

Pondering the Mysteries

By Robi Josephson,
Research Associate

Taking a break during a field trip, I leaned back against the rock wall. Leaves rustled in the late afternoon breeze. My eyes drooped, and time dropped away.

"Running Bear, wake up!" My cousin, River Deer, jabs me. "It's time to go."

I grunt, feeling a twinge in my knee. Next year when we hunt up here on the mountain, I may be the one to sit in camp and protect the food. That's a job for the older men, but not yet for me. I grab my quiver, arrows and knife, throwing a few extra points into my belt sack. My points are okay. They do the job, but River Deer's ... now those will be admired for many generations to come.

Before taking off, I stop for a moment, thankful for this life, my family and village at the river below, and the food I will bring them. All in all, I'm a lucky soul.

Me, too. In my work for the Daniel Smiley Research Center, I get to, among many other things, ponder. Good old-fashioned pondering is at the heart of good research. What happened here at this rock wall? How and why did it happen? We collect information, we sift through clues, and sometimes we get lucky. Eureka happens.

One time it happened when I was cataloging the Preserve's Indian artifact collection. The collection had been excavated in the 1980s by SUNY New Paltz students under the direction of the late Len Eisenberg, director of the college's archaeological field schools, who also had been a Research Associate. While inspecting the stone tools, I wondered how some of them had been

used. The projectile points, many beautifully crafted, were clear enough, but how were the other oddly shaped tools held?

After handling dozens, one day I fiddled with one, rolling it over and over with my fingers. My thumb slipped into a groove. Suddenly, the

sharpest edge emerged. I shivered. At that moment, it was no longer an artifact but a tool that long ago helped a family

to survive. Applying "the thumb test" to each, I was able to more fully admire how it was made, as well as imagine what life was like for a hunter and his family centuries ago.

My research has taken me many places, thanks in large part to the support of Paul Huth and the Preserve staff. No matter, though, how we volunteer for the Preserve, we're all lucky souls. We get to do something we love, have a lot of fun, and help out along the way.

In July 2001, Robi Josephson celebrates her 15th anniversary as a Preserve volunteer. A former English Lit major, she sometimes plays with rocks and happily ponders the mysteries.

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