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INSIDE LONG ISLAND: ARCHAEOLOGICAL DIG

From 2,000 Years Ago, Lost Tribe, Buried Civilization

By John McDonald

STAFF WRITER

Archaeologists surveying some land near Montauk where a real estate developer is planning a subdivision of homes have discovered that somebody else had the same idea for the parcel — long, long ago.

Those ancient residents were a heretofore unknown group of Indians who lived on the site about 2,000 years ago. Ancestors of the Algonquins, they were gone by the time Europeans arrived in the 1600s, and until relics were discovered last year during an archaeological survey of the property, all evidence of their civilization had been buried for centuries.

Archaeologists say the site is unique for Long Island because it was inhabited for more than 1,000 years and has been undisturbed for more than 500 years.

"Somebody wants a home on a beautiful bluff next to a stream, it is the same today as it was in prehistoric times," said Joel Grossman, an archaeologist reviewing the site for East Hampton Town.

He said that a reconstruction of the entire Indian settlement could be accomplished from artifacts and other evidence he believes will be found there.

While only preliminary surveys of the site have been completed, the discovery of more than 1,000 artifacts and other evidence there is impressive. Robert D. Kuhn, historic preservation program analyst for the state, said it is a unique site for the region. "It dates to the mid- or late Woodland Period [circa 700 B.C.-1600] and the site contains a buried living floor and features postholes and large artifacts, stone tools and ceramics."

The settled area discovered is 150 by 180 feet and consists of the organic remains of what was a complex of dwellings that were inhabited for as many as 1,500 years. The development plan will give the area a wide berth, said Eric Bregman, lawyer for 511 Equities Corp., a Manhattan firm planning to construct about 60 houses on 272 acres.

"We're in the process of redesigning the subdivision and reducing the number of ocean-front lots," and will probably eliminate four or five of those lots,

Bregman said, noting that the waterfront lots are the most valuable part of the property. "I mention that because it is indicative of this developer's willingness to work with the town."

David Bernstein, project director of the Stony Brook-based Institute for Long Island Archaeology, supervised the archaeological survey for 511 Equities, an effort that began in 1987 and includes the digging of hundreds of shovel-size holes and several 3-foot-by-3-foot pits. Of the artifacts unearthed during the survey, many are shavings from tool making and pieces of ceramic pottery. The discovery of evidence of campfires and postholes could provide clues to the layout of the settlement.

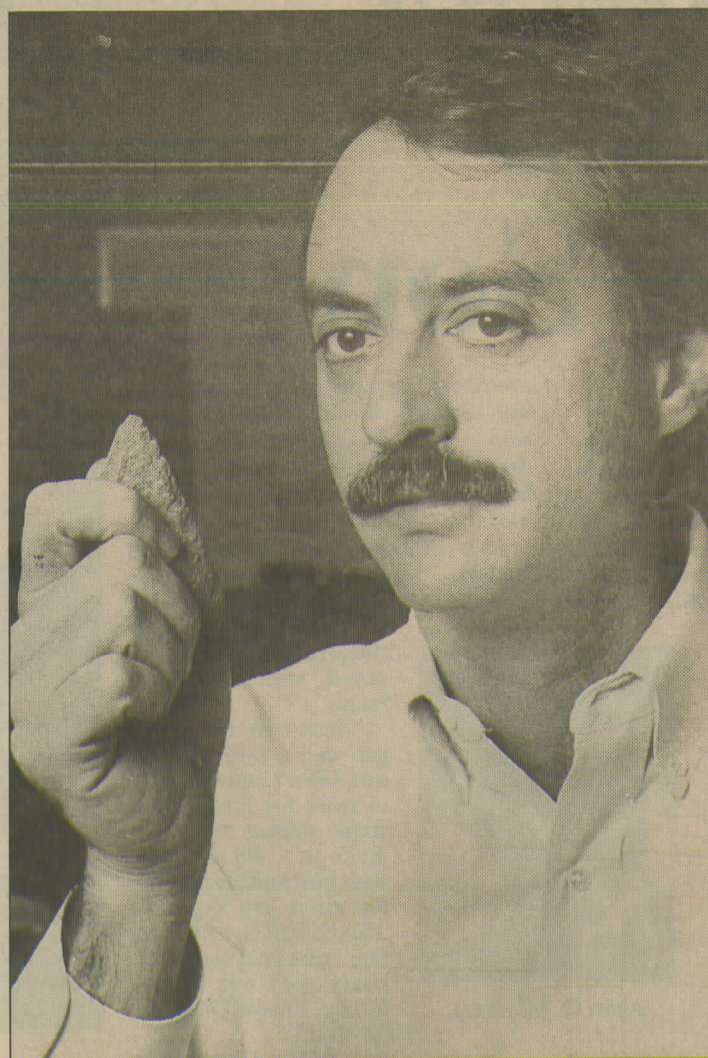
"What is most unique about this site is that it has not been previously disturbed," Bernstein said. "The area was never plowed; there are no roads and no houses. We have evidence of activity on the site going on there for 1,000 to 1,500 years and it has been sealed," since before arrival of European influence, he said.

Since that took place the site has been left undisturbed, despite cattle grazing nearby and military activity in the area during the Revolutionary War, the Spanish-American War and World War II.

The site is near Culloden Point, where the British warship HMS Culloden ran aground and sank during the Revolutionary War. Now that the site has been discovered, Bernstein said he lives in fear of tourists with shovels digging up the area for souvenirs.

It is a fear shared by Grossman, who said the site could provide a wealth of knowledge about a nearly unknown civilization. "These were the ancestors of the Indians who taught the Europeans how to catch whales," Grossman said. "The stage we are at now is to decide how big is the site and how do we best protect it."

East Hampton Supervisor Tony Bullock said he is meeting this week with representatives of the Nature Conservancy to enlist their help in protecting as much of the parcel as possible. "This is a regionally significant site. Everybody including the applicant and planning board members sense that this is not a garden variety archaeological find. We are all going to make sure it is properly protected."



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Bernstein with 1,400-year-old cutting device found at site