

NATIVE AMERICAN SITES: THE MANNAHOAKS

In the summer of 1608, Captain John Smith worked a vessel upstream to the falls of the Rappahannock, while exploring the Chesapeake Bay. He and his crew came across a people called the Mannahoaks, but the encounter was hostile and after a short skirmish, the Englishmen withdrew. Historic knowledge related to these Native Americans is limited to the information John Smith was able to glean in a few hours from a captured Mannahoak warrior. This information is probably somewhat obscured, though, for having passed through an Algonquian interpreter the Englishmen had picked up before ascending the Rappahannock. Archaeological information has also been limited because flooding has eroded some sites while alluvial depositions have buried others. Further, most archaeological investigations have been at a reconnaissance level only, although Mary Washington College has recently done more extensive work in the Hunting Run area of Spotsylvania County.

In 1624, John Smith charted a map based on his interrogation of the Mannahoak he had captured in 1608. This map shows five sites which subsequent field investigation three hundred years later were shown to have been surprisingly accurate. The first Native American site, indicated by a cross on the south bank of the river above a large island at the Falls of the Rappahannock, is a hunting camp called Mahaskahod. The village sites, depicted by houses, include Hassuiuga and Tanxsnitania on the Rappahannock and Shackaconia and Stegara on the Rapidan. Three other names appear in Captain Smith's written account although there is no indication of their location on his map. These latter names include Outponcas, Tegoneaes, and Whonkentyaes. Further confusion is inevitable because it is not known whether these eight names apply to specific settlements or whether they are the names of individual chiefs whose people occupied the areas shown on the 1624 map.

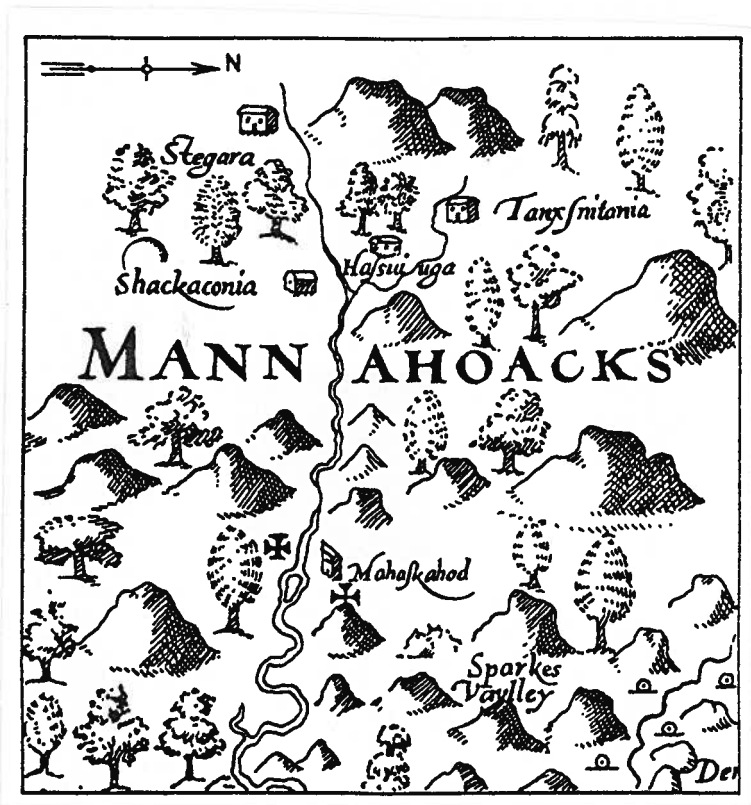
Following John Smith's experience in 1608, there was no further contact between the Mannahoaks and Europeans in the Rappahannock valley. This isolation was the result of a powerful Native American confederation under Powhatan and Opechancanough which blocked the English from Virginia's interior reaches. In 1670, after this confederation had been defeated, John Lederer traveled up the Rappahannock valley with John Catlett, but these explorers encountered no Mannahoaks. These early inhabitants had likely been dispersed by enemy tribes from the north or had succumbed to disease. There is documentary evidence that some Mannahoaks ended up on the James River, joining the Monacans, with whom they had traditionally been friendly.

