

Indian Head's Human History Spans Millennia

Man's Presence Dates to the Times of Early Egypt

IT IS HARD to believe that man's presence at Indian Head is older than the Egyptian pyramids. Archeological surveys at Naval Support Facility (NSF) Indian Head, Maryland indicate that Native American Indians occupied Cornwallis Neck and Stump Neck since 10,000 years BP (before present) and continued through the early 1800s.

The earliest recorded occupation dates back to the Paleo-Indian period (9000 to 7500 B.C.). To date, NSF Indian Head has documented over 120 archeological sites, ranging from small flakes and early pottery to a European "contact site" known as the Posey Site. It is named after Calvert Posey who was an engineer at Indian Head in the early 1960s.

After an explosion at one of the buildings, Calvert Posey began looking for artifacts. Based upon his early collections, the significance of the site was revealed. With approxi-

mately 28,118 artifacts recovered at the site, crucial information is revealed on the first contact between Europeans and the local Indians at the Posey site. It is believed that this initial contact occurred sometime between 1648 and 1670.

Evidence of trading—such as glass beads, clay pipes and copper—is prevalent throughout the Posey Site,

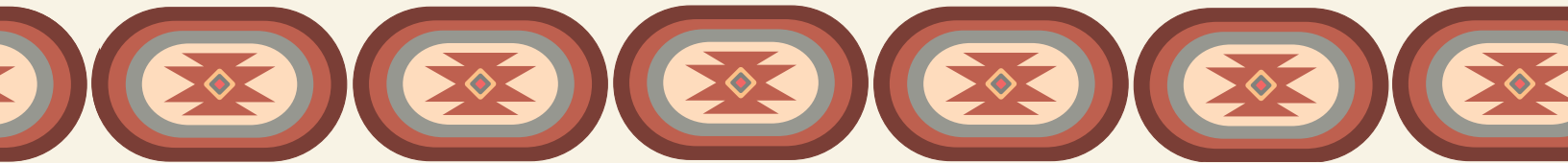
indicating that the European settlers traded their goods for items such as food, animal skins, and pottery made by Native Americans.

The Native Americans incorporated the goods received from the Europeans into their daily lives in the form of copper points for arrows and ceremonial pieces and glass beads for decoration and trade.



A fragment of ancient pottery discovered at NSF Indian Head's Stump Neck Annex during an archeology dig conducted in April 2013. The pottery is an example of Popes Creek Net Impressed pottery made from roughly 500 B.C. to 300 A.D. The clay of Popes Creek vessels was generally mixed with lots of sand, and the pots fired at a low temperature. This meant that they were somewhat fragile, so intact examples are extremely uncommon. Archeologists said it was very unusual to find such a large fragment.

Andrew Revelos



The ecosystems of today are dramatically different than those of the distant past. Archeological scholars believe that the sea level was about 100 feet lower than it was 10,000 years ago. The people occupying the area at that time would have had access to significantly different resources than those found at the Posey Site today.

As the water levels rose, the characteristics of the Potomac River changed. During the Late Archaic Period (4000 to 1000 B.C.), camps were established adjacent to major waterways to use the varied resources associated with river systems. These resources would have included fish, wildlife and a variety of plants.

With an increase in available food resources, the Native Americans developed the use of ground steatite bowls (stone bowls). These bowls were largely shaped by carving but grinding and polishing were also used as part of the process. Steatite bowls were a major change in food cooking. They are recognized as the first portable cooking containers that are found archeologically.

These vessels are a precursor of the ceramic bowls that were developed by Native Americans during the Woodland Period, and are considered a primary marker between the Archaic Period and the Woodland Period.

The appearance of ceramic technology marks the advent of the Woodland Period (1000 B.C. to 1600 A.D.). Two types of ceramic ware common to the Early and Middle Woodland sites are the Accokeek and Popes Creek types. The Accokeek has a cord impression on the vessel while the Popes Creek has a net impression. Recent archeological surveys on Stump Neck revealed examples of the Popes Creek ware.

The Middle and Late Woodland Period saw an evolution of a diversified hunting and gathering system that was made possible by the increasingly complex riverine environment of the Chesapeake Bay.

