



**THE NATIONAL TRUST  
OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

# **BANWARI TRACE**

## **ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE — DATED 5000BC**

**A TECHNICAL REPORT**

Information by Dr. Basil Reid, Lecturer in Archaeology, Department of History, UWI, St. Augustine (2002)

Layout and design by Kara Roopsingh, Research Officer, National Trust

# BANWARI TRACE - FACTS



- Dated about 5000BC or 7000 B.P (years Before Present), it is the oldest pre-Columbian site in the West Indies (Rouse and Allaire 1978)
- Banwari Trace sheds considerable light on the patterns of migration of Archaic (pre-ceramic) people from mainland South America to the Lesser Antilles via Trinidad between 5000 and 2000 B.C. (see Davis 1993).
- The site provides rich insights into the lifeways of one of the earliest pre-Columbian settlers in the Caribbean.
- Banwari Trace has yielded human remains of Trinidad's oldest resident.

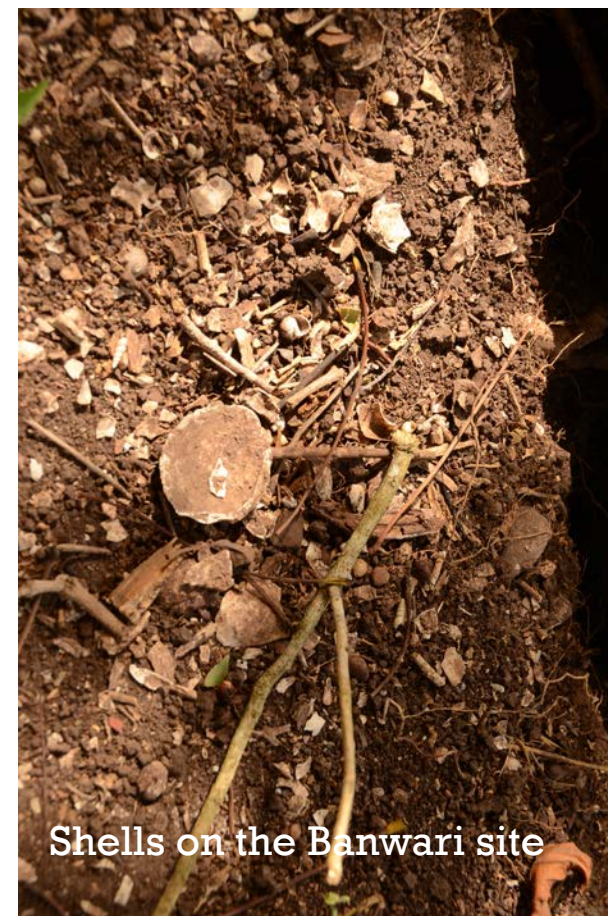


# BANWARI TRACE'S ANTIQUITY

In addressing what constitutes the Archaic, R. Christopher Goodwin (1978) recognized three different perspectives:

- first, the Archaic as an *age* defined by the absence of pottery and the presence of ground stone and /or shell;
- second, the Archaic as a developmental *stage* characterized by the marine-oriented subsistence that followed a terrestrial hunting-based economy (see Keegan 1994 pp 265-266).

There are several Archaic sites that have been identified throughout the West Indies. Sites have been identified on St. Kitts (Armstrong 1978; Goodwin 1978), Nevis (Wilson 1991), Antigua (Davis 1982, 1993; Nodine 1990; Stokes 1991) the U.S. Virgin Islands (Lundberg 1989, 1991), along the North and South coast of Haiti (Rouse 1992) and in the river valleys and along the coast of Dominican Republic and Cuba (Keegan 1994, Rouse 1992)



Shells on the Banwari site



# RADIOCARBON DATING

- Of all the Archaic-age sites in the West Indies, Banwari Trace is the oldest with radiocarbon dates indicating a chronology of approximately 7000B.P.
- The antiquity of the site is further evidenced by the presence of only freshwater shells in the lower layers, dating from the time before Trinidad was separated from the mainland by the postglacial rise in sea level



