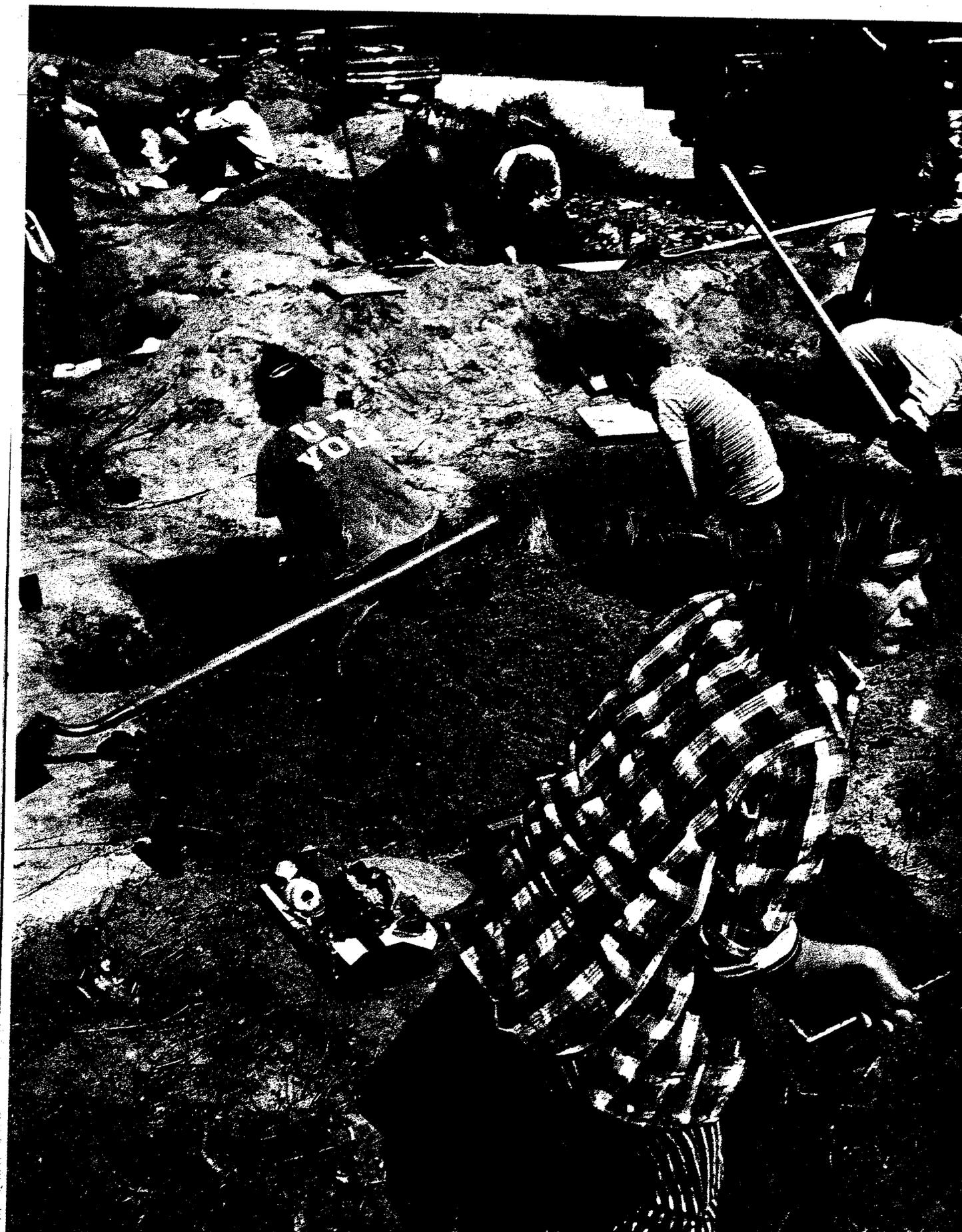