While the Mannahoaks had disappeared, other Native American tribes remained a powerful presence on the Virginia frontier. Iroquois hunting trails coursed along the north-south mountain chains and other Native Americans still inhabited the mountains themselves. In 1676, Nathaniel Bacon led a group of colonists in revolt against Governor William Berkeley because they perceived that the colonial government was not sufficiently active in controlling the Native American tribes. Civil order was certainly maintained when Bacon was captured and hanged, but the colonists still needed to exercise caution as they encroached on Native American lands. In 1676, Governor Berkeley awarded a land grant along the Rappahannock to Lawrence Smith, for his assistance in suppressing Bacon's Rebellion. A palisaded fort was the construction of choice on this tract, probably in the vicinity of the Fredericksburg Country Club, as these men explored the area for subsequent exploitation and settlement.

The Native American presence has long passed, but the evidence of their earlier occupation can be found in numerous locations along the banks of the Rappahannock and Rapidan Rivers. Prehistoric sites in eastern North America are typically divided into three cultural periods: Paleo-Indian, Archaic, and Woodland. The Paleo-Indian period is defined from circa. 12000 - 8000 B.C. and was characterized by small mobile hunting groups living in the cool environment of the postglacial period. Archaeologists have recovered very few artifacts from this time in the Virginia Piedmont section of the Chesapeake Drainage. Instead, the earliest known Native American presence in the Rappahannock basin occurred during the Early Archaic period (8000-6000 B.C.).

Current research indicates no strong distinctions between the Paleo-Indian and Archaic periods except for an increase in the number and size of sites and different types of tools and projectile points. Aboriginal groups began to use locally available rocks, for instance, to develop chipped-stone tools rather than relying on distant cryptocrystalline lithic sources that had previously been so important. Ground stone tools also appeared during this period, such as axes and grinding stones.

The Middle Archaic (6000-3000 B.C.) and the Late Archaic (3000-1500 B.C.) periods also exhibit great continuity with one another, although there were different adaptations to climate and continued development of more efficient projectile points and other tools. During the Middle Archaic period the climate continued to change from the cool Pleistocene environment to the warmer and drier climates we experience today. Settlement occurred along streams and rivers as well as in upland areas where expanding hardwood forests provided shelter and sustenance. During the Late Archaic period, populations continued to increase as tribal groups exploited



Map 2. John Smith's 1624 Map (portion).

the well-established oak-dominated forests of the Piedmont.

The transitional period between the Archaic and Woodland periods, called the Terminal Archaic period (1500-800 B.C.), is characterized by dramatic changes in climate. As the great glaciers receded, sea levels rose, submerging large portions of the Atlantic coast which created great estuaries and tidal wetlands. Native American groups located increasingly in river valleys, perhaps to take advantage of extended runs of anadromous fish.

