



MEDIA RELEASE

*For immediate release
March 26, 2007*

Students help archaeologists answer lingering questions

Like pieces of a two-hectare puzzle, some interesting pictures of early settlement on Hogg Bay near Perth are slowly coming together.

Thanks to an exciting hands-on archaeology program for Grade 5 students offered by the Friends of Murphys Point Park, more than 400 students have helped connect the pieces of this giant puzzle.

Each fall since 2004, the week-long program has been offered to local schools. One class attends each day, spending half the time excavating a real historic site with licensed archaeologists and the other half learning about artifact cleaning and cataloguing, as well as completing a mapping exercise and learning about the history of the site.

The excavation is located at the McParlan House and Burgess Mill site on Hogg Bay in Murphys Point Provincial Park, which is on the shores of Big Rideau Lake.

“When the Friends first conceived of this archaeology project, one of the things we wanted to help the park to do was to answer a number of questions about this site,” explains Stephanie Gray, Friends vice president and chair of the project committee. “For example, we know it was settled after 1812, but we aren’t sure if the house is the original homestead. If it wasn’t, where was the original house? What other buildings were on the site? What is there to know about the people who lived and worked there?”

Since 2004, the answers to many of these and other questions are slowly being uncovered.

Brenda Kennett and Jeff Earl of Past Recovery Archaeological Services, the project’s consulting archaeologists, are in the midst of finalizing their latest report on the students’ findings from recent excavations.

“In the first two years, most of our excavation units were located close to McParlan House,” Ms. Kennett said. “The majority of the artifacts recovered from those units date back to no earlier than the 1840s. Since we know the site was settled by 1820, this seems to indicate McParlan House was not the first house there.”

In October 2006, the archaeologists established units farther away from the house, closer to the ruins of the Burgess Mill, which is believed to have been one of the earliest operating sawmills on the Rideau.

“The artifacts found in those units are consistent with the first phase of occupation on the site,” Mr. Earl said. “They date to the 1820s and 1830s, which means they could have belonged to the house built by Reuben Sherwood, the man who surveyed much of Perth and this district, and who we know settled on the Hogg Bay site and set up the mill operation.”

Domestic material found in the units was mixed with structural material, which Mr. Earl says could indicate the original house was closer to the mill than the present McParlan House. “The ceramic sherds recovered in these units included creamware and pearlware, which are usually identified with 1820s/1830s deposits or earlier.”

The artifacts found in front of the McParlan House and closer to the mill are small, which the archaeologists say is typical in high-traffic areas.

“We would like to return to the vicinity of these units near the mill this fall, where we hope to find more evidence of a house in the area, such as structural features,” Mr. Earl said.

“We already consider this to be a significant finding,” said Tobi Kiesewalter, Murphys Point's senior park naturalist. “The students who have participated in this project so far can be very proud that they were involved in helping us to better understand the settlement history of this site. Their discoveries will be noted in official reports submitted to the provincial government.”

Ms. Gray added this is just one of several notable discoveries. As part of the testing phase, archaeologists were able to locate remnants of a blacksmith shop on the site. Since 2004, students have unearthed a variety of interesting artifacts, including a range of ceramics and glassware; building implements, such as nails, that show the progression of construction from early settlement to more recent restorations; bones of animals butchered on the farm; and much more.

Findings from the excavations also show there was a high concentration of artifacts from the mid 1800s near the house, but nothing from the late 1800s and early 1900s. “This could be showing different patterns of refuse disposal amongst various occupants, perhaps a reflection of concern for cleanliness,” Ms. Kennett said.

The project is designed to mesh well with Grade 5 curriculum, particularly in social studies, mathematics and language. “There is much to learn from this site and archaeology gives students a chance to see, in a hands-on way, exactly how the pioneers they are learning about actually lived,” Ms. Gray says. “It takes the information out of the textbook and classroom and makes it real, living history they can touch.”

The Friends have launched their 2007 fundraising campaign to help run the week-long program in October, which features a crew of licensed archaeologists, park staff and trained volunteers.

“This is truly a worthwhile educational experience,” Ms. Gray said. “Our committee works hard to subsidize the program so students only have to pay for the bus to get to the park. The community has supported us in the past, and we hope the generosity will continue.”

She added there is no shortage of archaeology to be done. “We have this big, exciting puzzle that will take us years to solve, and we would like hundreds more students to have the chance to connect some pieces.”

For more information, to donate or to get involved, please contact Stephanie Gray at 613-264-0447, e-mail friendsofmurphyspointpark@yahoo.ca or check www.friendsofmurphyspoint.ca.

–30–

For more information contact:

Stephanie Gray
Friends of Murphys Point Park
613-264-0447

Photos

Artifacts: Artifacts found in the units closer to the Burgess Mill include two clay smoking pipe stems stamped “A. COGHILL” (upper left) and “MURRAY” (left), both manufactured in Glasgow; a blue painted sugar bowl lid (lower left); a creamware (upper centre), a blue-edged ridged dish (centre); a blue-edged pearlware soup plate (lower centre), a shoe buckle (upper right) and two blacksmith-wrought nails (right).

Excavation: Is McParlan House (background) the first homestead on this site at Hogg Bay? Since 2004, local students have been excavating for the answers to this and other questions.