Remains of the  
Archaeological dig

- Radiocarbon chronology suggests that the first period of Archaic occupation at the Banwari Trace site spanned from approximately 7200 to 6100 B.P, (Strata I and II or Early Banwari Trace), whereas the second episode of midden accumulation (Stratum III or Late Banwari Trace) probably lasted from 6100 B.P. until 5500 B.P. (Boomert 2000)



# BANWARI MAN — TRINIDAD'S OLDEST RESIDENT

- In November 1969, the remains of a human skeleton were discovered at Banwari Trace by the Trinidad and Tobago Historical Society. Lying on its left-hand side, in a typical Amerindian “crouched” burial position along a northwest axis (Harris 1978), Banwari Man was found 20 cm below the surface.
- Only two items were associated with the burial, a round pebble by the skull and a needlepoint by the hip. Banwari Man was apparently interred in a shell midden and subsequently covered by shell refuse.
- Based on its stratigraphic location in the site's archaeological deposits, its burial has been placed shortly before the end of occupation, approximately 3,400BC.
- Hailed as the oldest residence of Trinidad (Harris 1978), Banwari Man is an important icon of Trinidad's early antiquity.



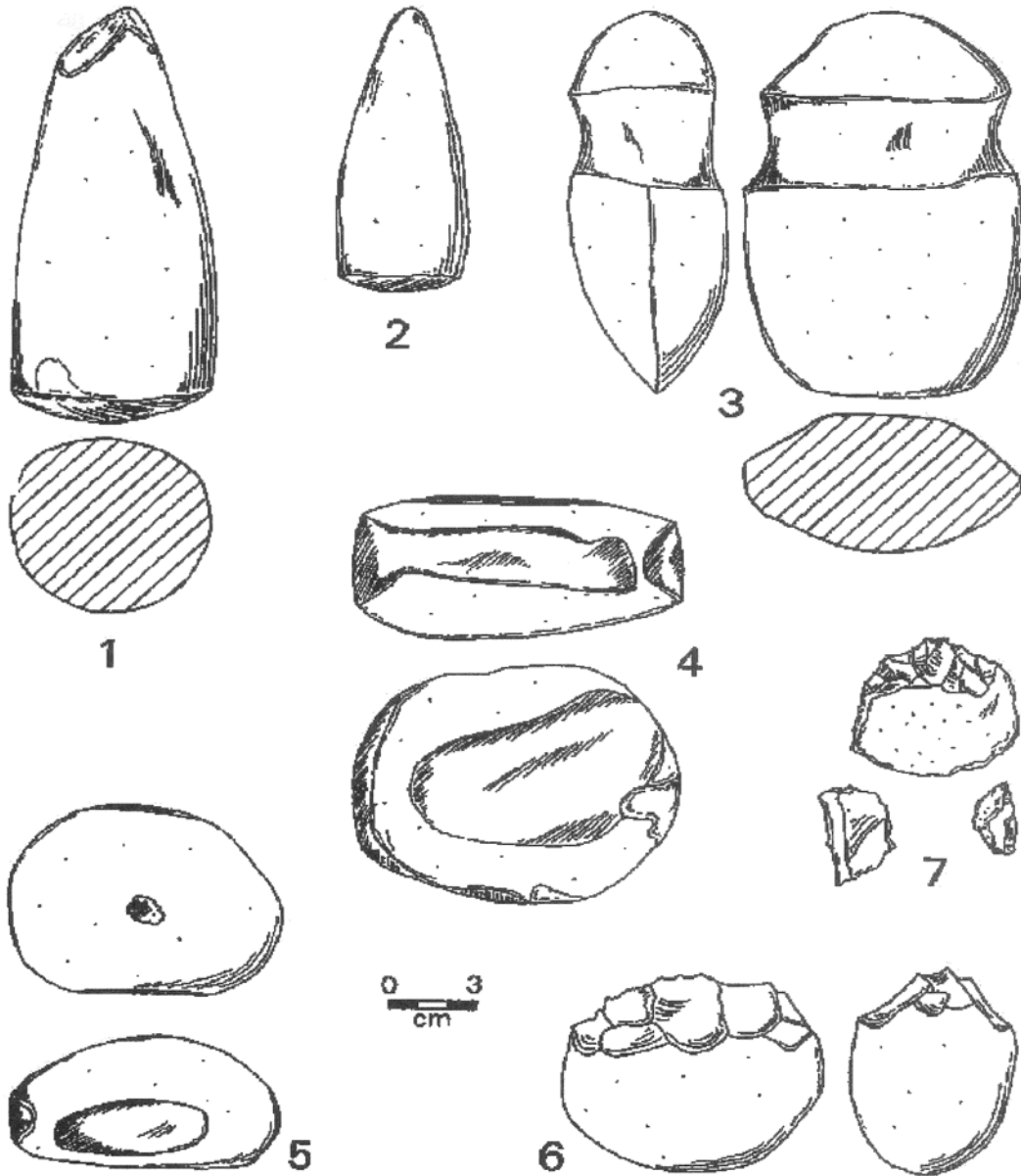
# STONE ARTIFACTS

Stone Artifacts of the Banwari Trace complex, Trinidad.

Legend:

- (1) Conical Pestle, Banwari Trace
- (2) Conical Pestle, St. John
- (3) Grooved Axe, Banwari Trace
- (4-5) Side “faceted” grinders, Banwari Trace
- (6) ‘Chopper’, Banwari Trace
- (7) Utilized flakes, Banwari Trace

Coll. WFT (1-2, 4, 6-7), UWI (5). Private (3)



# BANWARI TRACE TODAY



- The opened dig site is covered with a sheet of galvanise to protect it while still allowing easy viewing for visitors.



- The property is fenced and under the daily watch of a caretaker.



# VIEWS OF BANWARI SITE



- National Trust Staff on a site visit to Banwari Trace Archaeological Site. (2016)



