

NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE TRAIL GUIDE



Dedicated to the Piscataway Conoy Indian Tribe

The Middle Potomac Valley, between Seneca Creek and Point of Rocks, has been inhabited by American Indians for over 12,000 years. This trail guide helps you envision different time periods and activities along the Potomac by sharing highlights of this rich indigenous history.

Our trail traces the C&O Canal Towpath and uses its mile markers for points of reflection on native heritage. The Piscataway Conoy Tribe and the Piscataway Indian Nation are Maryland state-recognized tribes with deep connections to this area. This trail celebrates their heritage and culture and that of the many tribes associated with this landscape.

Sugarloaf Regional Trails (SRT), a 501(c) 3 organization, is dedicated to the conservation of Montgomery County's rural cultural landscape and to the Potomac highland region. Membership is open to everyone.



Tuscarora Aqueduct
Photograph by Jean King Phillips

COHONGOROOTO



The Native Americans called this area **Cohongorooto**, "The Land Above the Falls."

Over 12,000 years ago, the climate here was colder and conifer trees were abundant. PaleoIndian peoples lived in small groups and moved seasonally to hunt mammoth, bison, and giant beavers using poles tipped with "fluted points" (or stone tools with a large flake removed from the center). Some fluted points have been found on the ground near the confluence of the Potomac and Seneca Creek (Mile Marker 22.8), in the vicinity of the McKee-Beshers Wildlife Management Area (MM 27.2), and near Tuscarora Creek (MM 44).

About 9,000 years ago the climate warmed and plants and animals similar to today's species proliferated along the Potomac. Evidence of human occupation dating to the "Archaic Period" is found along the Potomac buried many feet in the soil and on upland areas. Potomac River cobbles were used to make stone tools. Evidence of the Archaic Period has been found along the C&O Canal near White's Ferry Road (MMs 33 through 35.5), near the Dickerson Conservation Facility (MM 39.5), and at Point of Rocks (MM 48.2).

Around 3500 years ago, life was more sedentary although people still moved seasonally across uplands and in aquatic environments. A variety of plants were collected including seed collecting which eventually led to agriculture. Pottery making began as well.

By AD 1000, American Indians embarked on a new way of life on the broad Potomac floodplains. In addition to hunting, fishing, and gathering, they established large, more concentrated settlements with palisades and maize and other horticulture. Archaeologists found evidence of villages at Point of Rocks (MM 48.2), along the Monocacy (MM 42.2), at Noland's Ferry (MM 44.6), on Mason (MM 38.2) and Seldon Islands (MM 29 and near McKee-Beshers (MM 27.2) and Seneca Creek (MM 22.8).

Cover photo: Brandon Harley, Lead Dancer
Piscataway Conoy Indian Tribe
Photograph by Jean King Phillips

INFORMATION



Sugarloaf Regional Trails promotes respect for indigenous people and archaeological and natural resources.

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Funding for this brochure was generously provided by Heritage Montgomery and Maryland Heritage Area Authority.

SRT thanks the Piscataway Conoy Indian Tribe; Glass Trading Beads found by Dennis Curry on Conoy Island, Dennis Curry (Chief Archeologist of Maryland Historical Trust), MD DNR, MD NR Police; Kevin Brandt of the NPS C&O Canal Headquarters Office; Dr. Stephen R. Potter of NPS, NCR; and the Archeological Society of Maryland. Text developed by Margaret Coleman and Virginia R. Busby, PhD of Hillside Consulting, LLC.



Conoy Island
Photograph by Jean King Phillips

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PISCATAWAY CONOY INDIAN TRIBE





Glass Trading Beads found on Conoy (Heaters) Island by Dennis Curry. Photograph by Christopher Curry

MM (Mile Marker) 48 POINT OF ROCKS



Our trail begins at Point of Rocks. Look across the river at Conoy (Heaters) Island, where our trail begins.

