

Archaeological Investigations at Biscoe Gray Heritage Farm Uncover Rare Evidence for Native Architecture

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Archaeologists from St. Mary's College of Maryland in conjunction with the Calvert County Natural Resources Division spent several weeks in October testing an important Native American archaeological site. Overlooking Battle Creek, the site appears to have been occupied from as early as ca. 200 CE until 1300 CE. The purpose of the investigations was to collect additional information about the site and its function in preparation for nominating the site to the National Register of Historic Places.

The investigations yielded thousands of fragments of oyster shell, stone artifacts, and ceramic vessel fragments. Perhaps the most exciting find consisted of a linear series of post molds presumably associated with long-vanished architecture at the site. These post molds, ranging from 3 to 4 inches in diameter, were spaced approximately 8 inches apart. Architecture from these early centuries is relatively rare in the Chesapeake. Its presence at Biscoe Gray Heritage Farm enhances the historical significance of the park.

Although the site is relatively small in size, measuring only a couple hundred feet in length and extending only a short distance from the creek bank, the thick deposits of shell and numbers of stone and lithic artifacts indicates that this site was repeatedly visited for several centuries on a seasonal basis before an as-yet-unexplained abandonment.

At the time the site appears to have gone out of use, major changes were happening in the Native American world of the Middle Atlantic. Groups from west of the fall line appear to have been migrating into the Potomac River's inner coastal plain, and these migrations may be related to the reasons the site at Biscoe Gray was abandoned. Whatever the reason, the preservation of this important property will insure that scientists will have the opportunity to research this question.

The archaeological investigations at Biscoe Gray have been funded by a very generous grant from the National Park Service. Today's indigenous descendants, including the Piscataway Conoy Tribe of Maryland, have been intimately involved with the work and joined Calvert County and SMCM in an Open House held at the site in mid-October.