

# The Twiddy-Saunders Site: A Volunteer Archaeological Event in Currituck County, North Carolina

## Background

In October 2005, the North Carolina Archaeological Society (NCAS) sponsored a volunteer archaeological project in Currituck County at the Twiddy-Saunders site (31CK179). The site was discovered during construction activity for a housing development, and the developer graciously allowed the NCAS to work with local volunteers to salvage information from the site.



Location of the Twiddy-Saunders Site.

## Location

The Twiddy-Saunders site is located on the western side of the Currituck peninsula adjacent to a broad wetland along the North River. The site is situated on a long, narrow, wind-blown sand dune that formed during the Pleistocene on the rim of a large Carolina Bay. The swamp adjacent to the site is actually the interior portion of the bay, which would have been an attractive location for Native Americans in the past because of its abundant wetland resources. Furthermore, the site's location on a Carolina Bay increases its significance because of its potential to investigate questions about human responses to long-term climate change.



Photos from NCAS fieldwork at the Twiddy-Saunders Site.

## North Carolina's Pre-History

The story of North Carolina did not begin in the 1500s with the expeditions and settlements of Spanish and English explorers. In fact, Native Americans have been living in North Carolina for at least 12,000 years, since the end of the last Ice Age! Much of what we know about the ancient past of Native Americans in North Carolina comes from the archaeological record. In the Coastal Plain, which includes Currituck County, archaeologists recognize three broad time periods, each of which represents a different way of life. These time periods are the Paleo-Indian period (before 9,500 - 7,900 B.C.), the Archaic period (8,000 - 1,000 B.C.), and the Woodland period (1,000 B.C. - A.D. 1600). Archaeologists recognize each period based on the presence of distinctive artifacts.



Former NCAS President Tom Oakes shows Currituck High School students an article in the *Daily Advance* that described the dig.

For more information on the archaeology of North Carolina, please see:

- The NCAS website - <http://www.rla.unc.edu/ncas/>
- *Time Before History* - [http://uncpress.unc.edu/browse/book\\_detail?title\\_id=210](http://uncpress.unc.edu/browse/book_detail?title_id=210)
- *The Archaeology of North Carolina* - <http://rla.unc.edu/ArchaeoNC/>
- *Intrigue of the Past: North Carolina's First Peoples* - <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/intrigue>



## The Excavations

The NCAS fieldwork at the Twiddy-Saunders site took place over three days in October of 2005. The goal of this project involved locating and salvaging information from archaeological deposits that had not been affected by looting or development. The NCAS and local volunteers placed five excavation units and three shovel-test pits across the site. These excavations located intact archaeological deposits and recovered artifacts that allowed archaeologists to determine when the site had been occupied.

## Results

Artifacts recovered during the NCAS excavations mostly consist of projectile points, debris from making stone tools, and pottery with impressions of netting on its outer surface. This style of pottery suggests that the site's main period of occupation occurred some time during the Middle Woodland period (300 B.C. - A.D. 800). Interestingly, a concentration of artifacts suggests that an intact, ancient habitation level may have been present around 40-50 cm below the surface. Projectile points found at the site prior to the NCAS fieldwork indicate that Native Americans also used the site during the Archaic period (8,000 - 1,000 B.C.), which indicates that the Twiddy-Saunders site was an important place for thousands of years.

## Acknowledgments

Many individuals and groups contributed to the success of this project. Without their help, this project could not have been undertaken and a valuable piece of North Carolina's pre-history may have been lost. These include local residents and school groups who volunteered at the site. Excavations were allowed by C.A. Howard and they were made possible by Tom Oakes. Groups who supported the project include the Currituck Historical Society and the Coinjock Ruritan Club. The Currituck County Board of Commissioners graciously funded the analysis and report preparation of this project.