The Piscataway Conoy Indians lived on this large island. They were agriculturists who planted corn, squash, tobacco and beans on the fertile river-bottom soil, fished in the river and hunted game. A people of peace, they palisaded their village to protect against warlike tribes.

By 1699, Europeans had arrived and were visited by two Virginians. They counted 150 inhabitants living in houses within a palisaded village. But by 1722, their number had decreased to 50 persons—not enough to protect themselves from warring tribes—and the Piscataways left their island home.

FISH WEIRS There are nine of these intriguing fish traps between Seneca and Point of Rocks, viewable only when the water level is low.



MM 44.5 NOLAND'S FERRY



1000-3000 BC. An Indian village, pottery, projectile points and burial ground were excavated here in 1978 during the 8th annual Maryland Archaeological Field Session, led by Spencer Geasey.

MM 44 TUSCARORA CREEK



This is one of the earliest Paleo Indian sites in Maryland, radio-carbon-dated to 7320-7520 BC, 13,000 years ago!

MM 42 MONOCACY AQUEDUCT

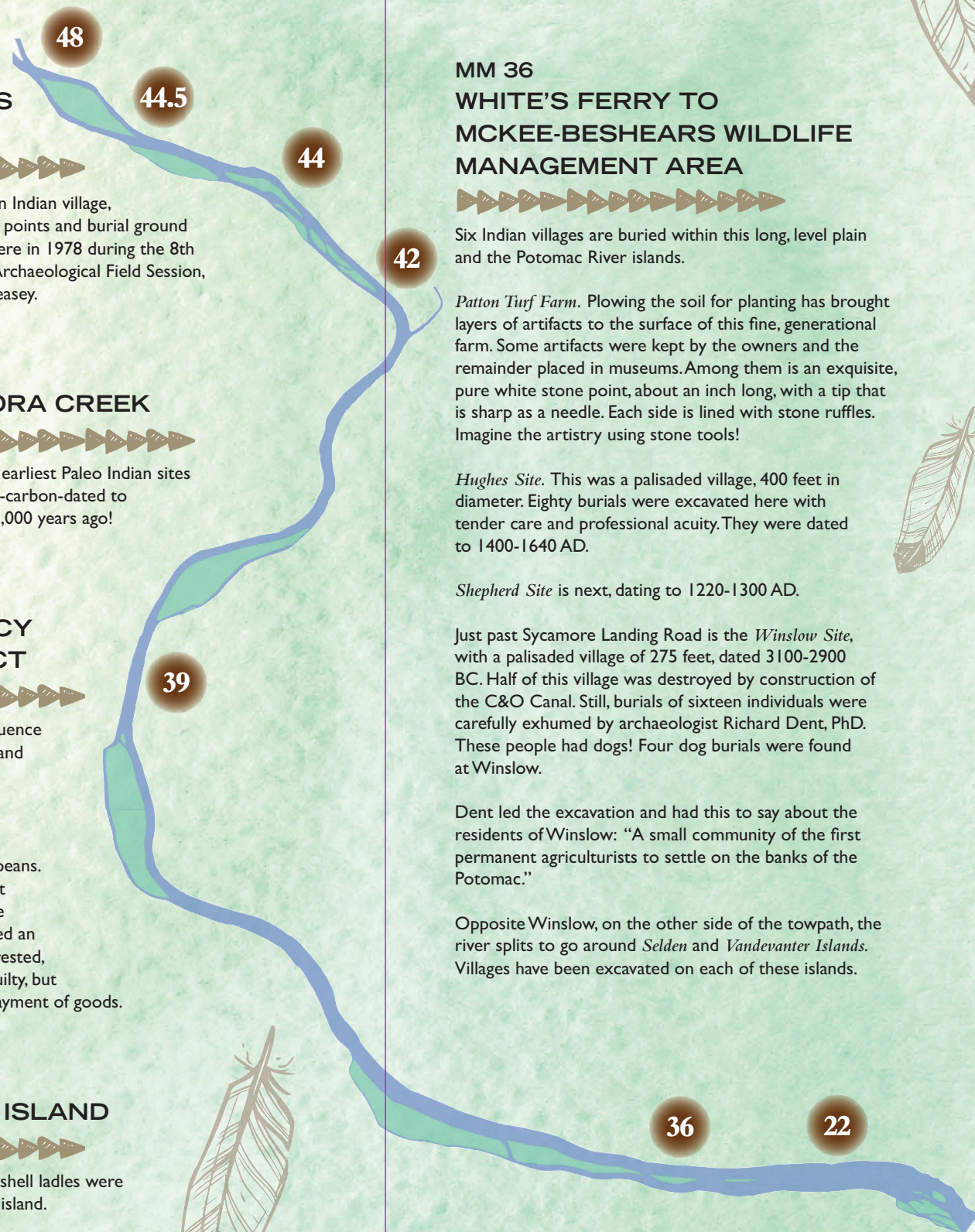


Here, at the confluence of the Monocacy and Potomac rivers, a busy trading post was located, run first by Indians and later by Europeans. During a late-night quarrel, one of the white owners killed an Indian. He was arrested, tried and found guilty, but pardoned upon payment of goods.

MM 39 MASON'S ISLAND



Burials and turtle shell ladles were excavated on this island.



MM 36 WHITE'S FERRY TO MCKEE-BESHEARS WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA



Six Indian villages are buried within this long, level plain and the Potomac River islands.

Patton Turf Farm. Plowing the soil for planting has brought layers of artifacts to the surface of this fine, generational farm. Some artifacts were kept by the owners and the remainder placed in museums. Among them is an exquisite, pure white stone point, about an inch long, with a tip that is sharp as a needle. Each side is lined with stone ruffles. Imagine the artistry using stone tools!

Hughes Site. This was a palisaded village, 400 feet in diameter. Eighty burials were excavated here with tender care and professional acuity. They were dated to 1400-1640 AD.

