

**In the Shadow of Vroomans Nose:
Recent Excavations at the Bohringer Site,
Schoharie County, New York**

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Abstract

Birchwood Archaeological Services recently conducted excavations as part of a buried irrigation line project at the Bohringer Site, located south of the village of Middleburgh in Schoharie County, New York. The site was formerly the subject of a series of archaeological investigations performed by the Iroquois Indian Museum, who identified an 18th century Mohawk occupation and a French and Indian War fort as well as a series of precontact occupations dating from the Early Woodland through the period of European contact. This more recent archaeological undertaking proved a success due, in part, to the close cooperation of members of Iroquois Indian Museum. The 2009 investigations at the Bohringer Site provided a valuable opportunity to supplement our knowledge of this important site. Results of these recent excavations include a radiocarbon date obtained from a stratified ash feature that appears to be associated with the nearby Nahrwold Site, while fragments of pottery recovered may be associated with a significant find made by the Museum during their excavations in the 1980s.

Introduction

In 2009 Birchwood Archaeological Services conducted archaeological investigations for the New York State Office of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service as part of a farm improvement project at the Bohringer Site, located south of the Village of Middleburgh in Schoharie County, New York (Figure 1). The site is situated along a floodplain at the base of large cliff face known as “Vroomans Nose.” The Bohringer Site was the home of an 18th century Mohawk community as well as a French and Indian War era fort, and also contains artifacts dating as far back as the Late Archaic Period.

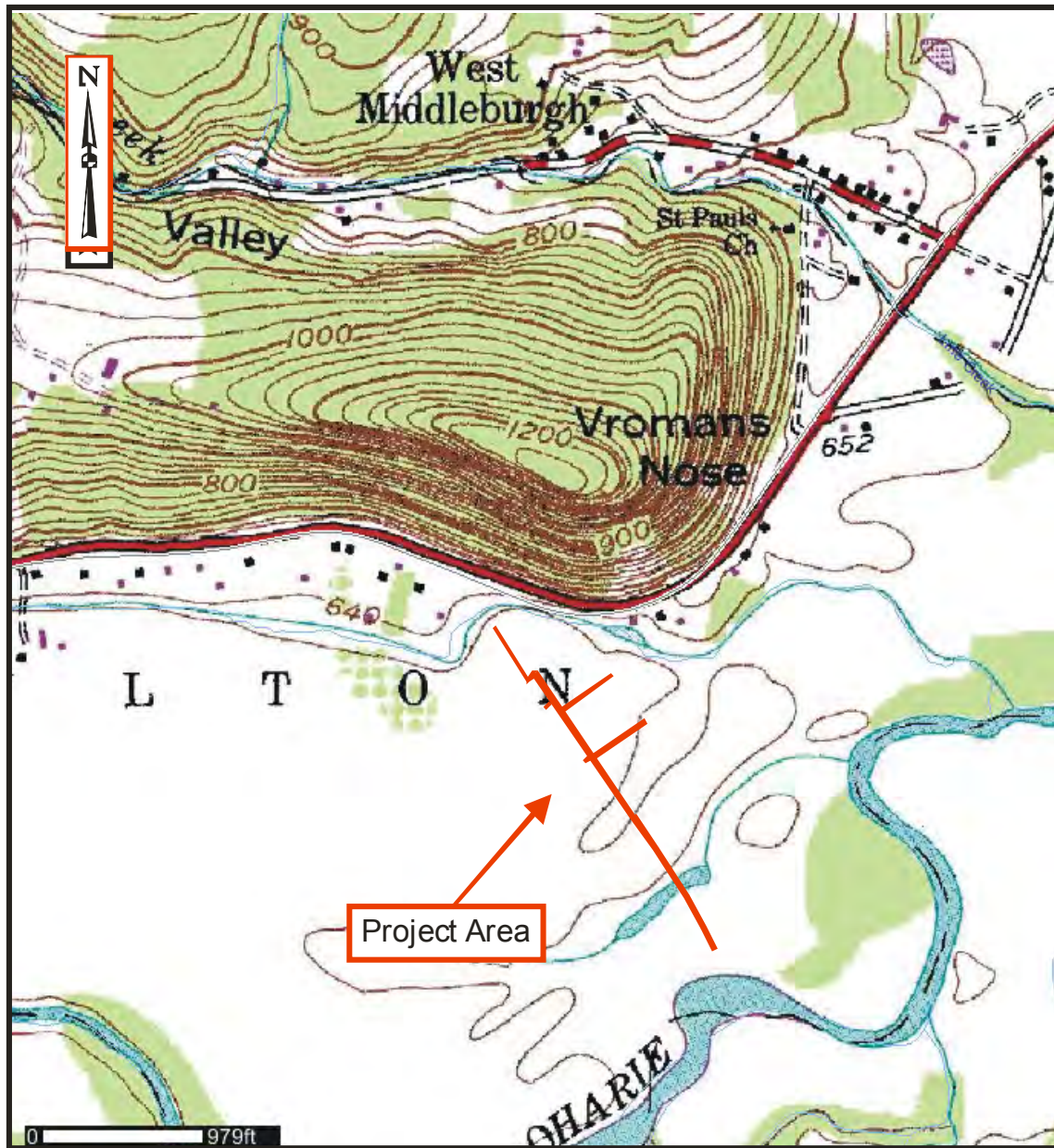


Figure 1. Map showing the location of the project on Middleburgh USGS topographic map.

Vroomans Nose is an imposing natural feature along the landscape, and is considered one of the great geological and scenic wonders of the northern Catskills (Titus 2003:88). The nose was, and remains, an important element of the physical and spiritual landscape to native people today. The Mohawks refer to Vroomans Nose as **Onitstenhrakara:wen**, meaning “an opening in the rocks” (Beauchamp 1907).

The first European to settle in the area was Adam Vrooman, who moved to the area from Schenectady in 1711. Vrooman initially purchased 260 acres from the Mohawks. This land included the cliff that now bears his name as well as the surrounding flats, which included the existing the Schoharie Mohawk village (Simms 1845:55 Figure 2). It is unclear why the Mohawks would have sold the ground from beneath their feet when land speculation in the valley was still in its earliest stages. Some evidence suggests that those Mohawks who signed the deed didn't live in Schoharie but further north in the Mohawk Valley, and they were actively trying to maintain their land base in that area, possibly to the detriment of Native people living elsewhere. Others contend that the Schoharie Mohawks anticipated the land grabs that were to come, and chose to sell to Peter Vrooman, who was well liked by Native neighbors, spoke fluent Mohawk as did his sons, and served as godparents to many native children (Ferguson 2009:48-19).

The property was the setting for a series of excavations conducted by the Iroquois Indian Museum in the 1980s and early 1990s under the direction of the late John Ferguson. In addition, the Bohringer family donated a collection of over 2,000 artifacts to the Iroquois Indian Museum, making it among the most well represented sites in the museum's collections. Several of the fantastic artifacts currently on display at the museum were recovered from the Bohringer Site. Excavations directed by Ferguson uncovered a host of interesting artifacts and features, which have been summarized in a recent book published by the Iroquois Museum (Ferguson 2009). In addition to providing archaeological information, the book also contains a wealth of social history, and documents the gradual loss of Mohawk homelands in the Schoharie Valley in the wake of increasing social and political tensions.

