HA-1227 c. B.C. 1700-1000
Orr Prehistoric Steatite Quarry Archeological Site
(Broad Creek Soapstone Quarries)
Robinson Mill Road
Dublin
Private

The Orr Prehistoric Steatite Quarry site encompasses an exposed boulder field extending along a 30 to 40 degree slope which decreases to approximately 10 degrees at the base and crest of the ridge. Due to the rocky surface and steep slope, the site has escaped cultivation although the oak-chestnut forest which covers the site was harvested around the 1930s. The site was surface collected by an amateur archeologist in the 1930s, and possibly once in the 1950s. An examination of the Orr collection and of the site's surface revealed the manufacture of vessels from boulders instead of from bedrock. Apparently natural boulders of suitable size and shape were selected from the surface until the supply was exhausted. Then pits were opened into the ridge to obtain suitable boulders. The first stage in the manufacturing process was the modification of the long axis to form handles. After the exterior edges were shaped, the interior area was removed. Bowls were abandoned when unusually hard areas prevented reduction, when the bowl fractured during the process, or when in the process of roughing out the bowl it was reduced past an acceptable dimension. The roughed-out vessels fall within two vessel types: the rounded bottom, oval-shaped Orient Phase type and the straight-sided, flat-bottomed Frost Island and Miller Field phase types. The popularity of steatite vessels is dated from 1700 to 1000 B.C. The quarrying activities at the site probably represent periodic visits throughout this period to replenish the exhausted supply of previously obtained bowls.

The extensive and well-preserved Orr Prehistoric Steatite Quarry is one of the few known sites in the eastern United States where soapstone vessels were fashioned from steatite boulders instead of from bedrock deposits. While other prehistoric quarries reported from this area may have assemblages representing similar manufacturing processes, these sites have been destroyed by modern quarrying activities. Located on the upper western shore of the Chesapeake Bay, the site is vital to studies of procurement systems of various cultures of the Susquehanna Soapstone tradition, c. B.C. 1700-1000. The high-grade soapstone found in boulder form at the site is a better grade than that reported from the Harland Mill Steatite Quarry located in nearby Cecil County. The Orr site confirms the assertion that the prehistoric quarrier modified his manufacturing techniques to meet the local situation. The site's excellent state of preservation increases the potential value of the site for understanding a previously unexplained manufacturing technique.