

Police Track Down Looters

by David Deese, Stanly News & Press Staff Writer

A screen commonly used to sift dirt for artifacts was found this week at the Hardaway archaeological site. Earlier in the week, two people carrying digging tools had been discovered near where the screen was found. Hardaway was recently named a historic landmark, which protects it from unlawful digging for artifacts.

The couple was discovered on the property Monday morning by the land owners. On Tuesday, the landowner took detectives and a state archaeologist to the place where the couple was discovered on the property. The screen was found near where the man and his wife had been standing. They told police during questioning that they had left a screen at the site.

Near the screen, the archaeologist found small piles of dirt created when soil is sifted through a screen. The detective described the soil as “freshly dug” and the screen showed signs that it had been recently used for sifting dirt. Also nearby were stone tools used by ancient Indian cultures. The archaeologist said that the Hardaway projectile point, or arrowhead, and other rare tools like snub-nosed scrapers are valued by people who collect Indian artifacts.

The Hardaway site is protected by state law, and there are many signs warning that the area is off-limits to digging.

“One sign was within 50 feet of where the couple were found,” said the archaeologist.

When the couple was discovered, the landowner told them they were on protected property and asked for their names and addresses. The couple would not reveal their names and left the site. They were later arrested by police. Inside their backpack, the police found digging tools, including a pick, and a small shovel. No Indian artifacts were found in their possession.

The Hardaway site is important because soil at the site is stratified in layers. This means the artifacts are found at different levels below the surface. The deeper in the ground an artifact is found, the older the artifact is. Before they dug at Hardaway, archaeologists had no way to date artifacts of ancient Indian cultures because all artifacts found were from a single soil layer. Because of the soil layers at Hardaway, archaeologists have been able to date similar artifacts found at sites all across the southeastern United States.

“Hardaway is very unique, and it is being substantially affected by people coming in and looting the site with no respect for the history of North Carolina,” said the state archaeologist.

[The above article was excerpted and revised from two articles: “Badin Indian Site Declared U.S. Landmark” by David Deese, The Stanly News and Press, July 10, 1990; and “Police Recover Dirt-Sifting Tool at Indian Camp” by David Deese, The Stanly News and Press, July 12, 1990.]