Archaeology at Morven Park
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Surrounding Morven Park’s historic mansion is a landscape full of clues about the people who previously occupied the property. Archaeology, which is the study of past human culture through material remains, is one of the key methodologies used to understand these clues at Morven Park.

By prohibiting all on-site metal detecting since 2010, the Westmoreland Davis Memorial Foundation (WDMF) Board of Trustees and staff have ensured the protection of the archaeological sites and the information they contain for future generations. The staff is extremely grateful to the metal detecting
community for respecting these restrictions and for sharing some of the artifacts that were found on site in the 1970s and ‘80s.

In addition to the policies and procedures established for the management of archaeological sites at Morven Park, an additional layer of protection has been provided through a conservation easement held by the Virginia Outdoor Foundation. The easement protects over 600 acres of land at Morven Park, the bulk of which lies on the ridge adjacent to the historic buildings and within the viewshed of the Davis Mansion. The easement protects both known and unknown archaeological sites and requires the supervision of a qualified archaeologist for all excavations. Fortunately, Morven Park has a staff member who meets all federal and state archaeology qualifications.

You may be surprised to learn that the best way to protect an archaeological site is to refrain from excavating it. Because excavating results in the destruction of the site, excavations at Morven Park occur only if there is a threat to the site or if it is necessary to answer a research question, such as confirming the location of a long-lost building. No matter the reason for the excavation, the archaeological team has just one chance to get it right and record as much data as possible. Data such as original ground level, the location of each artifact, color and type of soil, and the relationships between artifacts and other natural or manmade features are critical to understanding the site. By recording an excavation in detail, archaeologists can review the data and draw conclusions about the history of the site and ensure that future researchers have access to the same data for further examination.

The WDMF Board of Trustees and staff are honored to care for all the history held at Morven Park, both above and below ground.

To learn more about archaeology, visit the Archaeological Institute of America [https://www.archaeological.org/] or the Society for American Archaeology [https://www.saa.org/]

1 Society for American Archaeology website: [www.saa.org/about-archaeology/what-is-archaeology]