

DESCRIPTIONS OF 2026 FIELD TRAINING SITES

by Jonathan Burns and Kurt Carr

FORT HALIFAX

History of Fort Halifax

Fort Halifax was a key temporary British frontier post constructed in 1756 during the French and Indian War (1754–1763). Built under the command of Colonel William Clapham, the fort stood along the east bank of the Susquehanna River near present-day Halifax, Dauphin County, and formed part of a coordinated chain of Pennsylvania Provincial forts designed to defend the colony's northern frontier.



Built in the spring of 1756, and functioning primarily as a logistical supply depot and communications node, the fort supported military movement on the river between Hunter's Fort to the south and Fort Augusta to the north. Its location above the Juniata falls was strategically selected for access to abundant pine

timber and proximity to Armstrong's water-powered sawmill. For a brief period between summer of 1756 and fall of 1757, Fort Halifax was a crucial post before troops were reassigned to the other forts. There is record of the post being largely dismantled upon abandonment, with a second episode of demolition in 1763 during Pontiac's Rebellion.

Remarkably, much of the material record of the fort's occupation is archaeologically intact providing the opportunity to know more about the site than we would from the historic record alone. The archaeological resolution is high as the fort was occupied for such a brief period (just sixteen months). Despite its short occupation, Fort Halifax played a crucial role

in British frontier strategy and offers a well-documented example of mid-18th-century provincial military logistics. The non-profit group, Friends of Fort Halifax Park, are dedicated to the stewardship and interpretation of this highly significant archaeological site. They have hosted the Juniata College Archaeological Field School aimed at documenting the fort site for several seasons.

Archaeological Investigations

For much of the 19th and 20th centuries, the exact location of Fort Halifax remained uncertain, known only from historical maps, journals, and local tradition. Systematic archaeological work in the park landscape began in the early 2000s, but the most significant breakthroughs occurred during multiple Juniata College



Archaeological Field Schools, beginning in 2021.

Subsequent field seasons (2023–2025) refined understanding of the fort’s physical layout. Across multiple seasons, the Fort Halifax project has functioned as a training ground for undergraduate archaeologists, military veterans, and community volunteers. Students gained experience in survey and excavation techniques, artifact identification, and public interpretation and stewardship ethics.

The work has been supported by grants from the National Park Service, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission Keystone Grant, and Louis J. Appell, Jr., Preservation Fund for Central Pennsylvania, underscoring Fort Halifax’s significance in regional heritage

management. In addition to the foundation from the fort's internal structures, recovered artifacts include buttons, lead ammunition, coins, historic ceramics, iron hardware, dietary bone refuse and various prehistoric artifacts like chipped stone tools, debitage, ceramics, and dietary bone refuse.

During this 2026 season, the work will resume with test unit excavation in several areas that have produced archaeological features as well as some areas with geophysical anomalies. Test units are relatively shallow and are excavated through the plowzone to the B-Horizon (or subsoil) to search for features like trash pits, fire hearths, and architectural foundations. The 18th century Fort Halifax site is situated on the east bank of the Susquehanna River and is therefore comingled with over 10,000 years of Native American occupations that were disturbed and displaced during the fort's construction; therefore, participants will become familiar with both historic and prehistoric artifacts.

Archaeological Field Director Bio

Dr. Jonathan Burns is an archaeology professor and Director of the Cultural Resource Institute in the History and Art History Department at Juniata College in Huntingdon, Pennsylvania. His research focuses on colonial-era fortifications and battlefield sites in Pennsylvania dating from 1755 to 1783, using archaeological investigation to illuminate memorialization practices, ethnic diversity, and early global interactions in North America. Through projects centered on site discovery, material culture, and historic preservation, he works to deepen public understanding of the region's colonial past. Since 2017, Burns has led the Juniata College Veterans Archaeology Program, a collaborative initiative with Fort Ligonier and other nonprofit partners that provides archaeological training and continuing education to US military veterans. His community-oriented approach emphasizes hands-on learning, public engagement, and long-term stewardship of cultural resources. Burns currently serves as Vice President of the Pennsylvania Archaeological Council.

