

National Park Service



Archeology in the Prince William Forest Park

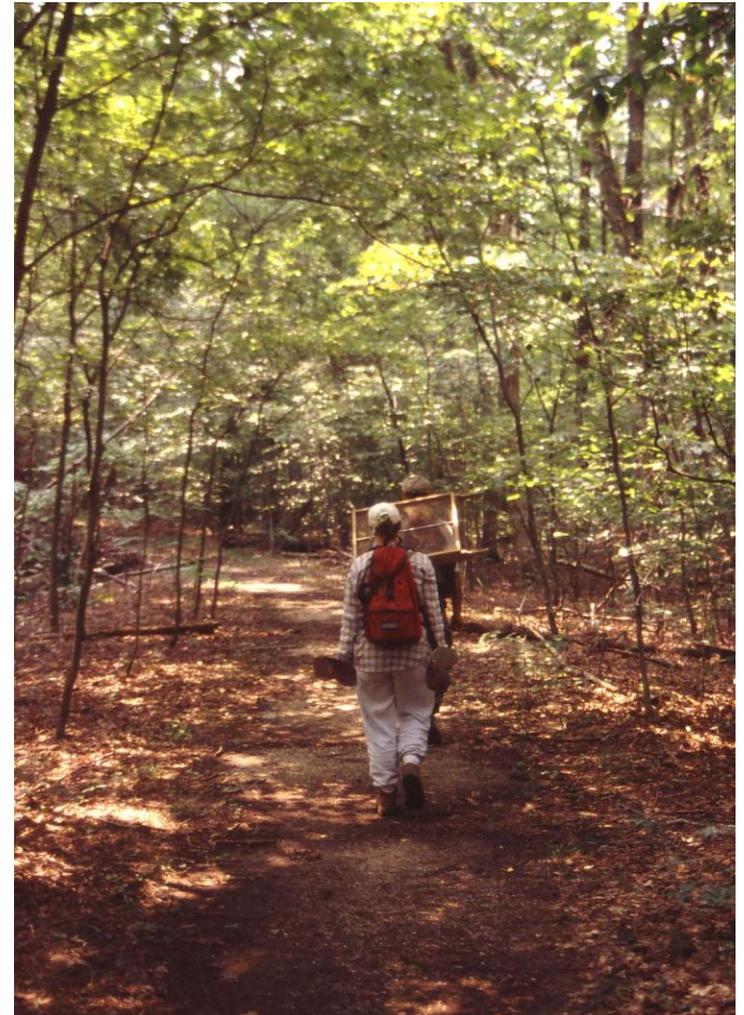


Prince William Forest Park



THE PRINCE WILLIAM FOREST PARK

- Today the Prince William Forest Park is a 13,000 acre nature preserve and recreational area.
- The park was established in 1930s on land that had been home to several hundred mostly poor rural people, black and white.
- Young men from the Civilian Conservation Corps built camps and trails, and old farm fields have slowly reverted to forest.





TRACES OF THE PAST

- The park contains many remains of its history as a farming community.
- Because the park has not been developed, logged, or farmed since 1937, many remains of its past are preserved intact. The landscape of the 1780 to 1935 period is especially well-preserved, but remains of colonial settlement and ancient Native American camp sites can also be found.





ROADS TO THE PAST



The entire network of old roads in the park, including public roads and farm lanes, is preserved.



THE RIDGE ROAD

- This mile post stands along an old public road known as the Ridge Road.
- The Ridge Road ran through the center of the park by 1711 and probably followed an even older Indian trail.





OLD FIELDS

- These stones mark the edge of an old plowed field.
- Drainage ditches, fences, and other signs of farming can also be seen.
- Erosion gullies can be seen in a few parts of the park where farmers were careless, but in most parts of the park the land is not badly eroded.





ARCHEOLOGICAL STUDY

- A 4-year archeological study of the park was carried out in 2000-2003.
- More than 60 archeological sites were found, including Native American camps, colonial plantations, mills, mines, farms, and schools.





