INTRODUCTION

This report describes the research, excavation, and results of the final archaeological excavations at the Mermaid Tavern Site Complex, located at the intersection of Limestone Road (State Route 7) and Old Mermaid-Stoney Batter Road (Figure 1, Plate 1). The intersection and Route 7 were slated to be improved by the Delaware Department of Transportation, and archaeological investigations were required before such improvements could be implemented. Three distinct but related historical archaeological sites were located at the intersection and comprised the site complex: the Mermaid Tavern (7NC-D-106A), the Mermaid Blacksmith Shop and Stable (7NC-D-106B), and the Mermaid Wheelwright Shop (7NC-D-106C) (Figure 2, Appendix I). The project was funded by the Delaware Department of Transportation (DelDOT) and the Federal Highway Administration and all excavations were conducted by archaeologists from the University of Delaware, Center for Archaeological Research (UDCAR). Field investigations at the Blacksmith Shop were conducted during the summer of 1989, and field investigations at the Wheelwright Shop were undertaken in the summer of 1990. No further archaeological testing was necessary at the Mermaid Tavern site itself (located on the west side of Limestone Road). Phase I testing at the intersection was originally conducted in 1985 by UDCAR, but was curtailed due to access difficulties (Catts et al. 1986:153-160). At that time, it was recommended that additional investigations be undertaken at the Wheelwright Shop and Blacksmith Shop sites to fulfill regulatory obligations under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

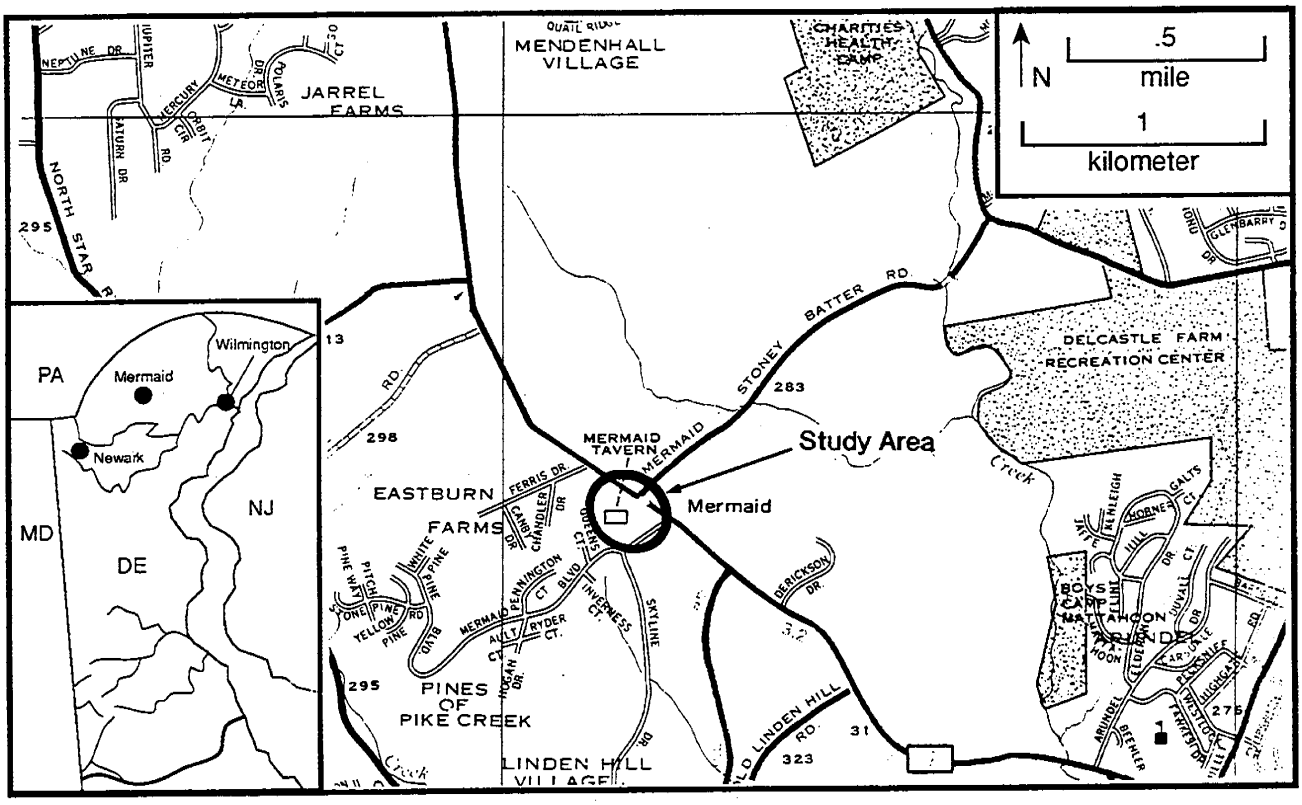
The following report will be presented in several sections. A general environmental setting for the Mermaid intersection will be described, followed by a localized historic background study placing the intersection and Mill Creek Hundred in an overall historical context. Each of the archaeological investigations at the sites will be presented separately, including discussions of the archaeological remains and features, the artifacts recovered, and interpretations and analyses of the sites.