Trapping fresh and salt water fish, hunting small animals, the developing of corn horticulture, and gathering other plant resources were all part of the subsistence patterns of the Woodland people.

These behavioral changes led to the development of large permanent and semi-permanent stockade villages. Two such villages, Moyaone and the Potomac Creek sites, are located near Indian Head.



A sample of some of the artifacts found at NSF Indian Head's Stump Neck Annex during the archeology dig.
Andrew Revelos

During this time, there were also significant changes in the projectile points used in weaponry. The development and use of the bow and arrow necessitated the adoption of small triangular projectile points as opposed to larger stone points used on spears. This allowed for more efficient hunting of larger game such as deer and elk.

The establishment of horticulture and large villages during the Woodland Period provided the social and economic stimulus necessary to support the increase in the population of Native Americans in the region. As the population increased, so did the demand on the local resources. It is believed that this may have led to competition and inter-tribal hostility between villages and tribes after 1300 A.D. This is indicated by the appearance of tall, strong defensive fences made of logs or stakes around villages prior to the arrival of Europeans. It is apparent that only the larger or more important villages, or those along the cultural borders, had such walls, which are known as palisades.

Early English accounts described these villages as ranging in size from 12 to 25 houses. It is believed that these villages were occasionally moved due to agricultural practices that depleted the soil after several years of use. Other factors contributing to village relocation included the exhaustion of local sources of fauna, wood, and other plants due to intensive hunting and gathering within a limited area around the village.

Semi-permanent villages often served as base camps and were part of a settlement pattern that residents would use

CONTINUED ON PAGE 59

Native American Archeological Site Confirms Early Trade with Europeans: Evidence of Robust Colonial Commerce Uncovered at Naval Support Facility Indian Head

IN THE EARLY 1960s, a chemist at what is now NSF Indian Head, was the first to notice the remnants of artifacts of an ancient American Indian village on the installation, which apparently had been uncovered following a non-fatal explosion that occurred in 1957.

The late Calvert R. Posey was an amateur archeologist and very interested in the history of early European settlement around Indian Head. But what he found would come to jar long-held beliefs about where European and Native American societies first came together in the New World.

"He (Posey) first began poking around the place during his lunch breaks with a few friends," said Sara Rivers-Cofield of Maryland's Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum, part of the Old Line State's Department of Planning activity that excavated the site.

"He began finding stuff such as iron nails, copper, buttons, glass beads, lead shot

and clay items such as pipes and pottery. It was determined to be one of the first contact sites (between the Europeans settlers and Indians) where trading took place in Maryland."

In 1985, the site was tested by William Barse as part of a much larger archaeological survey of NSF Indian Head. The site was investigated more extensively in 1996 by staff from the Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum, under the direction of Julia King and Edward Chaney.

The location was estimated to be more than 300 years old, meaning that around 1650, American Indians and the European settlers were getting along fairly well in their relationships. This relationship resulted in spirited trading with one another as the Europeans were changing Indian life with the introduction of new goods and technologies and Indians were teaching Europeans how to survive in the wilderness, living off of Maryland's abundant agricultural, game and fish bounties.

Rivers-Cofield said that archeologists can determine a lot about the early societies from the ancient remains, such as their dietary habits.

"The animal bones found indicate that they ate a lot of fish and wild animals such as deer," she said.

Also learned was how Old World technology was affecting Native American culture.

"What is also interesting is that (the Indians) were taking in copper from the Europeans... probably an old pot or a kettle that had a hole in it, and remaking it into tools and projectile points (arrow heads)," she said.



ABOVE: The copper points recovered by archeologists at the Posey site show that the people who lived there experimented with different point shapes and styles.

LEFT: Artifacts from the Posey site show the presence of European items, traditional Indian goods, and artifacts that were made by Indians using materials from Europe. Top row: copper points, stone points and ceramic rims sherds made by Posey's inhabitants. Middle row: copper scraps, imported white clay pipes, locally made pipe, shell beads, nails and copper cones. Bottom row: German stoneware ceramics, iron knife fragment, European-style bone comb and two bone needles or awls.

