

field investigations

## DELAWARE ROUTE 273

This section of the project report concerns the archaeological field investigations conducted along the proposed ROW of a realigned Route 273 to the south of the town of Christiana, New Castle County, Delaware. The specific area of study begins at Route 273 northwest of the town of Christiana and just east of the intersection of Route 273 and Interstate 95 (see Figure V-1). It then runs along new ROW southeast to a crossing of the Christina River from where it swings northeast to a crossing of Route 7 and a merging with the present Route 273.

### Segment A

Segment A extends from the centerline of Route 273 west of its intersection with Road 347 and east of the Interstate 95 interchange and runs approximately 3100 feet southeast to an intersection with Old Baltimore Pike some 1650 feet southwest of the center of the town of Christiana. The topography consists of an up-slope grade which crosses an upland meadow, a cultivated knoll, a stream, a fallow field (one strip 75 feet wide being freshly cultivated), another fallow field, a drainage ditch, and another fallow field, which exhibits considerable episodes of fill and disturbance. Both cultivated zones are potential prehistoric habitation areas, however, the intense surface collection performed by the MAAR survey team failed to locate any cultural debris within the ROW. No subsurface testing was conducted within Segment A.

### Segment B

Segment B begins at Old Baltimore Pike, some 1650 feet south of the town of Christiana, and runs southeast approximately 1400 feet to the Christina River. The topographic setting is a gentle slope leading down toward the river (a freshly cultivated cornfield), a soggy meadow, and a braided flood plain. The soils crossed are of three types: the floodplain is Hatboro silt loam; the meadow is Keyport silt loam and the cornfield is Sassafras sandy loam.

The soggy meadow contains pools and drainage ditches as well as a recently installed sewer system with elevated manhole access covers. The floodplain is highly disturbed with many recent flood channels near or at the present high tide water level of the Christina.

Locus B-1 is a slight knoll near the Old Baltimore Pike on the surface of which were found one redware and two whiteware sherds of 19th century derivation. Locus B-2 is a knoll overlooking the braided floodplain of the river. Surface visibility on this knoll was excellent and intensive surface inspection resulted in the recovery of approximately a half dozen quartz flakes and bifaces. The intensity of this prehistoric occupation was very low, however, and no subsurface testing was felt necessary.

## Segment C

Segment C extends from the center of the Christina River northeast to an intersection with Route 7, some 2400 feet east of the center of the town of Christiana. The topography is varied and the entire segment is wooded, except for a small area where the ROW traverses the Department of Transportation's Bear Highway Yard. Relief, at times, is extreme with knolls falling off rapidly into boggy swamps, in addition to streams, an elevated plateau and the lowlying Christina River floodplain.

A large portion of the Christina River floodplain consists of Matapeake soils. An informant, Mr. Clay of Christiana, who used to farm the floodplain area within the ROW, reported that over the years this locale, Locus C-1, had been subjected to surface collecting activities by local avocational archaeologists. According to Mr. Clay, hundreds of artifacts had been removed from the locus. Access to the field was limited and the owners of the artifact collections were not contacted. The site reported by Mr. Clay has also been reported by Mr. H. Geiger Omwake, with whom the writer first visited the site over twelve years ago.

Locus C-1 was subjected to both surface collecting and subsurface testing by MAAR survey personnel. That portion of the site which will be crossed by the highway ROW proved to have been extensively disturbed during grading operations relating to the construction of housing along the banks of the river. Post-hole testing (6) demonstrated the removal of all top soil from the area and its cutting several feet below the natural grade.

Locus C-2 is an area west of the ROW on the banks of the river. Foundations of early structures can be seen at this location. No impact to these potential resources will be caused by the construction of the Route 273 highway within the present ROW.

Locus C-3 is situated on a large knoll overlooking a deep drainage cut and an artificial pond just south of Route 7. The soils in this area consist of Sassafras sandy loam and are well-drained. The major portion of the knoll appears to have been destroyed by several gravel (?) pits and drainage cuts (see Figure V-2). Surface examination resulted in the discovery of aboriginal, as well as historical, artifacts (see Appendix A - Artifact Inventory).

A total of 15 post-hole tests and three measured test units were excavated on the knoll. Figure V-2 gives the location of these subsurface investigations and Figure V-3 illustrates a typical profile. It is possible that the wide variety of cobbles, which represents a good source of lithic raw materials for the manufacturing of stone tools, represents the site function. Many of the recovered artifacts are flakes with cortex showing that the cobble source was being utilized. Fire cracked rock, in large amounts, excavated from test units and post-hole excavations, indicate that the area was an occupation site.