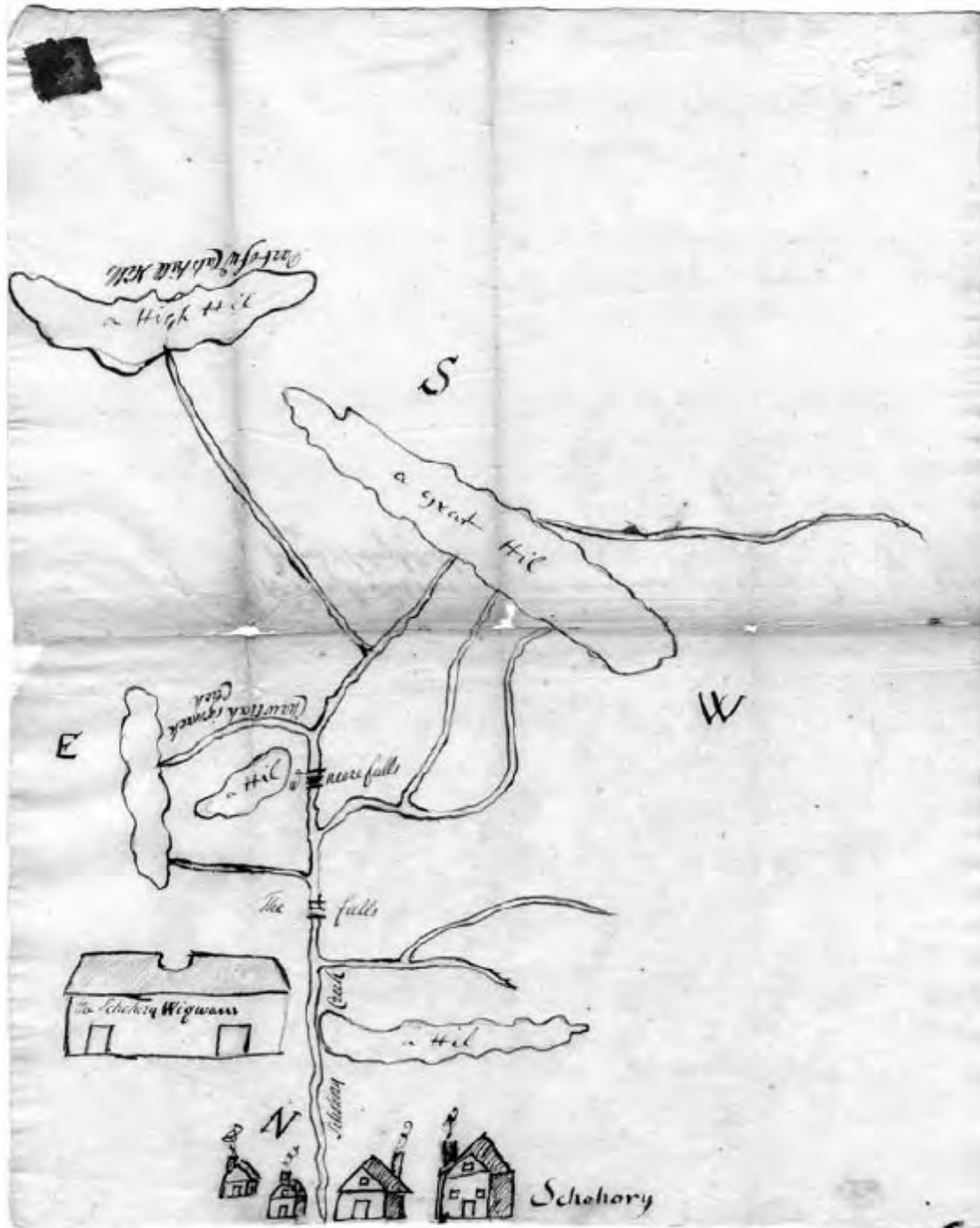


Figure 2. 1734 Map showing the Schoharie Valley. The Mohawk village is erroneously shown on the wrong (east) side of the creek. From: *Petitions of the Sachems or Chiefs of the Schoharie Mohawk Indians* [1734]. New York State Archives, Albany.

Forts are now building in the Seneca's Country, at Onondaga, Oneida & Schohere. The Cayouga Indians have not yet applied, The Fort for the Aughquagas is upon the account of the Disturbances to the Southward, deferred till the meeting at Onondaga is over.

Memorandum on the back of the above letter.

100ft. square the Stockad^s P. or Ok 15ft. long 3 of wch. at least to be sunk in the ground well pounded & rammed & y^e 2 touching sides square so as to lay close Loop holes to be made 4 ft dis^e. ; 2 Bl. H^{ses}. 20ft. sq. below & above to project 1½ foot over y^e Beams well roofd & shingled & a good Sentry Box on the top of each. a good Gate of 3 In^e oak Pl. & iron hinges & a small Gate of Oak Plank of same thick^s.

Endorsed.

Fort Johnson May 28th. 1756

My Letter to the Lords
of Trade & Plantations
with Indn. Proceedings.

Figure 3. Description of the stockaded fort constructed on the Bohringer Site in 1756.

Among the more significant components investigated by the museum was the remains of a fort building constructed in 1756 as part of the French and Indian War (Figure 3). This fort once stood along the lower floodplain terrace between the Dovegaat and Schoharie Creek. Excavations conducted by Ferguson identified a rectangular configuration of hand wrought nails that appear to follow the approximate dimensions of the fort. No evidence of a log palisade was identified, and the lack of construction materials other than nails was interpreted as representing a fort made from sawed planks which was likely short lived and scavenged soon after abandonment, leaving little evidence remaining.

Much of the success of the project relied on the mutual cooperation between our office and the Archeology Department at the Iroquois Indian Museum in Howes Cave (Figure 4). Before we began any fieldwork for the initial survey, I sent Fred Stevens at the Iroquois Indian Museum a copy of a USGS map showing the project and asked him if he



Figure 4. Birchwood staff with members of the Iroquois Indian Museum.



Figure 5. Artifacts from the Tom Anderson Collection from the Bohringer Site.

knew of any sites in the area. The Iroquois Indian Museum maintains a separate site inventory from the New York State Museum or the state historic preservation office that is built primarily from their own research as well as from individuals bringing artifacts into the museum to be identified. As a result, the Iroquois Indian Museum inventory includes many sites that are not included in the other inventories, which are often built using historic information and data derived from contract archaeology surveys.

The Tom Anderson Collection from the Bohringer Site

We also invited the museum to visit our excavations and to give us a tour of their past investigations of the property. Among the avocationalists from the museum that we had the opportunity to talk with was Tom Anderson, who conducted a series of controlled surface collections on the Bohringer Site where he has collected over the past 30 years. Tom kept detailed notes regarding where each artifact was found along the landscape, and supplemented his notes with GPS coordinates of his find spots. Through the use of Tom's records and coordinates, we were able to create a map showing the location of each of his sites. We also photographed all of Anderson's collection from the property as grouped by site area. All of the above information was submitted along with the report to the state historic preservation office (Figure 5).

Anderson's collection makes an important contribution to our understanding of the site, as many of the artifacts donated by the Bohringer family did not have the level of provenience information that this collection has. Most significantly, the Anderson collection shows a greater diversity of point types than previously thought, with Late Archaic through Early Woodland point styles represented. It is these earlier points and their provenience information that suggests temporally specific occupation and activity areas along the landscape.

