

**Recent Excavations in Area 2 of Site 36AL480:  
a Stratified Site along the Ohio River at Leetsdale**

Patricia E. Miller  
KCI Technologies, Inc.

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**Abstract**

The US Army Corps of Engineers sponsored archaeological investigations at Site 36AL480, located on terraces of the Ohio River northwest of Pittsburgh. This paper presents preliminary results of work at Area 2 conducted between August 2002 and January 2003. Three major components were identified in stratified context. The uppermost component dated to approximately 3200 BP and was characterized by fishtail points and poorly preserved ceramics. An earlier Transitional Period component was found at approximately 1.6 m below the surface. The component produced small amounts of steatite and a number of very small points. The lowermost component at 2.6 m below the surface represented a series Brewerton/Vosburg occupations. Features were associated with all three components.

Site 36AL480 is a large, stratified site located on the eastern bank of the Ohio river to the west of Pittsburgh. **[Slide]** The extensive archaeological investigations at the site were funded by the US Army Corps of Engineers, Pittsburgh District, in compliance with Section 106 of the NHPA. **[Slide]** The work was undertaken for the Braddock Dam component of the Monongahela River Locks and Dams 2, 3 and 4, "the Lower Mon Project". This is the casting basin excavated for the fabrication of two sections of the Braddock dam; **[Slide]** Area 2 is located adjacent and to the south of the basin. **[Slide]** Three areas of the site were set aside for data recovery investigations. Area 1 contained, in addition to prehistoric components, the Harmony Brick Works. To the east of Area 1, in the wooded area, is a former back channel that \*separated the site from the mainland. **[Slide]** This is a view of Area 2, facing north. The casting basin has been backfilled and restored. Area 1 is in the upper right of the photo.

**[Slide]** Excavations in Area 2 began last August and resulted in the identification of four major

components, the uppermost three of which are shown here. The most recent was an Early Woodland component characterized by fishtail points and ceramics with radiocarbon dates around 3000-3100 BP. The underlying component was a Transitional Period component characterized by numerous small points and a small amount of steatite. The component dated to 3300-3500 BP. The lowermost component consisted of a series of occupations distributed through a 50-cm thick package. It produced Brewerton and Vosburg points and was radiocarbon dated to 54-5600 BP. The fourth component, not shown here, is a recently discovered Early or Middle Archaic component that is being excavated with fieldwork that began May 1 and continues.

[Slide] Excavations in the upper 3 m of the site were conducted within a 13 m x 15 m excavation area. [Slide] The fishtail component was found in the upper 70 cm of the undisturbed alluvium. [Slide] These maps show the distribution of artifacts in the fishtail component, indicating that the areas of high artifact density move to the south with depth. Although this may indicate a series of occupations with the earlier ones to the south, there is some evidence to suggest that the occupational surface is sloping more steeply than the excavation surface. [Slide] - **sloping rock**

[Slide] This component had the highest artifact density, averaging 35 artifact per one-meter-square level. Lithic materials were primarily Upper Mercer chert and Onondaga chert, the latter most likely from cobbles found along the river. These are some of the fishtail points that were found, along with tools including [Slide] scrapers, [Slide] spokeshaves, and [Slide] a variety of other tools. Many of the tools were simply small river pebbles with a few flakes removed.

[Slide] The features included five large roasting pits, along with a number of [Slide] smaller hearths, pit features, and [Slide] rock clusters. Four postmolds were also found, showing no real pattern.

[Slide] I refer to the underlying component as a Broadspear component because it contained some broadspears and steatite and correlates in age with Broadspear components on the Susquehanna River. However, small points were far more numerous. [Slide] The density maps show the distribution of features and debitage, largely along the west and north areas of the

excavation block. **[axiom]** **[Slide]** Artifact densities were considerably lower and no ceramics were present. However, 46 pieces of steatite were found. These are some of the larger points or knives, and these are some of the small points. **[Slide]** As in the upper component, tools were very often made quickly from river pebbles.

**[Slide]** None of the large roasting pits were present in this component. Features included reddened soil stains, some small and circumscribed, **[Slide]** others large and more diffuse, with varying degrees of charcoal scattered within them. **[Slide]** Small hearths were present, **[Slide]** as were fire-cracked rock clusters.

**[Slide]** The first piece of steatite was found in this feature, **[Slide]** which was later determine to be a tree burn. **[Slide]** The steatite included two small disks **[Slide]** with striations on the surface and on one, a groove around the side.

**[Slide]** The Late Archaic components began approximately 1.8 m below the top of the undisturbed alluvium and **[Slide][Slide]** were confined mostly to the northern half of the excavation block. **[Slide]** Artifact densities were much lower, possibly because sedimentation rates were higher and the occupations were vertically separated and represent shorter periods of use. **[Slide]** Points included Brewerton side and eared-notched and Vosburg points. **[Slide]** This is a small sample of the tools, again showing heavy use of pebbles from the nearby river. **[Slide]** Features included hearths, **[Slide]** some with dense fire-cracked rock, **[Slide]** and charcoal stains.

**[Slide]** At this point in the excavations we were into late January and we decided to close down the site until better weather conditions prevailed. We started up again on March 31. **[Slide]** Excavations between 3 and 4 meters below the surface produced only two artifacts and one small hearth. **[Slide]** So the remaining soils were stripped within a 7 m x 9 m block and three test units were excavated between 4 m and the water table, which was encountered at about 4.65 m below the surface. Nothing was found and we all went home. We came back for one last backhoe trench to determine the depth of the channel gravel below the base of the excavation. **[show trench location]** **[Slide]** And in this trench, of course, we found two features, **[two axioms]** one at the end of the trench, **[Slide]** with a large pecked stone, some fire-cracked rock, and six small

retouch flakes. **[Slide]** The second was found in the wall of the backhoe trench. **[Slide]** We later found a third, similar but smaller feature. The features consisted of reddened soil stains with scattered charcoal. The screened soils around the feature produced nine additional pieces of debitage. Although we do not as yet have radiocarbon dates, the stratigraphic position of the features indicates an early Middle Archaic or Early Archaic age.

**[Slide]** So we have expanded the block to the south and west to open an area of 80 square meters. **[Slide]** We are now working on defining the boundaries and excavating this component.