

# Assessment of the Eight Mile River's Archaeological Resources

## Cultural resources and research design

Nearly 300 archaeological<sup>1</sup> and historic architectural sites have been identified for the towns and villages within the Eight Mile River watershed, 23 of these are located within ¼ mile of the Eight Mile River and the East Branch. The historic sites<sup>2</sup> include many existing buildings, bridges, mills and dams, cemeteries and wharfs, a number of which are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Historic Districts are found in Salem, Lyme and East Haddam. The prehistoric sites<sup>3</sup> (Native American), spanning at least 8,000 years (Middle Archaic - Historic Periods), have been identified by artifacts found during surficial and subsurface surveys and through information provided by collectors. These archaeology sites document the region's progress from settlements of hunters-gatherers to colonial agriculturalists whose industrial and commercial adaptations during the Industrial Revolution ushered them into the world of industrial capitalism. Several of these archaeological sites have outstanding resource value.

Given the time and space constraints of the present assessment and the vast archaeological resources that exist in proximity to the Eight Mile River, the approach taken for the present study has been to compile a list of known archaeology sites, and then to present a summary of the archaeological resources, highlighting the more significant sites and presenting a general synopsis of the known sites and their potential resource value. This information also provides a basis for predicting where additional, presently unknown and most likely buried sites may be found. Site data for the towns within the Eight Mile River Watershed were gathered through an extensive review of the site files and maps at the Office of State Archaeology (Storrs), the State Historic Preservation Office (Hartford) and the Public Archaeology Survey Team, Inc. (Mansfield). The review included manuscripts and survey reports pertaining to the archaeology of the Eight Mile River area and prehistoric subsistence and settlement patterns in Connecticut and southern New England. Historic references and maps were examined for information pertaining to Native American groups following European contact.

## Important Sites and Surveys within the Eight Mile River Watershed

In addition to local historic districts which include Hadlyme Ferry (Lyme), East Haddam, Haddam Center and Salem, four sites within the Eight Mile River Watershed are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register of Historic Places includes "cultural resources of state, local as well as national significance in order to ensure future generations an opportunity to appreciate and enjoy the nation's heritage" (Poirier 1987:7). The following extract

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<sup>1</sup> Archaeology sites are places where human occupations and/or activities have taken place. Associated artifacts, structures, and features provide clues to the nature of these sites.

<sup>2</sup> Historic archaeological sites are those that post date European contact, c.1500.

<sup>3</sup> Prehistoric archaeological sites are those that predate European contact. Prior to this time Native American groups in southern New England relied on oral tradition as a means of recording their past.

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from the *Environmental Review Primer for Connecticut's Archaeological Resources* outlines the National Register criteria.

“The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archaeology, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and:

- A. that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
- B. that are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
- C. that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- D. that have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history (Poirier 1987: 7).”

Clearly, National Register sites in the Eight Mile River Watershed hold “outstanding resource value”. The descriptions of these properties have been excerpted from their National Register of Historic Places - Nomination Forms:

**Simon Tiffany House** in Salem is a typical 19<sup>th</sup> century Federal Period construction. This gambrel roofed, two-story, center chimney house was built c.1799. The Tiffanys were among the early settlers in Salem and farmed the land during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The property provides insight into the rural/farming period in Salem's history.

The **Hamburg Bridge Historic District** located in Lyme includes the three arched concrete bridge (1936) that crosses the Eight Mile River two miles above its confluence with the Connecticut River, c.18 parcels of land, and 10 houses and a series of wharfs. The Colonial, Georgian, Greek Revival, Eastlake and vernacular style houses with a single exception date from the 18<sup>th</sup>- through 19<sup>th</sup>-centuries and functioned in conjunction with the wharfs that were used for boat traffic and early commercial activities such as lumber shipping from 1800 to 1824 when the river was dredged and the focus of activities shifted to the center of Hamburg.

The **Salem Historic District** consists of white framed buildings along the Salem green (northern zone). These include an array of public and private buildings that provide a window into 18<sup>th</sup> century and early 19<sup>th</sup> century life in southern New England: the Congregational Church c.1840, the Grange Hall moved to Salem in 1831, the Salem Town House built in 1840

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and used for general meetings and several 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century houses. The southern zone includes the Methodist Tavern c.1720, a Federal Style house c.1820 (Rev. John Whittlesey Home) and a barn used for the Music Vale Seminary which was the first degree granting school of music in the United States (1835).

