

Dresden's 9,000-year-old campground toured

By SUSAN JOHNS
Staff Reporter

About 30 people on Sunday walked the Dresden field where Native Americans camped after the Ice Age. Tour-goers got to stand where archeologists found a 7,000-year-old spear point. Many also stepped onto the shallow mud along the Kennebec River, near where a great waterfall once gave the Native Americans a prime fishing spot.



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PO Box 429, Wiscasset, ME 04578
882-6355

State archeologist Arthur Spiess, of the Maine Historic Preservation Commission, said the site was used by Native Americans beginning about 9,000 years ago, and later by colonists in the 1770's. He passed around a copy of a 1772 British map that showed four structures in the vicinity. "At least one, maybe two of their archeological remnants are in this field, from the Revolutionary War," Spiess said.

Spiess also passed around a boxed display that held a hard-wrought nail and a piece of pottery, both from Colonial times, as well as the spear point and pieces of burned bone he said were from a fish or animal in the Native Americans' fire hearths.

"They discarded their food in the fire, and it's preserved," Spiess said. "The burned bone and plant material provides us with a snapshot of the ecology here (at) the time." The most plentiful fish appeared to have

been sturgeon and striped bass, while animal evidence from the time of the Native American encampment indicates there were deer, muskrats and beavers, he said.

A botanist has determined that, about 6,000 to 7,000 years ago, trees around the site included maple, birch, beech, ash, red oak, elm "and a little bit of pine," Spiess said. "So it was basically a hardwood-dominated forest at the time, not that different from what it is today."

Archeologists have found "tons and tons of debris" from when the Native Americans were making stone tools, Spiess continued.

Until about five years ago, a farmer had been maintaining a potato field there, Spiess said. "Luckily, the farmer only plowed to a depth of about eight inches, so below that there's really good archeological stuff left."

Underwater topography has shown

there was "a huge falls" here, Spiess said.

"It was an impediment to fish going up," Friends of Merrymeeting Bay (FOMB) Chairman Ed Friedman added.

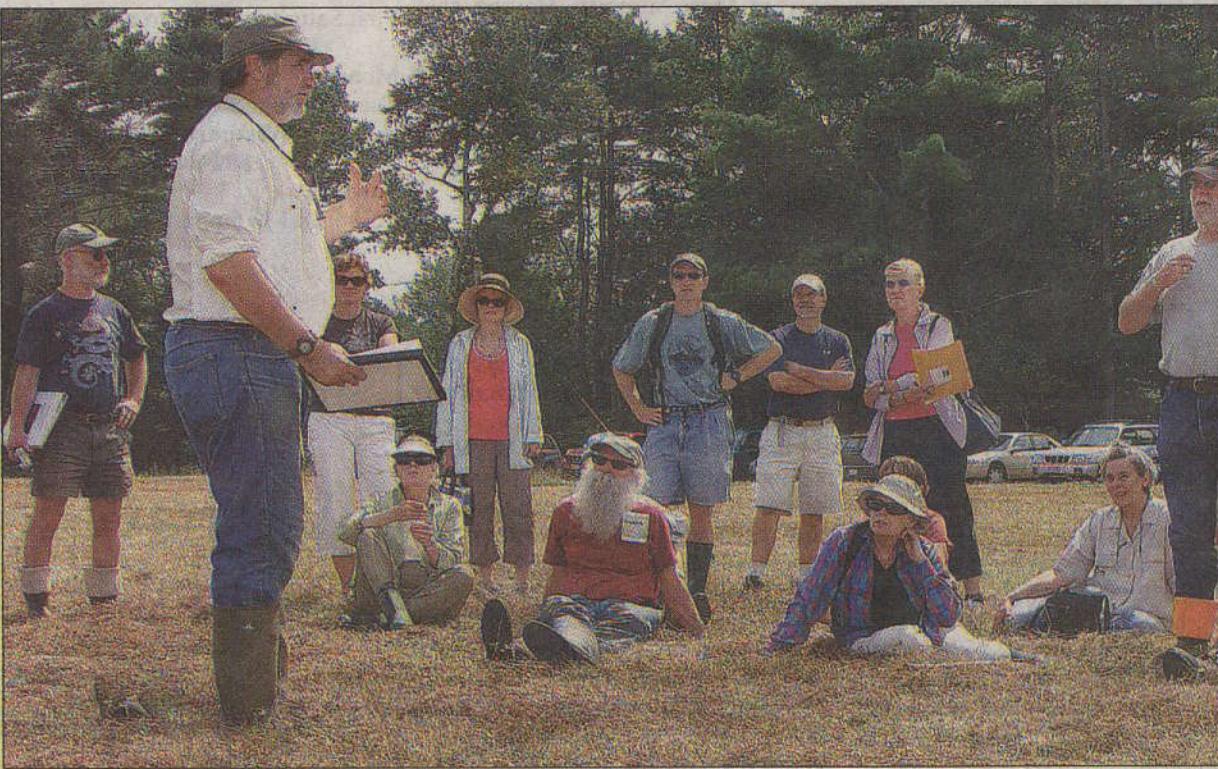
Kathy Bridge of Brunswick asked if any similar sites have been found in Maine.

