**Location**

Meadowcroft National Historic Landmark, 401 Meadowcroft Rd., Avella, Pa., Washington Co., Jefferson Twp., lat: 40.2865, lon: -80.4914; Avella 7.5-minute quadrangle

**Geology**

Meadowcroft is an important archaeological site of the earliest known American Indian habitat in the United States. It was discovered in 1955 by Albert Miller, reportedly with the aid of a groundhog that cast aside relics while burrowing its home. After nearly 20 years, Miller went public with his discovery. Led by the University of Pittsburgh, archaeologists uncovered a succession of stratified evidence of the longest continual occupancy of a site in North America. The excavation of layers exposed changing cultures over time. The discovery touched off an intense controversy about the age of the site, but archaeologists have now essentially agreed that this rock shelter covered human settlement as far back as 16,000 years. The site, and others since, showed that settlement was “Pre-Clovis,” that is, beyond the previously accepted date of human settlement of the Americas around the end of the Ice Age about 13,000 years ago. The relics have included stone and bone tools, pottery pieces, food remains, and evidence of campfires.

The rock shelter was formed by differential weathering along a cliff of sandstone, siltstone, and shale of the Casselman Formation, Middle to Late Pennsylvanian age (over 300 million years ago). The more resistant sandstone overhang provided shelter with a southern exposure, while nearby springs and Cross Creek provided sources of water and food. Meadowcroft is the oldest site in North America that shows human occupancy.

Recommended Reading


For information regarding outstanding geologic features, contact the Pennsylvania Geological Survey:

Bureau of Topographic and Geologic Survey, 3240 Schoolhouse Rd., Middletown, PA 17057
717-702-2017  www.dcnr.state.pa.us/topgeo

Visit the Rockshelter page of the Heinz History Center Meadowcroft web site.

S. Reese, 2013