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

The Mermaid intersection is located in the Delaware Piedmont Uplands. The local environmental setting presented here is largely taken from the 1985 archaeological investigations of

FIGURE 1

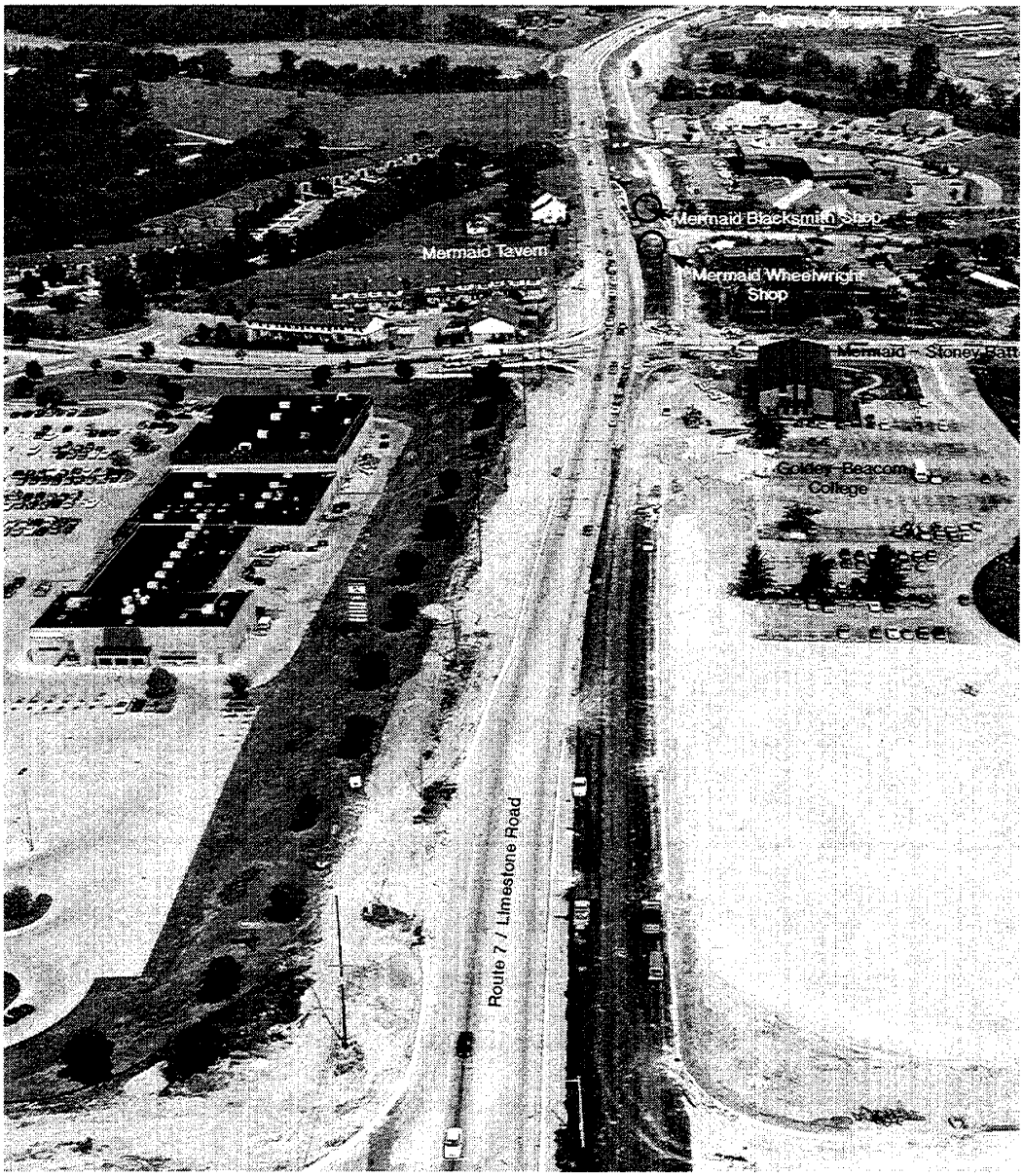
Study Area Location



Route 7 North (Catts et al. 1986). The Piedmont Uplands of Delaware represent the northernmost portion of the Delmarva Peninsula and are characterized by a diversified relief dissected by narrow stream valleys with isolated knolls rising above the general upland level (Spoljaric 1967:3). Thornbury (1965:88) notes that within the Piedmont Uplands there are no large tributaries of the older incised river systems, the Susquehanna and the Delaware. Instead, there are a number of smaller, lower order drainage systems. Some large floodplains can be found along some of the higher order streams such as the White Clay Creek and the Brandywine, Elk, and Northeast rivers. However, these setting are not common. Elevation differences of up to 82 meters (270 feet) can be found between small floodplains of the numerous drainages and the tops of the adjacent knolls, and these elevation differences are sufficient to cause changes in tree community distributions (Braun 1967:192-194). Soils of the Piedmont Uplands can generally be characterized as well-drained with some poorly-drained areas in floodplains and upland flats.

PLATE 1

Aerial View of Project Area, 1992

