What did we find?

Archaeologists recovered thousands of artifacts in seven different locations used by Native Americans from about 1,000 to 6,000 years ago. Various stone tools, including projectile points, debitage (waste) from the production of stone tools, pottery fragments, and botanical remains (seeds, nuts, and corn) were all buried by centuries of soil deposition in this area. Evidence of hearths (fire pits) was also found, as was a unique stone feature (a boulder). This boulder may have functioned as a seat where a Native American once sat to make tools. The tools found at the site would have been used to hunt and prepare food, while decorated clay pots were used to carry and cook food.

How did people use this area in the past?

The archaeological data suggest that the valley divide was favored by Native Americans over an extended period of time. Archaeologists found evidence that the area was used on a short-term basis. Individuals or groups most likely visited the divide to rest, make tools, collect local resources, and camp overnight as they traveled through the area. Or, this particular area may have had special significance that drew people here. Documentation of this series of sites creates a unique archaeological case study that suggests more than just hunting and gathering food by prehistoric Native Americans. While the data provide valuable information about the collection, processing, and consumption of food, this upland area may have embodied symbolic meaning for the people who repeatedly visited this landscape.

Explore the inside of this brochure to learn more about the archaeologists' findings and about the Native Americans who traversed the divide thousands of years ago!

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More information about Herrick Hollow, PAF's public education programs, and other regional archaeological sites can be found on the web at: http://paf.binghamton.edu/

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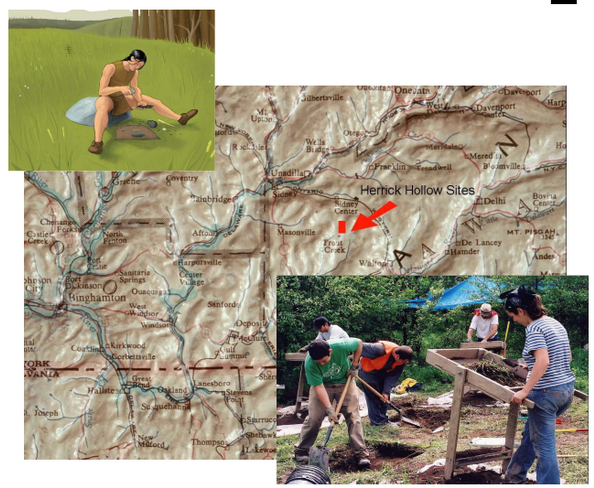
Archaeology on the Divide



The Herrick Hollow Prehistoric Archaeological District

Meadowood Knife

Early Woodland (1000-500 B.C.)

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Introduction

During the remedial investigation of the Richardson Hill Road Landfill Superfund Site in the Towns of Sidney and Masonville, Delaware County, New York, crews from the Public Archaeology Facility (PAF) searched the uplands between the Susquehanna and Delaware valleys for evidence of prehistoric (meaning, before Europeans arrived) sites. The goal was to identify whether Native Americans used this unique area—the valley divide—thousands of years ago, and if so, what kinds of activities they carried out here. Archaeological sites are identified by the presence of artifacts and features left behind by past peoples. Artifacts are objects—such as prehistoric stone tools, pottery, and food remains—that were used by people and then left behind eventually becoming buried in the soil. Features are the remains—such as a fire pit—that can be seen in the soil and recorded but can't be moved without being destroyed.

How did we find the sites?

Archaeologists first discovered prehistoric artifacts in shovel test pits (STPs) excavated throughout the project area. STPs are round holes dug in the ground to identify the presence or absence of artifacts within an area designated for construction. Once artifacts are found, they are evaluated to determine whether they are part of an important archaeological site. If the finds are declared significant, more extensive archaeological study of the area is called for if the site containing the artifacts is going to be destroyed by construction.

The purpose of conducting this archaeological study was to collect and preserve a sample of the site's important data—including artifacts, information on soils, botanical remains, and features—while at the same time allowing the Superfund Site remediation to proceed.

The Hunter, Painting by Ernest Smith. From the Collections of the Rochester Museum & Science Center, Rochester, N.Y.

Site Age and Function

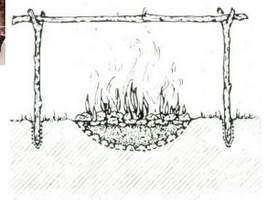
The ages of the Herrick Hollow sites were determined by the types of projectile points and pottery recovered, and through dating of carbon, maize (corn), and acorns. The divide was visited as long ago as the Late Archaic (4000-1500 B.C.), but was used most often during the Early Woodland (1000-500 B.C.) and Late Woodland (A.D. 900-1200). The artifacts tell a strikingly similar story about how the area was used by Native Americans throughout history. First, people always used the land on a short-term basis: archaeologists found only small camp sites, evidenced by the presence of hearths and small amounts of food (maize, nuts, and berries). Second, of all the stone tool waste found, pieces from the later stages of manufacture were most abundant. This suggests that some hunting tools were made at the site, but most were brought by people to the site and then refined and sharpened there. Finally, expedient tools—made for immediate use and then discarded—were found in large quantities, showing that local resources such as small game, plants, bark, and reeds were being collected and processed on site.

