the time of the Orient occupation of the site. The exact culture is hard to determine because the pit was recessed and the top had been disturbed by a horse-drawn plow about 70 years ago. . . . ALL FIFTEEN C-14 dates, determined by tests on items submitted to Geochron Laboratory by SVAS and its members, are now available to SVAS members. On the sheet listing the dates are all the data received from the laboratory, the culture to which each item belongs (if known), and the identity of the person in charge of collection of the samples. If you want a copy, enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope with your request to Shepaug Valley Archaeological Society, Box 85, Washington, Ct 06793 . . . . ALSO AVAILABLE FREE, as a SVAS gift to members, is the 1973 edition of the Connecticut Archaeological Bulletin—which will contain two major research papers by SVAS researchers: one by David Thompson on the Lake Waramaug Site; the other by Edmund K. Swigart on the 1970 excavation of Terrace Two of the Kirby Brook Site. The Bulletin will be off the press late this summer. SVAS will purchase a limited supply, based on member requests received before August 1. So reserve your copy promptly— to the above address.

Summer Schedule

For Shepaug River Sites

Dig Director: Edmund K. Swigart, Washington, Conn. 06793

Dates: Tuesday July 3 through Friday August 31.

Days: 9 a.m. to 12 noon every Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday (with the exception of Wednesday July 4.)

Assembly Place: In front of the First Congregational Church on the Green in Washington, Conn. (Just off Route 47).

Volunteers: You may attend any days at your convenience.

BE PROMPT . . .

WEAR OLD CLOTHES

- You will be furnished equipment necessary for digging. But if you have a small pail and trowel, bring them along.
- You will probably enjoy your digging more if you can read ahead of time some material on excavation techniques—like, for example, "Amateur Archaeologists Handbook" by Maurice Robbins. Published by Thomas Y. Crowell Press, this book was reviewed in the September 1972 ARTIFACTS.

SVAS has welcomed diggers in age from six to 80. Children under 11 must be accompanied by an adult.

Books

Indians of Western Connecticut
- Samuel Orcutt, 1882, reprinted by John E. Edwards, 61 Winston Place, Stratford, Conn. 1972

This book was written in much the same style and using many of the same source materials as John DeForest’s "History of the Connecticut Indian" (reviewed in the September 1972 edition of ARTIFACTS). The same white biases and the same time period—largely the white contact era—are given in this Orcutt book. However, the Western Connecticut Indians are reported in far greater detail. This book is probably the single most complete record of what Indian life was like during the white contact period in Western Connecticut.

Method and Theory in American Archeology

As the title of this book suggests, it is a very scholarly treatment of the vocabulary and theory of American Archeology. It is one of the principal texts used in many college-level courses in this field. The serious student of archeology will find the book well worth reading. A beginner, however, will want to acquire some background knowledge of the subject before approaching so sophisticated a treatment.

Site Tests - continued from page 1

Kirby Brook Site, SVAS's oldest, has been closed after yielding much valuable scientific information.

Sound Expansion Base

This greatly expanded SVAS program of research and continued digging stems from a healthy increase in the number and diversification of volunteers. We would have too many volunteers to put to work at a single site.

Also, a membership increase of more than 100% is permitting the modest budget increases necessary to implement an expanded research program.