



A Legacy Of Maine's Ancient Past

The Conservancy partners with several parties to acquire the Dresden Falls Archaic site.



MARTHA SPIESS

Arthur Spiess collects 7,000-year-old feature fill from a trench wall during excavations in 2008.

THE DRESDEN FALLS Archaic site (8000–3000 B.C.) is the largest and most intensively occupied Early-to-Middle Archaic site in Maine, and it has yielded more stone artifacts from this period than any other site in the state. The site was discovered about 20 years ago by artifact collectors who reported finding stone tools in a plowed field.

In 2008, Maine Historic Preservation Commission

archaeologist Arthur Spiess received permission from the landowners to conduct the first professional excavations at the site. In addition to recovering Middle Archaic projectile points and slate knife fragments, he found intact hearths and garbage pits buried a foot beneath the surface. Charcoal from one pit was radiocarbon dated to 7,000 years ago. “At over 15 acres in size, this is one of the largest Early and Middle Archaic sites in northern New England,” said Spiess.



MAINE STATE MUSEUM



These are some of the knife and spear points that were found on the surface by artifact hunters. They're approximately 5,000 years old.

“The cultural material is closely related to southern Maine and southern New England at the time.”

Merrymeeting Bay is now part of the Kennebec River estuary. The coast of Maine has been sinking since the end of the Ice Age, and consequently coastal sites have been flooded and destroyed, but the Dresden Falls Archaic site is high enough above the river that it's not threatened by erosion. At the time it was occupied, the site was located next to a major waterfall. Spiess recovered numerous fish bones, indicating that these falls were an excellent place to catch migrating fish, including striped bass, sturgeon, and salmon. Since about 3000 B.C. the waterfall has been covered by the rising sea and the best fishing locations moved upstream.

Situated on a beautiful sloping expanse along the bank of the Kennebec River in the town of Dresden, the site is adjacent to the Swan Island Wildlife Management Area, and within the Merrymeeting Bay and Lower American Archaeology

Kennebec River Estuary. In addition to protecting the site's cultural resources, this acquisition also preserves 560 feet of river frontage and nearly 27 acres of wildlife habitat.

Thanks to the efforts of a coalition that included the Conservancy, the local

land trust Friends of Merrymeeting Bay, the state's Land for Maine's Future program, and Spiess, this important site will be permanently protected. This is an example of the important role partnerships can play in saving America's distant past. —Andy Stout

CONSERVANCY Plan of Action

SITE: Dresden Falls

CULTURE AND TIME PERIOD: Early to Middle Archaic (8000 to 3000 B.C.)

STATUS: The site was threatened by development.

ACQUISITION: The Conservancy needs to raise \$75,000.

HOW YOU CAN HELP: Please send contributions to The Archaeological Conservancy, Attn: Dresden Falls, 5301 Central Ave. NE, Suite 902, Albuquerque, NM 87108-1530.

