Whenever I am at Werowocomoco, I feel that I am home and a part of the past.

– Howard Adams, Upper Mattaponi

The beauty of the location combined with the sacred presence of ancestral power and awe brings Werowocomoco once again into the forefront of Native Virginians’ consciousness as the state and nation move to recognize the relationships and legacies established at this important site long before 1607.

Werowocomoco, or ‘great king’ over numerous settlements, is the Woodland center of power. They are seeking to better understand the origins of the Powhatan chiefdom, the complexities of Powhatan society and the interactions between Natives and Europeans during the early contact era in Virginia. This unique alliance of partners combines archaeological methods, colonial narratives and contemporary Native commentary to generate a more complete picture of Werowocomoco and its place in history.

Colonial documents and Native oral traditions indicate that Werowocomoco, better known as Chief Powhatan, held the position of Mamanatowick, or ‘great king’ over numerous settlements. The Powhatan world of Werowocomoco with its horticultural-foraging economy was grouped into approximately 30 political districts. Their villages lined the banks of the Virginia Coastal Plain. The Powhatan society was defined by differences of status, authority and wealth and included various resplendent titles such as kings, commanders or chiefs.

Werowocomoco and other settlements are known to have traded wares to negotiate alliances and to trade. As the most influential leader of the period, Chief Powhatan developed extensive trade networks and internal systems that enriched the prestige of Werowocomoco and reinforced the village’s prominence in society, politics and religion.

Research at Werowocomoco

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Why excavate at Werowocomoco?

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**What are the excavations conducted?**

Archaeological excavation proceeds through several stages in a careful and deliberate manner. Initially, a survey of the Werowocomoco site was conducted in order to identify the site and distribution of artifacts on the site. The archaeologists then excavated small test units and finally opened broader excavation blocks. These larger excavation blocks were chosen to expose archaeological features such as test exams from pits and house floors. After the archaeological excavation can only be conducted once, detailed notes, drawings and photographs of the fieldwork are kept. Artifacts, features, faunal and floral remains are analyzed in a laboratory setting and reports of findings with interpretations are prepared and published.

**What do the 17th-century documents tell us about Werowocomoco?**

Several seventeenth-century nobles, including John Smith, William Strachey, Robert Tallmadge and Pedro Zuniga, document the location and provide evidence for the village’s significance.

**What are researchers finding at Werowocomoco?**

The village’s archaeology contains evidence from a range of occupations and includes materials, such as stone points, that date from the Archaic period (starting 10,000 years ago) through the early explorative era. Beneath the top layer of soil archaeologists have found Native artifacts from the village. The excavation has uncovered Native artifacts from the residential area dating from A.D. 1300 through the early 1600s. The materials – pottery, stone tools, bone, shell, plant remains, wood pits and post holes – site the remains of daily Powhatan life. Pieces of copper likely traded by Jamestown colonists can also be found in these deposits. Another area of the site archaeologists have found a series of ditch features that appear to separate the residential area of the village from a special area of the site. Native artifacts from the ditches, including trade goods and decorated pottery, may be linked to Werowocomoco’s status as a place of power.

**Partners and Sponsors**

The Werowocomoco research project has received critical assistance from numerous individuals and several institutions. The project would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of landowners Bob and Lynn Ripley. Members of the Virginia Indian Advisory Board representing the Pamunkey, Mattaponi, Chickahominy, Nansemond, Rappahannock and Upper Mattaponi have given generously of their time to meet with researchers and act as liaisons to the largest Virginia Indian communities. Also critical to the research was institutional support from the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, the College of William & Mary, the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

To learn more about the Werowocomoco research project visit powhatan.wm.edu

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