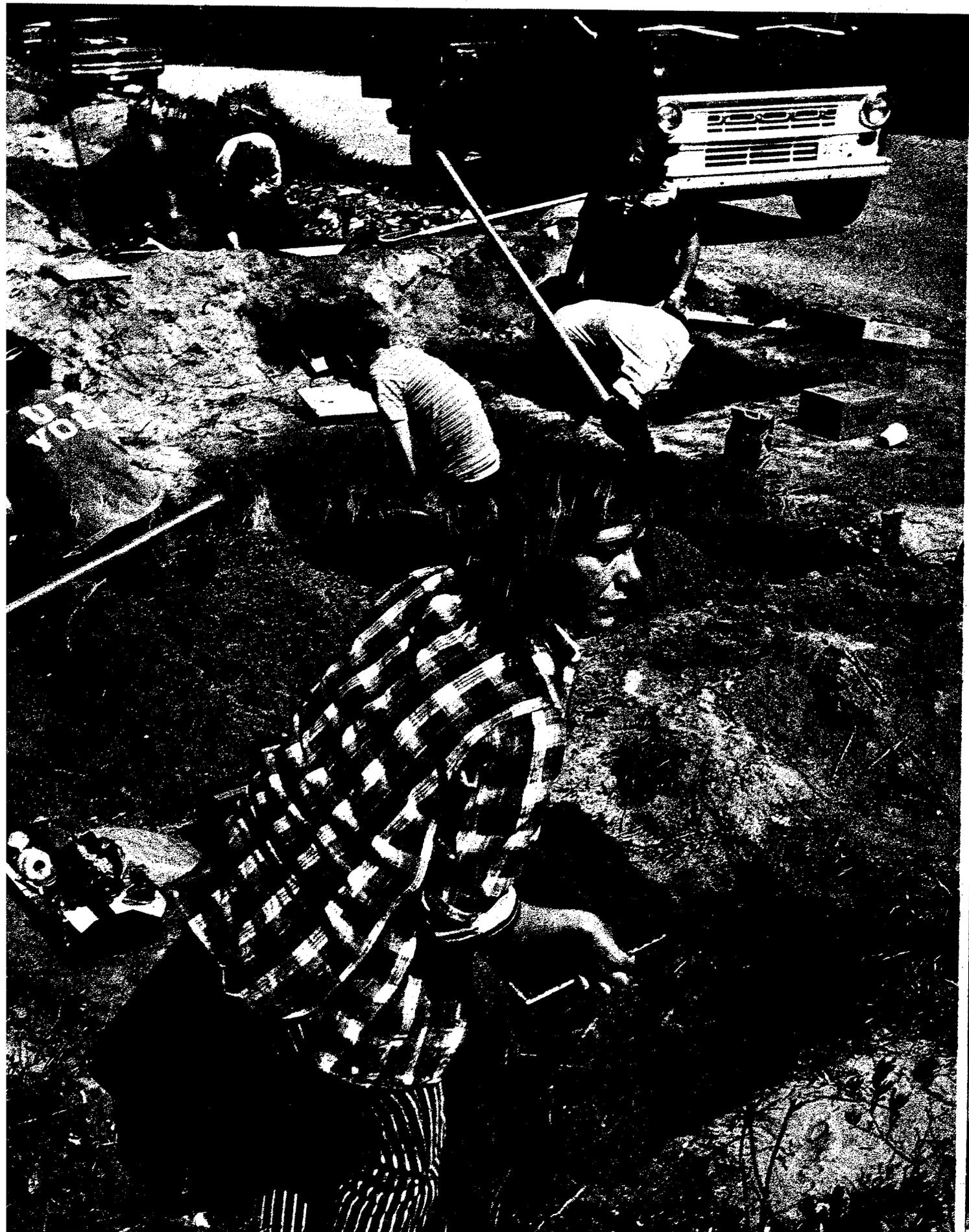


