



Knowing the Past—Building the Future

PUBLIC SUMMARY: SITE 44AX0240

Dovetail Cultural Resource Group (Dovetail) conducted a Phase I archaeological survey of the Strawberry Run project area in Alexandria, Virginia, on behalf of Wood PLC. The Office of Historic Alexandria and Alexandria Archaeology requested the study of the 3.9-acre (1.6-ha) parcel of land situated on the west side of Fort Williams Parkway prior to stream restoration (Photo 1; Figure 1 and Figure 2, p. 2–3). Due to the proximity of the project area to two Civil War fort sites, a metal detector survey was also conducted in undisturbed portions of the project area. The Phase I archaeological survey resulted in identification of one archaeological site, 44AX0240. Because of planned construction activities, avoidance was not possible and, as such, a Phase II site evaluation was conducted.



Photo 1: Typical Setting in Project Area, Looking North.

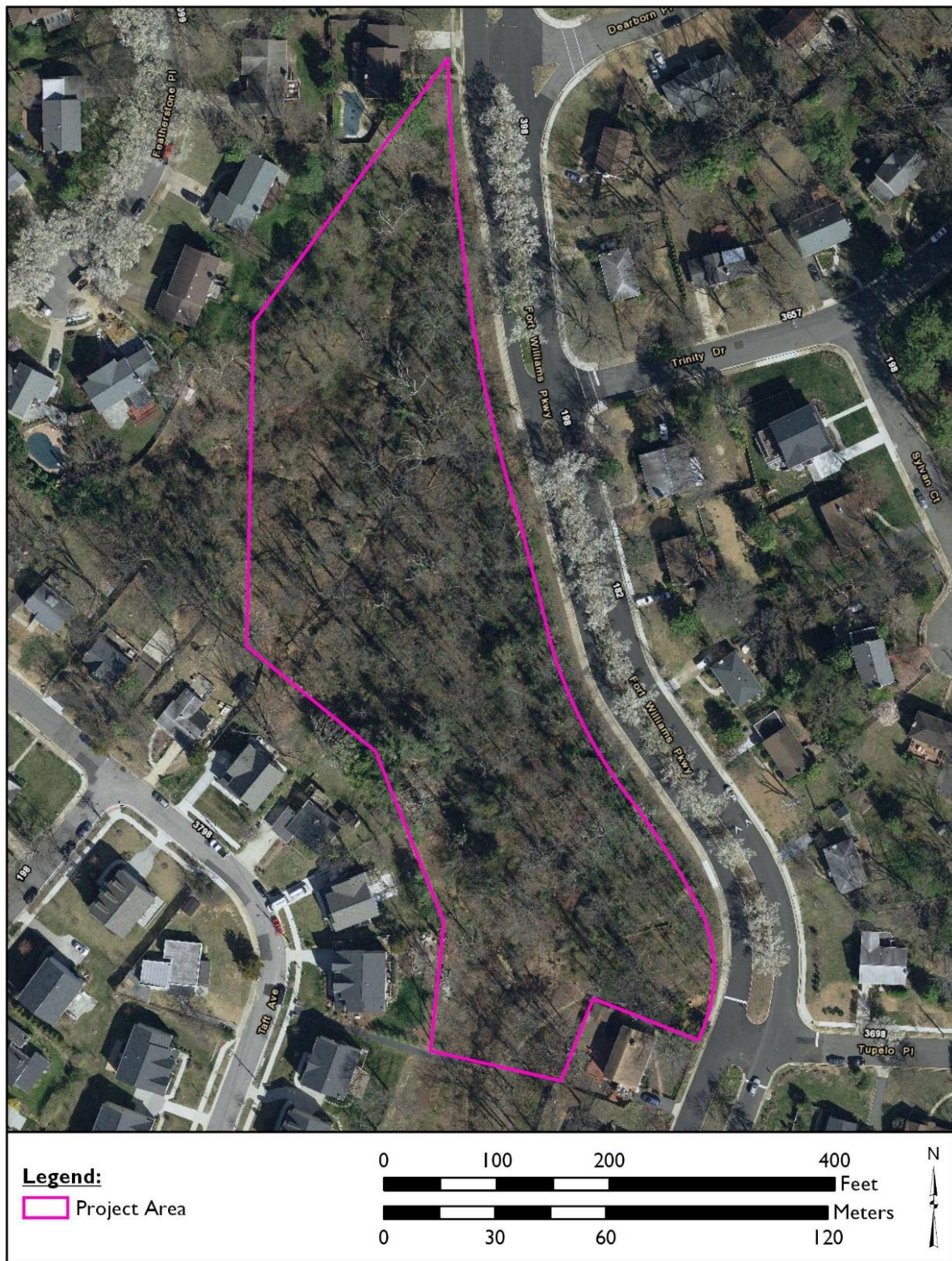


Figure 1: Strawberry Run Project Area (Esri 2017).



Figure 2: Location of the Project Area on the United States Geological Survey's Alexandria, Virginia 7.5 Minute Topographic Digital Raster Graphic Mosaic (Esri 2018).

Archaeological Survey

The Phase I archaeological survey at the Strawberry Run project area resulted in the excavation of 34 STPs and the identification of one archaeological site, 44AX0240. Because the proposed project is focused on stream restoration and the archaeological site was located largely within the stream channel, avoidance of the site during construction activities was not possible. As a result, it was decided that a Phase II evaluation of the site was warranted. The Phase II investigations at the site resulted in the excavation of an additional 33 STPs and four test units (TUs).

Site Description

Site 44AX0240 as identified during the Phase I survey consisted primarily of a surface scatter of prehistoric lithic artifacts in and around the bed of Strawberry Run. A total of 32 artifacts was recovered from the site during the Phase I STP and surface collection survey. The lithic assemblage was recovered primarily from the surface (n=24), with a small portion (n=4) of the lithic artifacts being found in subsurface contexts. Lithics recovered included two early-stage bifaces (Photo 2, p. 5), a split cobble, two cores, an anvil stone, two tested cobbles, and 18 pieces of debitage, mainly indicating early-stage lithic reduction, as well as a single temporally diagnostic artifact, a Halifax projectile point dating to the Middle to Late Archaic period (JefPat 2012).

