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National Park Service

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PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:

The Barnes Woods Archaeological District consists of four prehistoric archaeological sites within Barnes Woods Nature Preserve, located west of Seaford, Sussex County, Delaware, on Butler Mill Branch, a tributary of the Nanticoke River. These sites represent a segment of the settlement system of groups living in the Nanticoke drainage in prehistoric times. Two of these sites (7S-E-38 and 7S-E-39) are small, micro-band base camps, occupied by a limited number of family groups for short periods of time. The other two sites (7S-E-40 and 7S-E-151) are procurement camps, intermittently occupied by specialized work parties for a few days at a time. Each site functioned in different ways in the settlement pattern, but all four sites appear to have been utilized through the Woodland I and Woodland II periods, and at least one site (7S-E-38) was occupied into the Contact period. One of the four sites (7S-E-38), was also a slave and free African-American farmstead occupied from about 1780 to about 1820.

In prehistoric archaeology, it is rarely possible to demonstrate that sites were occupied at the same time, or even during the same generation. Sites are considered contemporary if it can be shown, through the presence of temporally diagnostic artifact types, that they were occupied during the same cultural episodes. Cultural periods defined by temporally diagnostic artifacts may be 300 years long to more than 1000 years long.

Sites with similar natural stratigraphies and soil characteristics can also be considered contemporary if they can be shown to have been occupied during the same depositional episodes, even if diagnostic artifacts are absent for certain cultural periods. Stratified deposits resulting from the accumulation of aeolian (windblown) deposits have been identified throughout Delaware. The soil profiles for the various sites within the Barnes Woods Archaeological District demonstrate the presence of aeolian deposits and show similar developmental sequences, indicating that the same or similar processes have been at work over the same periods of time.

In historic archaeology, it is sometimes difficult to determine precisely when a site was occupied, particularly when the occupants were tenants. Quantitative analyses of refined ceramics using known dates of manufacture can be used to estimate the midpoint of the likely occupation period. This method is commonly referred to as the South Mean Ceramic Dating Formula, and has been shown to be reasonably accurate for sites dating to the 18th and early-19th centuries. Historic documents may indicate the presence of

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tenant houses on a tract of land, and may even indicate where such buildings were located. It is sometimes possible to determine when a tenant site was occupied by examining a series of documents relating to the property. These two sources of information may be used together to determine the period of time when a site was occupied. In the case of 7S-E-38, the period of occupation indicated by historic records such as wills, tax assessments, and Orphans court surveys confirm the period of occupation indicated by the quantitative analysis of the refined ceramics.

Barnes Woods Nature Preserve includes an unusually well-preserved example of the oak-pine forest which once covered much of Sussex County, as well as several acres of wooded swamp. It is this environmental diversity which led to the dedication of the area as a nature preserve. According to the donor, the preserve has not been logged in this century, although it has been subjected to natural hazards such as a surface fire and an infestation of pine-loopers (Barnes n.d.) Documentary research suggests that the property may have been set aside as a wood lot by the beginning of the nineteenth century. William Neal stipulated in his will, dated March 4, 1834, that his wife was not to permit additional clearing on the property to be inherited by his minor daughter. The land included in the Barnes Woods Nature Preserve was part of this property. This means that archaeological deposits within this tract of land are substantially undisturbed by cultural processes. The presence of windblown soils also contributes to the integrity of the archaeological sites within the Barnes Woods Archaeological District, because these soils have buried archaeological remains, providing a degree of separation between earlier and later deposits.

Site Summaries

CONTRIBUTING ELEMENTS:

- .001 The prehistoric component of 7S-E-38 is a micro-band base camp (S-4981) located on a low sand ridge at the southern end of the preserve, at the confluence of Turtle Gut with Butler Mill Branch. An historic period component dating to 1780 - 1820 is also present, but does not appear to have substantially disturbed the prehistoric component. Two prehistoric subsurface pit features, both containing Woodland II ceramics, were identified. A small area of midden containing shell was

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found at the eastern end of the site, closest to Butler Mill Branch.

Artifacts not found in pit features were recovered to a depth of 60 cm below the present surface, indicating that aeolian soil accumulation has occurred at this site. Vertical distributions are not, however, as clearly defined as at sites in the James Branch watershed, where Division of Parks and Recreation archaeologists have been studying this phenomenon.

