



Spearpoint, c. 11,000 B.C.

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Bull Brook Paleo-Indian site, Ipswich, MA
Red chert



HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Bull Brook site, excavated from the 1950s to the 1970s, is an important site for understanding Paleo-Indians in North America. In 1951, Bill Eldridge and Joe Vaccaro explored an area of Ipswich, Massachusetts, where the land owners had started to remove layers of soil in order to sell the sand below. They found objects that encouraged them to get permission from the land owners to test some areas for more artifacts, and with additional help, began to search the area and record their results. The following selections are from a letter written by Nick Vaccaro and Bill Eldridge on June 19, 1952:

...We seem to be setting on a wonderful fluted point [site] in Ipswich... and doing the best we can to keep the finds recorded. More info. if you're interested.

It started with a surface find that I recognized as a fluted point

Nick and I felt there was more to the site than showed on the surface. So we began excavations...¹

The "Bull Brook Boys" realized what an amazing site they were exploring. It appeared to be a Paleoindian (a gathering of people who were in the settlement at about the same time) area that dated to over 10,000 years ago. Also, they recognized that with 42 loci, the site was the largest of its kind discovered in the United States. It was nearly four times larger than the next largest site in New Great Britain. Owners of the land waited until the site was excavated before removing and selling the gravel from the area.

ART HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Bull Brook site in Ipswich, Massachusetts features many objects made from chert (a fine stone with a glass-like surface). To form a spear point like this, a person would strike one stone against another. When struck, flakes of chert fall away from the stone. A skilled spear point maker can shape a point by precisely removing flakes until the desired shape results.

SAMPLE GUIDING QUESTIONS

- Describe notable features of this spearpoint.
- How or why might a person use a spear?
- What does this suggest about the people who settled at Bull Brook?
- If you were one of these people, what types of resources would you look for when selecting a site to settle?
- What do you think people 10,000 years from now will dig up and interpret about us and our lives in the early 21st century?

SUGGESTED LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- Provide a variety of images of different spearpoint types. Using a venn diagram or other graphic organizer, ask students to compare and contrast the points to determine which are most similar to the Bull Brook example.
- Ask students to perform a classroom or backyard archaeological "dig." You may want to provide a box filled with a variety of materials that students uncover, or have students describe materials that they find on their own.
- Create a timeline of Ipswich, Massachusetts starting with the Bull Brook site. Ask students to research important dates and developments that occurred over time. In a class discussion, consider what we believe are "important" dates to track. How is this important to our understanding of the disciplines of history or archeology?

2003 Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Frameworks 3.8, 3.9, 3.11, 3.12, 7.2, 7.3, 7.6

¹ Nick Vaccaro and Bill Eldridge, Ipswich, MA, to "Rip" 19 June 1952. Bull Brook Collection, Peabody Essex Museum.