

A QUIET DAY AT THE LAB

July 30, 2011 Elizabeth Moore Day of Archaeology, Day of Archaeology 2011, Environmental Archaeology, Museum Archaeology, Science Antler, Baltimore, fauna, ivory, Maryland, Maryland Historical Trust, metal cases, Native American, Natural History, The Walters Art Museum, Trust library, village site, Virginia, Virginia Museum of Natural History

As a zooarchaeologist at the Virginia Museum of Natural History, I usually spend quite a bit of time in my lab identifying, or trying to identify, many pieces of bone, antler, and shell, mostly from Native American sites in the North American Middle Atlantic states. The lab is also usually bustling with volunteers washing, sorting, and labeling samples. Today though, the lab is unusually quiet (hopefully there's a photo below). I am out of town doing some background research for a new project, the fauna from the Barton site – a multicomponent Native American village site in western Maryland. This week I was working at the library at the Maryland Historical Trust. The Trust library houses the site files, reports, and publications dealing with Maryland archaeology and historical resources. I now have a much longer reading list to work through over the next couple of months!

I decided to take a break from library work and the 100 degree heat and took a diversionary trip to The Walters Art Museum (thewalters.org) in Baltimore to see their temporary exhibit on writing implements. I saw an object new to me – an 18th century small ivory writing tablet. The tablets in the exhibit were small (approximately 1 in wide and 2 inches long) and were stored in small metal cases. The user would write a note on the tablet and then they could wipe the note off of the smooth ivory surface and write a new note when needed. The first write-on-wipe-off board! And one more use for ivory to consider if I see flat ivory pieces in a historic site assemblage. Even on a gallery visit where I didn't plan on seeing anything work related there was still something to keep in mind for future analyses. That's one of the great things about archaeology; there's always something new to learn and almost everywhere you go there is something relevant to what we do.



It looks pretty quiet in there!