

CE-793
Great Prehistoric Village Site
Crystal Beach vicinity
Private

Late Woodland period

The Great Prehistoric Village site falls within the low salinity, non-oyster producing Eastern Shore section of the Upper Chesapeake Bay region. The abundance of fish coming to this area in the spring to spawn must have been a major attraction to this area in aboriginal times. In 1971, the site was discovered and tested by an amateur archeologist. Test pitting along the 5'-20' undisturbed strip of land along the northern edge of the site revealed a mature soil profile with cultural material extending a maximum of 18" below the present surface. One test pit in the western section of the site revealed a feature of stones which when exposed by two 5' squares contained several hundred fire-cracked and regular river bed cobbles. Bone fragments, pottery, jasper and quartz debitage, and triangular projectile points were found associated with this feature. Similar stone features found at various other sites have not been assigned a function although connections to fish procurement activities are suggested. The Great collection provides the primary source of artifactual data from the site. Two major components of the Late Woodland period are identifiable. The earlier component, represented by an undefined shell-tempered ware, represents cultures of coastal development. Quartz was the predominant lithic material found at the site, with rhyolite debitage in a minority. The second component is marked by a grit-tempered pottery similar to Shanks Ferry and Page Cord-Marked. The general Late Woodland grit-tempered tradition is primarily located in the Piedmont Province and to the west. During the early historic period, the Susquehannocks, who defeated and absorbed the indigenous Shanks Ferry people, reportedly traveled to the mouth of the Susquehanna River to exploit the tremendous spring fish runs. The presence of a Piedmont or western grit-tempered pottery-producing component at this coastal location is attributed to the importance of the area during the spawning period. A spring occupation of the site is suggested. When John Smith visited the upper Bay in 1608, the remnants of the Toghogs, allies with the Susquehannocks against the common enemy of the tribes of the Five Nations, inhabited a palisaded village on the Sassafras River. While the Great site probably lacks an historic component, the site may contain a component of the people who populated the area prior to the disruptive forces of the protohistoric period.

The Great Prehistoric Village site is the northernmost known Late Woodland village site on the Eastern Shore of the Chesapeake Bay outside of the Susquehanna River Basin. While the archeological resources of the site are virtually untested, the limited analysis to date indicates at least two components of the Late Woodland period c. 100-1500 A.D. Producers of a shell-tempered pottery representing a continuance of coastal culture was apparently replaced by a grit-tempered pottery producing people from the Piedmont or westward. The site is potentially important to studies of one aspect of the seasonal round of coastal and Piedmont cultures: the exploitation of the annual spring fish spawning runs.



Facing South Wayne Clark 4-8-74

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