

Herndon's *Actual* Earliest Inhabitants

By Chuck Mauro

The earliest people to set foot on the land that would become Herndon were hunters and gatherers known as Paleoindians.

Some 13,000 years ago, the first American Indians—the Paleoindians—walked across the land that would eventually be called Herndon. They were a Stone Age people who made and used stone tools. Evidence of their existence in Herndon was first uncovered during construction of the Herndon Municipal Golf Course in the early 1980s.

Paleoindians traveled from northeast Asia to Alaska and gradually migrated south. They eventually occupied all of North and South America. They arrived in the Fairfax County area between 23,000 and 13,000 years ago, during or near the end of the last great Ice Age. This was a time when mastadon, bison, moose, elk, deer, bear, wolves, and large cats roamed through the forests of Northern Virginia.

Herndon was not an area for a permanent settlement. The Indians would probably camp in the area and hunt and gather within a one-day round trip from their base camp. They had not yet developed adequate food storage techniques, so they probably didn't live in a single area for more than a couple of weeks—at most a month.

The oldest known named Indians in Fairfax County were discovered a relatively short 400 years ago, in 1608, when Captain John Smith sailed up the Potomac from the Jamestown settlement. The English called the American Indians in Fairfax County the Dogue. Unknown families of Indians—perhaps the Dogue—lived in the Herndon area in the winter. They would break into small family groups, take their stores with them and lived in a winter house they had set up previously along Folly Lick and the Sugarland Run.

The Dogue population declined in Fairfax County due to the encroachment of and the diseases introduced by the Europeans. By about 1675, they were gone. Sadly, only a few artifacts still exist today to remind us of the first inhabitants of the Herndon area many thousands of years ago.