Temporally diagnostic ceramics recovered from this site include Dames Quarter (1000 B.C. - 700 B.C.), Wolfe Neck (700 B.C. - 400 B.C.), Mockley (A.D. 100 - A.D. 500), Hell Island (A.D. 600 - A.D. 1000), and Townsend/Killens Pond (A.D. 1000 - A.D. 1600.) Projectile points include a Jack's Reef corner-notched point, dating from about A.D. 500 to about A.D. 800, a quartz lanceolate point, which probably dates to the same time period, and two small triangular points, dating from about A.D. 800 to A.D. 1600. Occupation into the Contact Period is indicated by the presence of a fragment of a Native American roulette decorated pipe which dates to the late seventeenth century. Fragments of European-made pipes of the same time period were also recovered.

The prehistoric tool assemblage from 7S-E-38 as a whole is dominated by small utilized flakes, but includes fragments of grinding and pounding stones among the fire-cracked rock. Utilized flakes were used in a variety of processing activities, including butchering. Grinding and pounding stones were used to process seeds and nuts into flours. The presence of cores and biface fragments suggests that tool repair and replacement was a typical activity at this site.

The historic component of 7S-E-38 represents a slave and later free black household from circa 1778 through 1820 (Scholl and Blume 1994). No subsurface features associated structure have been located, however a dense and closely grouped scatter of artifacts identify the approximate location of the house. An analysis of the artifacts from the site revealed a pattern very similar to a pattern associated with slave occupations in South Carolina.

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Archival research has associated the site with the slaves of Hudson Cannon, who first occupied a 699 acre plantation complete with a saw mill and a grist mill about 1780. Sometime after the turn of the nineteenth century, perhaps at Hudson Cannon's death, the slaves became free and took the Cannon name. Isaac and Plemoth Cannon farmed, as tenants, four hundred acres of the plantation inherited by Stansberry Cannon from about 1805 to 1818, when Stansberry reached the age of majority and sold the property. The lack of artifacts from after this date indicates the Cannons moved away from the house at 7S-E-38 at about the same time.

.002
(S-4982)

7S-E-39, located on a higher rise at the northern end of the district, can also be classified as a microband base camp, although there are indications that the processing activities at this site differed significantly from those at 7S-E-38. Biface fragments are rare, as are cores, indicating that tool repair and replacement was not a significant activity. The dominant tool type is a pebble scraper in which the cortex forms the working edge. This tool type was not found at 7S-E-38. Utilized flakes are rare in the assemblage from 7S-E-39, which contrasts with the comparatively large number of such tools from 7S-E-38. Although fire-cracked rock is more frequent at 7S-E-39 than at 7S-E-38, grinding and pounding tools are less frequent. Projectile points are more frequent at 7S-E-39 than at 7S-E-38, suggesting that hunting may have been a more important activity at 7S-E-39.

The range of temporally diagnostic ceramics recovered from 7S-E-39 is similar to that from 7S-E-38. Projectile points include a variety of Woodland I stemmed points, which probably date from first half of this period, as well as small triangles like those found at 7S-E-38. The temporally diagnostic artifacts are a clear indication that these sites were occupied during all or most of the same cultural episodes.

Artifacts not associated with pit features were recovered to a depth of 40 to 50 cm below the present surface, indicating a limited amount of aeolian (windblown) soil accumulation at this site. Only one prehistoric subsurface feature was identified at this site, a rectangular pit house with corner posts, dating

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to the early Woodland II period. This is the only pit house identified anywhere on the Nanticoke drainage to date, and differs from other pit houses identified in Delaware in the absence of a central fire hearth.

Following the abandonment and refilling of the pit house, a second structure was built over the filled pit. The second house was also rectangular with corner posts. The second set of posts was associated with an interior living floor of midden. Two exterior living floors were also identified. Complicated incised Woodland II ceramics were found associated with all three living floors, indicating that the structures were occupied during the early part of that period.

.003
(S-5742) 7S-E-40 is a small procurement site located on the sand ridge just north of 7S-E-38. Artifacts recovered from this site include Coulbourn ceramics, a generalized side-notched point, and a jasper core. The point was found in level 5 (40 to 50 cm below the surface), indicating the presence of aeolian (windblown) deposits at this site. Generalized side-notched points are associated with the entire Woodland I Period (3000 B. C. to A. D. 1000), but the stratigraphic position of this particular point indicates a date early in this period. Coulbourn ceramics date from 300 B. C. to 100 B. C., and were also found at 7S-E-38 and 7S-E-39.