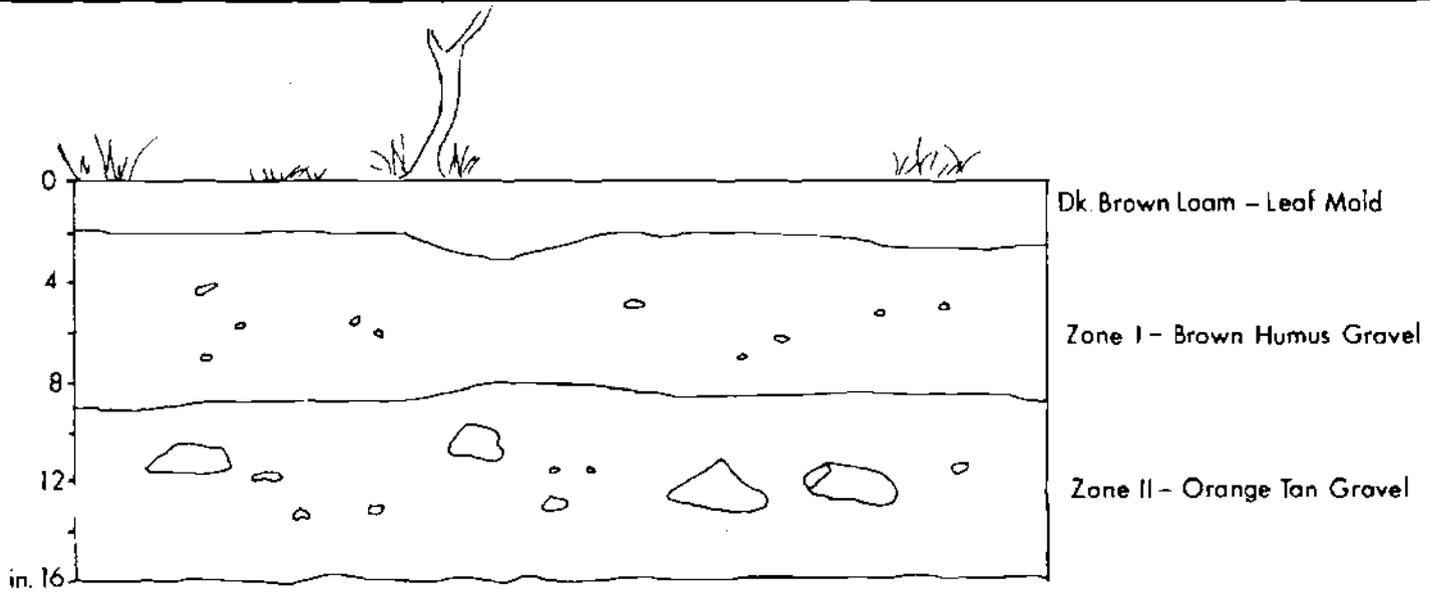


Figure V-3      NORTH PROFILE  
TEST PIT 3      SEGMENT C      LOCUS 3

Similar sites have been recorded from New Castle County (see Section III) as well as throughout the Middle Atlantic Coast. Dr. William M. Gardner (1977) of Catholic University dates such sites from the Late Archaic through Middle Woodland times. These lithic acquisition and processing stations fall within the predicted settlement pattern discussed in Section II of this report and previously postulated by archaeologists in neighboring areas.

Although the intensity of occupation and utilization of this site is quite high, and the potential for providing data on lithic processing sites may have been significant, the excavations conducted at the site raise questions as to the integrity of the site. Figure V-2 indicates that the surface disturbance is quite high and that portion of the site remaining on the narrow knoll is probably much less than once existed. Profiles of the many tests placed within Locus C-3 indicate that the small portion still remaining has been graded. It is unlikely that the loss of integrity can be overlooked when evaluating the significance of this archaeological resource. Although some archaeological data may remain within the locus, eligibility for listing on the National Register of Historic Places is non-existent.

#### Segment D

Segment D of the Route 273 realignment project is a short segment running from Route 7, through a fallow field, to the present ROW of Route 273. The surface survey of this site revealed a single locus, Locus D-1, that contained eroded quartz cobbles and broken quartz chunks. Although many of these quartz pieces could have been utilized by prehistoric man, an examination of those removed to the lab indicates that no aboriginal modification has occurred. Those questionable pieces found at Locus D-1 are listed in Appendix A.