

Werowocomoco was principal residence of Powhatan, paramount chief of 30-some Indian tribes in Virginia's coastal region at the time English colonists arrived in 1607. Archaeological research in the past decade has revealed not only that the York River site was a uniquely important place during Powhatan's time, but also that its role as a political and social center predated the Powhatan chiefdom.

More than 60 artifacts discovered at Werowocomoco – projectile points, stone tools, pottery sherds and English copper – are shown for the first time at Jamestown Settlement with archaeological objects from collections of the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation and the Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

Developed in cooperation with Werowocomoco site owners Robert F. and C. Lynn Ripley, the Werowocomoco Research Group and the Virginia Indian Advisory Board, the exhibition also explores what Werowocomoco means to descendent Virginia Indian communities today. James City County has provided funding in support of this special exhibition.

## WEROWOCOMOCO'S PLACE IN HISTORY

Werowocomoco was an important Native community in Tidewater Virginia and the capital of the Powhatan chiefdom during the early 17th century. The town also was the location of events at the beginnings of the English colonial experience in the Americas. It was at Werowocomoco that the Powhatan leader Wahunsenacawh (also known as Powhatan) first met with English colonists from Jamestown.

English historical accounts provide a limited perspective on Werowocomoco and the Native people who lived there, and new archaeological research of the site offers the opportunity to explore the "deep history" of a powerful Native place.

## ARCHAEOLOGY AT WEROWOCOMOCO

The archaeological research at Werowocomoco emphasizes a community-oriented perspective on the development of the Powhatan chiefdom. A key idea behind this approach is the notion of a "cultural landscape," understood as the imprint of past societies on the

A bird's-eye view of Werowocomoco as it appears today in Gloucester County. Bordered by the York River, Leigh Creek (left) and Bland Creek (right), the archaeological site is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and the Virginia Historic Landmarks Register.



spaces and structures that they built and modified. A cultural landscape involves not simply buildings constructed for utilitarian purposes, but also includes the expression of ideas and meanings there.

The cultural landscapes associated with North American centers of authority demonstrate that elites often recognized the ideological power of place, transforming settlements into politicized locations by segmenting sacred space and by constructing monumental architecture. The Werowocomoco investigations have focused on finding evidence of the settlement's spatial organization, exchange relations, and subsistence patterns during the periods immediately before and after Jamestown's settlement, and to understand how social power came to be concentrated within, and exercised from, Werowocomoco.

## THE EARLY HISTORY OF WEROWOCOMOCO

Excavations at the Werowocomoco site have focused on the development of the site's cultural landscape during the late pre-contact centuries of circa A.D. 1300-1600. However, the earliest traces of occupation at Werowocomoco date to the Archaic period (circa 8000 to 1200 B.C.). It was not until the subsequent Late Woodland period that the site began its rise to prominence within Tsenacommacah, the Powhatan name for the Virginia coastal plain.

The Werowocomoco site contains evidence of dispersed Native communities existing there by about A.D. 1250. Soon

Detail from "Their Manner of Praying With Rattles About the Fire," Theodor de Bry, 1590. *Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation collection.*

afterwards Werowocomoco began to emerge as a ceremonial and political center for Algonquian-speaking communities in the Chesapeake. The process of place-making at Werowocomoco likely played a role in the development of social ranking in the Chesapeake after A.D. 1300 and in the origins of the Powhatan chiefdom.

## POWER, LANDSCAPE AND HISTORY

Landscapes associated with Amerindian chiefdoms – that is, regional polities with social ranking and institutional governance that organized a population of several thousand – often include large-scale or monumental architecture that transformed space within sacropolitical centers.

Throughout the Chesapeake region, Native communities constructed boundary ditches and enclosures within select towns, marking spaces in novel ways. The earthworks at Werowocomoco represent prominent landscape features that defined the location as a similarly powerful place, perhaps drawing Wahunsenacawh to establish his residence there. The remarkable constructions that constitute Werowocomoco are just one expression of a widespread Amerindian practice that links power, landscape and history.