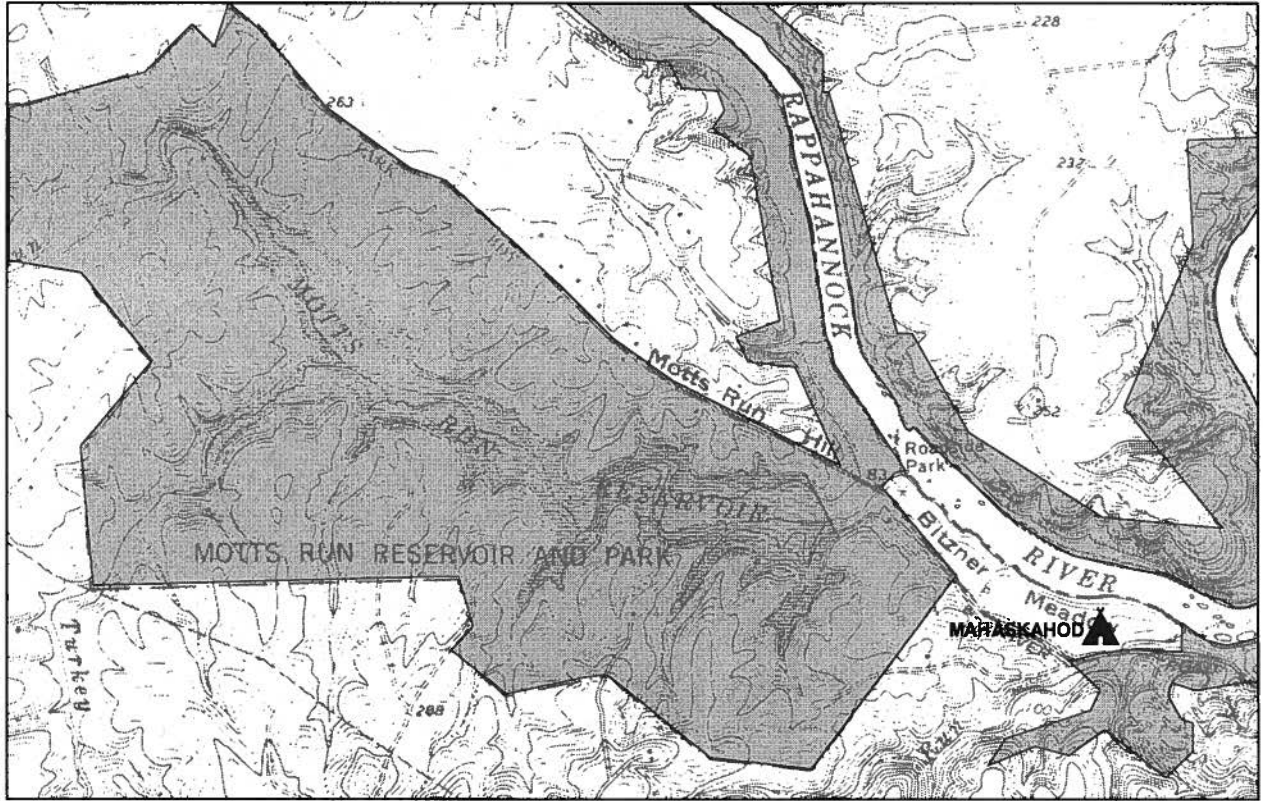
Early Woodland period (1000-300 B.C.) excavations suggest increased use of floodplains for horticulture, a trend that continued through the Middle Woodland (300 B.C. -1000 A.D.) and Late Woodland (1000 A.D. - European Contact) periods. These eras are characterized by increasingly secure subsistence economies that allowed groups to remain in one place on a seasonal basis. Other developments included long-distance trade and construction of earthen mounds for burials.

The Late Woodland Period saw the settlement of large villages and the formation of strong regional identities, as tribes became less nomadic. Some of the identified Mannahoak sites were undoubtedly occupied in 1608 when John Smith made contact, but it is not possible to firmly establish the location of villages by name. Archaeologists at the University of Virginia and Mary Washington College (MWC) have indicated that the upper Rappahannock's Native American sites remain significant because of the Mannahoak's limited contact with Europeans. Recent work by MWC at Hunting Run has revealed the wealth of information that remains to be recovered by more intense archaeological investigations.

Selected Bibliography

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- ▶ Speck, Frank. *The Rappahannock Indians of Virginia.* New York: Museum of American Indians, Heve Foundation, 1925.
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Hunting Camp at Falls of the Rappahannock - Scholars have suggested that the south bank of the Rappahannock River, between Mott's Run and Embrey Run (the area shown as Bitzner Meadow on USGS topographical maps) may be the Mannahoak hunting camp called Mahaskahod. This assertion is based on the incidence of pottery, projectile points, and stone implements recovered in this area by David I. Bushnell, Jr. in 1934. This area also exhibits a large quantity of broken pebbles and stone flakes, indicating that this site was used to make a variety of tools and projectile points. Similar items have been found on the riverbanks downstream, especially the area on and around Hunter's Island. In fact, the high ground of Hunter's Island was likely a fishing camp, based on the artifacts located there, and because it is high enough to avoid being disturbed by most spring floods. The stone fish traps, still visible from the Falmouth Bridge, are the type used by Native Americans although their origins are unknowable.