# The RHODE ISLANDER®

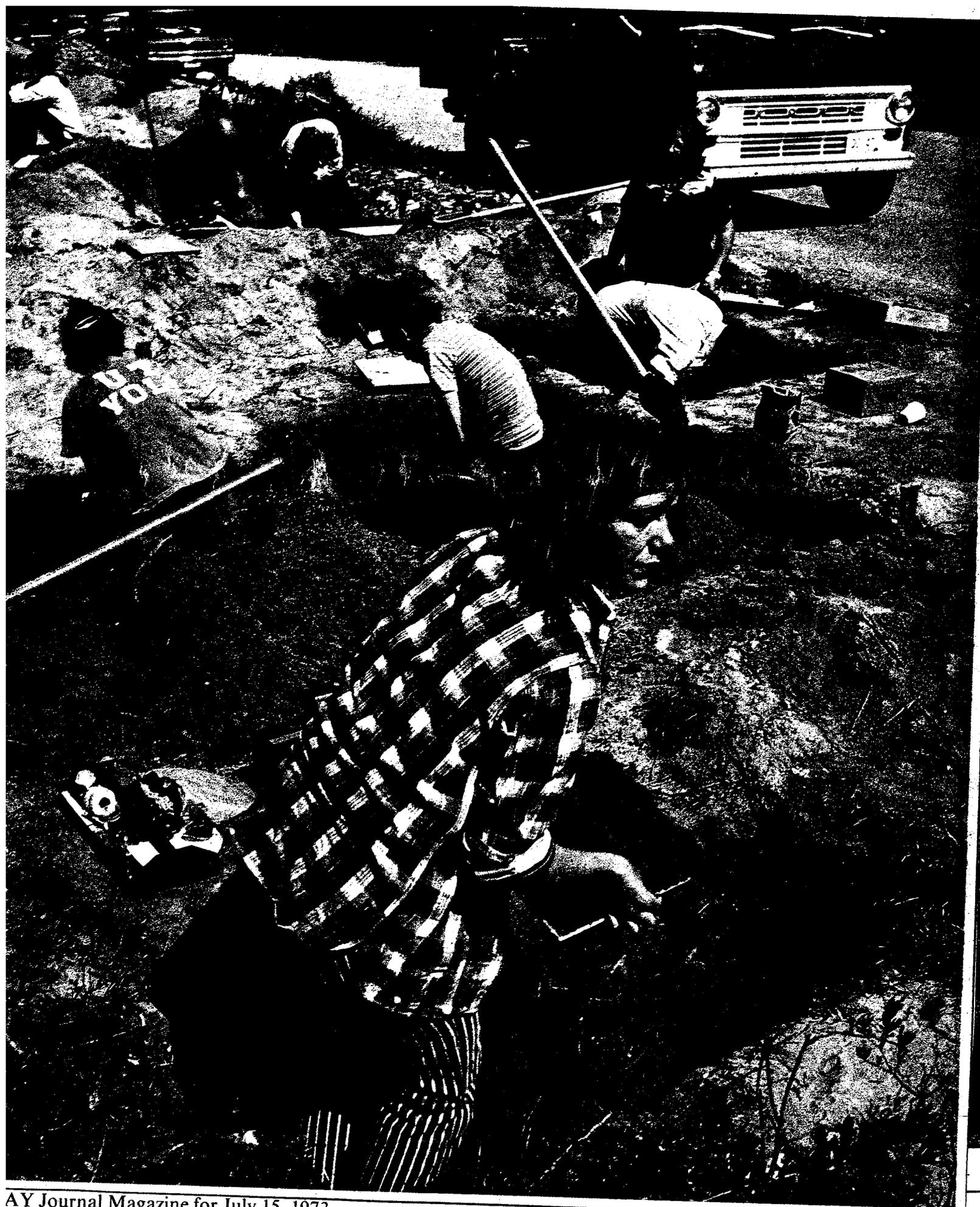
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# Dig it!

**There's an archeological dig going on in Seekonk to unearth a prehistoric campsite, and we're all invited. C'mon over — and bring a trowel.**

By CHARLES A. PAXTON

**I**N A NOTCH of land formed by the V-shaped intersection of School and Leavitt Streets in Seekonk, lies a slightly elevated knoll measuring about 75 by 25 paces. Until recently, this piece of land was owned by the family of Charles Read, whose ancestor, John Read, settled here in 1644. On its western side the knoll ends abruptly in a 15-foot cliff where, in February of 1972, a construction worker was busy with a bulldozer, tearing out huge masses of gravel for a nearby road project.

I've never talked with this construction worker; I haven't even been able to find out his name. But I think of him often. I try to visualize him, hard at work on that cold and windy day, guiding the huge blades of his machine into the still-frozen earth. I try to see his expression as he gouges out one particular section of the cliff, revealing a new section which is peculiarly different from the rest. I wince as I see him fighting his curiosity and almost continuing on with his work. But he doesn't. He climbs down from the controls and approaches the cliff, peering intently at the strange rocks in the cliff-face; rocks which somehow seemed to have a purpose of their own.

Once, about 4,000 years ago, they did: They formed part of a fireplace used by the original New Englanders.

Our alert construction worker had discovered a prehistoric campsite.

**W**here did these ancient people come from?

To answer this question we must travel far back in time to a point when, for reasons which remain a mystery to this day, the temperature of the earth very slowly began to drop. It dropped so slowly that if a man had somehow lived for 10,000 years, *still* he would not have noticed any change.

But change there was, change so slow that it required the almost inconceivable span of 40 million years for the earth's mean annual temperature to drop a mere 19 degrees. And at this point,

epoch, the summer's heat could no longer completely melt the winter's snow.