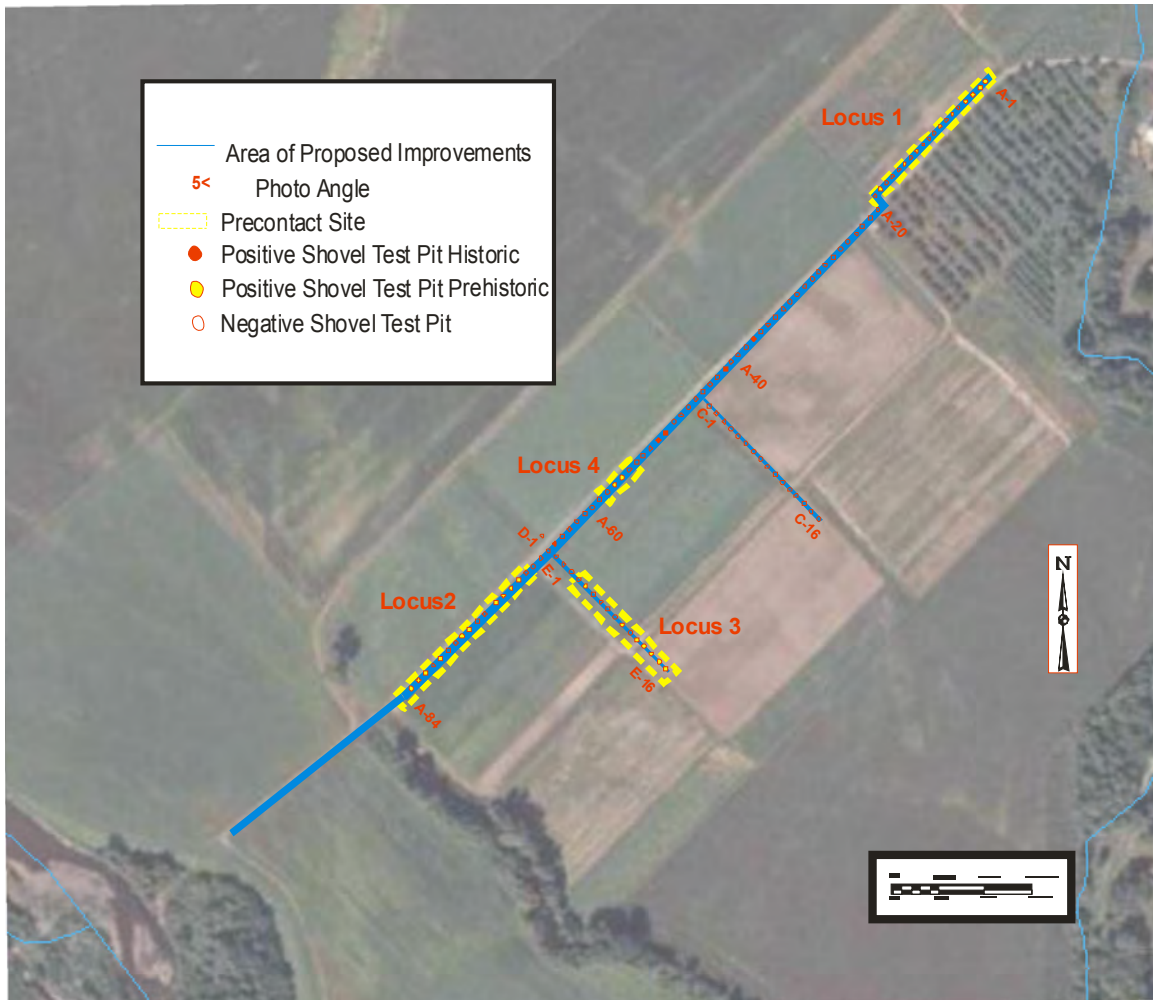


Figure 6. Map showing recent excavations at the Bohringer Site.

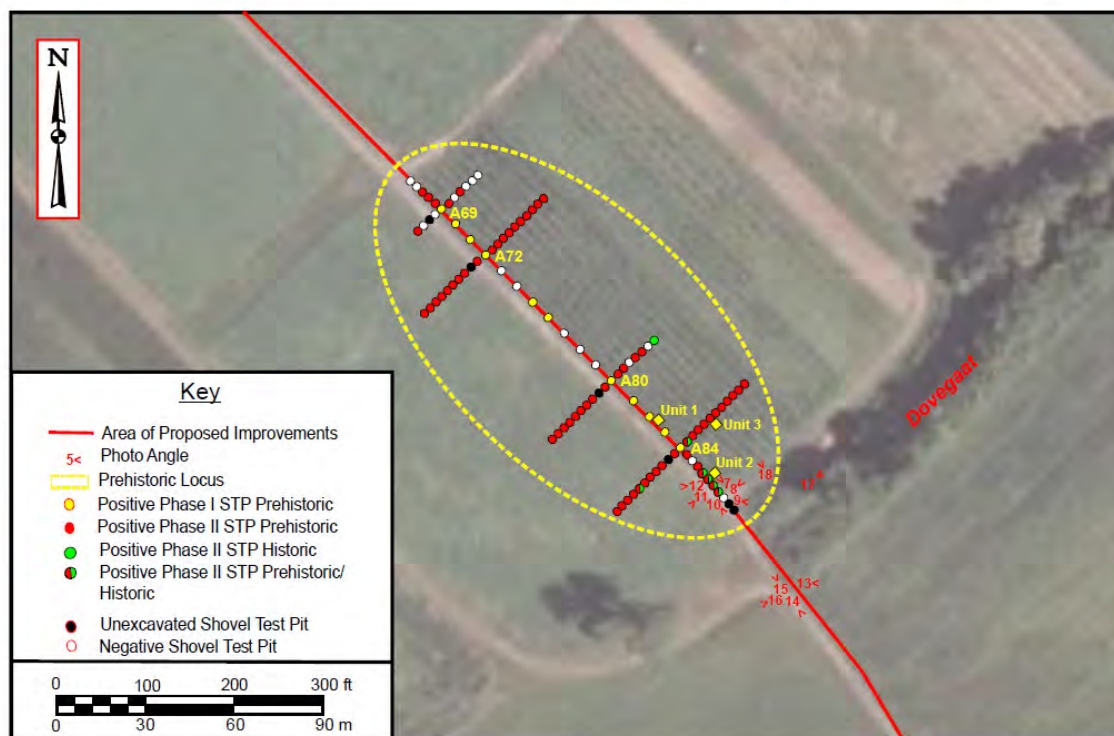


Figure 7. Map showing excavations at Locus 1.

Recent Archaeological Investigations

The current archaeological investigations were conducted as part of a construction project that involves burying an irrigation line along a series of gravel farm roads through the property (Figure 6). Our first step was to excavate along the route of the proposed waterline in 7.5 m (25 ft) intervals to try to find out where the artifact concentrations were. We identified four artifact concentrations along the route that appeared sufficiently large to be considered archaeological sites. The USDA had us do some additional testing at two of the four sites to determine if they were eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. Our plan was to continue excavating in 2 m intervals in all directions to try to find the site's boundaries and place units where we found tools or charcoal features.

