Society for Pennsylvania Archaeology Frances Dorrance Chapter 11

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Point Peninsula Pot

Late Archaic to Early Archaic Levels

*With special thanks
to the
Reading & Northern
Railroad*

**In Commemoration of
Dawn Griffiths**

Come Join Us at the
CONRAIL SITE OPEN HOUSE
SUNDAY, JULY 22, 2012
10:00am to 4:00pm
Fun – Educational – Hands on
Volunteers are welcome to participate in an
archaeological dig.

Archaeology of the Conrail Site 36LU169

Everyone from prehistoric families living in the shadows of the retreating glaciers, through early canal workers and railroaders, left a little something for archaeologists to find. The Conrail Site (officially referred to as 36LU169) which is located at the Coxton Rail Yards in Duryea, Luzerne County, Pennsylvania, is situated within half a mile of where the Lackawanna River flows into the Susquehanna River. This is the entrance to the Wyoming Valley. Campbell's Ledge, which lies ¾ miles to the east, looms above the Susquehanna as it flows into the fertile valley which was so prized by the Native Americans and later by pioneers. The site lies 37 feet above the river channel and 100 feet from the shoreline.

Approximately 90% of the features uncovered at the site contain nut hull of hickory or walnut, which represents a fall occupation of nut harvesting.

This site has presented valuable information about prehistoric and historic Pennsylvania and the sequence of human activity here. Substantially more information awaits us as the excavation continues.

The soils of the Conrail Site have been relatively undisturbed since the first human set foot here. As the soil built up over the centuries the articles left behind by the people who lived here have been locked in place and eventually covered. In unpeeling these undisturbed layers we are able to reveal each human occupation. Working backward through the plow zone (those parts of the deposits mixed together by historic period farming and industry) we arrive at levels where intact cultural artifacts and materials lie. These undisturbed layers reveal a chronological sequence of dateable artifacts spanning from 8025BC to 360AD. Stone tools and plant remains tell the story of how the various people who lived along and visited the river survived.

Visitors and volunteers are always welcome to join in the unearthing of prehistoric and historic evidence. The site excavation runs from early Spring to late Fall, depending on the weather. We meet each Sunday from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM. We also conduct demonstrations and displays at many local community events, as well as our own open house and picnic event.

Volunteers moving a weather port

Display & Information Tent at the Riverfest "2008" Pittston City

This location would have made an attractive spot for anyone to live, so it is no wonder that it was used from prehistoric times up through the present.

Cross Section Feature

Rock Hearth

The Frances Dorrance Chapter (Chapter 11) of the Society for Pennsylvania Archaeology has been excavating Site 36LU169 since the early 1990's. The society was allowed to conduct this excavation by Conrail, the owners at that time. When the rail yard was purchased by the Reading and Northern Railroad, they allowed the dig to continue. To date 170 square meters have been excavated. (metric measurements are used in prehistoric archaeology – a meter is a little longer than a yard)

Students working on their Senior Project

The Conrail Site is located on a terrace above the river which scientists tell us was formed about 14,000 B.C. Prehistoric peoples first moved into this area of Pennsylvania as the last glacial period ended and began living on the thin layer of soil deposited on the gravels of this terrace. These 16,000 year old gravels are the base on which all later civilizations built their villages and encampments.