The Phase II investigations at site 44AX0240 involved the excavation of 33 close-interval STPs and four 3 x 3-foot (0.9 x 0.9-m) test units across the site, as well as additional metal detecting. A total of 245 artifacts was recovered during the Phase II work. The majority of these artifacts were prehistoric lithics. As a result of the Phase II evaluation the boundaries of the site were expanded, and the site as bounded during the Phase II encompasses 1.2 acres (0.5 ha) (Figure 3, p. 6).

Interpretation

In all 251 lithic artifacts were found during the combined Phase I and II testing at site 44AX0420, 24 during Phase I and 227 during the Phase II. Thirty-one of these artifacts were recovered from the surface while the remaining 196 were recovered from subsurface contexts. The overall lithic assemblage included 188 flakes. Notably the majority of the flakes recovered were fragments rather than whole flakes, and as such could not be accurately analyzed as to size or presence of cortex. Of the 64 flakes that were intact, the majority were large flakes and the collection completely lacked small flakes. This debitage composition is indicative of primarily or exclusively early-stage reduction within the site. The predominance of flakes with some intact cortex, which made up 59 percent of the measurable flakes within the assemblage, also indicates early-stage reduction activities occurring at the site. The lithic assemblage also included a combined total of 10 cores, and split or tested cobbles, and 29 fragments of thermally altered stone.

Of the overall lithic assemblage, 97 percent (244 of 251) were either quartz or quartzite, consistent with the observed presence of predominantly quartz and quartzite cobbles in the stream bed. In light of the obvious abundance of quartz cobbles that can be seen in and around Strawberry Run, it is likely that the site was intermittently used, perhaps over millennia, for expedient lithic material procurement and reduction, but was not intensely occupied at any given time, leaving no evidence of concentrated areas of activity. The single temporally diagnostic artifact recovered from the site was the Middle to Late Archaic Halifax point found during the Phase I survey.



Photo 2: Quartzite Biface Recovered from Site 44AX0240.