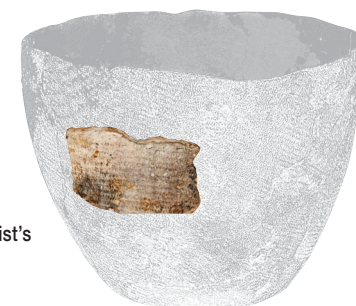


Other American Indian "seats of power" are cited in the exhibition. Pictured is Black-on-White painted pottery from Chaco Canyon, New Mexico, A.D. 900-1050. *Private Collection.*



St. Albans quartz projectile point (left), Early Archaic, 6800 to 6500 B.C., and a Palmer quartzite projectile point (far left), Early Archaic, 8000-7200 B.C. *Courtesy of Robert F. and C. Lynn Ripley.*

A Townsend pottery sherd from Werowocomoco dating to A.D. 900-1600 is positioned in an artist's rendering of a pot. *Courtesy of Robert F. and C. Lynn Ripley.*





## WEROWOCOMOCO AND OUR UNDERSTANDING OF VIRGINIA'S PAST

Archaeological and documentary evidence provides a basis for a deeper sense of Werowocomoco as a Native place, a place that is not recognizable from English historical accounts alone. Archaeological investigations indicate that, approximately 300 years before the English came to Virginia, the residents of Werowocomoco changed and reorganized their town as it became an important regional center, constructing an earthwork enclosure there to separate the residential portion of the town from what appears to be a ceremonial enclosure. Later, in the early 17th century, a large structure was built within this enclosure, providing clear evidence of status differences within the settlement.

A large quantity of copper recovered from the site is of European manufacture and has the same chemical composition as similar copper pieces found at Jamestown. Copper alloy pieces, shown here rolled into a bead and in a sheet, found at Werowocomoco, 17th century, Europe. *Courtesy of Robert F. and C. Lynn Ripley.*



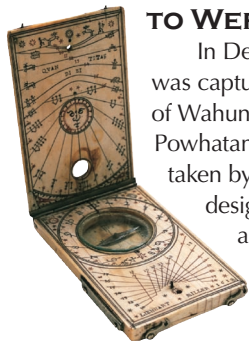
## CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH'S JOURNEY TO WEROWOCOMOCO

In December 1607, Captain John Smith was captured by Opechancanough, the brother of Wahunsenacawh, paramount chief of the Powhatan. In the following weeks Smith was taken by a circuitous route to Werowocomoco, designed by his captors to both teach Smith about the Powhatan world and to bring him, through ritual and symbolism, into a new relationship with that world.

On his part, Captain John Smith saw his captivity as an opportunity to develop a different sort of relationship with the Virginia Indians that would serve the interests of the Jamestown colonists. In effect,

Ivory diptych compass and sundial, German, early 17th century. *Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation collection.*

Smith presented the Powhatan Indians with a competing world view based on European concepts of science, geography and history. One of the ways Smith communicated with the Indians was by showing them his ivory pocket compass, in which he demonstrated "the roundness of the earth and skies, ... the greatness of the land and sea, the diversity of nations." What resulted was a far-ranging exchange of ideas and belief systems between Smith and the Powhatan Indians that must have been heavily dependant on symbolism and analogy, since neither side knew much of the other's language.



Cover: Powhatan at Werowocomoco, detail from John Smith's Map of Virginia, 1612. *Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation collection.*

## WEROWOCOMOCO AND THE VIRGINIA INDIAN COMMUNITY

Virginia's Indian community has an enduring and powerful connection to Werowocomoco not just as the historic center of the Powhatan chiefdom, but also as a modern place for renewing Virginia Indians' influence on representations of the Native past. The Werowocomoco Research Group – a collaboration of researchers from the Fairfield Foundation, the Virginia Department of Historic Resources and the College of William and Mary – has worked over the past decade to develop an archaeological project built around close partnerships with representatives from six of the Powhatan descendent communities. At Werowocomoco, new forms of collaborative and consultative archaeology are emerging that combine indigenous values with academic research. This special exhibition makes it accessible to the public. ❖

### LEARN MORE

The story of Powhatan Indians in 17th-century Virginia is examined in Jamestown Settlement permanent gallery exhibits and a re-created Powhatan Indian village, where historical interpreters discuss and demonstrate the Powhatan way of life.



Jamestown Settlement and Yorktown Victory Center living-history museums are administered by the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, an educational institution of the Commonwealth of Virginia, accredited by the American Association of Museums, that fosters awareness and understanding of the early history of the United States and the enduring legacies bequeathed to the nation.

Jamestown Settlement interprets the founding of Jamestown, America's first permanent English settlement, and the diverse cultures, including Powhatan Indian, African and European, that converged in 17th-century Virginia. The Yorktown Victory Center tells the story of the American Revolution and the development of the new nation.

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# JAMESTOWN SETTLEMENT

## SPECIAL EXHIBITION

May 15 through November 15, 2010



# WEROWOCOMOCO: SEAT OF POWER

*At the time Jamestown, America's first permanent English colony, was founded in 1607, the center of power in coastal Virginia was at Werowocomoco, principal residence of Powhatan, the region's paramount chief. The importance of this location in Virginia Indian history and its role in early contact between Powhatan and English cultures is explored in "Werowocomoco: Seat of Power," where artifacts spanning close to 10,000 years are on exhibit for the first time in a museum setting.*