- Mr Harrypersad (caretaker) and Mr Peter Harris) with First Peoples Visitors at Banwari Trace Archaeological Site. (2011)





## CARETAKER NORMANDIE HARRYPERSAD AND NATIONAL TRUST STAFF (2016)

- Mr Harrypersad (extreme left of photo on right) worked with Peter Harris and was present at the time the skeleton was unearthed. The site remains close to his heart as he keeps a watchful eye on the premises.



# PRESERVATION OF THE BANWARI TRACE SITE

- The skeletal remains of Banwari is presently in the custody of the Zoology Museum, U.W.I., St. Augustine. Preserved with cellulose-in-acetone, the skeleton is in a secure environment and on display for visitors and remains available for future research.
- The 3,127.2 m<sup>2</sup> property on which the site is situated is now Government owned, having been acquired from a private land owner in March 2000 after it was partially destroyed. This has afforded for ease of access to the site and ongoing maintenance by the National Trust.
- The National Trust maintains a partnership with the Siparia Regional Corporation on all activities concerning the Banwari Trace site.



# PRESERVATION CONTINUED...

- The Archaeological Site at Banwari was featured in World Monument Watch 2004, an internationally acclaimed watch list that showcases the world's 100 most endangered sites.
- The site has been fenced and is looked after by a caretaker who reports to the National Trust.
- Peter Harris was instrumental in fighting for the preservation of the site, and influencing the state acquisition of the property.
- The first peoples visit Banwari Trace Archaeological Site to pay their respect to their ancestors.



# FIRST PEOPLES AT BANWARI



# BANWARI MAN SKELETAL REMAINS



Photo Credit: UWI Zoology Museum, Dept. of Life Sciences,  
UWI St. Augustine Campus



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