



# THE DATUM POINT

Newsletter of the  
NORTHERN VIRGINIA CHAPTER OF THE  
ARCHEOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF VIRGINIA

Chapter Website – [www.nvcasv.org](http://www.nvcasv.org)

March 2011

## FROM THE PRESIDENT – JOHN KELSEY

I can tell from the poison ivy on my arms that spring is almost here. We're blessed with excellent digging opportunities at Colchester and Westbrook – both historic and prehistoric. Colchester has enlisted a total of 23 volunteers and logged over 400 volunteer hours in February, a short and sometimes nasty month. Overall, County volunteers logged approximately 670 hours, counting Colchester, Westbrook, and lab work at the James Lee Center. Beyond the personal satisfaction that we get as volunteers, this is eloquent testimony to the contribution that volunteers make to the County, and it sends a strong message to County officials as we approach another budget cycle. As the weather improves, I hope to see many of you at both sites. See updates from both sites later in this edition.

By the way, the Mike Johnson poison ivy treatment really does help, as I've unfortunately had a recent opportunity to learn. See Mike's article later in this edition.

At our February meeting, the members present approved a new set of Chapter bylaws. Our webmaster, Diane Schug-O'Neill, has posted them on our website.

Beyond the normal March meeting, with the always interesting Patrick O'Neill as our speaker, there are several upcoming events to highlight:

- A group of us will be spending a week at the Gault prehistoric site outside of Austin, Texas from March 28<sup>th</sup> to April 1<sup>st</sup>. Gault is a fantastic place – one of the premier Paleo sites in North America. It's not too late to sign up, if you're interested. Feel free to contact me or Mike Johnson for details.
- On Saturday, April 16<sup>th</sup>, the Fairfax County Cultural Resources Management and Protection Office (i.e., Liz Crowell and her group) will be hosting a

symposium on local archaeology that promises to be very interesting. A highlight will be the keynote address by Dr. Dennis Stanford, Head of the Division of Archaeology and Director of the Paleoindian/Paleoecology program at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History. He will be talking about current work around the Chesapeake Bay and how it fits into the "Origins of the First Americans." He is an engaging and provocative speaker, and I think you'll all enjoy his talk. More information on the symposium will follow later.

- Don't forget the Chapter field trip to historic St. Mary's City on Saturday, April 30<sup>th</sup>. We'll have a speaker on their archaeology program and a tour of major portions of the site. I'll be asking for sign-ups by email later this month.

**Because of these two activities in April, we will not hold our normal Chapter meeting in that month.**

## MARCH 9, 2011 PRESENTATION CHAPMAN'S MILL By Patrick O'Neill



**FIELD SCHOOL**  
**SCHOLARSHIP ANNOUNCEMENT**

**By Will Nelson**

Everyone is reminded that funds are available to support attendance at field schools and for research projects. The Williams-Mullen Memorial Field Study Scholarship Fund's application deadline is April 1st. More information about it and the Rubis-Fuller Research Fund is available online at [www.nvcasv.org](http://www.nvcasv.org). To apply for support from either of these funds, you have to fill out an application and send it to me for presentation to the Chapter. I can be contacted at: [wnelson095@gmail.com](mailto:wnelson095@gmail.com). Both application forms are on the Chapter website. Please allow time to receive, publish, and vote on applications at a Chapter meeting.

**COLCHESTER UPDATE**

**By the Colchester Archaeological Research Team**

February was an eventful month for C.A.R.T. First and foremost, crew seems to be ever-expanding with permanent staff, interns, and volunteers. Last month Robin Kuprewicz joined the historic team. Her extensive experience and positive attitude have already proved a welcome addition. Likewise, Michael Burmeister and Justin Herbst, George Mason University interns, joined the fold along with four interns from a local high school. We anticipate more interns from other institutions of higher learning as we expand our educational role.

Finally, new volunteers arrive weekly. Combined with our merry bunch of regulars, over 400 hours of volunteer time were logged in February. This near-record breaking number was achieved despite this being the shortest and one of the coldest months of the year. Most of our volunteers are affiliated with the ASV Northern Virginia Chapter, again proving the benefit of our relationship.



