

# Evidence of Native American Brush Fish Weirs in South Cove, Old Saybrook, CT

A Power Point Discussion

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Archaeological Society of Connecticut Fall Meeting  
“Aqua Archaeology and Current Research”

October 18, 2008

The Fairfield Museum and History Center

**The First Shad Fishery**

**Timothy C. Visel, Coordinator**

**The Sound School Regional Vocational Aquaculture Center**

**Native American Brush Traps – *South Cove, Old Saybrook, Connecticut***

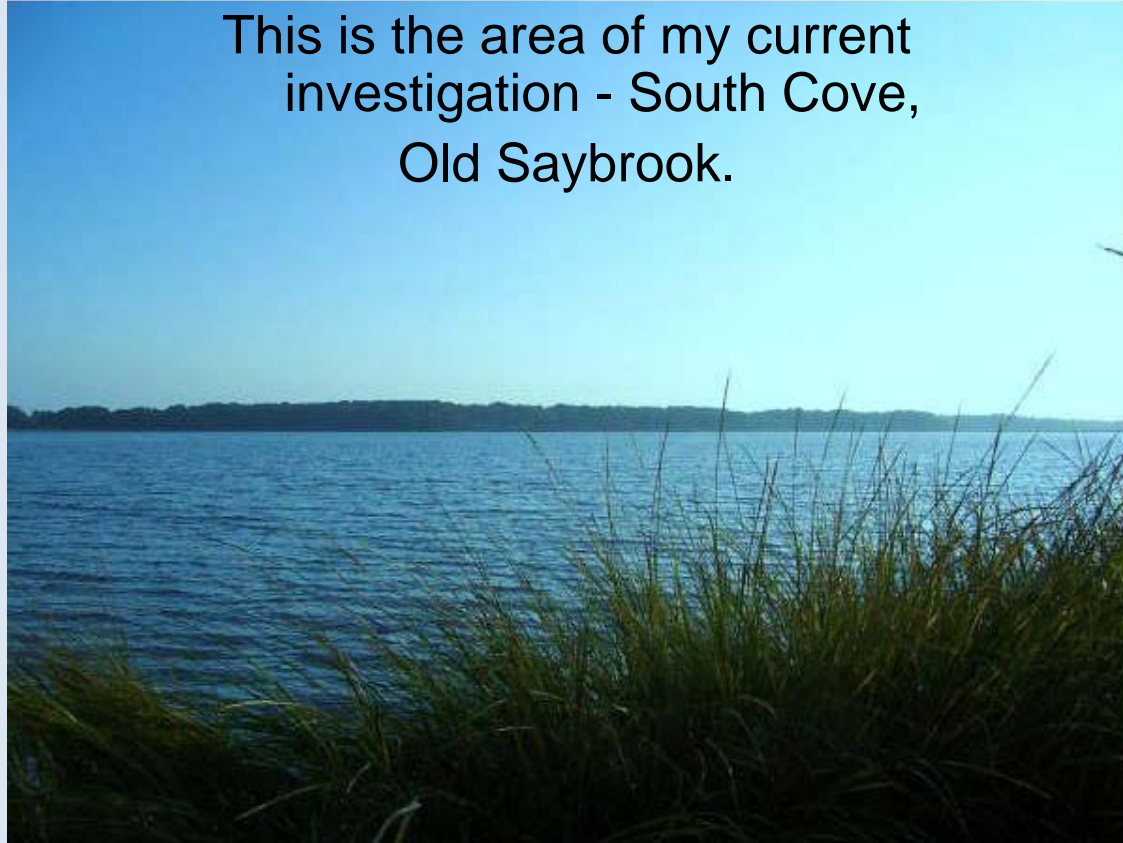
***And Neighboring Coastal Towns***

**Connecticut River Museum Shad Program**

***Lecture Presentation May 20, 2006***

# Location

This is the area of my current investigation - South Cove, Old Saybrook.



It freely communicates with the lower most tidal portions of the Connecticut River.

The mean tidal range in the cove is approximately 4.8 feet.

# Site Conditions

Most of the upland areas have been developed as residential.

The cove contains a fringing salt marsh characteristic of south-eastern tidal estuaries.

The cove has been crossed by railroad spur (now ruins) and a newer road causeway.



# History

Site of the early 1630's settlement  
by English Colonists



South Cove splits Saybrook Point from Fenwick Point two protruding land forms.

Harbor development was limited by the Connecticut River and bars that form off shore of the river's mouth.

# South Cove Fisheries

Early fishery's history written records - both haul seine and weir mentioned



Oral accounts persist among local fishermen who fish the area.

The cove shape would naturally direct anadromous fish runs such as salmon, shad, and smelt into a circular

# The First Shad Fishery

Introduced to the shad fishery as part of graduate shellfish researching local resident Howard Clark



Mr. Clark's family has been in Old Saybrook for generations. He was a commercial shad fisherman concerned with the ecology in South Cove.