### **The Bingham Farm in Salem**

The Bingham Farm in Salem holds tremendous archaeological potential and has been under consideration for the National Register. The title chain for the property can be followed to its purchase from a Niantic Sachem in 1664 through its 20<sup>th</sup> century purchase by Hiram Bingham who discovered Macchu Picchu, an important archaeological site, in the Peruvian Andes (Office of State Archaeology manuscript 1997). The property contains three of the Valley's earliest houses, an 18<sup>th</sup> century barn, and possible slave quarters and burials. The latter sites provide an opportunity to increase our understanding about the life of African Americans in colonial southern New England. A section of the Governor's Highway also passed through the property. Given the criteria outlined above, Bingham's twentieth century home built on the property also appears to be eligible for the National Register (N. Bellantoni, personal communication 2004).

### **18<sup>th</sup> Century Foundations in the Millington Section of East Haddam**

Early foundations still visible in Millington hold the potential to reveal details about life in East Haddam during the mid- and late-18<sup>th</sup> century. These ruins include the foundations of Revolutionary War General Joshua Spencer's home and general store. Artifacts associated with these latter structures have been recovered from the wooded front yard of Mrs. Anita Sherman (N. Bellantoni; D.Poirier personal communications 2004). More detailed information on this site can be obtained at the Office of State Archaeology.

Archaeological surveys conducted during the early 1980s by the Public Archaeology Survey Team, Inc. under the direction of Dr. Kevin McBride resulted in creation of **The Lower Connecticut River Valley Woodland Period Archaeological Thematic Resource**. During these surveys over 350 prehistoric sites were located, 36 of these represent the Roaring Brook (A.D.1-750) and the Selden Creek (A.D. 750-1500) prehistoric cultural phases in the lower Connecticut Valley. Fourteen of these sites are listed on the National Register of Historic Places as part of the "lower Connecticut River Valley Woodland Period Archaeological Thematic Resource" nomination. Two additional sites were determined by the National Park Service to be eligible for listing, but were not listed due to owner objection (D. Poirier, personal communication 2004). The survey included the towns of East Haddam, Haddam, Lyme and Old Lyme. Archaeological data obtained from these sites reflects subsistence and settlement changes that were occurring during these Woodland Period phases. Together these sites are designated a "thematic resource" as they presently provide our total understanding of Native American life along the lower portion of the Connecticut River during the Late Woodland Period. The archaeological assemblages indicate a greater riverine focus possibly tied to resources

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associated with advancing tidal marshes. Although upland resources continued to be exploited, large seasonal camps once found in the interior were being replaced by smaller temporary camps and task specific sites that were components of large base camps close to the rivers. An increasing reliance on non-local lithic materials suggests a greater interaction with other Native American groups throughout the region was also occurring during these phases. The **Hamburg Cove Site** (75-7) located near the confluence of the Eight Mile and Connecticut Rivers dates mid-way between the two phases. Large quantities of deer bone recovered from the faunal assemblage suggest that "longer-term" hunting activities occurred at this site (National Register Form 1986). It is logical that because of its proximity to the lower Connecticut River, its limited archaeological investigation, and the relatively undeveloped landscape of the Eight Mile River that known and presently unknown sites along this waterway need to be considered as part of this thematic resource.

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### Unrecorded sites

Information regarding a number of known but as yet uninvestigated historic and prehistoric sites within the Eight Mile River Watershed was provided by State Archaeologist Dr. Nicholas Bellantoni, Mary Harper, Director of the Public Archaeology Survey Team, Inc. and Dr. David Poirier, Staff Archaeologist for the State Historic Preservation Office. These highly sensitive archaeological sites, not presently recorded at the Office of State Archaeology include:

- The Bingham Property, located along the East Branch in Salem includes stone features, foundations and stone piles related to farm activities.
- A dam and mill remains at the west end of Ed Bills Pond (N.Lyme).
- An 18<sup>th</sup> century cellar hole west of an abandoned road (Baker Lane) (N.Lyme).
- A cellar hole west of intersection of RT. 82 and Hopyard Rd. (E.Haddam). Lithic materials were reported on what is now a golf course.
- The North Plain Cemetery which contains both Native American and European burials. Native American artifacts were also collected a short distance northeast of the cemetery on the east side of Eight Mile River (E.Haddam).
- Mill ruins and a dam along Muddy Brook near Devil's Hopyard (East Haddam).
- A Native American site near the north end of Hopyard Road (east side)(E.Haddam).
- A foundation near the intersection of Eight Mile River and Haywardville Road (E.Haddam).
- An abandoned community in East Lyme.
- An abandoned stone arch bridge located near Route 82 near Woodbridge Road (Salem).

