The Archaeology of a Stone Tool Industry: The Black Diamond Site (7NC-J-225) New Castle County, Delaware

VERSAR, INC.

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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ABSTRACT

Archaeological site evaluation and data recovery investigations at the Black Diamond site (7NC-J-225), in southern New Castle County, Delaware, represented an extensive investigation of early Native American occupation of the Delmarva Peninsula. The work was conducted in compliance with federal legislation, employing a work plan designed specifically to mitigate the adverse effects of road construction associated with the upgrading of U.S. Highway 13/State Route 1.

The site lay on a low ridge overlooking a bay/basin depression. Initial site evaluation work defined a dense concentration of prehistoric artifacts, consisting primarily of quartzite flaking debris, near the crest of the ridge above the bay/basin. A plow zone mantled the entire site, but undisturbed sub-plow zone contexts occurred in the area of the main artifact concentration. Data recovery investigations were carried out within a block of contiguous 1-m^2 excavation units placed over the main artifact concentration.

The archaeological remains at the Black Diamond site were characterized by a distinctive form of quartzite used to manufacture a projectile point form related to or derived from the Savannah River tradition. The industry at the site appeared to have been part of a widely recognized pattern in the Late Archaic of broad-bladed point forms made from hard, coarse-grained stone that was generally available from local sources. The source of the quartzite that people used at Black Diamond was projected to have been in the Herring Run area of the Blackbird Creek Valley north of the site. Extensive analyses were conducted of the debris from the manufacturing process that suggested the raw material was brought to the site in partly reduced form and that 100 or more points may have been made from the material at the site.

While quartzite reduction was the most visible site activity, other data indicated that the occupation of the Black Diamond site was functionally diverse and represented more than a simple lithic reduction locale. Tools unrelated to stone tool making were recovered, a series of pit features that may have been used for storage were present, and clear or artifact-free areas within the site suggested site maintenance within living areas.

In contrast to upland settlement models suggesting that locations such as the Black Diamond site were typically procurement locales populated on a short-term basis, evidence from the Black Diamond site indicated that people lived at the site over an extended span of time. As a small site with a clearly defined occupational component, the Black Diamond site provided a well-defined artifact assemblage for study that resulted in valuable insights into the lives of people living in upland Delmarva in the past.

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