ANCIENT NATIVE AMERICANS



- Native Americans began camping in the park at least 8000 years ago. Large camp sites dating to the period from 5000 to 500 years ago overlook Quantico Creek in the eastern part of the park.
- The most common finds at these sites are remains of quarrying stone and making stone tools.



EARLY EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT, 1680 TO 1730

- Most land in the park was patented (claimed) by wealthy speculators in large blocks of 400 to 2000 acres between 1665 and 1720.
- Most of these landowners lived elsewhere, and the lands in the park were worked (if at all) by tenant farmers or gangs of African slaves.
- These poor frontier people had few possessions, so it is very hard to find house sites in the park of this early period.





THE WILLIAM AND MARGARET BENNETT PLANTATION, 1708

- One planter who lived in the park was William Bennett, who patented 400 acres of park lands in 1708.
- William and Margaret Bennett built a frame house with brick foundations in the park some time before 1740.
- Like their neighbors, the Bennetts grew mainly tobacco and corn.
- The farm consisted of a house, a tobacco barn, a few sheds, and some rough, unplowed fields surrounded by split rail fences.





THE WILLIAM AND MARGARET BENNETT PLANTATION, 1708

- The main archeological discovery on the Bennett Plantation Site was a cellar hole about three feet deep.
- This test unit was dug into the cellar and reaches to the floor, showing the rubble and soil that now fills the cellar.
- Artifacts such as pottery, glass from wine bottles, and pieces of tobacco pipes were found in the cellar; they show the cellar was filled in around 1800.





ESTABLISHMENT OF FAMILY FARMS, 1770 TO 1830

- Most of the farm sites you can see in the park today were established around 1800.
- In this period the speculators and wealthy planters sold off their lands in the park to family farmers.
- At the same time, the agricultural focus shifted from tobacco to wheat.
- The remaining woodlands were logged, and instead of old-growth forests the fields were surrounded by managed wood lots.





ESTABLISHMENT OF FAMILY FARMS, 1770 TO 1830



- At least ten farms were set up in the park in this period that lasted down to the 1930s.
- These farmers invested heavily in their properties, building houses and barns, digging wells, erecting fences, and clearing stones from fields. The average farm measured about 150 to 200 acres.



FAMILY CEMETERIES

From 1750 to 1940, many residents were buried in small graveyards on their own property. At least 26 graveyards are present in the park. Most older graves are unmarked or marked only with rough field stones.





POOR HOUSE, 1795 TO 1928

The Prince William County Poor House was built by 1795. The counties took over poor relief from the church after the separation of church and state that took place after the American Revolution. The Poor House was home to 8 to 25 mostly elderly or handicapped people.





POOR HOUSE, 1795 TO 1928

- Archeologists excavated the base of the chimney of a structure built around 1800 that may be the first Poor House.
- The structure measured about 14 by 28 feet and had a foundation made of stone rubble.



