

HA-1227

Orr Prehistoric Steatite Quarry Arch. Site (Broad Creek Soapstone Quarries)

Architectural Survey File

This is the architectural survey file for this MIHP record. The survey file is organized reverse-chronological (that is, with the latest material on top). It contains all MIHP inventory forms, National Register nomination forms, determinations of eligibility (DOE) forms, and accompanying documentation such as photographs and maps.

Users should be aware that additional undigitized material about this property may be found in on-site architectural reports, copies of HABS/HAER or other documentation, drawings, and the “vertical files” at the MHT Library in Crownsville. The vertical files may include newspaper clippings, field notes, draft versions of forms and architectural reports, photographs, maps, and drawings. Researchers who need a thorough understanding of this property should plan to visit the MHT Library as part of their research project; look at the MHT web site (mht.maryland.gov) for details about how to make an appointment.

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Last Updated: 02-18-2004

HA-1227

c. B.C. 1700-1000

Orr Prehistoric Steatite Quarry Archeological Site
(Broad Creek Soapstone Quarries)
Robinson Mill Road
Dublin
Private

The Orr Prehistoric Steatite Quarry site encompasses an exposed boulder field extending along a 30 to 40 degree slope which decreases to approximately 10 degrees at the base and crest of the ridge. Due to the rocky surface and steep slope, the site has escaped cultivation although the oak-chestnut forest which covers the site was harvested around the 1930s. The site was surface collected by an amateur archeologist in the 1930s, and possibly once in the 1950s. An examination of the Orr collection and of the site's surface revealed the manufacture of vessels from boulders instead of from bedrock. Apparently natural boulders of suitable size and shape were selected from the surface until the supply was exhausted. Then pits were opened into the ridge to obtain suitable boulders. The first stage in the manufacturing process was the modification of the long axis to form handles. After the exterior edges were shaped, the interior area was removed. Bowls were abandoned when unusually hard areas prevented reduction, when the bowl fractured during the process, or when in the process of roughing out the bowl it was reduced past an acceptable dimension. The roughed-out vessels fall within two vessel types: the rounded bottom, oval-shaped Orient Phase type and the straight-sided, flat-bottomed Frost Island and Miller Field phase types. The popularity of steatite vessels is dated from 1700 to 1000 B.C. The quarrying activities at the site probably represent periodic visits throughout this period to replenish the exhausted supply of previously obtained bowls.

The extensive and well-preserved Orr Prehistoric Steatite Quarry is one of the few known sites in the eastern United States where soapstone vessels were fashioned from steatite boulders instead of from bedrock deposits. While other prehistoric quarries reported from this area may have assemblages representing similar manufacturing processes, these sites have been destroyed by modern quarrying activities. Located on the upper western shore of the Chesapeake Bay, the site is vital to studies of procurement systems of various cultures of the Susquehanna Soapstone tradition, c. B.C. 1700-1000. The high-grade soapstone found in boulder form at the site is a better grade than that reported from the Harland Mill Steatite Quarry located in nearby Cecil County. The Orr site confirms the assertion that the prehistoric quarrier modified his manufacturing techniques to meet the local situation. The site's excellent state of preservation increases the potential value of the site for understanding a previously unexplained manufacturing technique.