# Indian Brush Fish Weirs

Native American Brush Weir Early Fyke Pocket/Basket  
South Cove, Old Saybrook, CT 1600<sub>A.D.</sub> (approx.)

Created at tidal areas and somewhat sheltered from open waters

Many accounts tell about the existence of such fish traps consisting of wood, webbing, and small stones. Two basic types are full tide and half tide.

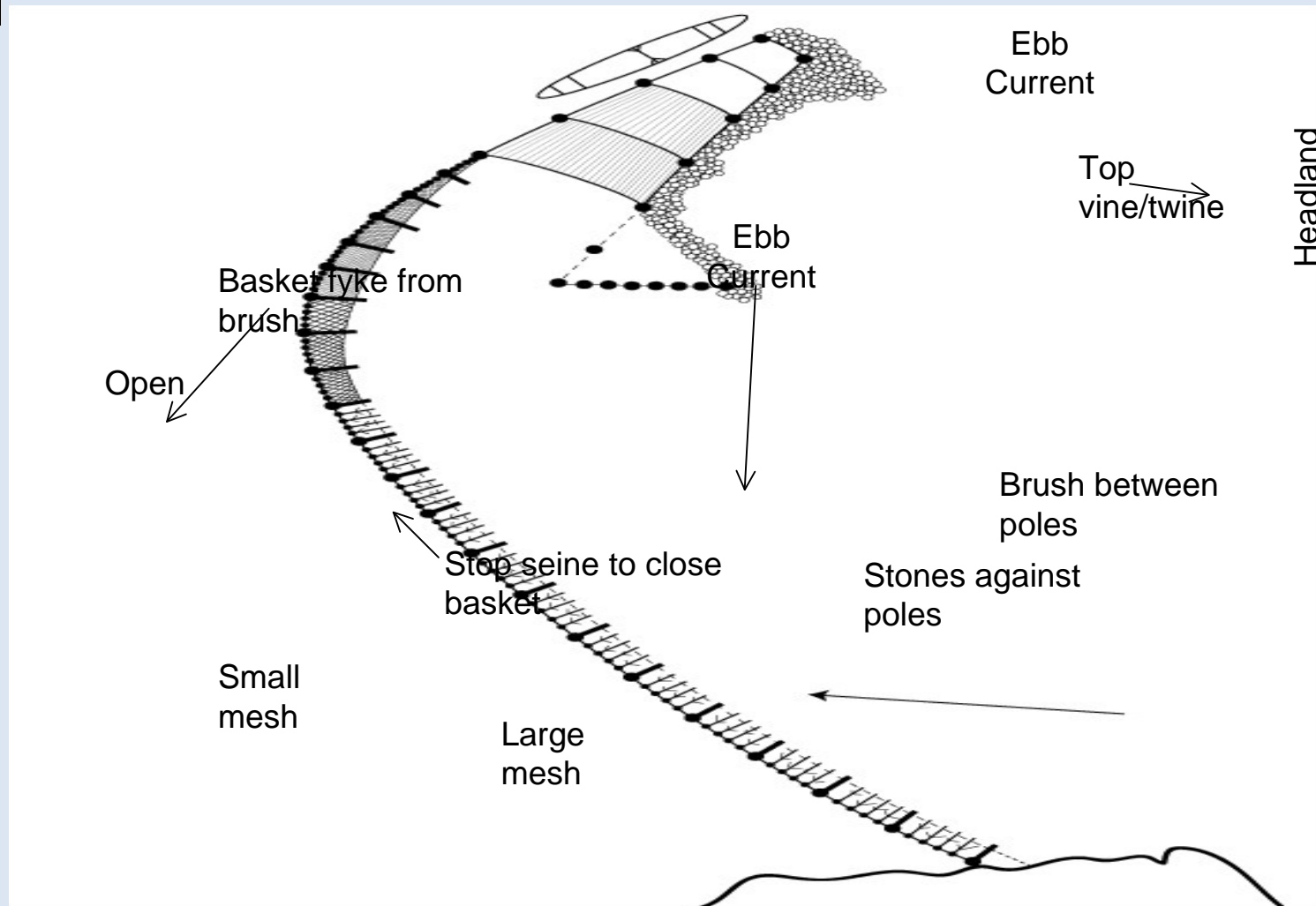


Diagram by Alicia Cook

# Suggested Possible Location

The cove shape itself lends to the trapping of fish - haul seine fishery maintains Native American rights (1819) William Lynde.

In 1981, Mr. Clark stated the position was adjacent to a small point or headland west of Cove Road. He mentions two hook shaped brush weirs.