"No," Spiess answered. He said New Hampshire has one and Massachusetts has some, "but this is it, for northern New England – this, right here."

State officials have described the site as one of Maine's most significant prehistoric sites, changing the understanding of how Native Americans repopulated Maine after the Ice Age. They had been thought to have travelled quickly northeastward. But the Dresden site was a seasonal camp-

ground.

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IN DRESDEN SUNDAY, state archeologist Arthur Spiess, foreground, shares information about the prehistoric campground located off Route 128.

SUSAN JOHNS/Wiscasset Newspaper

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Dresden campground

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With help from FOMB, the Maine Historic Preservation Commission, the Land for Maine's Future Board and other partners, the Archeological Conservancy now owns most of the site, according to information provided at Sunday's event. Fundraising is ongoing to buy the rest, Friedman said, eliciting laughs when he added, "We take large checks."

Under the arrangement that was years in the making, FOMB will have a conservation easement and the state, through the Maine Historic Preservation Commission, will have a preservation agreement.

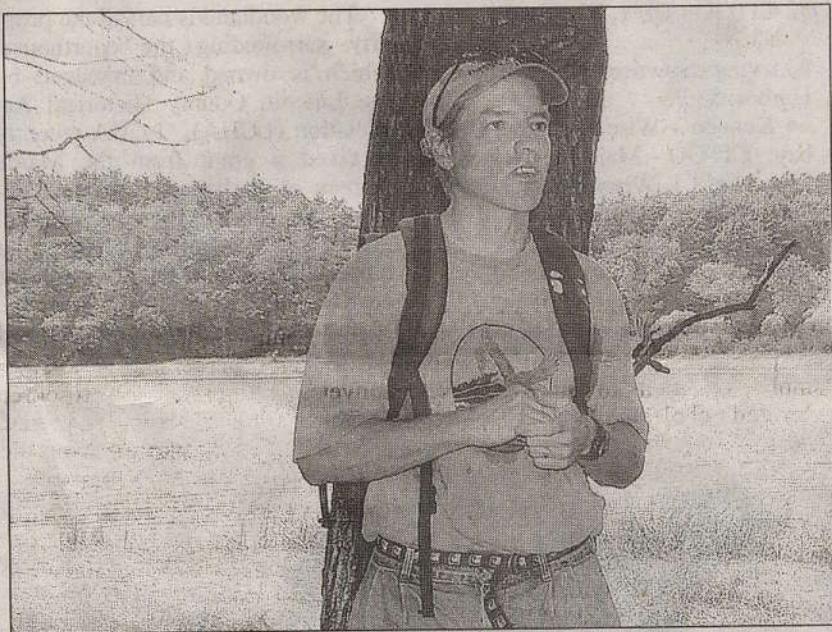
Friedman commented, "It's really good to have multiple layers of protection on this property. He noted the state has previously sold some properties "they wish they hadn't. So, the more layers you have, the better."

Andy Cutko, an ecologist with the Maine Department of Conservation, led Sunday's group down a wooded slope from the field to the shoreline. He pointed out the wild rice that is "by far the dominant plant" in Merrymeeting Bay.

Cutko was not sure if the wild rice was there when the Native Americans were, but he said the fast-moving water back then would have made it less likely.

No evidence of wild rice has been found in the fire hearths, Spiess said later. The bay was not tidal when the Native Americans were there, he noted.

Merrymeeting Bay's thousands of acres of habitat are "pretty unique to the eastern part of the continent," Cutko said. Other places have more



ANDY CUTKO, a state ecologist, discusses plant life on Merrymeeting Bay, at the Dresden site for which the state will now have a conservation easement.

SUSAN JOHNS/Wiscasset Newspaper

environmental degradation from development, and more of a problem with invasive species, he explained. "It's a pretty unique and important resource, and it's a very intact resource, so we're very fortunate to have the Friends of Merrymeeting Bay and oth-

ers working to protect it," Cutko told the group.

Andrew Fiori of Bowdoinham took the tour with son Aiden, 6. "Aiden's an avid Native American fan," his father said.

Brunswick resident Jim Bridge came



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with wife Kathy, an archeology assistant, who said she would be going to "put my life on hold to and work here."

Nate Clark of Dresden said he was most interested in "the history of things. I've heard about this for time," he said of the site.

Friedman said the site is now open to the public, including dogs, for activities such as walking and picnics, providing the visitors "leave nothing behind. Picking plants and digging is not allowed, he said. No motor traffic is allowed, Spiess added.

Visitors may walk around the site, the driveway on Route 128, and continue on foot up to the field, Friedman said.

More information about the site is available at www.friendsofmerymeetingbay.org.

Time & Tides

	HIGH	A.M.	P.M.	L
Fri. - Aug. 26	9:12	9:24		2:58
Height	8.2	9.7		0.6
Sunrise/Set	5:54	7:26		
Sat. - Aug. 27	10:01	10:15		3:47
Height	8.8	10.2		0.0
Sunrise/Set	5:55	7:24		
Sun. - Aug. 28	10:48	11:05		4:34
Height	9.4	10.6		-0.5
Sunrise/Set	5:56	7:22		
Mon. - Aug. 29	11:34	11:54		5:20
Height	10.0	10.8		-0.9
Sunrise/Set	5:57	7:20		