Maryland Archaeological Conservation Laboratory

She noted that copper, “probably obtained from the settlers as trade for pelts, hides or food items,” gave the Native Americans at the Posey site particular status as it was a rare item in the New World before European contact. Not only could copper be made into weaponry and tools, it could also be ornamental and worn on clothing.

Rivers-Cofield also said that the variety of copper point types recovered at the Posey site indicates that there was experimentation made with the metal. In one case, she noted in a review written about the site, two scrap fragments were folded over each other to make a barbed point.

Other points were made by snipping sheet copper into isosceles triangles or small equilateral triangles. She pointed out that while some of the points have holes in them, others do not. Other archaeological examples indicate that once completed, these copper points were then probably attached to hardwood arrow shafts with fine sinew and glue they manufactured from game killed.

According to a comparative study of colonial Chesapeake culture—cited on line at www.chesapeakearchaeology.org—research “suggests that the Indians living at Posey were likely members of the Mattawoman petty chiefdom, a component group of the Piscataway Indians.”

The research found that, although there is no evidence any Europeans were living in the area by the mid-1600s, “Nancotamon, one of the great men of Mattawoman, came before the Maryland Provincial Council in October 1665 and asked what his people should do, whether they should ‘remove further into the woods or to remain upon the land where they now or lately lived,’ presumably in this portion of Charles County.”

In response, the council “ordered the metes and bounds of the “ould (old) habitations”



Excavations on NSF Indian Head between the mid-1980s and late 1990s uncovered substantial evidence of some of the earliest trading activity between Europeans and Native American Indians. This 1996 photo shows staff from the Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum at work at what has become known as the Posey site.

Maryland Archaeological Conservation Laboratory

of the Mattawoman Indians surveyed, and, in the interest of peace and safety, forbade any Englishman from taking up lands within those boundaries. The Council further declared that any Englishman so settling risked imprisonment.

Apparently, the governmental council worked hard for a while in protecting their host’s lands and preserving peace between the European settlers and the Indians. But that all changed when, what would become “Maryland Gold,” significantly increased in demand back in Europe and tobacco became a way to prosperity for New World fortune seekers. In 1695, due to the need to develop more land to produce tobacco, the council began trying to persuade the Indian inhabitants to allow more production of tobacco, and by 1700 the Posey site is believed to have been abandoned by the Indians.

In late 2009, the state of Maryland officially displayed the artifacts of the Posey site as Charles County cut the ribbon on the installation of a temporary archaeology exhibit in the lobby of the Charles County Government building in La Plata.

The exhibit was developed in partnership with the Maryland Historical Trust, the

Maryland Archaeological Conservation Laboratory (MAC Lab), NSF Indian Head, and Charles County’s Department of Economic Development and Tourism. A grant from the Institute for Museum, Preservation, Archaeology Research and Training provided a stipend for a St. Mary’s College of Maryland student intern to research artifacts and to work with museum staff to develop and install it for Charles County’s citizens and visitors.

“The Maryland Historical Trust and the Maryland Archaeological Conservation Laboratory were pleased to work with Charles County on this exciting project that highlights some of the county’s buried past,” said Dr. Patricia Samford, Director of the MAC Lab.

“Our long-term goal is to place archaeological exhibits in every county in Maryland, and we are delighted that Charles County was willing to be our pilot for this statewide project,” Samford continued.

This exhibition, meant to be a model for other Maryland counties, showcased local and state history through artifacts that the public does not usually have the opportunity to see.

The History Behind Naval Support Facility Indian Head

TODAY'S MILITARY COMMUNITY on board NSF Indian Head represents a diverse and strategically important mix of research and development activities, alongside operational support programs that are protecting the U.S. homeland from terrorist threats, as well as serving U.S. Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force and Army forces deployed worldwide on a daily basis. In addition to its military value, the Indian Head Navy installation makes a significant economic contribution to the local community by serving as one of Charles County, Maryland's largest employers.

The Indian Head Navy installation makes a significant economic contribution to the local community by serving as one of Charles County's largest employers.