.004
(S-8590) 7S-E-151 is also a small procurement site located on a ridge south of 7S-E-39 and separated from it by a drainage swale. Only flakes were recovered from the single unit excavated at this site, but aeolian (windblown) deposition is indicated by the depth of recovery (40 cm) and an examination of the soil profile. Although no temporally diagnostic artifacts were recovered from this site, the recovery of flakes from 40 cm below the surface indicates that it was occupied during the early part of the Woodland I period.

Environmental Setting

Barnes Woods Archaeological District is located on Butler Mill Branch approximately 1/4 mile from its confluence with the Nanticoke River. Both Butler Mill Branch and Turtle Gut, which forms the southern boundary of the

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district, are affected by freshwater tidal action from the Nanticoke River, which empties into the Chesapeake Bay. The topography consists of a series of low ridges, probably early Holocene sand ridges, running at an angle to Butler Mill Branch and blending into the flat Coastal Plain uplands along the west side of the preserve. At the north end of the preserve, the most prominent of these ridges forms a low bluff overlooking Butler Mill Branch.

A variety of food resources were undoubtedly available to the Native American inhabitants of the Barnes Woods Archaeological District. Arrow arum, which produces a starchy tuber that can be processed for flour, is abundant in the freshwater tidal marsh which borders Butler Mill Branch. A variety of edible berries, herbs, and mushrooms have also been observed within the preserve. Deer would have been present in the forest, as they are now, and the population of fish in the bordering streams was most probably greater than at present.

Historically, the vegetation of the upland portion of Barnes Woods Nature Preserve has consisted of Virginia and loblolly pines with some hardwoods. An infestation of pine looper has destroyed much of the Virginia pine, and a transition to hardwood forest is taking place (Barnes n.d.) In his 1834 will, William Neal directed that no further clearing should take place on the 400 acre tract of which Barnes Woods Nature Preserve was a part, and that no timber should be sold while his wife, Kitty Neal, occupied the property (Sussex County Probate Records.) No archaeological evidence of cultivation was found, and it is likely that only selective cutting of timber has taken place on the Barnes Woods tract over the last 150 years or more.

Previous Archaeological Investigations

The prehistoric sites included in Barnes Woods Nature Preserve represent a segment of a prehistoric settlement system adapted to the streams and marshes of the Nanticoke drainage. Until recently, very little was known about prehistoric settlement in the Nanticoke watershed area. Even now, most of the available information is based on surface survey (Custer and Mellin 1989) and on subsurface testing in the watershed of James Branch, a tributary of the Nanticoke (Wise and Clark 1988; Wise and Clark 1989; Wise, Clark and Dunn 1989). Local collections are known for the area but few have been reported.

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When the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control acquired Barnes Woods Nature Preserve in 1984, no archaeological survey had been conducted on this tract of land. Following acquisition, the Delaware Division of Parks and Recreation conducted a reconnaissance level study under an Historic Preservation Survey and Planning grant from the National Park Service through the Delaware Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs. A total of 33.5 test units, measuring 1 meter X 1 meter, were excavated. Four prehistoric archaeological sites were identified as a result of this study, each located on a distinct sand ridge and separated from the next site by a swale (Wise 1984).

In 1987/1988, under a second survey and planning grant, intensive level testing was conducted for 7S-E-38 and 7S-E-39. The purpose of this additional work was to determine the boundaries of the major sites and to obtain information on internal site structure. A total of 35 units were excavated at 7S-E-38, of which four fell outside the boundaries of the site, and one was only excavated to 10 cm below the surface because a unit excavated in 1984 was encountered. Forty-seven units were excavated at 7S-E-39. Twenty-one of these units were only excavated to the base of the A horizon in order to expose two features. Only one of these features, a house pit, proved to be of cultural origin. Finally, in 1990, a 2 meter X 2 meter block was excavated at 7S-E-38, under funding from the Delaware Coastal Management Program, in order to obtain data on site stratigraphy comparable to that obtained from sites on James Branch.