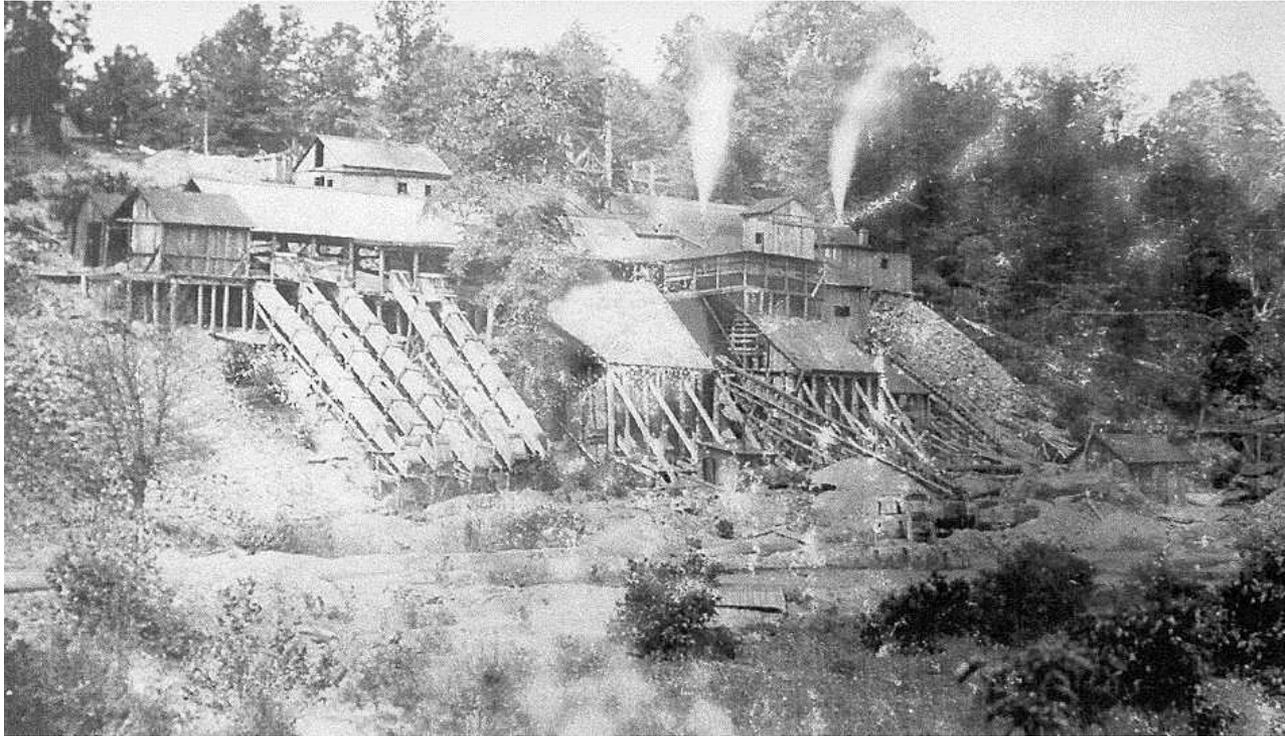


CIVIL WAR

- Several park residents fought for the Confederacy in the Civil War.
- Skirmishes took place in and around the park during 1862 and 1863.
- The Prince William Partisan Rangers made many attacks on Union outposts and pickets in the area, leading one Union officer to say the area was “infested by a set of bushwhacking thieves and smugglers who should be eradicated root and branch.”



CABIN BRANCH PYRITE MINE



- The Cabin Branch Pyrite Mine was opened around 1889 and worked until 1916.
- The mine employed hundreds of workers and brought many new residents to the park.
- However, the mine became a major source of pollution.

Hickory Ridge

- After the Civil War the community of Hickory Ridge grew up in the eastern part of the park.
- By the 1930s more than two dozen families, a majority of them African-American, lived in Hickory Ridge.
- The house of one of the community's founders, Zeal Williams, has been found and excavated by the archeologists.





Hickory Ridge

This artist's reconstruction shows the Zeal Williams house as it might have looked around 1900, based on the foundations and the appearance of surviving houses of that period. The porch was a major focus of family life.



REMAINS OF RURAL GARDENS



- Besides the house foundations, the park contains many plants that were established by the residents.
- These include ornamentals such as mock orange and firethorn bushes, daffodils, and blackberry lilies, as well as fruit trees.



WORLD WAR II

- During World War II, the park was used by the OSS to train agents, including radio operators and spies.
- Bunkers and gun emplacements built at this time can still be seen in the park.





PROTECT OUR HISTORICAL HERITAGE

- The Archeological Resources Protection Act makes it a federal crime to take artifacts from federal lands.
- Please respect our historical heritage and leave all artifacts and building remains where you find them as you enjoy the park.