



# Historic Context for Historic Period Archaeological Sites On Virginia's Coastal Plain

Project #  
05-262

## Background:

The Department of Defense (DoD) has over a dozen installations located on the coastal plain of Virginia, including Fort Story, Fort Eustis, Marine Corps Base Quantico, the Yorktown Naval Weapons Station, Little Creek Amphibious Base and Langley Air Force Base. Under the National Historic Preservation Act, each installation is required to identify and evaluate the significance of any archaeological site that would be affected by the installation's actions. One difficulty faced by installations is they often attempt to assess the significance of a historic period archaeological site in comparison to other sites on the installation, rather than using all the information in the state. This is due in part to the fragmented manner in which archaeology is managed. The installation and the state historic preservation office tend to see only compliance based projects, while in Virginia, non-compliance based archaeology is being done at major research centers such as the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, the Jamestown Rediscovery Project, and Mount Vernon. A project that combined the work being done by federal agencies to ensure legal compliance and the work done by research institutions would give installation cultural resources managers information dominance over the subject to make better, more accurate determinations of significance.

## Objective:

In cooperation with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (VDHR), this study is developing scientific standards of significance for historic period archaeological sites that date from 1830 to 1914 on the Coastal Plain of Virginia. This study is reviewing the relevant archaeological research conducted on the Coastal Plain of Virginia (both academic and that driven by compliance needs) and determining the current state of knowledge. This will allow sites on DoD installations within the Coastal Plain of Virginia to view the historic period archaeological sites under their control within a larger context.

## Summary of Approach:

Using the historic framework developed by the VDHR, and with the consultation of DoD installation cultural resource managers, we are reviewing the archaeological work that has been done on Virginia's coastal plain in an attempt to determine what data gaps are present; what research themes are significant, and what themes have been vigorously investigated and require no further work.

The end result will be a context for sites dating from 1830 -1914 on the coastal plain of Virginia.

## Benefit:

This larger holistic context will allow the actual significance of the studied time period archaeological sites to be determined, as opposed to the current "ad hoc" system which views each site individually. The resulting study will reduce mission impact caused by historic period archaeological sites by allowing for the effective and efficient management of the archaeological sites on military land on the Coastal Plain of Virginia. This project will also allow the various installations to interpret their historic sites to the post community and visitors.

## Accomplishments:

As of March 2006, we have reviewed all sites within the project area for which eligibility determinations have been made, and have studied the research themes that have been addressed. A paper on the project was presented at the Eastern States Archaeological Federation in November 2005 and at the Middle Atlantic Archaeological Conference in March 2006. We are currently compiling an historic context for the Virginia Coastal Plain, with particular focus on nineteenth century farmsteads, a resource deemed by many to be ubiquitous. Once complete, this document will allow installations to make better decisions about a site's significance. This will ensure that only truly significant sites are managed ensuring the maximum acreage for training and testing.

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