The base was founded in 1890 as the Naval Proving Ground and was the Navy's first established presence in southern Maryland. By 1913, the base gradually moved away from the simple proving of guns and armor to include standardization of shells and powder. In 1915, an ammonium picrate plant was opened to

expand the chemical research program, both routine and experimental. When the United States entered World War I in 1917, the Naval Powder Factory was a major producer of smokeless powder for the Navy. After 1921, Indian Head was no longer designated as the "Naval Proving Ground" but was referred to as the "Naval Powder Factory." The facility shifted from a naval gun proving ground to a chemical factory, research laboratory and explosives factory.

In 1947, the Bureau of Ordnance agreed to the establishment of a set of pilot plants at Indian Head that would have the capacity to produce experimental new propellants for naval research use: a nitroglycerin pilot plant, a plant to produce varied nitrogen-content nitrocellulose, a plant for mixing and rolling experimental lots of solvent and solventless propellant, and a fourth plant for experimental production of cast propulsion units. During the 1950s, the Korean conflict provided the impetus for the factory's stepped up explosive and propellant production. Building on work done at the facility's Patterson Pilot Plant during the 1940s, the factory began to produce missile fuel for the long-range Polaris missile and smaller rockets and later, propellants for emergency ejection mechanisms.

In 1958, reflecting its new mission and direction, the base officially became the Naval Propellant Plant. In 1966, because of the diversification from propellants into related fields of chemistry, engineering and production contract management, the base changed its name, becoming the Naval Ordnance Station (NOS). The mid to late-1960s were characterized by the production of

The Basics About the Maryland Archaeological Conservation Laboratory

THE MAC LAB is a state-of-the-art archaeological research, conservation, and curation facility located at Jefferson Patterson Park & Museum, the State Museum of Archaeology, in southern Maryland. The MAC Lab serves as a clearinghouse for archaeological collections recovered from land-based and underwater projects conducted by State and Federal agencies throughout Maryland. The MAC Lab also houses a number of major collections acquired through private donation to the Maryland Historical Trust. All of these collections are available for research, education, and exhibit purposes to students, scholars, museum curators, and educators. For more information, visit www.jefpat.org/mac_lab.html.



such products as the plastic explosive C-3 in 1965, an updated Zuni rocket in 1966, Polaris casting powder from 1961 through 1967, Poseidon casting powder (C-3) in 1967, and composite propellant and explosive processing.

Recognizing the achievement of the station, the Naval Sea Systems Command reconstituted several of the previously acquired agency roles as official "centers of excellence" for the Navy. This meant that the Navy would not duplicate the effort elsewhere and would treat the facility as the primary collection of experts in a particular area. NOS acquired the "center of excellence" designation by mid-1989 for six technologies: guns, rockets and missiles, energetic chemicals, ordnance devices (Cartridge Actuated Devices/Propellant Actuated Devices), missile weapon simulators, explosive process development engineering, and explosive safety, occupational safety and health, and environmental protection.

Installation management of the Navy base at Indian Head transferred to Commander Navy Installation Command in 2003 with the stand-up of this new Echelon II command, charged with providing shore installation management services to all Navy activities. All naval installations within the National Capital Region aligned with Naval District Washington, and on November 3, 2005, the Indian Head base was renamed as Naval Support Facility Indian Head with the commissioning of Naval Support Activity South Potomac as the installation's host command.

Major commands currently residing on NSF Indian Head include the Naval Surface Warfare Center Indian Head Explosive Ordnance Disposal Technology Division, the Naval Ordnance Safety and Security Activity, the Naval Sea Logistics Center Indian Head Detachment, the Joint Interoperability Test Command, and the Marine Corps Chemical Biological Incident Response Force.

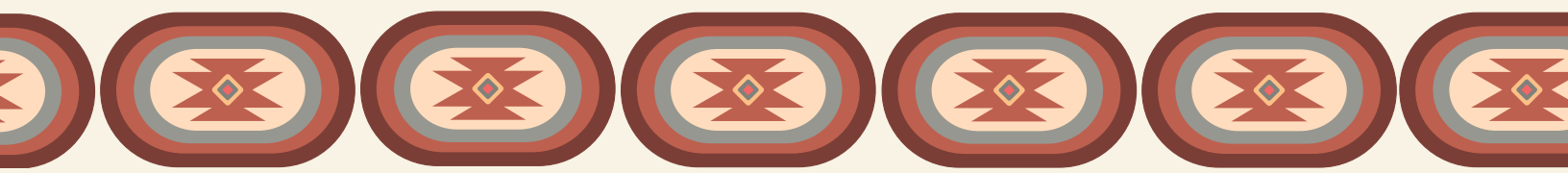
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 55

throughout the year to take advantage of the changing flora and fauna. The archeological finds at Indian Head indicate the use of base camps but not large permanent villages.