### Prehistoric site/settlement models

A number of archaeological studies have focused on the development of models for predicting site locations (Banks and Lavin 2003). These studies have shown repeatedly that archaeology sites are firmly associated with specific physical environments and landforms. Thornbahn's studies of several hundred sites in southeastern New England showed that prehistoric sites clustered within 300 meters of low-ranking streams and large wetlands (Thornbahn *et al.* 1980; Thornbahn 1982). Casjen's (1979) study of prehistoric settlement patterning in the Concord River Valley concluded that 80% of the valley's prehistoric sites were located within 200 meters of fresh water. Mulholland's (1984) doctoral dissertation on southern New England prehistory and McBride's (1984) doctoral dissertation on lower Connecticut Valley prehistory both confirm a strong Native American preference for settlements overlooking interior wetlands, lakes, rivers and streams. McBride and Soulsby's (1989) survey of the proposed corridor for Route 6/I-84 in eastern Connecticut found that 94% of the discovered sites were situated within 150 meters of freshwater; their average distance was 42 meters from a wetland or watercourse. Such environments sustain concentrated varieties of animal and plant food sources that would have been attractive to Native American peoples. Several of these surveys also noted the importance of well-drained, sandy terraces and knolls (e.g., Thornbahn *et al.* 1980; Thornbahn 1982; McBride 1984). During the mid-1990s, survey work across the McLean Game Refuge in

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the Farmington Valley Watershed demonstrated that Native American groups sometimes located themselves along landforms “too small to be discerned on standard USGS, 7.5 minute, 1:24,000 topographic maps (Feder 2001:19)”. A relationship was also identified between Native American sites and glacial features such as kettle holes and eskers that offered resource and hunting opportunities (Feder and Banks 1996). The most commonly occurring site soils were those representative of the moderately and well-drained Charlton, Hinckley, Hollis and Merrimac soil types (McBride and Soulsby 1989).

A recent study of the known Native American sites from the nearby Connecticut Valley Towns of Middletown and Cromwell indicates that Native Americans also preferred certain elevations and slope as well (Reeve and Lavin 2001:27, Table 1). Among these sites, the average site elevation was 120.26 feet; 90% were below 280.17 feet in elevation. Most of the prehistoric sites were located in relatively level settings. In total, 73.7 percent of prehistoric sites are in areas of 0 to 5 percent slopes; 21.0% were located in areas of 5-15% slope, while only 5.3% were located at 15-25% slope. No sites were located within an area of over 25% slope. As in the surveys discussed above, the Middletown/Cromwell sites show a preference for proximity to freshwater. Their average distance to fresh water was 249.37 feet (ca. 76 meters); 95% percent of the prehistoric sites were located 492 feet (ca. 150 meters) or less from a fresh water source, including rivers, streams and wetlands. All but one of the prehistoric sites in the steeper settings (5-25%) were rock shelters associated with bedrock outcrops. Additionally, prehistoric sites were identified in association with a wide range of landforms including river and stream terraces (52.6 percent of sites), knolls (10.5 percent of sites), upland flats and benches (21 percent of sites), and slopes (15.8 percent of sites). The diversity of landforms probably reflects the diversity of seasonal subsistence resources and habitats exploited by prehistoric hunter-gatherers and horticulturists.

Twenty five of the 278 recorded sites located in the towns encompassing the present assessment are located in the immediate vicinity of the Eight Mile River and its East Branch. Twenty of the twenty five sites are Native American. Many of the other sites represent different aspects of the same settlement systems. Native American subsistence was based on the exploitation of a wide variety of resources. Some of these resources were obtained from ecological zones away from the river. Many of these resources are seasonal and Native groups relocated across the landscape accordingly to take advantage of these resources. Consequently, sites along the river and those away from the river are components of the same Native American subsistence-settlement system and must be examined together to fully understand Native economy and social organization.

Native American sites close to the Eight Mile River and the East Branch display similar characteristics in terms of elevation, slope and distance to water sources to sites from the nearby Middletown Cromwell study. **Table 1** is a summary of the recorded archaeological sites near the Eight Mile River or the East Branch. Diagnostic artifacts from some of them indicate a

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Native American presence dating from the Middle Archaic Period (c.6, 000-4,000 BC) through European Contact (c.1500 AD). The sites have been listed in order of their potential importance based on their site integrity as assessed on the site forms. Sites designated as having good or fair site integrity should be considered archaeological sensitive and merit investigation should they be threatened by development. Twenty three of the twenty five sites are within ¼ mile (the buffer proposed this study) of these water sources. Although disturbances have limited the data available from some of the sites and development has impacted others since the time they were reported, the locations of these sites differ little from surrounding areas that have not been investigated. Thus, the potential for intact archaeological resources within the study area remains high.