We began by testing the northernmost site, Locus 1 (Figure 7). We continued to find a light density of chipped stone debitage but no evidence of charcoal or features. We then

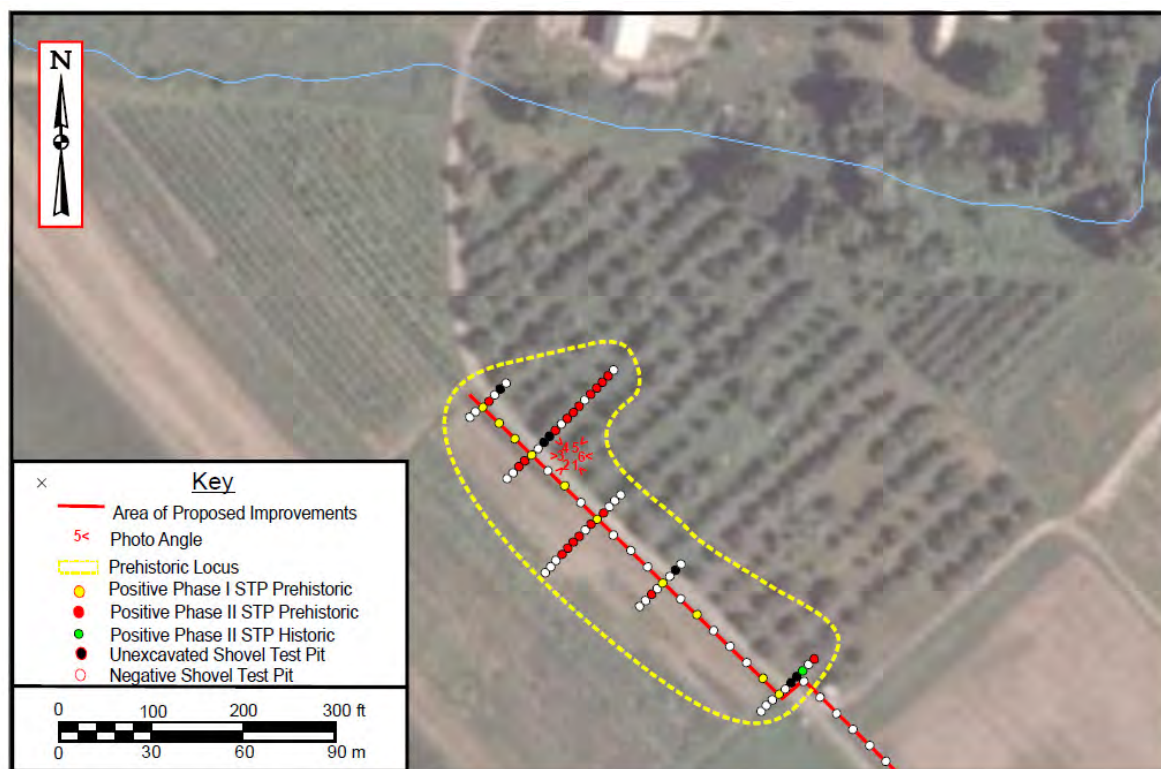


Figure 8. Map showing excavations at Locus 2.

began testing at Locus 2 at the southern end of the project area (Figure 8). We found a high density of artifacts in this area, as well as two charcoal features along the roadway and fragments of pottery to the east in an area of planted blueberry bushes. We decided to focus exclusively on Locus 2 and placed 1 x 1 m square excavation units near each of the two charcoal finds as well as a third where the pottery was found in the blueberry bushes.

Soon after the sod was removed in Unit 1 a dark stain was noted in the northeast corner. This stain continued and appeared to represent a highly stratified pit feature of charcoal and ash, which we designated Feature 1 (Figures 9 and 10). Charcoal taken from near the bottom of the feature was submitted for radiocarbon dating and yielded a conventional date of 600BP $\pm$ 40 years BP (Beta 264875). This date is very much in keeping with dates obtained by Ritchie at the Narhwold No. 1 Site, located directly across Schoharie Creek from the property (Figure 11).

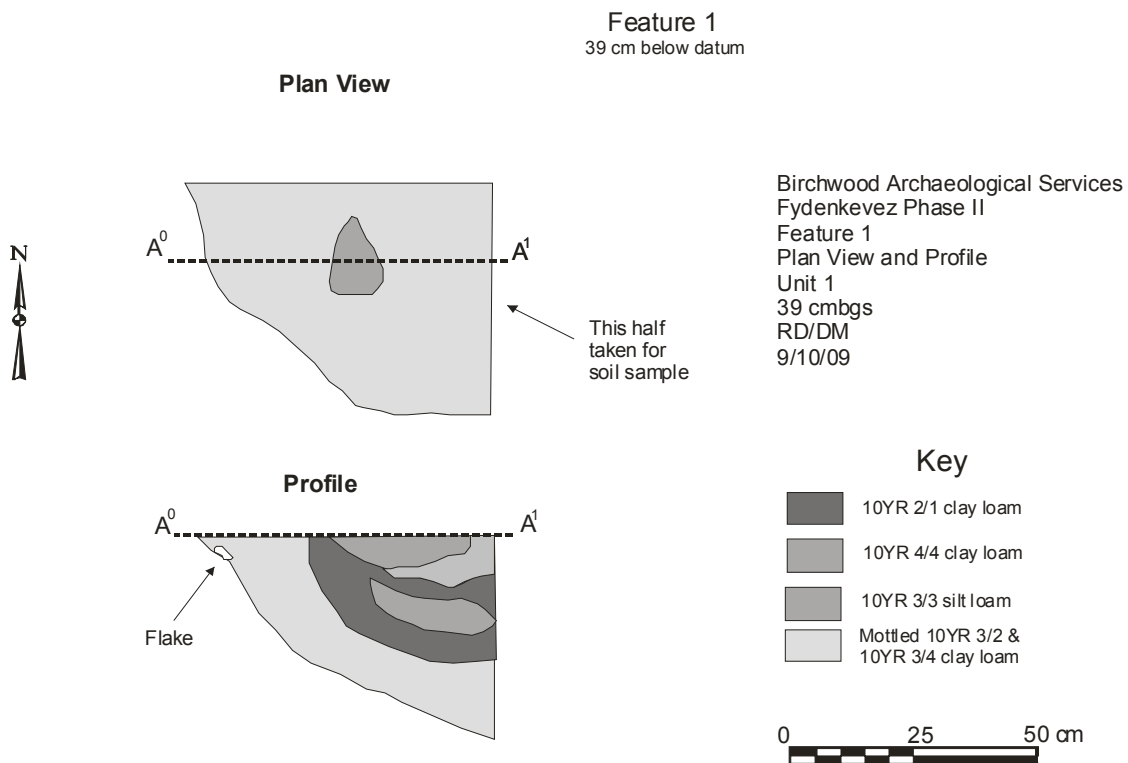


Figure 9. Profile and plan view of Feature 1 from Unit 1



Figure 10. Profile of Feature 1 in the north wall of Unit 1.

CALIBRATION OF RADIOCARBON AGE TO CALENDAR YEARS

(Variables: C13/C12=-25.3;lab. mult=1)