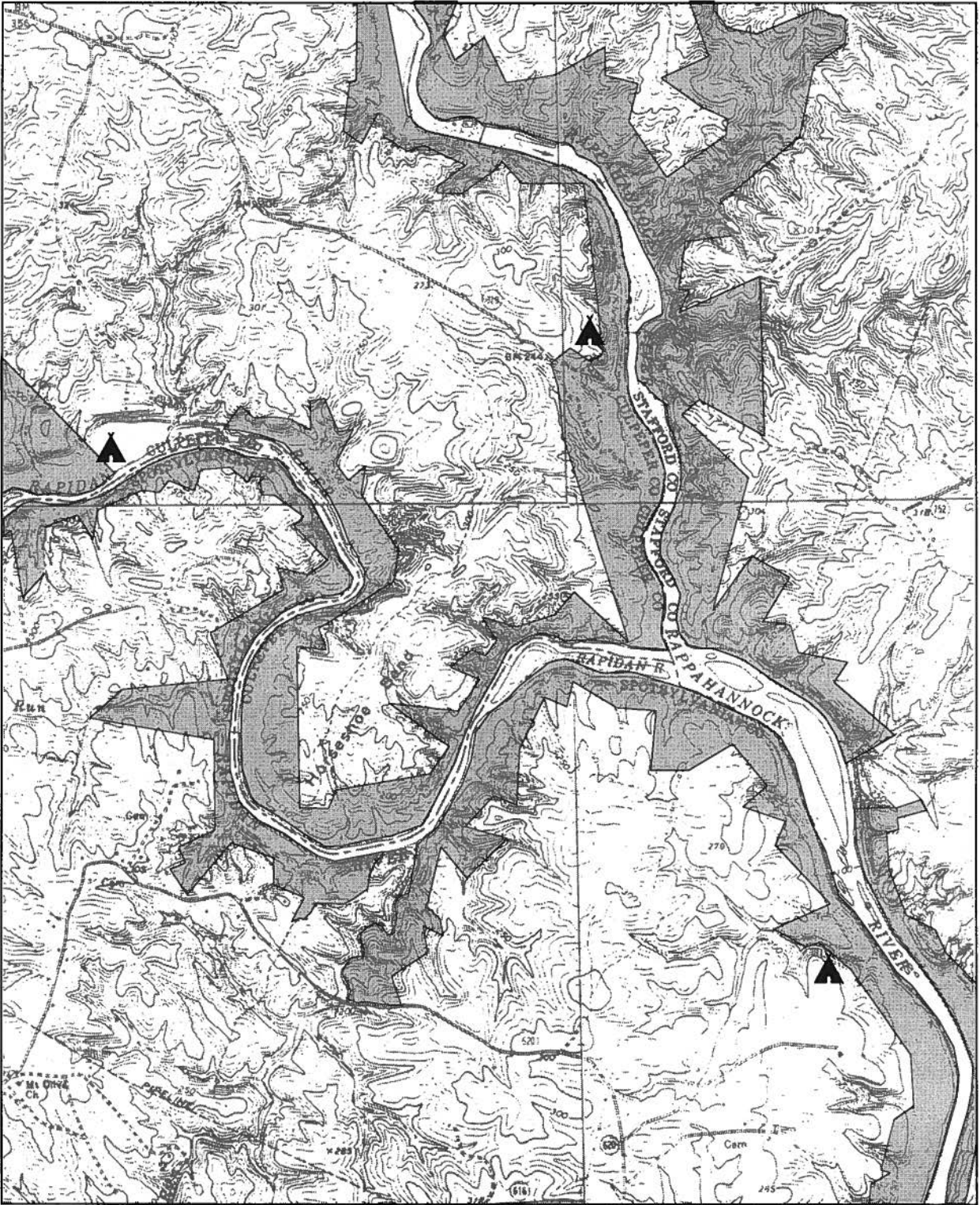
Map 3. Mannahoak Hunting Camp - Mahaskahod (site).