### **Eight Mile River: Archaeological Potential**

A wide range of habitats within the drainage supported many plant and animal resources that Native Americans relied on and the river provided transportation and trade possibilities. The Eight Mile River also provided access to coastal resources not readily available to Native American groups living in other parts of Connecticut. In addition, the topography, past land uses and delayed land development near the Eight Mile River sets it aside from other rivers in Connecticut and increase the potential for intact archaeological sites. Early archaeological surveys were often subjective and focused on certain landforms where sites were likely to be found and excluded others thought unlikely to have sites. These surveys sampled only a small percentage of the land area within the drainage. Sites located by collectors are also those with greater archaeological visibility (i.e., cleared and plowed land), the number of archaeology sites across the river drainage is certainly much greater and the entire drainage possesses a moderate to high degree of sensitivity for archaeological resources. Known and potential sites within the Eight Mile River watershed can increase our understanding of Late Woodland Period Native Americans and should also be included as part of the Woodland Period Archaeological Thematic Resource described above.

### **Historic Native American Groups within the Watershed**

Nineteenth and twentieth century histories record the rich Native American history within the vicinity of the Eight Mile River as of European Contact. These groups include the Wangunks (AKA Mattebessett; Machemoodus) around modern day Middletown, the Western Nehantics (AKA Niantics) from the Connecticut River to the Niantic River, the Pequots from the Niantic River east to within 10 miles east of the Pawcatuck River, and the Mohegans (whose first sachem was the well-known Uncas) north of the Pequots (DeForest 1852, Trumbull 1898; Roberts 1906; Harwood 1932). Alleged Native American territorial boundaries c. 1625 are depicted in Mathias Spiess's *Map of the State of Connecticut showing Indian Trails, Villages, & Sachemdoms* (Figure 1).

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### **Criteria for determining archaeological sensitivity**

In addition to the known sites along the Eight Mile River, various surveys of 100s of archaeology sites have shown that physiographic and other factors indicate sensitivity for unknown sites. These factors are discussed in the next section. A recent archaeological site sensitivity analysis in Simsbury outlined the criteria for determining the degree of sensitivity an area possesses for archaeological resources (Banks and Lavin 2002).

- Areas with known prehistoric and historic archaeology sites (including historic districts) are designated as highly sensitive, adjacent properties also have a moderate to high potential for archaeological resources.
- Areas possessing topography and environmental settings generally associated with prehistoric archaeology sites should be considered to have a high sensitivity. The major settings delineated by archaeologists have been floodplains, terraces overlooking water sources and uplands near plant, animal lithic resources (Feder 1981; McBride and Dewar 1981). Glacial and small topographic features were locations also selected by Native Americans during prehistory (Feder and Banks 1996; Feder 2001).
- Properties with relatively undeveloped/undisturbed landscapes should be considered to have minimally a moderate degree of sensitivity because of their potential for intact archaeological resources
- Conversely, land with a high degree of disturbance/modification is much less likely to have intact archaeological resources and thus is categorized as having low or no archaeological sensitivity
- Other areas included as having low or no archaeological sensitivity are properties with excess slopes or that are low-lying and wet.

### **Management of Eight Mile River Archaeological Resources**

The Eight Mile River Watershed offers an important opportunity to examine Native American subsistence and settlement systems that differ from those found elsewhere in southern New England owing to access to both interior and coastal resources. A topography void of broad floodplains reduced the areas suitable for intensive agriculture increasing the potential for intact archaeological resources. The delayed development of properties has also helped preserve the integrity of the watershed's archaeology.