Laboratory number: Beta-264875

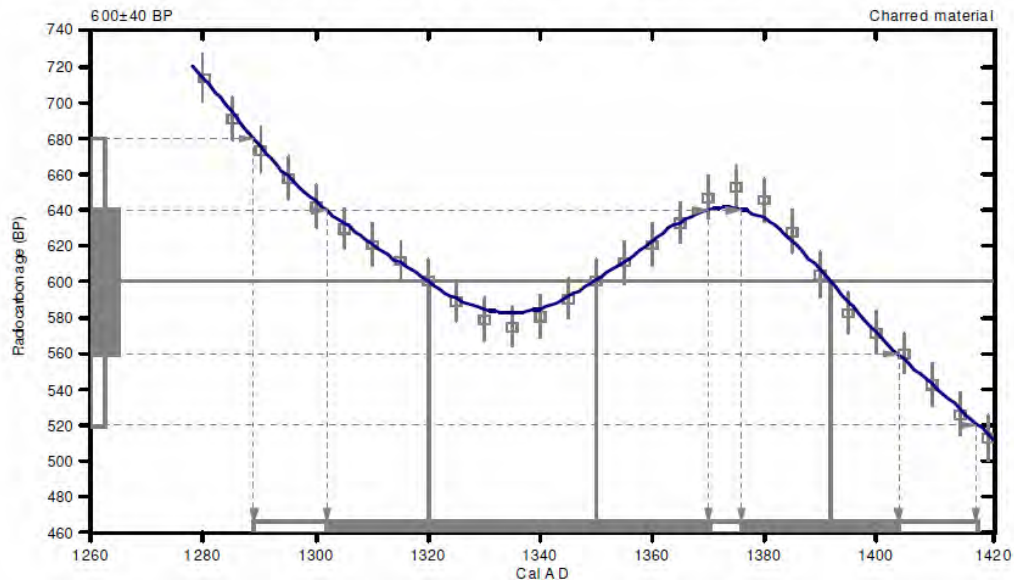
Conventional radiocarbon age: 600 ± 40 BP

2 Sigma calibrated result: Cal AD 1290 to 1420 (Cal BP 660 to 530)
(95% probability)

Intercept data

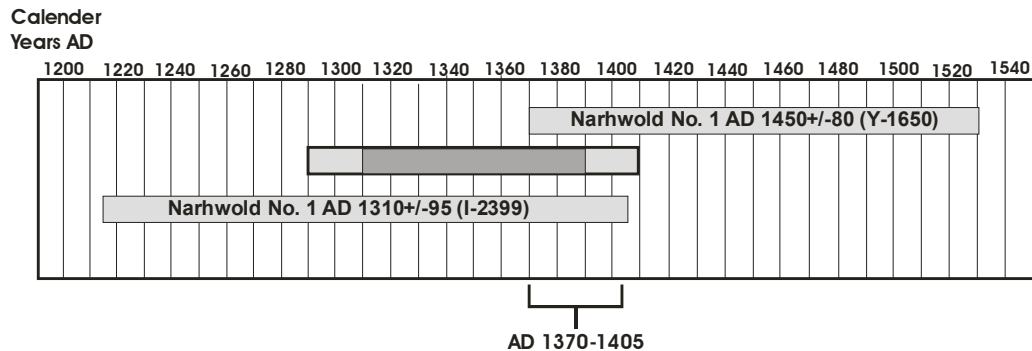
Intercepts of radiocarbon age
with calibration curve:
Cal AD 1320 (Cal BP 630) and
Cal AD 1350 (Cal BP 600) and
Cal AD 1390 (Cal BP 560)

1 Sigma calibrated results: Cal AD 1300 to 1370 (Cal BP 650 to 580) and
(68% probability) Cal AD 1380 to 1400 (Cal BP 570 to 550)



Radiocarbon Date Comparison

Bohringer Site and the Nahrwold No. 1 Site



Bohringer AD 1350 ± 40 (Beta 26475) 2 sigma Cal.

Conventional Radiocarbon Date = AD 1350 ± 40

Figure 11. Results of the radiocarbon date from Feature 1.

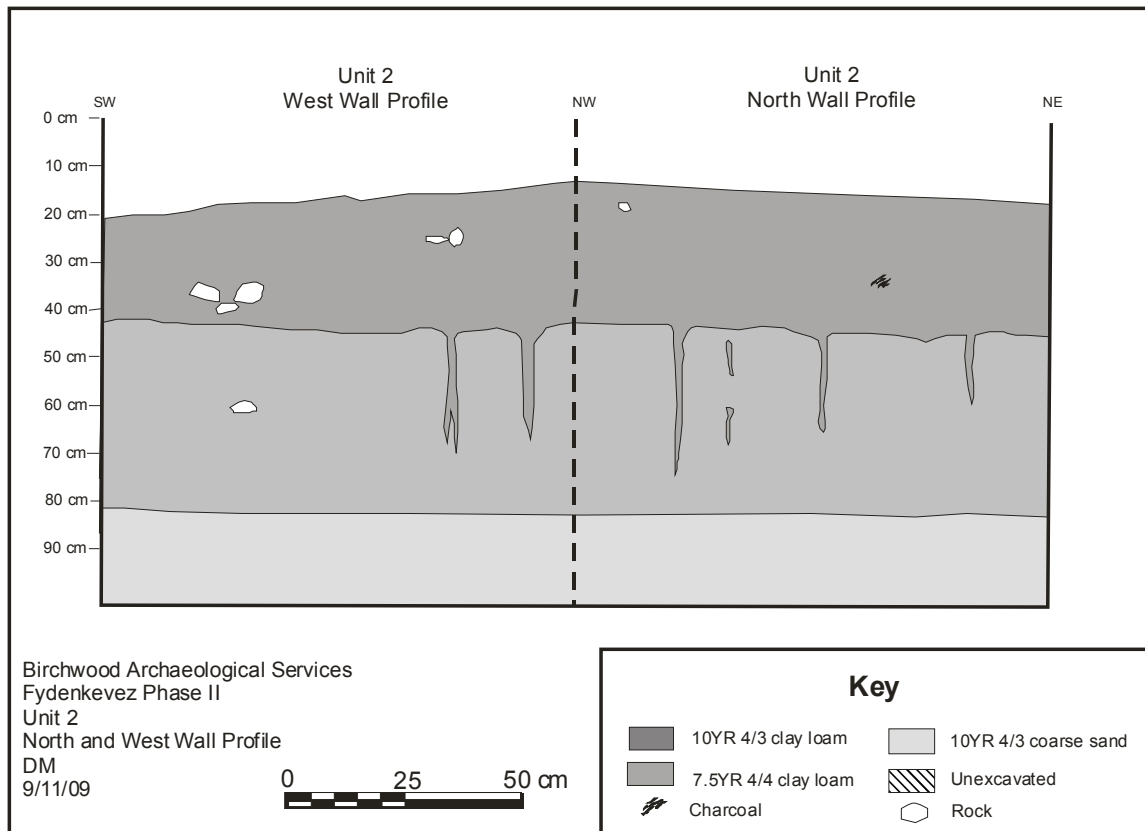


Figure 12. North and west wall profile of Unit 2.

Unit 2 was placed to the south of Unit 1 where another small concentration of charcoal was noted. Unfortunately, this charcoal appeared to represent diffuse flecking associated with early 20th century bottle glass and fragments of rusted wire nails (Figure 12). Unit 3 was placed near a pottery concentration in the blueberry bushes (Figure 13). This unit showed evidence of disturbed and uneven topography, likely associated with the planting of the berry bushes (Figure 14). Unit 3 also recovered 18 fragments of smooth and cord impressed pottery.



Figure 13. Excavation of Unit 3 along rows of blueberry bushes.