Thus, a glacier was born. And with it, this particular glacier (there were several throughout the world), called the Laurentian, had as its birthplace a broad plateau near Quebec, located approximately 900 miles north of Providence.

Actually, it is perhaps premature to use the word "glacier" to describe what was really a large snow field. Centuries or even thousands of years would have to pass before it reached the stage of growth. At this stage, which was when the snow field grew to a thickness of 200 feet, we can properly say that it was a glacier. Why? Because it began to move.

Under the tremendous weight of the accumulating snow, the glacier began to flow in various directions, like a huge glob of molasses. To the north and east the ice fell off into the form of gigantic icebergs. To the west it steadily advanced, constantly growing and filling in the valleys and overpoisoning the mountains. For 10,000 years it was so.

During the time of maximum glaciation, northern Canada lay under an ice sheet which has been at least two miles thick. In the United States, near the limits of glaciation, the ice must have been more than 6,000 feet thick. To cover such mountain ranges as the Appalachians (5,344 feet) and the White Mountains (6,288 feet), this incredible amount of ice, estimated at one million cubic miles, resulted in a drastic lowering of sea levels all over the world. As more and more of the ocean's water became trapped on land in the form of ice, sea level dropped anywhere from 400 to 600 feet below its present level. This is what you would have been in "Providence" during the time of maximum glaciation, not only would you have been standing on top of about 2,000 feet of ice, but you would have had to travel approximately 25 miles farther than Nantucket Island to reach the ocean!

Throughout the world during this time

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But change there was, change so slow that it required the almost inconceivable span of 40 million years for the earth's mean annual temperature to drop a mere 19 degrees. And at this point, which occurred some 500,000 years ago, during the middle of what is known as the Pleistocene

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*Charles Paxton is an anthropology major at Rhode Island College, and a freelance writer.*

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Thus, a glacier was born. And with it, an ice age. This particular glacier (there were several forming throughout the world), called the Laurentide Ice Cap, had as its birthplace a broad plateau in central Quebec, located approximately 900 miles due north of Providence.

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Under the tremendous weight of the accumulating snow, the glacier began to flow radially in all directions, like a huge glob of molasses. To the north and east the ice fell off into the sea in the form of gigantic icebergs. To the west and south it steadily advanced, constantly growing, continuously filling in the valleys and overpowering the mountains. For 10,000 years it was so.

During the time of maximum glaciation, Northern Canada lay under an ice sheet estimated to have been at least two miles thick. In the eastern United States, near the limits of glaciation, the ice must have been more than 6,000 feet thick to cover such mountain ranges as the Adirondacks (5,344 feet) and the White Mountains (6,288 feet). This incredible amount of ice, estimated at 12 million cubic miles, resulted in a drastic lowering of sea levels all over the world. As more and more of the ocean's water became trapped on land in the form of ice, sea level dropped anywhere from 200 to 400 feet below its present level. This means that if you had been in "Providence" during the time of maximum glaciation, not only would you have been standing on top of about 2,000 feet of ice, but you would have had to travel approximately 25 miles farther than Nantucket Island before you reached the ocean!

Throughout the world during this time, tremendous portions of land were being exposed to air after eons of knowing nothing but the water overhead. And of all the land that slowly emerged as the oceans receded, perhaps none carried the ultimate significance of that portion, now known as

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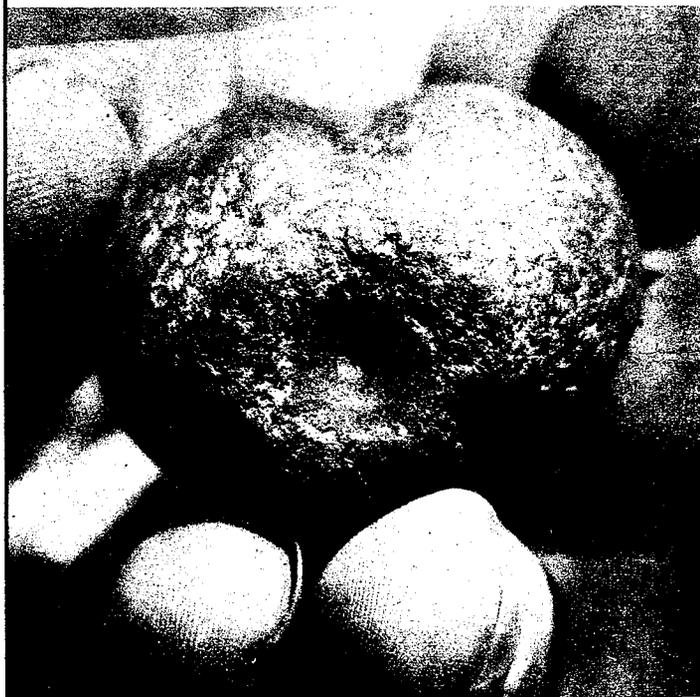
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heads of felsite (left), quartz (center) and green slate.



