

V. SUMMARY DISCUSSION

This report provides a summary of data recovery excavations conducted by Rutgers University at the Gabor Site in New Castle County, Delaware. Rutgers conducted fieldwork in 1993 and initiated analysis shortly thereafter. Rutgers prepared portions of a final report, though these efforts were never completed. URS resumed analysis and preparation of a final report on the data recovery excavations in 2002 at the request of the Delaware Department of Transportation (DelDOT). As noted in Chapter 1, several problems were encountered with the original notes and other supporting documentation from Rutgers' fieldwork. In many ways, such discrepancies hampered analysis and clear insights into some of the issues that might have been addressed if a single group of researchers had carried the work to completion. However, certain issues, identified in URS' proposal submitted to DelDOT, were treated in the analysis of the materials recovered by Rutgers. This chapter provides a summary discussion of the research issues that could be addressed with the recovered material and supporting documentation, beginning with site formation and chronology, nature of present occupations, and the use of a landform through time by multiple groups. As Chapter 4 features a discussion of pithouses, they will not be reviewed again here.

MICRO-BAND, MACRO-BAND, AND SETTLEMENT CONCEPTS AS APPLIED TO GABOR SITE COMPONENTS

“The built environment provides one of the major means by which people construct for themselves a sense of place, but it is not essential. Foraging groups have no use for such investments of energy and their sense of location embraces the whole environment.”

Roxana Waterson

In an ideal, anthropologically informed archaeology, an effort to link patterning in the record to some kind of meaningful social units with referents in the real world should be attempted. Much of the archaeological record in the Middle Atlantic region, including Delaware, refers to sites or components within sites as one or more varieties of base camps, forays, exploitative locations, etc. Custer formalized such terms in his several publications leading to the use of macro-band base camps, micro-band base camps, villages, etc. (Custer 1989). Some consideration of the use of these and other terms, along with their application to the components from the Gabor Site, is presented in the following paragraphs. Ethnographic literature provides a starting point for creating a more-detailed understanding of these settlement types.

Although there may be some dispute about the level of sociocultural integration during the Late Woodland, Native-American societies existing at the time of historic contact can be characterized in many ways as having a basic social organization centered on the house as the primary domestic unit. In this sense, these were “house societies,” a concept embedded in the works of Levi-Strauss (cf. 1983) and elaborated upon in Hugh-Jones and Carsten (1995:1 – 46). Descola (1996:108 – 135) also discusses the importance of the house for social organization. The “house” provides the nexus of intersection between descent and affiliation, production and

consumption, and the locus of ritual life. As an architectural entity, it “houses” the personnel or household members involved in the pursuit of day-to-day tasks. The house as a built structure can serve not only as a domicile in which such activities take place, but also as a metaphor for a conception of the universe (that is, the house as map of the cosmos). In the political vein, Waterson argues that whether a society is egalitarian or hierarchically ranked, the concept of house society can be employed as an organizing concept (Waterson 1995:56). The concept of a house society and its extensions is applicable to the Middle Atlantic, in that it forms a conceptual grid to view the succession of occupation within the landscape through time.

It is certain that both prehorticultural as well as horticultural societies in the Middle Atlantic region and Delmarva Peninsula constructed one or more kinds of domiciles for dwelling and ritual purposes. The archaeological record of such architectural entities, however (despite the pithouse dispute noted herein and elsewhere), is scant. Most well-documented structures for the Middle Atlantic and surrounding regions date to the Late Woodland period, though exceptions exist (Barse and Marston 2001 and McLearn 1991 for Early Woodland structures). It should be assumed, though, that base camps would have been recognizable by the presence of house forms of one type or another. House societies (be they longhouse groups in the South American tropics or in Southeast Asia) are usually internally differentiated by nuclear family groups or, as some investigators have termed them, hearth groups. Indeed, the hearth serves as a focal point, providing not only warmth, but also the necessary energy for cooking food, smoking meat or fish, and providing a modicum of light.