Historic Crew members Robin Kuprewicz and Megan Veness Excavating a Test Unit in Old Colchester

Fieldwork proceeds forward, with truly important gains for both the historic and prehistoric crews. On the historic side, we are splitting our time between multiple sites. During the early part of the week we visit some of the smaller sites in the park; later in the week, we return to the town site. We are gaining extensive knowledge and accumulating mounds of data (and back dirt) on the historic port town of Colchester. The shift from work along the road towards the south side of town has proven the richness of the resource with the identification of additional colonial period artifacts and features.

Work on the large prehistoric site continues to add layers of complexity to an already fascinating site. The prehistoric team is discovering that the true geographic expanse of the site is considerably greater than originally suggested. Also, testing is exposing variegated stratigraphy across the site. This data will be an important element not only to determining site taphonomy, but to understanding the process of site formation on the coastal plain and in the Occoquan basin.



ASV Volunteers Expose a Feature on the Historic Town Site

Our efforts are tireless and March is shaping up to be an equally busy month. CART is attending the Middle Atlantic Archaeological Conference in Ocean City from March 18 – 20. We will have a table in the book room and will be spreading the word about all that we have accomplished to date and our future plans. As the weather improves, we anticipate even more volunteer help, allowing us to learn more about the cultural resources within the Old Colchester Park and Preserve.

We remain grateful for all the assistance we have received from the ASV. Anyone interested in coming out to play with us need only attend a brief orientation. These can be conducted on site, Thursdays through Saturdays. To schedule an orientation or, for the oriented, to let us know you would like to lend a hand, send an email to us at [CART.volunteers@gmail.com](mailto:CART.volunteers@gmail.com) so we can put you on the calendar. As usual, you can follow our will follow our progress on our blog, <http://cartarchaeology.blogspot.com/>. Thanks for the help and support!

## **WESTBROOK UPDATE**

**By Mike Johnson**

Recently we have been working both on the transect interval sample grid, completing out through the N290 transect of 10x10-foot interval, 1x1-foot square samples, and two block excavations. We continue to get evidence of a new occupation area at

the northeast corner of the grid. So far it consists of increased fire cracked rocks, quartz and quartzite stone artifacts and Culpeper pottery. The location is on the highest and one of the flatter parts of the site.

Volunteers from Thunderbird have completed 20 square feet of a new section of block B with the block datum at N180E260. They have recovered one notched quartz point fragment in the dry screens and two probably Culpeper sherds in the lab sort. The debitage and tool counts are averaging about half that of the block B square centered on the N170E250 datum.

County volunteers have been working on block C at the southwest corner (N185E295 datum) of the pitted hornfels concentration. The block appears to be more diverse in raw material and tools. The attached artifacts are among the more recent diagnostics. Note that the Late Woodland triangular point came from the block B square at datum N170E250.





**MARGARET RICHARDSON'S**  
**POISON IVY CURE**  
**By Mike Johnson**

About 30 years ago I had numerous and repeated severe reactions to poison ivy. Having contracted thirteen cases in 1980 and nine in 1981, I began to call it “archeologist’s disease.” However, in 1981, after finding that “Poison Ivy Anonymous” meant giving up archeology altogether, I began the long trek toward a cure.

I had been victimized by P.I. since before college. My parents used the time-worn (useless) “cure,” Calamine Lotion. I even tried Caladryl with no better results. It relieved the itching for less than a minute. In college I got a severe case from burning the stuff. Being a college student with limited brain functions, I used bleach, which substituted burns for blisters. College students will do all kinds of stupid things under duress.

In grad school I had to go to the doctor for a shot, because I caught a case between my fingers, when I had a thesis deadline. Imagine trying to type a thesis with huge P.I. blisters between your typing fingers.

I was re-introduced to P.I. in Fairfax County, after having spent several years in the Navy and working as a federal bureaucrat. Those were jobs in which cases of P.I. are (for obvious reason) rare.

In the early days of local government archeology, the Fairfax County Archeological Survey was at the bottom of the automobile food chain. We got what seemed like a pre-air conditioning pick-up truck for our field work. Besides shimmying uncontrollably each time it hit a rut, pot hole or bump, the truck eventually proved to be the only vehicle (sic) I had for relieving poison ivy.