THIS STONE weight, called an 'atlatl,' is part of a kind  
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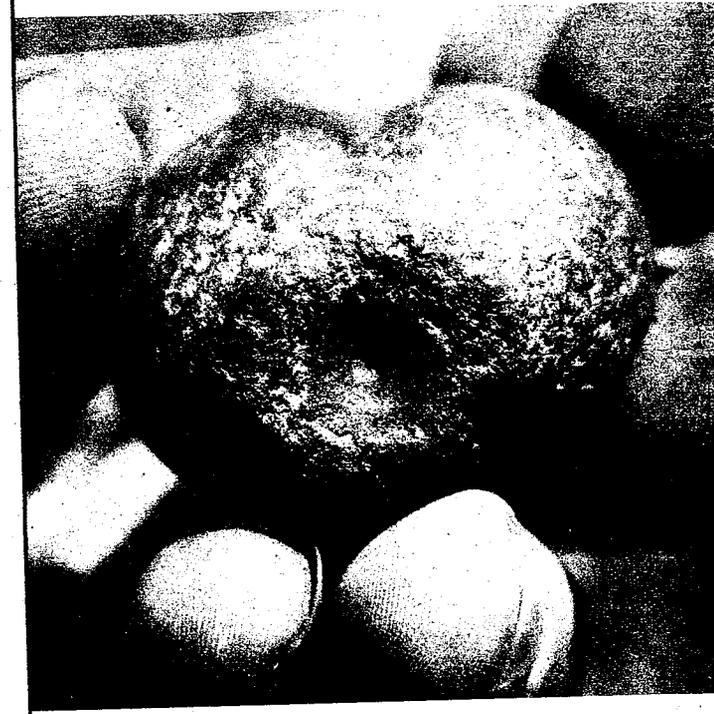
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A QUARTZITE dart point (or possibly a knife).



### Archaeological Dig Open on Weekends

The archaeological dig at the Red Farm in Seekonk will be open to the public Saturdays and Sundays only, from 8:30 a.m. to about 4 p.m.

A dig spokesman said yesterday that five months of work had been destroyed yesterday by unsupervised workers. He added that Dr. John Erhardt, chairman of the Seekonk Board of Selectmen, has asked police to patrol the area and inform the

the Bering Strait, which separated Alaska from Siberia. For it was there that man most assuredly crossed over and entered the New World.

We don't know exactly when this dramatic event happened: Most of the archeological evidence points to a time about 12,000 years ago, although there have been finds which point to a much earlier arrival — perhaps as long ago as 40,000 years,

In any event, the people came. And even if we assign them a date as recent as 10,000 years ago, they were still on hand to see the glory of a continent being re-born as the ice cap slowly fell back to the north.

Gradually then, the warming weather pushed the great ice-cap back. It began to leave Rhode Island about 20,000 years ago; it retreated from the Great Lakes as little as 10,000 years ago; and perhaps as recently as 3,000 years ago it finally vanished in the same area that had given it life almost a half million years before.

But the deglaciation not only opened up new land for man's future: It also cut him off from his past. The land bridge of the Bering Strait, connecting the Old World with the New, gradually disappeared under frigid waters as the ice-cap melted slowly away.

For better or worse, man was in the New World to stay.

In geological terms, the many waves of people who crossed over into North America did not stay long in any one place: Perhaps 100 years at a particular site, perhaps 500 years in a pleasanter valley further south. Some of them, such as the Eskimo, decided not to move at all. But most did

In general, they found the southern climates much more to their liking than the cold which still gripped much of the United States and Canada. Prior to the white man's invasion, the maximum population of North, Central, and South America combined is estimated to have been 20-30 million people. However, of this total, many experts agree that only one to two million inhabited all of the United States, Canada, and Alaska, while the great majority moved south and thus became the ancestors of the Aztecs, the Mayans, and the Incas.