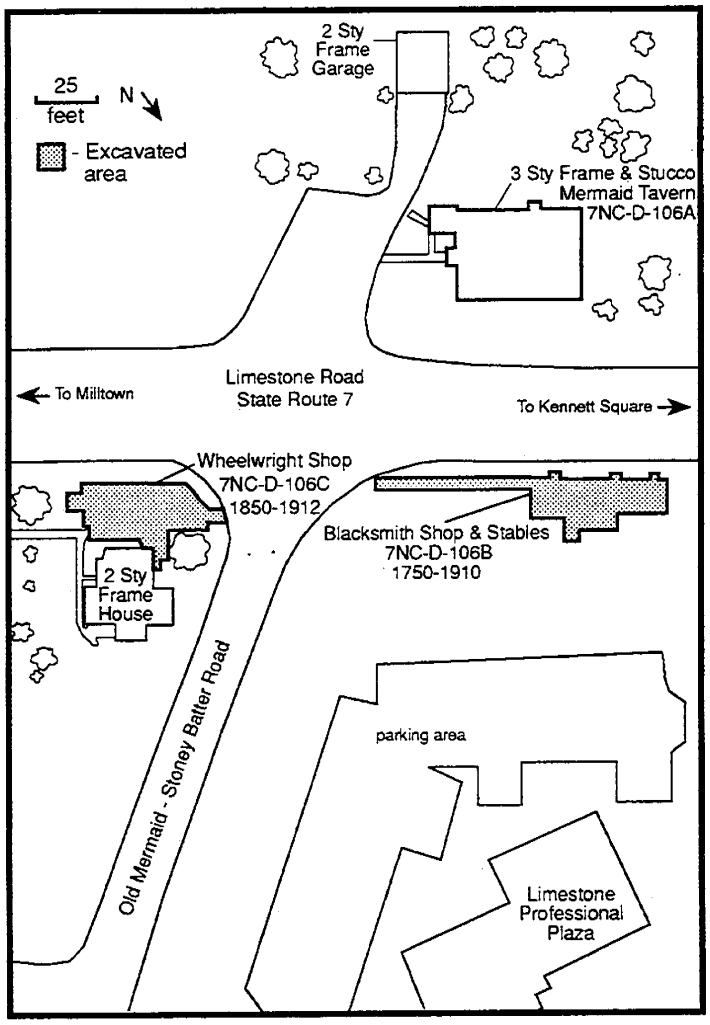


Route 7 from Milltown to the Pennsylvania State line represents a transect of the Piedmont Uplands running north from the Fall Line. Figure 3 shows a cross-section of the study area topography. For the most part, the study area consists of rolling hills and ephemeral stream channels.

The Mermaid intersection sits between the Mill Creek drainage to the east and the Pike Creek drainage to the west. The site complex is situated on a portion of a prominent, relatively flat ridge that extends in a north-to-southeast direction. Limestone Road (State Route 7) is constructed along this

Figure 2

Project Area Location Showing Mermaid Tavern Site Complex (7NC-D-106A, B and C)



ridge. The topography of the area ascends steadily to just north of the State Route 72-Limestone Road intersection. Adjacent to this ridge, the topography is diversified by numerous small ridge and valley combinations.

The hydrology of the Mermaid site Complex is comprised of three major drainages: Pike Creek, Mill Creek, and Ball Run. These water courses are roughly parallel to the ridge and Limestone Road (Figure 4). The streams flow generally north to south from Mermaid to where they drain into White Clay Creek. Ball Run joins Mill Creek just prior to Mill Creek's confluence with White Clay Creek. These water courses are fed by numerous lesser order streams and ephemeral drainages typical of the region's topography.