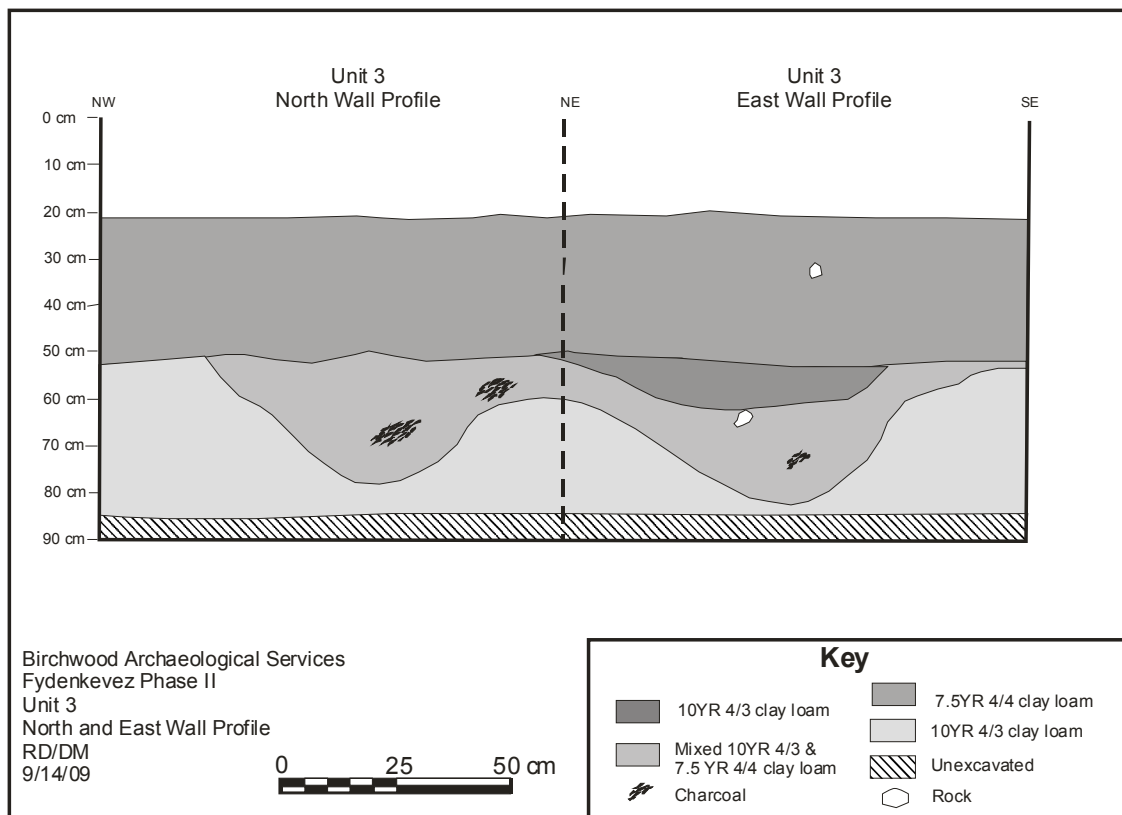


Figure 14. North and east wall profiles of Unit 3.



Figure 15. Photograph of Iroquois Indian Museum excavations in the blueberry bushes in April of 1988. Courtesy Iroquois Indian Museum.

The finding of this pottery was fortuitous, as it related to another important discovery made in the same vicinity many years before. In April of 1988, the Bohringer family called the Iroquois Indian Museum to come and investigate a large feature found while digging trenches with a backhoe for new blueberry bushes (Figure 15). As part of these investigations the museum group uncovered the base of ceramic pot, complete with a large rock located inside (Figure 16). This pottery base was removed from the ground in situ, and was crated in a wooden box and stored in the hallway of the department of sociology and anthropology at SUNY Cobleskill for over 12 years. As the department ultimately needed the space, they contacted the Iroquois Indian Museum, who stored the find in their repository (Figure 17). Then, about two years ago, an intern from Colgate University was cleaning the find and removed the rock which sat in the bottom of the pot for so many years. Beneath the rock was an unusual white substance that appeared to represent prehistoric textile. This textile fragment is currently under analysis at the Mercyhurst Archaeological Institute for further study.



Figure 16. Photograph of base of pot from the Bohringer Site. Courtesy Iroquois Indian Museum



Figure 17. View of the remains of the pottery find at the Iroquois Indian Museum



Figure 18. Pottery fragments recovered during recent excavations at the Bohringer Site. A=Pottery fragment recovered from Unit 2 Level 4. B=Pottery shards recovered from Level 1 of STP A84/10mE. C= Pottery punctate recovered from Unit 1 Level 4. D=Pottery fragments recovered from Unit 1 Level 4. E= Pottery fragments recovered from Unit 3 Level 1. F= Pottery fragments recovered from Unit 1 F1. G= Pottery fragments recovered from Unit 2 Level 4.

Pottery-A total of 18 fragments of prehistoric pottery were recovered from the excavations at Locus 2 (Figure 18). Pottery was recovered from five distinct contexts: four fragments were recovered from an STP (A84/10mE), while the remainder were recovered from the unit excavations. Unit 1 recovered most of the pottery we encountered (n=11), with smaller amounts of pottery recovered from Unit 2 (n=2) and Unit 3 (n=1).

Pottery recovered from Locus 2 is in keeping with ceramic traditions thought to date to Owasco times. Among the decorated sherds, cord impressing was the most common attribute, followed by punctates. Unfortunately, no complete rims or lips were recovered, preventing a more detailed analysis. All of the pottery exhibited grit tempering and appear to be globular body sherds, with no other evidence of vessel form. No evidence of



Figure 19. Scraper fragments from the recent excavations at the Bohringer Site. A=Scraper fragment recovered from Unit 2 Level 3. B= Scraper fragment recovered from Unit 1 Level 2. C=Scraper recovered from Level 1 of STP A4/8mE. D=Scraper recovered from Level 2 of STP A72/10mW. E= Scraper fragment recovered from Unit 1 Level 1. F= Scraper fragment recovered from Unit 2 Level 2. G=Scraper fragment recovered from Unit 1 Level 2. H= Scraper fragment recovered from STP A72/16mW. I=Scraper fragment recovered from Unit 1 Level 4. J=Scraper fragment recovered from Unit 1 Level 3. K=Scraper recovered from Level 1 of STP A72/18mW. L= Scraper recovered from Level 1 of STP A84/18mW. M= Scraper fragment recovered from Unit 1 Level 3.

incising was noted on any of the sherds.

The significance of our pottery find would not have been realized if we had not worked so closely with the archaeology department at the museum *during* the excavations. It is unclear at this time if the disturbance that we noted in Unit 3 was related to the original excavation of the trenches, from the 1988 archaeological investigations, or to the burial of the berry bushes after the trenches were cut.