Eventually, they discovered New England. Carol Barnes, professor of anthropology at Rhode Island College: "Our knowledge of the ancestors of the American Indians depends to a large extent on our knowledge of their tools. The earliest tools that have been well studied are those made by Paleo-Indian hunters and gatherers about 12,000 years ago. The use of these tools gradually spread eastward into New England



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A story in the Providence Sunday Journal Rhode Islander magazine said volunteers were welcome at the site.

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►9

*of Seekonk and Jeanne Paolo of RIC dust off a find. Photographs by Jack Spratt.*

# SEEKONK DIG continued

ple stayed in New England a relatively short time before they moved farther north, leaving New England empty again."

For perhaps 1,000 years, New England lay empty. During this long stretch of time, however, the countryside was indeed being reborn. As the temperature inched slowly upward, the barren tundra gradually gave way to thick grasslands. Out of these, there slowly emerged deep forests. And into these forests a multitude of animals found their way. Finally, man rediscovered New England.

Professor Barnes: "The first people to resettle New England were Early Archaic (8,000-5,000 B.C.) hunters and gatherers. These people were followed by other groups with different types of tools and slightly different hunting patterns. By Late Archaic times (2,500-1,000 B.C.), southeastern New England was the home of numerous groups of hunters-gatherers who used a variety of projectile points and other tools made of local quartz, shale, felsite, and quartzite. They were well acquainted with local resources. . . ."

In this day of pollution and industrial waste it's hard to envision a New England entirely blanketed with virgin forests of oak, hickory, red maple, juniper, and laurel. The air was pure and cool and sweet with the songs of robins, catbirds, orioles, tanagers, hairy woodpeckers, kingbirds, quail, passenger pigeons, thrashers, and heathen. Imagine great clumps of cherries, raspberries, blackberries, blueberries, bechnuts and cranberries dotting the landscape like bright splotches of paint on a surrealist's easel. Think for a moment about roaming through the forests in the company of wild turkey, puma, bobcat, white-tailed deer, gray wolf, red and gray fox, black bears, rabbits, short-tailed shrews, squirrels, woodchucks and a thousand other critters both big and small. If you're a fishing enthusiast, think about this: A list of fish caught in the waters around Newport in the year 1800 includes 112 species of sea animals, 66 of which were "fit for the table"!

Is it any wonder then, that New England became a site of heavy prehistoric occupation by a large number of Paleo-Indian groups? They came, liked what they saw, and stayed.

Many of these groups followed what is known as a "seasonal round," a common mode of existence among groups unacquainted with the idea of a stationary, agricultural life. They knew where to make the best seasonal campsites to take advantage of the fish runs, the wild fowl migrations, the animal trails, as well as where to spend the cold winter months. For any one group the number of campsites on the seasonal round, as well as the length of time spent at each site, was highly variable and depended to a large extent on the size of

rapidly expanding society. Frequently, however, the archeologist simply doesn't have the time to conduct a painstaking search and, as is often the case, hears of a new find only because some people are alert and perceptive enough to realize what they have stumbled upon.

All of which brings us right back to our construction worker on that cold day in February of last year. He may or may not have known what those strange rocks imbedded in the cliff-face meant. But he was curious, and his curiosity led him to notify Dr. John Erhardt, recently reelected chairman of the Seekonk Board of Selectmen.

John Erhardt is a man possessed of a remarkably lively, inquisitive mind, particularly when the topic concerns the history and prehistory of New England. (For example, did you know that Seekonk derives its name from the Indian words "Seeki Honk," meaning black goose?)

In any event, Dr. Erhardt was immediately intrigued by the discovery. Equally enthusiastic were his two colleagues on the board, Robert DelRosso and Edwin Morgan. Together they decided to halt the bulldozing operation and to notify Dr. Maurice Robbins, the Massachusetts state archeologist. He in turn got in touch with Thomas Lux, professor of anthropology at Providence College, and Carol Barnes, professor of anthropology at Rhode Island College. Professors Lux and Barnes then agreed to excavate the site as a research project for the Massachusetts Archeological Society.

**They decided to gamble and issue an open invitation.**

The dig site is on a piece of land which was formerly part of a farm owned by Charles Read. Thus the official name of the excavation is Read Farm #1. Actually, this is a very fitting name, for Charles Read soon became a stout supporter of the excavation, giving freely of his time, materials, and detailed knowledge of the history and terrain of the area.