Shepherd Site is next, dating to 1220-1300 AD.

Just past Sycamore Landing Road is the *Winslow Site*, with a palisaded village of 275 feet, dated 3100-2900 BC. Half of this village was destroyed by construction of the C&O Canal. Still, burials of sixteen individuals were carefully exhumed by archaeologist Richard Dent, PhD. These people had dogs! Four dog burials were found at Winslow.

Dent led the excavation and had this to say about the residents of Winslow: "A small community of the first permanent agriculturists to settle on the banks of the Potomac."

Opposite Winslow, on the other side of the towpath, the river splits to go around *Selden* and *Vandevanter Islands*. Villages have been excavated on each of these islands.

MM 22 SENECA



Seneca, arguably the most beautiful spot on the river, accentuates Cohongorooto, the land above the falls. Seneca Indians lived here from earliest times and the collection of their artifacts resides at the Smithsonian Institution. The Senecas were seasonal, migratory people who lived sometimes at Monocacy as well as other places.

This pot was reconstructed from sherds found at the **Winslow Site**. It was formed from local clay more than a thousand years before the arrival of Europeans. (Courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of Natural History)

Photograph by Jean King Phillips.



Credits —

Cohongorooto: The Potomac Above the Falls, Vol I and III, The Louis Berger Group, Inc., 2005

Maryland Room; C. Burr Arts Library, Frederick, MD

Hughes Site; www.jefpat.org/archeobotany/Sites/18MO1.aspx

Winslow Site; www.jefpat.org/archeobotany/Sites/18MO9.aspx, Richard Dent, PhD

Dennis C. Curry, Chief Archeologist of Maryland Historical Trust, 2011; "A Closer Look at the Last Disappearance of the Conoy Indians"

James Krakker, Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of Natural History, Anthropology Department

Judy Stone and Margi Wilkinson Levitt, Stone Graphics

NOTE: All Mile Markers (MM) are approximate by intention. Property bordering the C&O Canal National Park is privately owned. Disturbing the earth in any way will be prosecuted. NO TRESPASSING.