Settlement Site on Rappahannock below the Confluence - The south bank of the Rappahannock, approximately one mile below its confluence with the Rapidan River, has also yielded numerous artifacts. This area may have been a Mannahoak settlement site in 1608. Recovered artifacts also suggest more than one period of occupation based on the types of tools recovered. The City of Fredericksburg owns the riverfront in this area, but any significant Native American artifacts are more likely to be found on the privately owned upland plateau.

Settlement Site on Rappahannock above the Confluence - The area above the confluence around Richard's Ford has the characteristics of a desirable settlement. These advantages include the stream junction, which to this day is an excellent fishing area, and the wide low ground along the river backed up by a plateau that is safe from flooding. Many artifacts have been recovered in this area, including fabric impressed ceramics, which would indicate a Middle or Late Woodland period site.

This area corresponds with the name Hassuiuga shown on Smith's 1624 map. John Lederer is also believed to have traveled through this site in 1670, on his way west to the Appalachian Mountains (based on his own map and account of his travels). Much of this area is within the City of Fredericksburg's riparian holdings.

Settlement Site on Rapidan above the Confluence - Above a bend in the Rapidan River (approximately two miles from the confluence) is an area that flattens out on both sides of the river. In 1934, Bushnell was able to determine from local residents that a large burial mound had stood on the north bank but that it had been partially destroyed by a flood in the 1890s. Human remains and pottery were reported to have been recovered at that time, but these were lost by the time of Bushnell's visit. Bushnell did find many pottery shards and noticed a slight rise that may be the undisturbed lower portion of the reported burial mound. According to Smith's 1624 map, Shackaconia was the first settlement on the Rapidan in 1608. This area may have been occupied in 1608 and may, in fact, correspond to the historic map. Much of this area is within the City of Fredericksburg's riparian holdings.



Map 4. Mannahoak Settlement Sites Near Confluence.

Settlement Sites at Hunting Run - Mary Washington College had the opportunity to excavate two Native American sites, to mitigate the effects of eventual inundation by the Hunting Run Reservoir.