Between 2002 and 2006, research found some additional references including George Brown Goode, page 320, US Fish



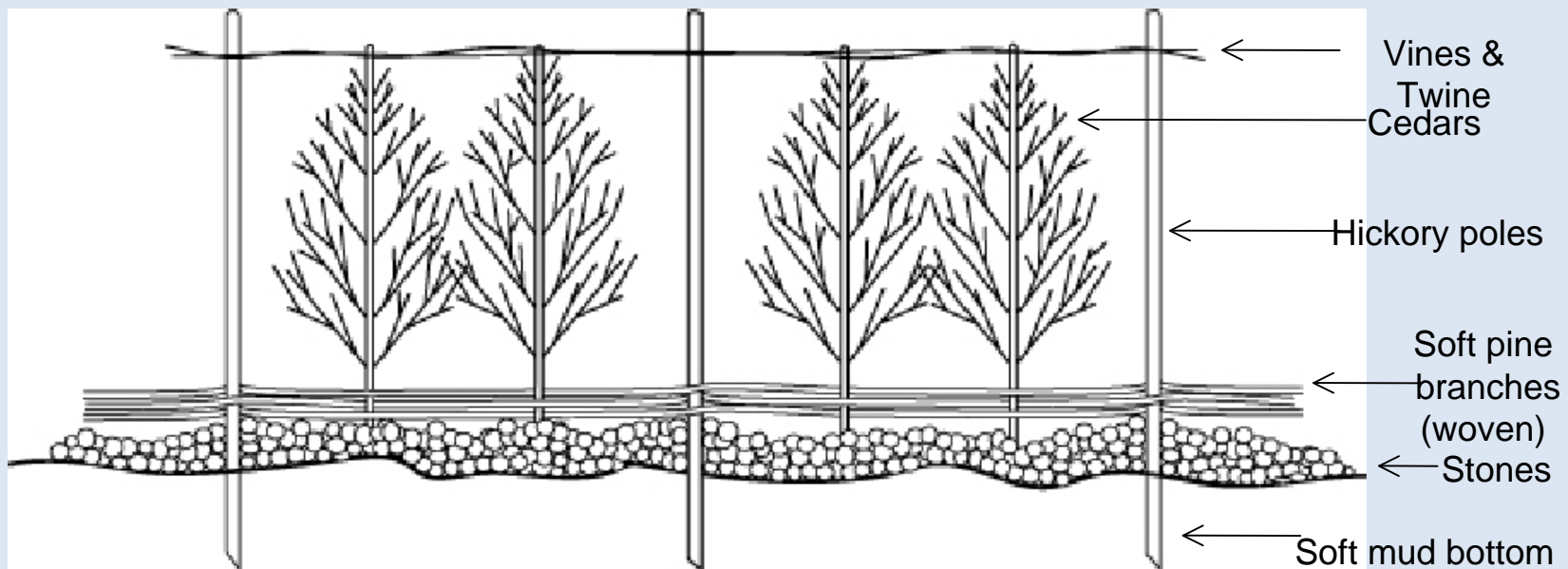


# Construction Methods

Materials to build brush weirs were available: small stones, brush, stakes and fibers for webbing for nets. A group of individuals could build a small one and repair it if necessary.

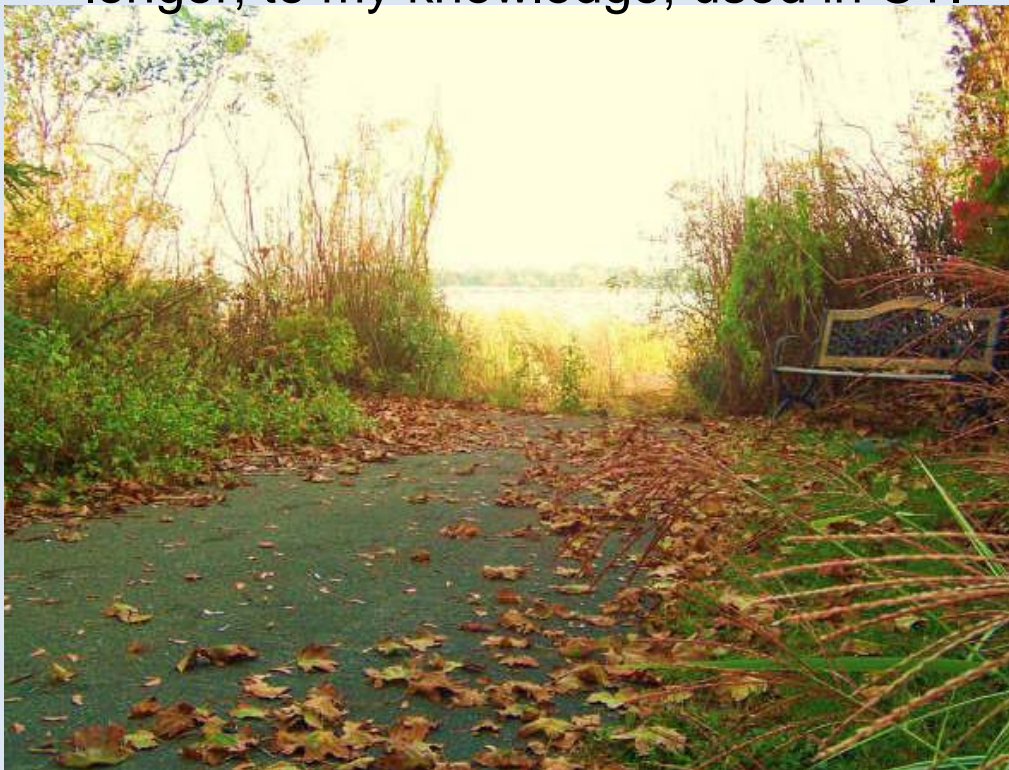
The design and placement was critical.