Unfortunately, however, archeology is no different from many other disciplines insofar as "time dictates methods". Despite their enthusiasm for the excavation project, the Board of Selectmen didn't feel they could justify to the townspeople a lengthy postponement of the original construction project. Thus a time limit of just a week or two was given to the diggers to complete their investigations. This time limit dictated that the site

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In recent years, archeologists in New England have been hard at work searching for these prehistoric campsites, trying to find them before they are forever lost to us under the asphalt jungle of a

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# KONK DIG continued

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...000 years, New England lay long stretch of time, however, as indeed being reborn. As the ed slowly upward, the barren gave way to thick grasslands. e slowly emerged deep forests. e forests a multitude of animals Finally, man rediscovered New

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...lution and industrial waste it's New England entirely blanket- ts of oak, hickory, red maple, . The air was pure and cool e songs of robins, catbirds,airy woodpeckers, kingbirds, geons, thrashers, and heath- clumps of cherries, raspber- blueberries, bechnuts and ; the landscape like bright on a surrealist's easel. Think t roaming through the forests wild turkey, puma, bobcat, gray wolf, red and gray fox, , short-tailed shrews, squirrels, thousand other critters both u're a fishing enthusiast, think of fish caught in the waters t the year 1800 includes 112 als, 66 of which were "fit for

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...rapidly expanding society. Frequently, however, the archeologist simply doesn't have the time to conduct a painstaking search and, as is often the case, hears of a new find only because some people are alert and perceptive enough to realize what they have stumbled upon.

**A**ll of which brings us right back to our construction worker on that cold day in February of last year. He may or may not have known what those strange rocks imbedded in the cliff-face meant. But he was curious, and his curiosity led him to notify Dr. John Erhardt, recently reelected chairman of the Seekonk Board of Selectmen.

John Erhardt is a man possessed of a remarkably lively, inquisitive mind, particularly when the topic concerns the history and prehistory of New England. (For example, did you know that Seekonk derives its name from the Indian words "Seeki Honk," meaning black goose?)

In any event, Dr. Erhardt was immediately intrigued by the discovery. Equally enthusiastic were his two colleagues on the board, Robert DelRosso and Edwin Morgan. Together they decided to halt the bulldozing operation and to notify Dr. Maurice Robbins, the Massachusetts state archeologist. He in turn got in touch with Thomas Lux, professor of anthropology at Providence College, and Carol Barnes, professor of anthropology at Rhode Island College. Professors Lux and Barnes then agreed to excavate the site as a research project for the Massachusetts Archeological Society.

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the very thought of which is sufficient to send shivers of horror coursing through any archeologist worthy of the title. Shovels may legitimately be used to clear away any unproductive materials, but they are far too clumsy and destructive for fine work. Standard implements for archeological diggers invariably include a six-inch pointed plastering trowel, a small whisk broom, and oftentimes a dentist's pick, tooth brush, and magnifying glass.

Certain controls were painstakingly set up to provide as much accuracy as possible. A detailed grid reference system was staked out to ensure accurate recordings of artifact locations; trial shafts were sunk to discern occupation levels and to determine the nature of the soils; flotation and distribution analyses were carried out throughout the digging season; and detailed photographic, written, and graphic records were maintained.

But, most importantly, there was the unflagging enthusiasm of the small group of diggers who volunteered their time, effort, and knowledge to the project. Working at the site as many as eight hours a day, five days a week, these people supplied the driving power that kept the excavation going through good times and bad.

One of the very worst of times occurred one night when a group of vandals discovered the site and in a short time destroyed literally weeks of hard work. The grid system was ripped up, paint was splattered all about, the side walls of the excavation were crushed underfoot, and garbage was thrown all over the site.

But, true to form, the diggers quickly shook off their initial anger and frustration, got back to work, and had the site straightened out again in a matter of just a few days.

Incidentally, this matter of vandalism could bear a little more attention. One of the prime reasons that the locations of archeological excavations are very rarely publicized is that vandalism and theft almost invariably follow.

The people in charge of the Read Farm dig decided to take a gamble. They sincerely want you, the people, to really get involved in and with the prehistoric cultures of New England. And to this end they offer an open invitation to anyone who is truly interested to visit the site, talk with the site directors, and even bring a trowel to help with the work. Anyone interested should call Carol Barnes or assistant director Leonard Loparto, both of whom can be reached at the Department of Anthropology at Rhode Island College.

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The people of Seekonk gradually began to show an awakening and responsive interest in the excavation, so much so that the original construc- tion project was halted completely. One man, evi- dently on his way home from work each day, would drive around the site two or three times, obviously trying to figure what the heck was going on. After a few weeks of this, his curiosity became so great that he simply had to stop and ask. When told that it was an archeological exca- vation, his face lit up with delight and he said,

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# SEEKONK DIG continued

"Ha, I knew it all along!" Others had different ideas about what was going on, and one elderly couple gave a big sigh of relief because they thought a hippie commune was starting up!