Since Native American settlement systems include a variety of site types across the landscape (i.e., seasonal camps, temporary camps, task specific sites) across the landscape, the entire Eight Mile River Watershed is a most suitable unit when trying to understand a Native group's entire subsistence system and settlement system. Sites located near the Eight Mile River are essential components of these systems. Only by identifying the relationship between these sites and those in the uplands can this be obtained. The first step in such an endeavor would be the adoption of archaeological regulations that require an archaeological assessment and/or



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reconnaissance survey prior to new development. Such regulations provide an opportunity to identify archaeological resources that may be present within a given project area so that an informed decision can be made regarding development plans. Efforts should be made to protect known sites and to require testing of areas deemed to have a moderate to high archaeological sensitivity. Ideally, the towns within the watershed should establish uniform regulations through their Planning and Zoning and Inland Wetland boards for the reasons stated above. Every attempt also should be made to document and photograph buildings, wharf remains, cellar holes, mill ruins and other unrecorded cultural features that exist within the watershed. These sites can add to our understanding of the history associated with the Eight Mile River and also how they related to contemporary events across Connecticut.

### **Overview/ Resource Value of the Eight Mile River**

The locations of known sites along the Eight Mile River are reflection of biases due to archaeological visibility, methodology and subjectivity of past testing and surface collecting. The paucity of archaeology sites along East Branch is due to a lack of archaeological testing. During early surveys emphasis was placed on particular landforms and others thought to be marginal (i.e., slopes greater than 5 or 10%) were overlooked. Although these oversights have been corrected to some extent, time and financial considerations continue to place limitations on the sample sizes of surveys. The area sampled across the Lower Connecticut River Valley during surveys by the Public Archaeology Survey Team, Inc. in the late 1970s and early 1980s was considerably less than 10 percent of the total land area (M. Harper; D. Forrest, personal communication 2004). Unquestionably, many more archaeology sites have yet to be identified along the Eight Mile River.

The Eight Mile River represents an outstanding resource value on several levels.

- First, a number of exceptional historic and prehistoric sites have already been recognized and placed on the National Register of Historic Places.
- Secondly, the land bordering the river has a high potential for intact archaeological resources, as the landscape has been less impacted by historic activities and development, although rapid development of more marginal land is now taking place. The potential for intact sites strongly suggests the possibility of other, presently unknown, archaeology sites that possess outstanding resource value.
- Thirdly, the proximity of watershed to coastal resources is another major difference. Access to the coast also provided opportunities for contact with other Native American groups, trade and the exchange of ideas. Such influences might be discernable in the archaeological record. This is also true for the Euro-American, Historic period cultures. Just as house placement during historic times seems to resemble patterns seen in Rhode Island (further from roadways) rather than that typically seen in Connecticut (close to the road) (M. Harper, personal communication 2004), it would not be unexpected that Native American subsistence and settlement patterns were to some

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degree influenced in a similar manner. Understanding how subsistence and settlement differed and the relationships between the groups living near the Eight Mile River and elsewhere in Connecticut would be an important contribution to our knowledge of the region's prehistory.