The Posey Site is a permanent site, but is small in nature. Due to the lack of a palisade or other defensive architecture, it is often referred to as a "hamlet." Archeologists speculate that the Posey Site could have played several different roles. The first one was that it served as a buffer between the colonists and the Native American populations in the "Old Pomunky Town" and other villages located to the north.

Mary Patton, crew chief for the Louis Berger Group, sifts through soil in search of artifacts during an archeology dig at NSF Indian Head's Stump Neck Annex in April 2013.
Andrew Revelos





Jason Shellenhamer, field supervisor for the Louis Berger Group, points out differences in soil strata visible in an excavated sample pit during an archeological survey conducted in April 2013 on NSF Indian Head's Stump Neck Annex. Identifying the soil strata is important in archeological work since it can assist archeologists in determining the age of recovered artifacts and the archeological period. For this reason, archaeologists excavate stratigraphically, or one layer at a time, removing all soil from one time period before excavating the layers that preceded it. Archeologists are then able to compare results from various dig sites on one location. This provides a better interpretation of the recovered artifacts from the same soil layer.

Andrew Revelos

The evidence from the Posey Site suggests that the Native Americans who lived in the area into the 18th century had well-developed strategies for survival. This conclusion is based upon the integration of elements from the traditional lifestyles with colonial lifestyles as well as the production of goods and/or services for use in a developing market economy.


Information gathered from the Posey Site indicates that the local Native Americans modified various aspects of their traditional technology for use in trade, and the survival of maintaining certain aspects of their traditional lifestyles. This adaptation was a response to a rapidly changing economic, political, cultural and demographic environment.

In 1665, due to the increasing European population in southern Maryland and the decline of the Native American population, the governor of Maryland set aside all of the land between the Mattawoman and Piscataway, Creeks which included Cornwallis Neck. This reservation was occupied by numerous local tribes including the Nacotchtanks, who moved from the Washington, D.C. area. The Maryland law, also known as the Indian Reservation Agreement, stated that white men could not establish residence within three miles of an Indian settlement.

By 1720, the local Indian population dropped dramatically, from 8,400 at the time of the first European settlement in St. Mary's county in 1634 to less than

200 in Southern Maryland. Of these, it is estimated that only 30 Native Americans were living on Cornwallis Neck.

Although there is no specific reason for the decline, several factors, including disease, war with the Susquehannocks, and abandonment of the area over broken treaties, contributed to the steep drop in the Native American population. In 1861, the Susquehannocks conducted a war raid in to Charles County. It is believed that many of the surviving Indians traveled to the fortified Indian village known as Fort Zekiah, located in the interior of Charles County. The fort existed from 1680 to 1692 when it was abandoned.

Archeological sites at Indian Head continue to reveal glimpses into the Native American lifestyles that existed and flourished for centuries. The Navy continues to fulfill its responsibility of surveying and gathering data on the historic and prehistoric occupation of NSF Indian Head. The collection of this information will provide a valuable insight in to the way of life of those that preceded our arrival. 

A second purpose was its use as a site to exploit trading with the European settlers by reprocessing goods acquired from them. This is believed possible due to its location on the Mattawoman River and its proximity to colonial settlements. Artifacts recovered indicate that these Native Americans utilized copper, ceramics, clay pipes, metal working tools, lead shot and other imported material.

A third use of the Posey Site may have been the European settlers' need for cleared land in order to begin farming activities.

These scenarios are all possible, but until further historical and archeological research is completed, the true answer remains elusive.

CONTACTS

Gary Wagner
Naval Support Activity South Potomac
540-653-1475
DSN: 249-1475
gary.wagner@navy.mil

Thomas Wright
Naval Support Activity South Potomac
301-744-2260
DSN: 354-2260
thomas.a.wright@navy.mil