At any event, the days and weeks rolled steadily by as the diggers slowly extracted every possible piece of evidence from the ancient soil. Gradually, from these scattered and oftentimes broken artifacts, a picture of the people began to develop.

This reconstruction process, whereby some sense of order is made out of all the bits and pieces, is really what archeology is all about. Making any sense out of the recovered artifacts of an excavation requires a great deal of meticulous work indeed, not to mention a logical, yet imaginative mind. Archeologist James Deetz of Brown University puts it this way:

"Take a glass coffee pot, a set of rosary beads, a wedding ring, a fishing pole complete with reel, a jewelry box, a pair of skis, an eight ball from a pool table, a crystal chandelier, a magnifying glass, a harmonica, and a vacuum tube and break them to pieces with a hammer. Bury them for three centuries, and then dig them up and present them to a literate citizen of Peking. Could he tell you the function of the objects which these fragments represent? A slightly far-fetched situation, we might say, but in many ways this is exactly the problem facing the archeologist who is attempting to determine the function of the various artifacts in his assemblage."

As far as the Read Farm site is concerned, this reconstruction process has proceeded remarkably well, although many questions, and a few mysteries, still remain. Here is the picture beginning to emerge:

The people who inhabited this campsite probably did so between 3,000 and 5,500 years ago. This estimate is based upon the types and quality of tools found at the site. For the present, this date will have to remain an estimate since money for a carbon-14 dating has become available only within the past few weeks.

The site was probably a seasonal camp. "This guess," according to Professor Barnes and Mr. Loparto, "is based partly on what we know of Indian lifestyles, both historic and prehistoric, and partly upon the observation that this high, exposed bluff is not a good place to camp during winter. In addition, the meager variety of tools would suggest not only limited occupation, but limited function as well. We are now making an analysis of the seed remains and hope to find out the exact time of year during which the camp site was occupied."

Nothing explicit at the site provides a satisfactory basis for estimating how many people were there at any one time. However, from the general

"We are guessing that they camped here for a few days or weeks in late spring/early summer, hunting in the surrounding woods and marshes, and fishing in the Runnins River," Professor Barnes said. "They may have dried or smoked fish, although our only current evidence for this is the large hearths at the site. They were also making tools of quartz, shale, felsite, and quartzite, which is interesting since this was not a quarry site, meaning that these raw materials were imported from elsewhere."

A number of mysterious gravel formations were uncovered at the site. They seem to occur at random, bearing little relation to adjacent or concurrent features. Not only that, but they appear to be peculiar only to this site: Either they do not appear anywhere else in New England archeology, or they have simply not been noticed by other excavators. Hopefully, as other sites are excavated, similar formations will be found and their significance will become clear.

All of these results, and there are many, many more which I couldn't possibly cover here, are important in and of themselves. But aside from them, there has been one of even more importance: one which in the final analysis perhaps should be the purpose and the goal of any endeavor by man: It has brought people closer together.

At first, one or two people began to stop by the site after their normal work day to talk with the diggers. Their interest grew. Soon, they began to come by on weekends to lend a hand with the work and to learn. They spread the word. More people came. Interest now turned to excitement as

**Now there's talk  
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into a public park.**

people from all walks of life rolled up their sleeves and worked side by side, shoveling, surveying, mapping, photographing, analyzing, and getting to know one another. Teachers began bringing their classes out to the site to give them direct knowledge about New England's first inhabitants. The students brought their parents. . . .

And now? Well, now the townspeople of Seekonk have shown enough active interest and enthusiasm that the Board of Selectmen is trying to acquire the property from the large oil company which owns it. The idea is to turn it into a peoples' park, a place of fun. If they succeed, we will all be the richer for it.

And the excavation continues! There is time now . . . time to dig carefully, time to give the site



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Nothing explicit at the site provides a satisfactory basis for estimating how many people were there at any one time. However, from the general nature of the camp itself, and from drawing analogies to modern people who live by hunting and gathering, it is reasonable to assume that the group was small, probably no more than 25-30 people.

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And the excavation continues! There is time now — time to dig carefully, time to give the site and the people it represents the attention they deserve, time to think about the way they lived and the way we live today, and time to form new friendships and refresh the old.

Got some free time? Come on out to the dig!

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