It began one hot summer afternoon after doing a field reconnaissance. I had a normal case of itching blisters on my forearms, hands and between my fingers. On that day I had to park the truck in the sun. As a result, the vinyl seat was quite hot. I inadvertently put my arm on the top edge of the seat back and found immediate relief from the sweaty, itchy P.I. For days I made a fool of myself driving

The two pieces of a Hellgrammite-like point (ca. 3000 BP) were recovered from the wet screen sort and missed in the field. The four artifacts pictured together below were recovered from the same 1 x 10 foot transect in the new Block C, which is at the edge of the pitted hornfels concentration. They may all date to the Savannah River period, approximately 4000 BP.



The huge question is, why were Middle Woodland people living on that ridge so far away from the nearby stream, Big Rocky Run? The Ellen Turner site (44FX2560) in the Sully Woodlands Park next to Cox Farm in the Culpeper Basin is a similar site, although not quite as intense. It was tested and found to be approximately 250x800 feet in size on a long ridge crest even further away from the nearest stream, Elklick Run. No diagnostic artifacts were recovered there, so we do not know the site's age. It too had significant amounts of hornfels artifacts.

down the road putting my arm and the back of my hand on the hot seat and dashboard. That worked until they cooled to the point of being useless for anything but a seat and dashboard.

Later I discovered that turning on the burners on the stove and hovering my afflicted hands and arms a “safe” distance over the flames was a more reliable method – it was not practical to spend all of my summer daylight hours in the County truck. The key was to leave the afflicted area over the heat until it stopped feeling great; i.e., the spot did not itch either. Ironically, the most important side benefit was that the heat felt better than scratching.

The method involved a procedure that helped get me through the day and to sleep at night. I would take the cure in the morning before going to work and in the evening before going to bed. It did not get rid of the problem immediately but made the days and nights much more comfortable. I found that it worked best the hotter it got. As a result, when I had poison ivy I had no hair on the back of my hands, the hair having all been singed off. By the way, I once tried hot water in the shower and ended up with a worse case than before.

After many years of using this method with acceptable results, one of our volunteers, Malcolm (Rich) Richardson, who was particularly sensitive to P.I. called me in desperation. He had been out helping Doug Owsley excavate an historic site. He had contracted a particularly virulent case. It is important to note that abandoned historic sites (Rich was an historical archeologist) are often loaded with the evil weed (P.I.) and numerous other evil weeds, most with thorns.

Rich heard that I had discovered a cure and wanted me to reveal it. When I told him about my stove burner method he indignantly stated that “no way was he going to do that.” It seems that it had spread to parts of his body that were inconvenient to be putting over a stove burner. I told him that beyond that I could not help him.

Several days later Rich called me. He was excited. Clearly his bout of P.I.-induced depression was over. He said that he had a better and safer cure than I was using. He had told his wife, Margaret,

about our conversation. He related to me that she responded, “Rich, you dummy, why don’t you use my hair dryer?” He claimed that it ended his misery and the P.I.

After making the shift to “Margaret’s (more civilized) Poison Ivy Cure” I went beyond mere relief to eliminating each case in days and eventually hours. The method is the same as with the stove burner but merely substituting a hair dryer.

I still do the same kind of archeology and have not had a case of P.I. in this century. It is not clear if that is due to a newly acquired immunity, successful avoidance, or pure luck.

The important thing is that P.I. is no longer a central part of my summer life.

## **NVC/ASV CHAPTER OFFICERS**

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## **Other Public Archaeological Programs in N. Va.**

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Alexandria Museum	Pam Cressey	<a href="mailto:pamela.cressey@alexandriava.gov">pamela.cressey@alexandriava.gov</a> 703-838-4399 (information)

## **NVC/ASV MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION**

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Return to:  
NVC/Archeological Society of Virginia  
2855 Annandale Rd.  
Falls Church, VA 22042

**Chapter members should join our parent organization, the Archeological Society of Virginia.**  
**[asv-archeology.org](http://asv-archeology.org)**

**The Chapter meets at 7:30p.m. on the second Wednesday of each month at the James Lee Center at the above address.**

**EVERYONE IS WELCOME!!!!**

## **THE DATUM POINT**

Northern Virginia Chapter  
Archeological Society of Virginia  
2855 Annandale Rd.  
Falls Church, VA 22042

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