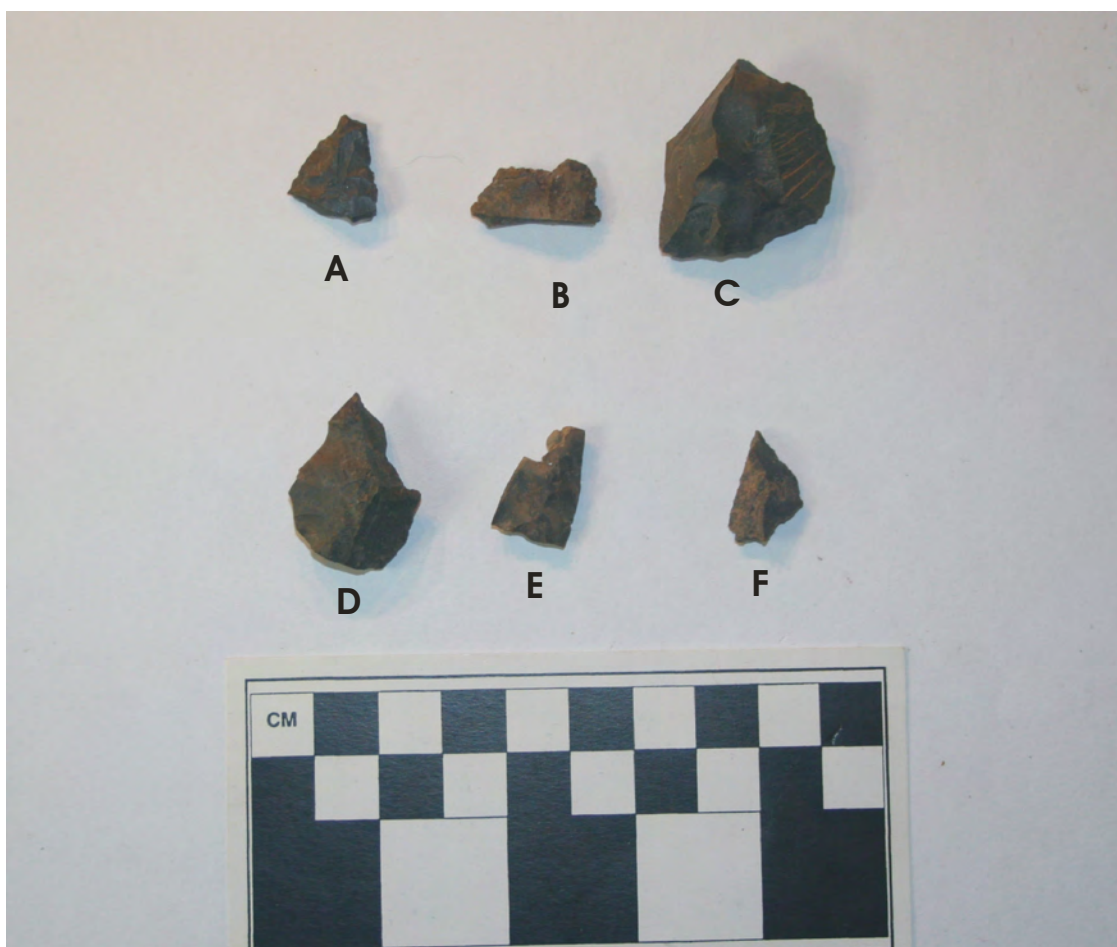


Figure 20. Bifaces recovered from the recent excavations at the Bohringer Site. A= Point tip recovered from road surface. B=Point fragment recovered from Unit1 Level 2. C=Biface fragment recovered from Unit 1 Level 4. D and E= Biface fragments recovered from Unit 1 Level 4. F=Biface fragment recovered from Unit 2 Level 3.

In addition to the pottery we also recovered a high density of chipped stone debitage, as well as small fragments of scrapers and bifaces. Some of these bifaces appear to represent Levanna points while others appear to represent knives (Figures 19 and 20). All of the chipped stone tools recovered were in very small fragments, probably due to the proximity of the proposed water line directly adjacent to the gravel roads. This made the study of bifacial tool use at the somewhat complicated, so relied on other forms of information to tell us about past activities.

Pebble Cobble Tools- Ten artifacts have been classified as belonging to this category (Figure 21). One of the greatest problems regarding the classification and description of



Figure 21. Pebble/Cobble Tools recovered from the recent excavations at the Bohringer Site. A=Pitted grinding stone recovered from Level 1 of STP A80/14mW. B=Ground stone recovered from Level 1 of STP A84/2mE. C= Ground stone recovered from Level 1 of STP A84/10mE. D=Grinding stone tool fragment recovered from Unit 2 Level 4. E=Abrader/Hammerstone recovered from Level 1 of STP A8/8mW. F=Netsinker recovered from Level 1 of STP A80/2mW. G= Netsinker recovered from Level 1 of STP A84/6mW. H=Netsinker fragment recovered from Level 1 of STP A84/18mE.

ground stone tools is that these objects often show more than one form of wear, likely associated with multiple activities being conducted with that artifact. As a result, traditional classifications of pebble/cobble tools, such as “hammerstone,” or “abrader”

are useful, but fail to convey the full spectrum of uses a specific artifact may have held (Adams 2002).

The assemblage can be further divided into two groups: multifunction tools and net weights. With the exception of the net weights, most of the pebble/cobble tools are unusually small fragments of grinding stones. This small fragment size is likely due to plowing and other agricultural disturbances. In addition to the grinding fragments, a hammerstone/abraider was recovered from STP A8/8mW. This fragment showed evidence of both pecking and abraising. Another large stone was recovered from A80/14mW. This stone also showed evidence of grinding.

It is interesting to note that only one of these pebble/cobble tools show multiple patterns of wear on their surfaces that would suggest that they served multiple uses. Multifunction tools are common attributes of non-sedentary people, who often limited in the number of objects they can carry and thus prefer small tools suitable for multiple tasks. Thus, it is not surprising to find the hammerstone/abraider in the northern end of the property where earlier point styles are found and evidence of grinding and milling tasking place at the southern end of the site where later Owasco settlement occurred.

The net weights assemblage is represented by three examples, all recovered from STPs near the southern end of Locus 2. This cluster of net weights was confirmed by Tom Anderson of the Iroquois Indian Museum, who stated that that portion of the site routinely produced net weights when plowed. A large number of net weights can be seen from this area in Anderson's collection (See Appendix F). The presence of net weights in this area is not surprising given its proximity to the Dovegaat, which once flowed along the edge of the terrace before being filled in.

Fire Cracked Rock- A total of 28 examples of fire-cracked rock (FCR) were recovered as part of the Phase II investigations, weighting a total of 17.1 kg (3.76 lbs). For purposes of this study, fire cracked rock is defined as having one or more of the following three attributes: redness, spalling, and evidence of internal fracturing. Other rocks subjected to

heating may not demonstrate any of the attributes described above, as many factors, including material composition, moisture, and proximity to the heat source also affect the ability to and accurately recognize this artifact type (Bellomo 1993).

No FCR was recovered from the STP grid at Locus 1, while seven fragments were recovered from the Locus 2 STP grid. Three quarters of the FCR was recovered from the from the unit excavations. Mean mass per fragment of FCR was relatively small, measuring only 60.90 g (2.14 oz). The small size of FCR fragments is likely due to a number of factors, including repeated use, high temperature firings, and post abandonment process such as plowing and frost activity.

All of the FCR recovered was made from white or reddish quartzite or granite, apparently glacial in origin. Most of the fire cracked rock was concentrated around the fire pit identified in Unit 1, with the remainder lightly distributed throughout Locus 2. This even distribution likely reflects the effects of repeated plowing rather than a lack of discrete activity areas. The lack of FCR at Locus 1 suggests that comparatively few fire related feature might occur nearby.

Bone- Two small fragments of bone were recovered during the Phase II excavations. The first fragment is a piece of calcined bone recovered from Level 1 of STP N84/W22. This fragment appears to be a small piece of the thick bone from a large animal, although mal it came from. The second is a fragment of bone recovered from Level 3 of Unit 1. This latter find was not burned or calcined and consequently may be recent in origin.

Debitage- A total of 914 chipped stone artifacts consisting ofdebitage, or lithic reduction waste, were recovered as part of the Phase II study (Table 4). Thedebitage assemblage consists of 140 complete flakes, 671 flake fragments, four core fragments and 99 fragments of non-diagnostic shatter. Definitions of each of these categories are based upon Andrefsky (1998) and are provided below.