The soils present at the Mermaid intersection consist of Glenelg and Manor loams with 3 to 15 percent slopes, and are moderately eroded. The soils are part of the Glenelg-Manor-Chester association (Matthews and Lavoie 1970). The soils were, and still are, very conducive to agricultural pursuits; historically, farming was intensive. Hay fields, pastures and woodlots once existed in areas too steep to farm.

Until quite recently, the environment of the project area had been overwhelmingly rural, consisting of dispersed homes, agricultural fields, woods and pastures, and some limited commercial and/or industrial facilities, such as mushroom farms or limestone quarries and kilns. Within the last three decades, however, considerable residential and commercial development has taken place, and the

FIGURE 3

Topographic Cross-Section

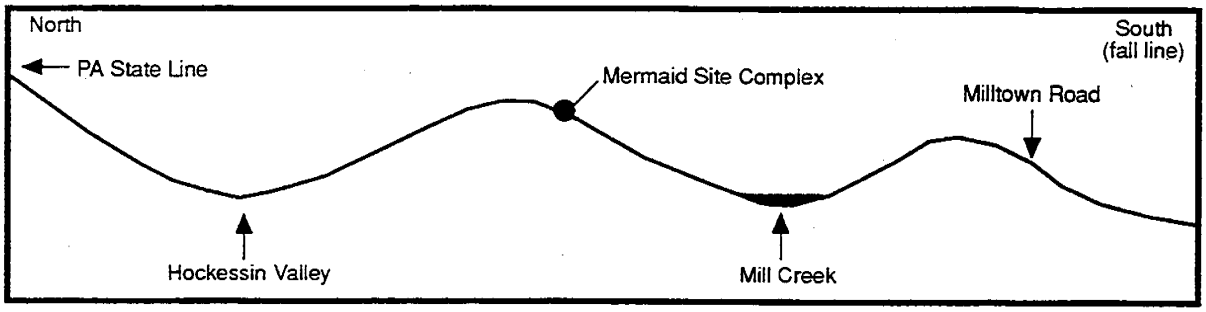
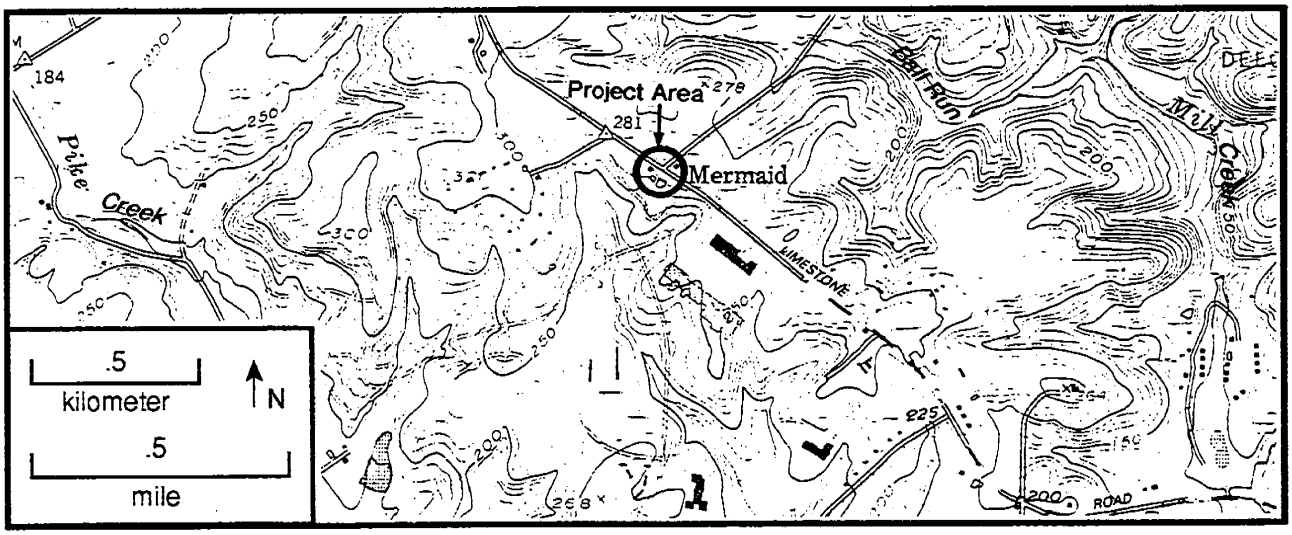


FIGURE 4

Topographic Map of the Project Area



area has assumed the characteristics of a suburban landscape, with housing subdivisions, businesses and commercial complexes, schools, and professional centers dominating the once rural environment. The change from rural to suburban is readily apparent at the Mermaid intersection. Directly behind the site of the Blacksmith shop is a professional center, and at the location of the Wheelwright shop is the Bellini shrubbery and flower nursery.