Left: *Stone tools were typically made from chert cobbles (center) that were shaped and formed into projectile points and other tools. Hammerstones and antlers were used to chip away at the cobble to refine its shape and form.*

Right: *Chert flake debris; scrapers, drill tip, and graver.*

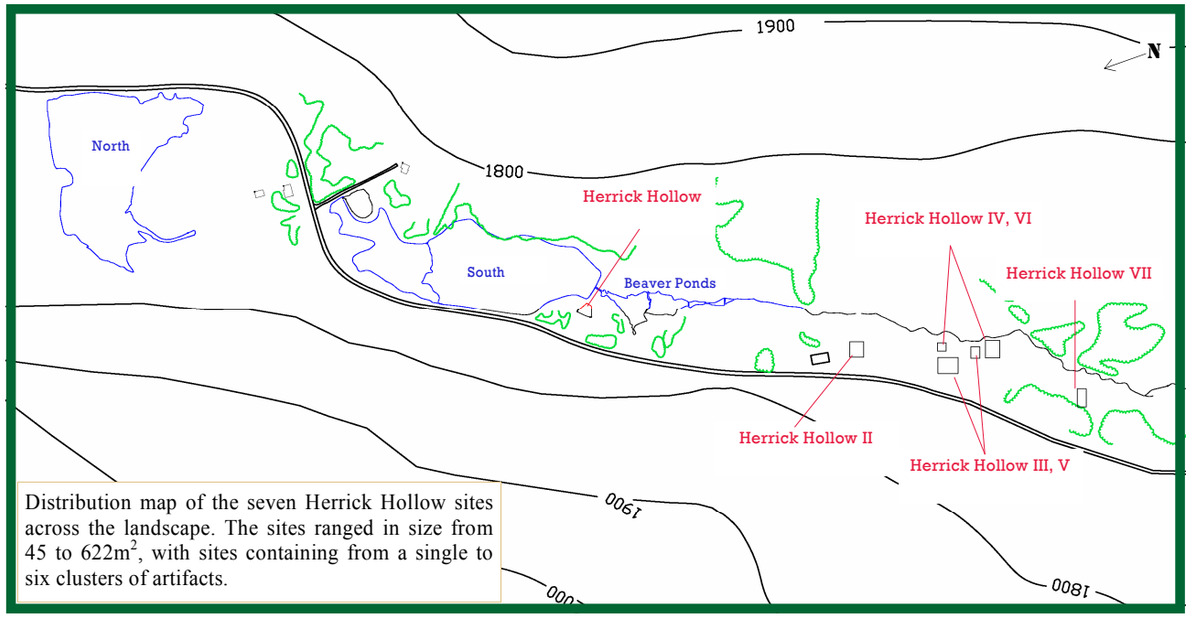
This photo shows the cross-section of a hearth feature found by archaeologists at one of the sites.

The drawing below shows how a hearth was made and used.



A fragment of a decorated clay pot found at Herrick Hollow.

An example of how a clay pot was used for cooking.



Distribution map of the seven Herrick Hollow sites across the landscape. The sites ranged in size from 45 to 622m^2, with sites containing from a single to six clusters of artifacts.

This sequence shows how a chert core was formed into a tool. First, large chunks of material were removed; then smaller flakes to refine the shape and sharpen the tool.

The Making of Stone Tools

The most common activities at Herrick Hollow were the finishing and sharpening of tools for hunting, and production of expedient tools for processing local resources. Expedient tools were typically formed from waste flakes chipped off a core. Analysts identified a full range of lithic (stone) debris, ranging from reduced cobbles to finished tools, indicating that tools were created, refined, and used here. Of special significance was the production of "Meadowood cache blades," thought to have special meaning to Native Americans. Often, these blades were placed in burials or offerings, or were found stored in pits (caches) in large quantities.

This boulder was used as a seat while making stone tools and blades. Archaeologists found debris from tool making, including Meadowood cache blades, strewn around it.

Why the Valley Divide?

The landscape of Herrick Hollow offered abundant resources that would have attracted small groups of foragers. However, this remote upland area was not easy to get to from the two main valleys to the north and south. Why would this land be chosen when other areas with easier access were available? There may have been multiple reasons beyond collecting food that could account for the repeated visits to this landscape. The making of Meadowood cache blades in the Early Woodland likely had symbolic meaning that reflected the importance of coming to this area. During the Late Woodland when groups lived in large, palisaded villages on the floodplains of the rivers, these remote upland sites tell us about possible symbolic meanings attached to areas beyond the village walls. Water coursing down the tributary valleys was crucial to the survival of crops, including the symbolic corn-beans-squash triad, considered to be the "Sustainers of Life." It is probable that the wetlands that gave rise to these enriching streams would have been imbued with sacred meaning, giving visits to this area a solemn aura of importance.

Examples of Herrick Hollow projectile points: Brewerton (Late Archaic); Meadowood (Early Woodland); Levanna (Late Woodland).

Projectile point types are used to estimate the dates when sites were used. Point styles and shapes reflect both the function of the tools and the general time period during which they were made.