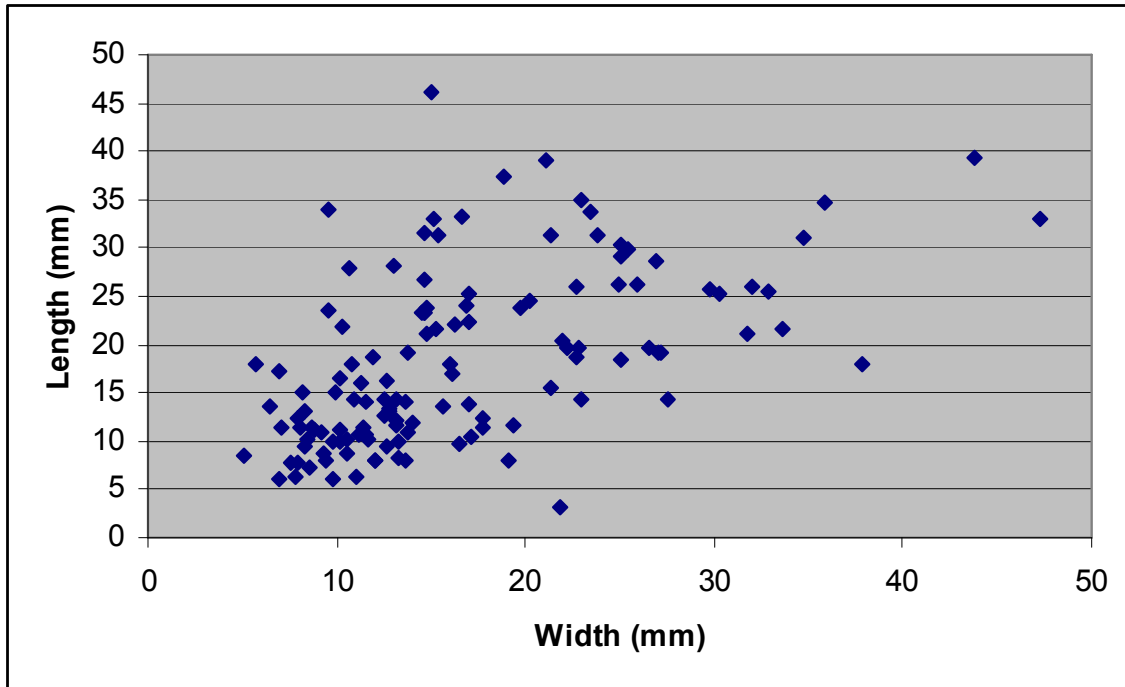


Figure 22. Scatter plot showing the size of complete flakes recovered from the Bohringer Site.

Complete flakes-For the purposes of this study, flakes are defined as a fragment of lithic debitage removed from a larger chert object. Flakes have standard characteristics, including a bulb, platform, and often ripple marks from the conchoidal fracture. This category is reserved for intact flakes, or for those flakes where the maximum original dimensions are known.

Flake fragments-These are fragments of debitage that are broken flakes like that above that share one or more of the diagnostic attributes (bulb, platform, etc.) but from which the full dimensions of the original flake are unknown.

Shatter-This category includes fragments of chert debitage which were likely produced as part of lithic reduction, but are lacking any diagnostic flake attributes. Shatter is part of a natural process in lithic reduction, since not all debitage demonstrate the same clear evidence of cultural manufacture. Additionally, cultural and natural site formation processes also break intact chert flakes and create undiagnostic shatter.

Each of the complete flakes was measured by their maximum length, width, and thickness as shown in Figure 22. Flakes vary in size between 5.1 and 47.3 mm in length and 3.1 to 46.2 mm in width. Flake thickness ranged between 0.7 and 13.3 mm. Mean flake size was 18.32 x 16.61 x 3.15 mm. All of the flakes showed evidence of cortex on 50% or less of the dorsal surface, suggesting that middle and later stage lithic reduction

Table 1.
Evidence of use wear on chipped stone debitage from the
Bohringer Site

Description of wear	Frequency/ Percentage	Comments
Utilized longitudinal	1 (3.70%)	
Utilized, transverse feathered	4 (14.81%)	
Utilized, transverse, hinged	2 (7.40%)	
Utilized, transverse, scalloped	1 (3.70%)	1 retouched
Utilized, transverse hinged feathered	3 (11.14%)	2 gray and grainy
Edge damage (indeterminate)	16 (59.25%)	
Total	27 (100.00%)	

was taking place at the site. Approximately 14 percent showed evidence of cortex on less than half of the dorsal surface, while 86 percent showed no evidence of any cortex at all. This would be in keeping with the lack of locally known raw material sources known from the immediate vicinity.

Raw material types associated with the flake tools and debitage show relatively high macroscopic variability, ranging from brown to light gray in color and grading to a grainy texture. However, most of this variation is within what is currently known about the Onondaga formation, which was likely readily available within the valley. Only one fragment of clearly non-local material was encountered at the site: a jasper flake fragment recovered from Level 1 of STP A72/12mW. Examples of points recovered from the site in the Tom Anderson collection include other material, including green Normanskill chert and Esopus shale. One fragment of debitage showed evidence of thermal alteration caused by the intentional heating of a material to make it easier to work. This was a fragment of shatter recovered from Level 1 of STP A72/10mW.

Use Wear- All prehistoric artifacts were examined under light microscopic (x30) magnification to aid proper identification and look for evidence of use wear. A total of 27 fragments of chert exhibited evidence of utilization. Sixteen of these examples did not



Figure 23. 18th century Bristol wire wound bead fragment recovered from the lower floodplain at the Bohringer Site.

exhibit sufficient evidence to assign to any specific wear patterns. Eleven fragments of debitage showed patterns and other evidence of wear consistent with specific forms of utilization. As shown in Table 1, Only one of the flakes showed evidence of longitudinal wear suggestive of cutting or sawing motions, while transverse wear indicative of scraping occurs in 10 (90.9%) of the examples. The experimental replication and use of stone tools indicate that activities such as butchering and hide scraping activities are often associated with transverse patterns of use wear, suggesting that these activities were taking place at the site. Five (45.45%) of the examples exhibited hinge fractures that often result from percussion or transverse pressure at a steep angle. These latter examples likely reflect chopping activities as well. Feathered terminations occur on four (36.36%) of the examples, suggesting that a soft material was being more actively worked, which is also suggestive of butchering activities.

Future Research- Months after the unit excavations we were able to continue our research along the southernmost end of the proposed water line along the lower

floodplain terrace. We used shovels and augers to excavate to a depth of 4 ft below the surface and recovered a light scatter of shipped stone debitage and half of an opaque Bristol wire wound bead dating to the early to mid 18th century (Figure 23). No feature or other evidence of the fort was found in the excavations.

We hope to continue some of this research in the future. Now that all of the artifacts have been curated at the Indian Museum it will be easier to macroscopically compare our ceramics with the pot base that contained the possible textile. Compositional analysis such as XRF may be useful in determining that the two are likely not from the same pot, but it probably wouldn't be able to say with any certainty that they were definitely associated. We would also like to make an effort to get the 1756 fort listed on the National Register of Historic Places. This was an important goal of John Ferguson's prior to his passing, and the whole property clearly represents an important cultural landscape worthy of such recognition.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Flo Schwartz and Manila Khouchaleun of the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service and to District Conservationist Tom Lacko for their support throughout the project. The Archeology Department at the Iroquois Indian Museum, including Fred Stevens, Tom Anderson and James Chat, all provided valuable assistance throughout the project; much of the project's success is shared with them. Thanks also to Sylvia Van Houten, the historian and caretaker of Vroomans Nose for sharing her knowledge and experiences surrounding a very special place. Special thanks must be given to the Fydenkevez family who own and operate Bohringers Farms for donating the artifacts from the project to the Iroquois Indian Museum and for their support throughout the project.

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