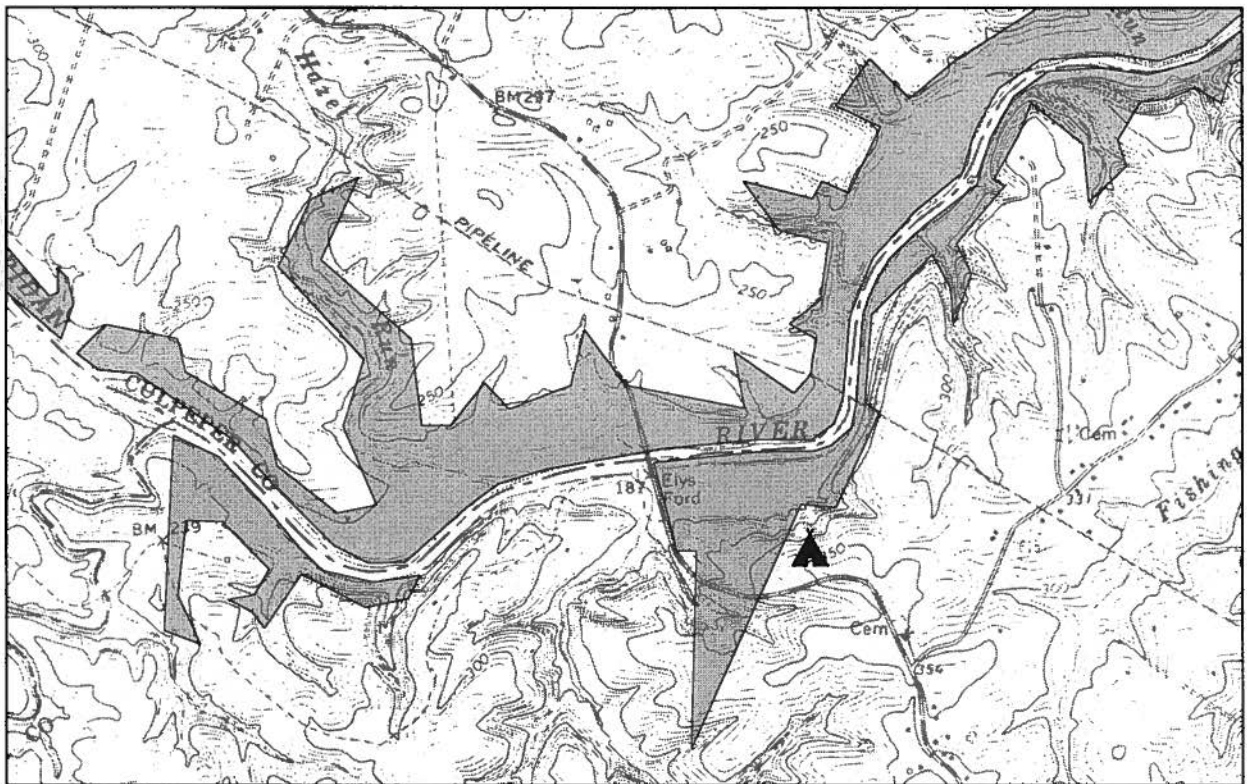
The first site contained evidence of use from the Late Archaic through the Late Woodland periods, circa 2500 B.C. to 1600 A.D. The archaeological evidence points to three to four different occupations during this period, the intensity and function of each shifting over time. The early and later uses of the site, for instance, are characterized by small scatters and concentrations of stone tools and flakes of a limited variety. These finds indicate short-term activities and camping by small, mobile groups. Stone tools and diagnostic ceramics, however, suggest the predominant period of occupation occurred during the Early Woodland to Middle Woodland periods, circa 1000 B.C. to 500 A.D. The more intense and longer occupations also show evidence of a greater variety of activities, such as processing of nuts and seeds, hunting, retooling, cutting, and scraping.

The second excavated site has a similar date range (about 3,000 years), but has a contrasting pattern of use. During the Late Archaic period (circa 2500 to 1000 B.C.), hunting bands used the site for short periods of time for camping, resharpening, and tool production. Only a small Early Woodland period occupation is evident. In contrast, evidence of a relatively large and extended encampment indicates that the most substantial use of the site occurred between 300 and 1600 A.D. (representing the Middle and Late Woodland periods). Most significant was the discovery of postmolds and other features that suggest a structure. This apparent house may be the first one recorded in the upland Piedmont region of Virginia (as contrasted to house patterns found at large village sites on river floodplains). The house measured about two to three meters across.

The City of Fredericksburg has deeded the land upon which these sites are located to Spotsylvania County.

