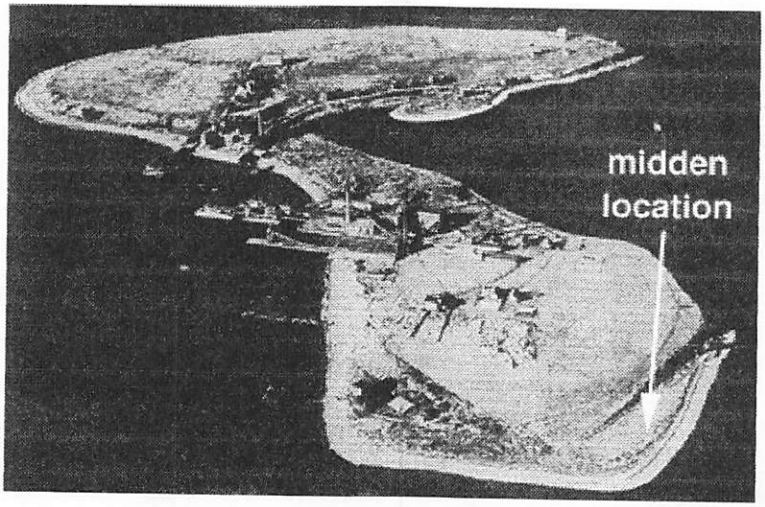
1932 A.D. Industrial Site



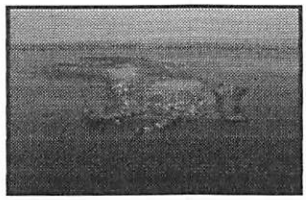
The island's location made it an ideal spot for industrial activities that would not be tolerated in heavily-populated Boston. This photograph shows two of the later occupants of Spectacle Island. In the background are the remnants of a horse-rendering plant on the northern portion of the island. It was built in 1857 and remained in use until horses were supplanted by the automobile. In the foreground is a garbage-rendering plant built by the City to extract grease from garbage and incinerate refuse. After the garbage plant closed in 1935, raw trash was simply dumped on the island. This stopped in 1959 when a bulldozer moving refuse on the island sank into the trash pile!

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CA/T: Dirt/Spectacle Island

The Changing Face of Spectacle Island



Over the past two years South Boston residents couldn't help but notice the changes being made to Spectacle Island in Boston Harbor. As part of the Central Artery/Tunnel Project, the island, a former city dump, has received about 3 million cubic yards of clay, dirt, and gravel that was dug for the Ted Williams Tunnel and its approaches.

"Its important to remember why the CA/T chose Spectacle Island in the first place," said Project Director Peter Zuk. "Only two years ago it was nothing more than a mountain of garbage in the middle of Boston Harbor, leaking thousands of gallons of toxic material into the surrounding water. Working with the City of Boston and the Department of Environmental Management, we came up with a plan that would: solve an environmental nightmare, give us a place to put most of the excavated material, and still allowing us to maintain our long-standing commitments to the people of South Boston a new park in their backyard."

According to Zuk, in the 1980s, about the time the Commonwealth resolved to clean up Boston harbor, the Central Artery/Tunnel project was seeking potential sites for excavated dirt. Also at that time, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management produced a master plan (still under discussion), for a Boston Harbor Islands State Park, which would include Spectacle Island. These mutual interests led to the choice of Spectacle as the site for about a quarter of the project's excavated dirt, gravel, and clay.

"A dike has been built to contain the new dirt that will cover the island's mountain of trash," according to Sharin Karinfiloglu, the project's Manager of Architecture and Urban Design. "Dirt and gravel will be used to reshape the island, over which a two-foot clay cap will be laid. A two to five foot layer topsoil will be placed above the cap so that trees and plants can once again flourish on the island."

For some, the size and height of the island have been the cause of some concern, but Zuk is quick to point out that both the island's contours and its height were approved by the Environmental Protection Agency and the State Department of Environmental Protection, and, most importantly, the island will not get any higher. As far as the other complaint - the island's brown color - Zuk said that "this fall Southie and the rest of the towns and communities that surround the harbor will see the beginnings of a new park as crews begin landscaping the island. The most noticeable change will be in the island's color, from brown to green, as we start to plant grass on the northern half of the island."

Spectacle has had a long and unique history, which begins with several Native American tribes who used it as a place to go fishing, clamming, and gathering food. A recent archaeological dig (done before work began on the island) produced a wealth of information on Native American culture and lifestyle. A mound of unearthed debris The island got its name after the English, who arrived in Boston in 1630, saw two large mounds connected by a sandbar in the middle of the harbor which looked like a pair of spectacles. The English used the island as a source of pasture land and timber.

The island's location made it an ideal place in the early 1700s for a quarantine hospital. After the hospital was moved to Rainsford Island in 1737, Spectacle was used for picnics and excursions from the mainland. In 1847 two resort hotels were built on the northern side of the island, with gambling as the major attraction. In 1857 the hotels were closed after a police raid discovered a brothel operating at the resort. After that, Spectacle served as the site of a horse-rendering plant that processed as many as 2000 horses a year into gluestock, hair, oil, and bones. During the 1920s, a plant for the reclamation of grease from garbage was established. Ten years later the city began dumping garbage and trash between the island's two hills. The dumping era ended in 1959 when, appropriately enough, a bulldozer sank in a pile of garbage.

Its rather smelly past behind it, Spectacle Island now looks forward to 2000, when the 105-acre public park is expected to be constructed. The new park will have docking access for public ferry and recreational boats, beaches, picnic

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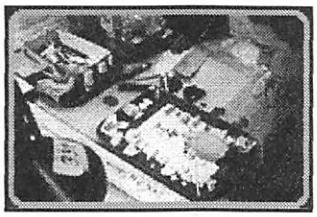
BBN's Spectacle Island Curriculum Project

Environment Page

Ted Williams Tunnel Page

Spectacle Island Visitors' Center

Archaeology



A prehistoric shell midden, sort of garbage dump was located on the southeastern end of the island. Uncovering artifacts in this area has helped archaeologists piece together a picture of Native American life in the prehistoric Archaic and Woodland periods.

The Boston Museum of Science has put on-line a sneak preview of their Spectacle Island Archaeology exhibit. This is a wonderful site! Please visit it to view artifacts from Spectacle Island, maps and more.

You might also try the ARCHNET for an indepth look at projectile points.

Print Resources:

Seashells, Seashells, By the Seashore - The Story of Spectacle Island Arcaeological Site CA/T Popular Report

Intensive Archaeological Survey of Spectacle Isalnd in Boston Harbor by Donald Jones - Office of Public Archeaology Boston Unitversity(may be obtained from CA/T)

Here are some archaeology related activities you might like to try in your classroom.

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