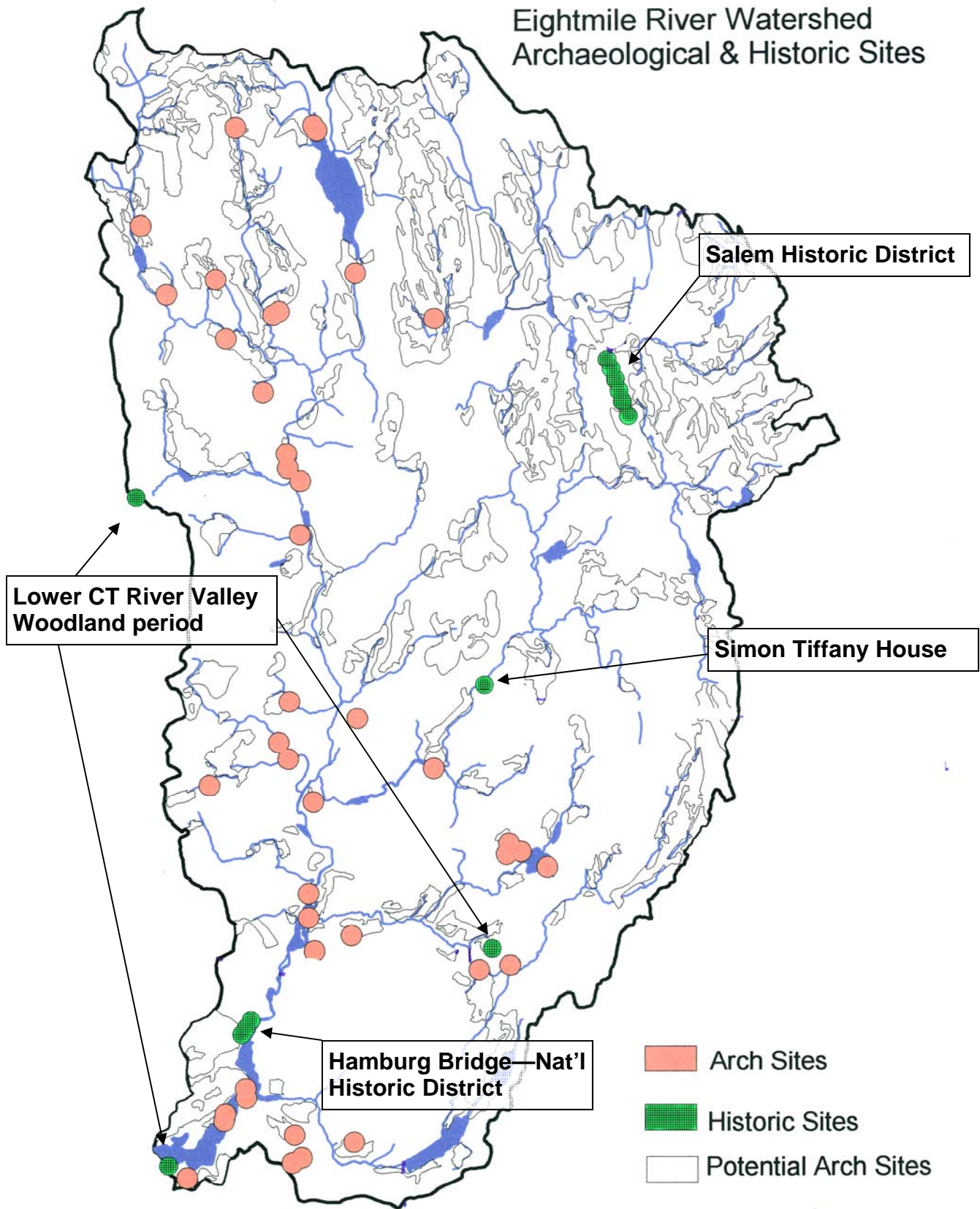
Table 1. Reported data for archaeological sites adjacent to the Eight Mile River

MA=Middle Archaic LA=Late Archaic  
 WL=Woodland na=not available

Site #	Name	Locale	Age	Site Type	Size	Slope (%)	Elevation	Soil Type	Nearest Water Source	Distance (m)
41-06	Duck Mill Pond	riverine	19th cen.	mill	2 acres	15-25	300'	Hollis- Charlton	Eight Mile River	0
41-05	Lake Hayward	knoll	LA	camp	1 acre	15-25	370'	Hinckley- Manchester	Lake Hayward	125
41-37	Dobbia Hill Road		unknown	hunting/ fishing	c.40x20 m	5-15	100'	na	Eight Mile River	12
41-28	Devil's Rock		contact other	rockshelter				Hinckley- Manchester	Eight Mile River	200
41-29	Devil's Hopyard Rockshelter		prehistoric	rockshelter		15-25	250'	na	Eight Mile River	100
41-82	Chapman Falls	terrace	LA & WL		3 acres	na	180	65B	Eight Mile River	20-0
41-119	Devil's Hopyard		archaic	undetermined			100'	na	Eight Mile River	c.60
75-35	Cricklewood Field		Archaic/ Woodland	na	unknown	0-5	50'	na	Eight Mile River	50
75-31	Macintosh		unknown	unknown		na	100'	na	trib. Eight Mile River	100
75-36	Sisson Cemetery		LA	seasonal camp	2500 sq. m	0-5	130	na	East Branch	50
75-19	no name		unknown	lithic scatter	unknown	05	20'	sand,silt	Hamburg Cove	100
75-20	no name		unknown	na	not determined	0-5	50	sand,silt	Eight Mile River	50
75-21	Costa's Cove		contact	camp/ rockshelter	25-50 sq. m	5-15	50	sand,silt	Hamburg Cove	70
75-47	Jewitt		unknown	unknown	na	0-5	50'	sand,silt	Hamburg Cove	10
75-50	Gerber		MA	unknown	unknown	na	100'	na	Eight Mile River	100
75-56	Cooper's Boat House		LA WL	find spot	unknown	na	40'	sand,silt	Hamburg Cove	50
75-57	Matson		WL			0-5	20'	silt	Eight Mile River	c.20
121-38	New Salem Plantation/ Elm Grove Cem.	Bingham Family	1800-1870	Bingham Family					wetland	na

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### Eightmile River Watershed Archaeological & Historic Sites



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