

## SADDLE BROOK FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY

### SADDLE BROOK HISTORICAL SOCIETY – JUNE 2014

#### FINDING NATIVE AMERICAN ARTIFACTS

It has been often said that time is a thief that plunders our memories. Even so, some recollections of the past cling to us, whether significant or trivial. One of my many special memories involved finding my first arrowhead. It was the genesis of a lifelong interest in history. I was twelve or thirteen years old and was fishing midmorning on Saddle River. The foliage on the eastern (Rochelle Park) side of the river obscured much of the sunlight



although some shafts of light managed to illuminate patches of the sandy islands that dotted the river. Waiting for some unsuspecting fish, hopefully a trout, to attack the worm on my fish hook was pleasant but tedious business. In those days, the forties and early fifties, the river and swamp west of it (now a lake) was our generation's playground. I had been on the sandbar for some time when I noticed a small, shining black object hidden among the sand, pebbles and broken shells that littered the island. A gift of the sunlight that bled through the trees, I picked it up and knew instantly that it was an arrowhead. I knew what it was because of the westerns, many Cowboys vs Indians (now Native Americans) that dominated early television. Fortunately, the Lenni Lenapes that inhabited New Jersey almost exclusively used flint, a black shiny mineral. It was a great find; and, over the years, a collection of arrowheads, spearheads, axes and knives gradually grew. I spoke to some of the people residing in the area, mostly those old timers living on the eastern side of Saddle River Road. I found that two had made similar finds while gardening. It became evident that there had been a long- or short-term settlement along the river stretching from what is now Route 4 to the middle of the Otto Pehle Park in Saddle Brook. If you are captured by the thought of searching for artifacts, here are some tips.

1. Know the topography of your search area. Except for a few hidden coves, the land surrounding the Saddle River was "channeled" or straightened in 1956 by the US Army Corps of Engineers to combat flooding. Also, the land around the swamp was raised. In other words, the ground is not pristine; and you will find "zip." Know the history of your target sites.

2. I was fortunate in that the Lenni Lenapes who lived in Northern New Jersey usually used flint which is easily recognized. Research the minerals that the Native Americans in your area used.
3. Although, the Native Americans made good use of rivers, they usually lived on higher grounds near rivers. Lower grounds with access to water were often used for farming.
4. Soil buildup over the years has buried many artifacts. River bank erosion can unearth some good finds. Also, trees uprooted by storms or construction near target sites might be productive.
5. As noted above, the Lenni Lenapes used a great deal of flint. They chipped the flint to make their tools. Many small pieces of flint in the soil might indicate a productive search area. Similarly, an abundance of broken rocks can indicate the remnants of an ancient campsite.
6. Dorothy L. Cross published *The Archaeology of New Jersey in 1941*. It was a WPA project which listed the locations of hundreds of sites throughout our state. Many local libraries still have copies of it. I would assume that these sites were initially “fished out.” However, land changes such as vegetation growth, erosion and flooding might make the locations viable.
7. Respect private property. Get permission and be positive. Assure the owner that you are “just looking” and that you are not going to damage anything. Bring a friendly dog with you. Most people are “suckers” for a wagging tail. Take the time to develop a rapport.
8. Know the implements that you are looking for. A knife looks nothing like a modern knife. A woman’s hammer is simply an oblong rounded rock with notches for the thumb on one side and the front of an index finger on the other. These and other artifacts are easily overlooked.
9. Except for the Loch Ness Monster, no one lives forever. Think about donating your collection to your local historical society before you “change worlds.”
10. Happy Hunting!

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