Although he did not analyze sites in the immediate project vicinity, the seminal works of William Henry Holmes on prehistoric archaeology in the Potomac Valley in and around Washington, D.C. may be informative in understanding prehistoric finds in the project area (Holmes 1897 and 1919). Site 44AX0420 was likely used in a manner somewhat similar to quarry localities described in detail by Holmes.

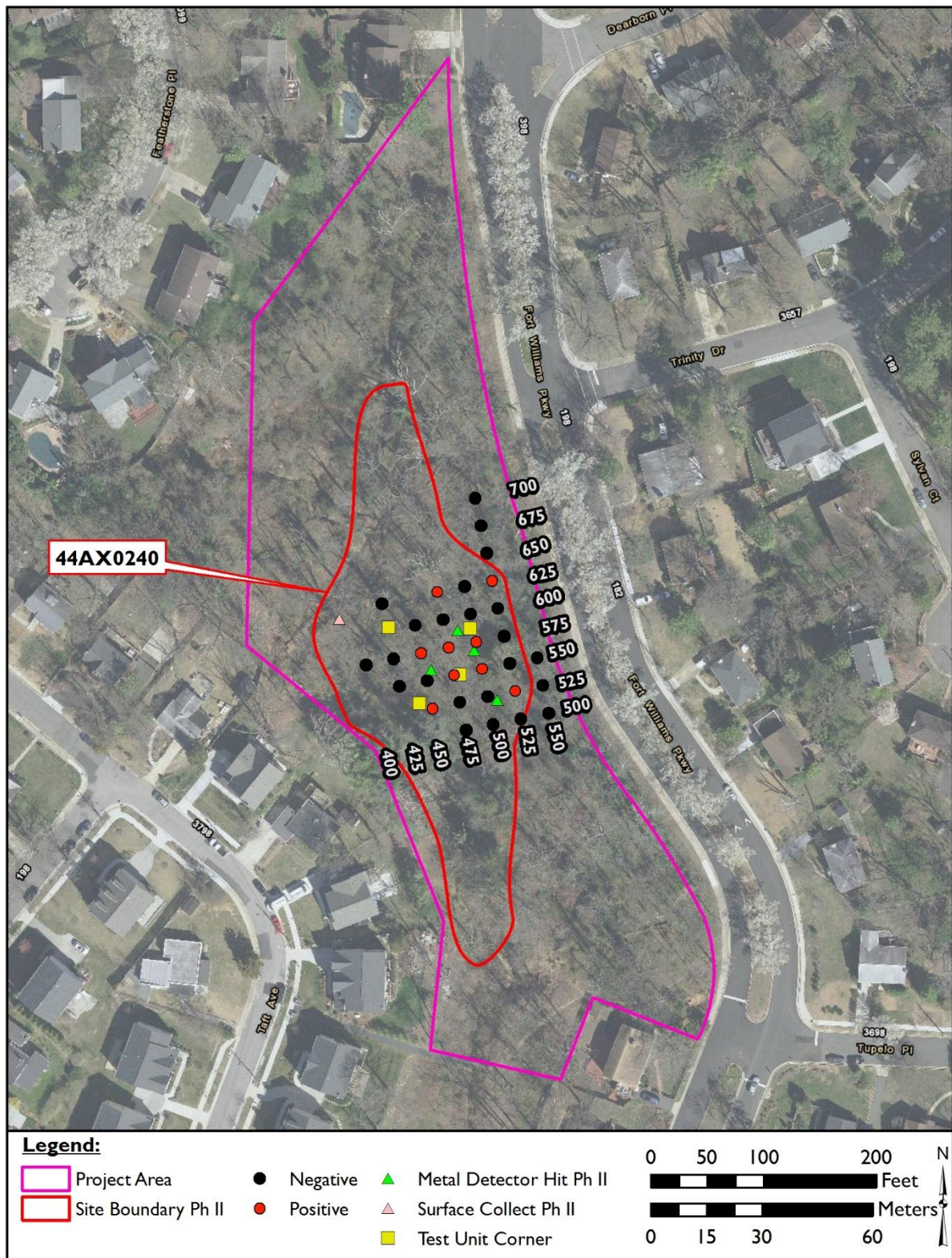


Figure 3: Phase II Testing in Site 44AX0240 (Esri 2017).