24

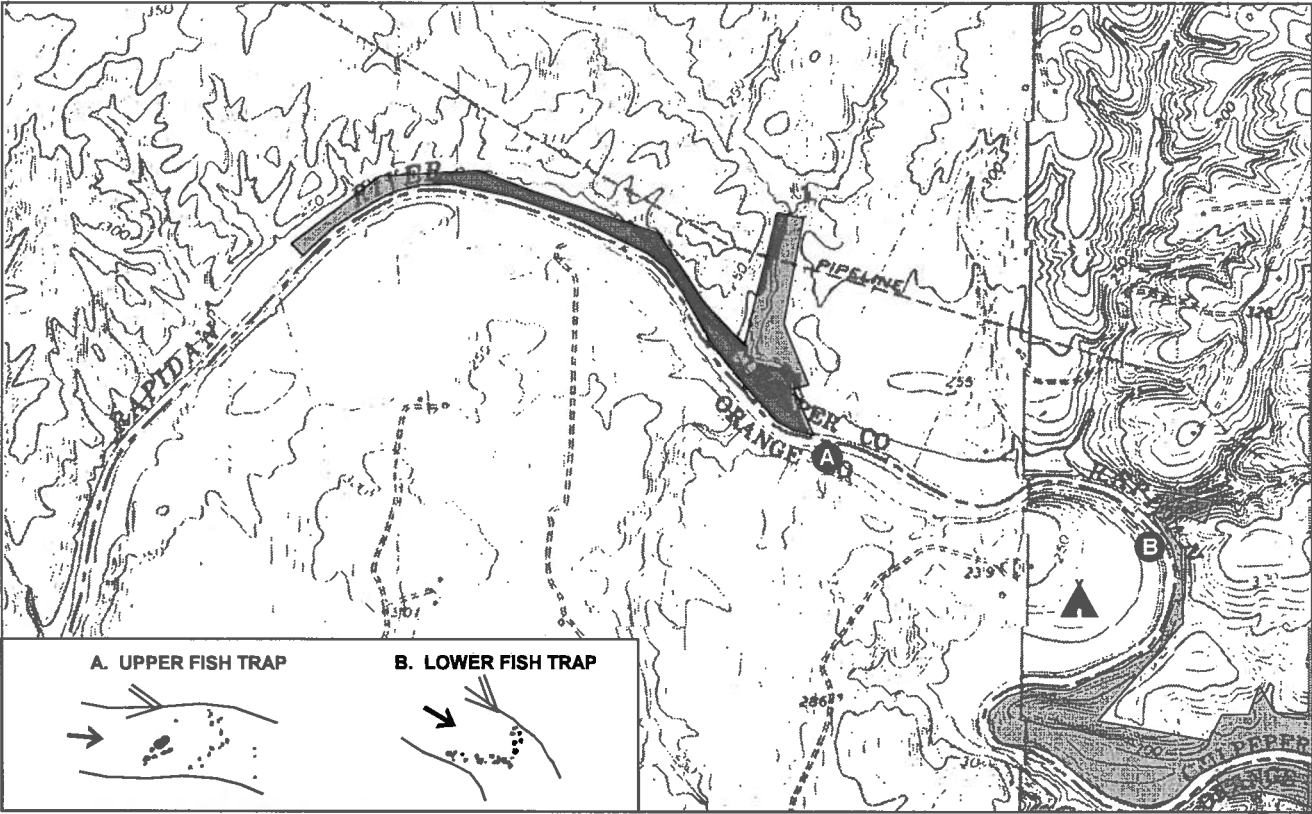
Settlement Site on Rapidan at Ely's Ford - This historic river crossing was part of a Native American trail long before the European arrival in North America. Evidence of occupation has been recovered in the form of tools, stone flakes, and pottery. The artifacts recovered in this location are few but suggest a very ancient settlement. Of additional interest is a highly specialized projectile point from an early culture that Bushnell discovered on the high ground north of the ford. This point was similar to identified Folsom points which have been found in widely scattered sites east of the Mississippi River, but not in great quantities in any one site. Upstream of Ely's Ford is a v-shaped fish dam. Much of this area is within the City of Fredericksburg's riparian holdings, although any settlements were probably located on the upland plateau that is privately owned.



Map 5. Settlement Site at Ely's Ford.

25

Settlement Site on Rapidan at Skinker's Ford - Strong evidence suggests an extensive Native American settlement occurred at Skinker's Ford. Recovered artifacts include tools, flakes, projectile points, and some pottery. This site may also have been occupied in 1608. The City of Fredericksburg owns very little property in this vicinity. Of interest, though, are what may be two fish traps that extend across the river. These features are similar to the type used by Native Americans but the origins of these specific traps may not be able to be determined.



Map 6. Skinker's Ford Fish Traps.