As a subunit within a group house (longhouse), the hearth can be seen as an organizing principal for viewing smaller, extra-local loci of temporary habitation away from the house. In this aspect, a map for understanding a model of landscape use is implicit, and certainly implied in Descola’s statement, “*The House is...the periodically displaced center of a network of forest paths and trails, the temporary focus, the starting point for using the surrounding space*” (Descola 1996:126, emphasis added). Thus, while the concept of “house” implies fixity in space, its individual members can move throughout the landscape. Both Waterson’s statement above on the concept of the whole environment (or landscape) and Descola’s mention of using surrounding space provide a useful map or model of understanding how micro-band camps might be treated in the Middle Atlantic region.

Small camps found away from large villages, the macro-band base camps, can be thought of as subdivisions of the house family group focused around a hearth. The pursuit of hunting or exploitation of various resources from the local environment surrounding the fixed center of the household is usually conducted (in the ethnographic realm) by small task groups, usually pairs of men from the same household, who may establish temporary overnight camps at various points on the landscape removed from the house site (or macro-band base camp). These men can be considered as mobile subdivisions or extensions of the house, focused around a hearth. In ongoing research in Venezuela, Barse has documented a number of temporary, overnight camps situated along small streams and away from village settings (macro-band base camps). The common denominator of such camps is a hearth and low density of discarded food remains. Temporary structures, such as lean-tos, were constructed in most cases; archaeologically, these are characterized by an abundance of FCR and little else.

These temporary camps can be equated with micro-band camps or exploitation camps used in the Delmarva Peninsula. Although the archaeological signature is somewhat different, given the lack of stone tool use, the structure of space around the South American overnight hearth sites is quite regular from camp to camp, suggesting that a basic pattern can be inferred for other sites.

The several occupations dating to the Middle and Late Archaic at the Gabor Site, some of which are spatially discrete, can be compared to the small, overnight camps Barse and others document in the South American tropics. Basic function of the Middle Archaic components at the site is unclear, given the poor degree of contextual resolution that would allow associating other artifact classes with diagnostic projectile points. The moderate-to-severe amount of curation exhibited by the points is of interest, in that it suggests preservation of raw materials, even quartz. Perhaps minimal retooling was carried out, with discard of exhausted specimens. Limited stone-tool manufacture and/or resharpening are considered tasks that would have been embedded in the behavioral repertoire of a hunting camp.

The Bare Island and Poplar Island Late Archaic components perhaps represent additional short-term hunting camps (micro-band camps). While all the Bare Island points are finished specimens, some of the Poplar Island points are clearly late-stage preforms, all manufactured from local chert. Given the proximity of the Iron Hill outcrops, localized exploitation of this lithic material may have been carried out during the course of several occupations dating to the Poplar Island components at the site. Several cores of local chert may be part of this group of components dating to the Late Archaic period. It is probable that this kind of site use continued into the Late Archaic/Transitional period, represented by Perkiomen and Susquehanna points, though these are not numerically common compared to the Poplar Island and Bare Island components.

The final component to be considered is the Late Woodland Riggins occupation. Although no structural features were documented, the component is best viewed as a hamlet, or single-family habitation, perhaps occupied for a short period of time. The presence or absence of a small structure of some kind is uncertain. Indeed, short-term, single-component occupations dating to the Late Woodland have been poorly investigated. The so-called pithouses are certainly not associated with this component. The one sizable hearth feature found in close association with ceramics implies some duration extending beyond an overnight or short-term occupation, such as those discovered in the earlier components. The relatively low number of discrete vessels recovered from a tight cluster of excavation units, and the nearly complete lack of ceramics from the rest of the site, point to a very small and limited occupation at that time. Using Custer's terminology, this component can be viewed as a micro-band base camp.

In brief, the Gabor Site can be considered as part of a larger geographic landscape utilized through time (Archaic and Woodland time) by small groups, each representing a segment of a larger household or extended family organization that sought to utilize-exploit, if you will- whatever resources were available be it lithic materials, fauna, or any one of a wide variety of plant resource. The archeological signature of any one of these small occupations would be small and spatially discrete, an image that certainly is conveyed by the debitage *Surfer* maps presented in Chapter 4. Considering such small concentrations scattered across the landscape that the Gabor Site contains as parts of larger social entities identified as "house societies"

provides a model for further investigation of micro-band base camps in the Middle Atlantic region and greater Eastern United states.