SHOOP SITE

Shoop Site Summary



The Shoop site (36Da20) is the largest known Paleoindian site in Pennsylvania. It consists of at least 18 artifact clusters spread over 38 acres. In 1952, state archaeologist John Witthoft produced the first report on the site, analyzing roughly 2,000 artifacts recovered from plowed fields. Based on the high frequency of spear points and hide

scrapers, he interpreted the site as an Early Paleoindian overlook, hunting, and processing camp. Witthoft identified the Onondaga chert quarries of western New York—located approximately 250 miles to the north— as the lithic source for an estimated 98 percent of the assemblage.

Subsequent analysis of more than 100 fluted projectile points suggests that the site reflects a limited number of occupations within a relatively short span of time during the Early Paleoindian period, around 12,800 calibrated years ago. Notably, there is little evidence for later-period use of the site.

Although over 6000 artifacts have been collected from the plowed fields, few of these have been mapped so the contents and size of the artifact clusters is unknown. Do the clusters reported by Witthoft represent separate visits or are they a combination of work areas and a few associated habitation areas? The answer to these questions, especially the number of visits, has important implications for understanding Early Paleoindian adaptive strategies, including patterns of mobility, resource procurement, and the exploitation of the environment.

To address these issues, a team of avocational and professional archaeologists began investigations in 2021 within an unplowed woodlot along the southern edge of the site. In this area, artifacts have remained relatively undisturbed allowing for a detailed map of activities that were conducted here by Paleoindians some 12,800 years ago.

The field strategy focuses on the excavation of systematically placed shovel test pits (STPs are 50 × 50 cm excavations) to identify artifact concentrations, followed by block excavations to investigate these clusters in greater detail. Initial testing at five-meter intervals



identified several relatively large artifact concentrations measuring up to 5 × 6 meters. When the testing interval was reduced to 2.5 meters, numerous smaller activity areas were identified, possibly representing tasks carried out by individual occupants.

Fieldwork for the 2026 season will include expanding two existing excavation blocks using trowels and other small excavating tools, as well as extending close-interval (2.5 m) STP testing with shovels and screens around these blocks. Given the small size of 80% of the artifacts, all excavated soils will be screened through 1/8-inch mesh.

Archaeological Field Director Bio

Kurt W. Carr, Ph.D. is the Director of excavations at Shoop. Dr Carr was educated at Franklin and Marshall College and Catholic University of America receiving his Ph.D. from Catholic University in 1992. He has had a long career as a Mid-Atlantic and Pennsylvania

Archaeologist. From 1975-1980 he was employed by the Thunderbird Research Corporation conducting archaeological surveys and authoring archaeological reports. From 1980-2021 he filled several roles at the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission – as manager of the Pennsylvania Archaeological Site Survey files from 1980-1988, as Chief of the Division of Archaeology and Protection of the Pennsylvania Bureau of Historic Preservation, and from 2007-2021 as Senior Curator of Archaeology in the State Museum of Pennsylvania. Dr. Carr is now retired but actively conducting archaeological research at Shoop and other Pennsylvania sites.

Dr. Carr's research interests include early Native American hunting and gathering cultural adaptations, stone tool technology, settlement pattern analysis, changing population density, geomorphology and environmental reconstructions. His field experience includes both large and small reconnaissance surveys, the intensive excavation of Late Woodland villages, the excavation of stratified Paleoindian and Late Archaic/Transitional period sites, and the multiyear excavation at the Shoop Paleoindian site. He is very interested in public outreach and conducted a public excavation at Fort Hunter for 14 years. In addition, Dr. Carr has over 30 publications in professional journals, coauthored four books and have over 50 presentations at professional meetings. He also is active in state and regional archaeological societies.