Holmes's work on quartzite cobble quarries revealed dense deposits of "shop refuse" were typically located nearby, and loci representing particular stages of reduction were noted, suggesting systematic exploitation of lithic materials. Quarry pits containing stratified deposits were also described, and large numbers of both quarry tools and early to mid-stage bifaces were recovered (Holmes 1897). In contrast, the Strawberry Run site yielded lithic reduction waste at a comparatively low density, with no intra-site patterning revealing loci of particularly intensive use. No features were encountered, and any evidence of mining directly into the ancient banks of Strawberry Run, if it occurred, has likely been destroyed by the erosion of the stream's banks. Site 44AX0240, as a result, appears to have been exploited in a more expedient manner rather than the systematically mined quarries and related workshops described by Holmes.

Metal detecting and excavation of STPs and TUs at the site during the Phase I and Phase II investigations also recovered eight lead projectiles including a Civil War-era Minié ball, five round balls, and two pieces of buckshot (Photo 3–Photo 4, p. 8). All of the projectiles recovered clearly exhibited deformation consistent with impact. However, no battles were fought in the vicinity of site 44AX0240, and the projectiles were all recovered from the valley floor rather than the steep valley walls, as might be expected if the military component of the site represented a firing range making use of the valley walls as a backstop. The projectiles may represent unloading of firearms, as they were all of types that would have been fired from muzzle-loading weapons. Once such a firearm is loaded, it can be unloaded only through extraction using a "worm," a corkscrew-like tool that taps into the projectile so it can be pulled out of the muzzle, or through discharge of the weapon (Patrick Severts, personal communication 2019). It may be the case that soldiers from one or both of the nearby forts used the Strawberry Run valley as a convenient and safe place to unload weapons by discharging them into the valley floor, perhaps during changing of guardpost personnel or when loaded weapons required maintenance.

It is also possible that the round balls recovered are not related to the Civil War at all, but rather to hunting in the Strawberry Run valley when the project area vicinity was more rural. However, the recovery of one Minié ball suggests that at least some of the firing of weapons in the project area vicinity did likely occur during the Civil War. Moreover, round balls, specifically in the form of buck-and-ball loads, are known to have been used in the Civil War (Bilby 1996), and two pieces of buckshot were recovered. The least deformed of the recovered balls measured approximately .65 caliber. Four of the five round balls recovered ranged in weight from 24.3 grams to 25.1 grams, only slightly less than the 412-grain (26.7 gram) weight for a .65 caliber musket ball described in the U.S. Army's 1861 Ordnance Manual (U.S. Army Ordnance Office 1861). The 1841 Ordnance Manual prescribes use of a .64 caliber musket ball (U.S. Army Ordnance Office 1841). While weight of the ball is not listed, the slightly smaller projectile would likely be similar in weight to those recovered at site 44AX0240. Both the 1861 and 1841 Ordnance manuals describe the use of buck-and-ball loads, typically with three buckshot to one musket ball, although loads using only 12 buckshot are also noted in the 1841 document. Use of .30 caliber buckshot is described in the 1841 manual, and one of the pieces of buckshot recovered at the site measured .31, while the other measured .36 caliber. Some variation from the standard is, however, unsurprising in such projectiles.



Photo 3: Minié Ball and Round Musket Balls Recovered from Site 44AX0240.



Photo 4: Buckshot Recovered from Site 44AX0240.

Evaluation and Significance

The Phase I and II investigations produced a relatively limited number of artifacts given that this is a quarrying site, with no clear special concentrations across site 44AX0240. The lithic assemblage was consistent with the use of the site for the procurement of quartz cobbles for lithic reduction. Given the relatively sparse artifact concentrations, eroded and disturbed soils observed in the Phase II investigations, and the lack of subsurface features, it is unlikely that any further information of significance about prehistoric quarrying in Alexandria can be gained from site 44AX0240. Likewise, the Civil War component within the site was limited, and no evidence was seen of any features, or intact soils representing a Civil War occupation beyond discharge of weapons in non-battle contexts. As such **Dovetail recommends that the site is not eligible for NRHP listing.**

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