Suggested Leader Construction for a Brush Weir  
According to Howard Clark of Old Saybrook, CT



# Future Investigations: Cove Road?

We need to gather as much information as possible. Current practices provide a link to the past, such as Indian fisheries which can create a “fisheries history.” Fyke Nets and Trap Nets are no longer, to my knowledge, used in CT.



We hope that this PowerPoint will generate discussion regarding Native American fisheries.

# A Big Question!!!

Possible Native American web (net) making loom –  
has anyone seen anything like this?

Figure (1) Native American Fish Net Frame  
From an Eskimo Sketch - University of Washington, 1984

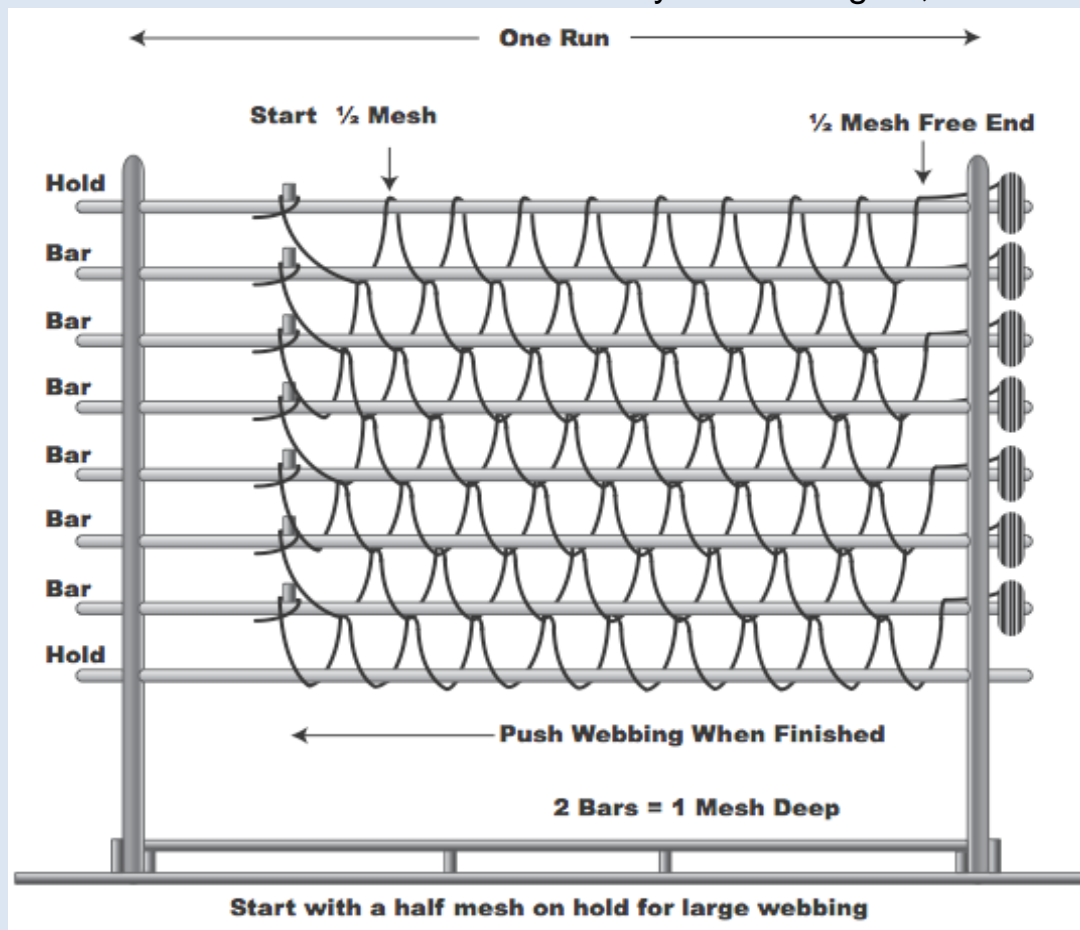


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