



# Public Archaeology Facility Report

---

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS  
MAIN STAGE AREA AT WOODSTOCK  
MUSEUM AT BETHEL WOODS  
BETHEL WOODS CENTER FOR THE ARTS  
TOWN OF BETHEL  
SULLIVAN COUNTY, NEW YORK

BY:

MARIA O'DONOVAN, PhD

AND

JOSH ANDERSON, MA

SUBMITTED TO:

WADE LAWRENCE  
THE MUSEUM AT BETHEL WOODS  
200 HURD ROAD  
BETHEL, NY 12720

SPONSOR:

THE MUSEUM AT BETHEL WOODS

SEPTEMBER 7, 2018

Funding for preservation activities regarding the historic 1969 Woodstock festival site is provided by Bethel Woods Center for the Arts members and donors. The stage marking and overlook project at the Woodstock site is funded in part by an EPF grant administered by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation through Title 9 of the Environmental Protection Act of 1993. Additional major support for the project has been provided by the A. Lindsay and Olive B. O'Connor Foundation; the Hart Family Fund for Small Towns at the National Trust for Historic Preservation; and the Sullivan County Plans & Progress Grants Program.

---

Binghamton University, State University of New York  
Binghamton, New York 13902-6000

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Main Stage Area Facilities at Woodstock.....	1
1.2 Current Setting.....	1
1.3 Goals of the Archaeological Investigations .....	2
II. METHODOLOGY .....	4
2.1 Introduction .....	4
2.2 Surface Walkover and Evaluation .....	4
2.3 Metal Detector Survey.....	4
2.4 Subsurface Testing Methods.....	5
2.5 Processing and Cataloging.....	7
III. RESULTS .....	9
3.1 Metal Detector Survey .....	9
3.2 Subsurface Investigations .....	9
3.3 Summary.....	10
IV. INTERPRETATIONS .....	15
APPENDIX I: REFERENCES CITED .....	<b>ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.</b>
APPENDIX II. PROJECT RECORDS.....	<b>ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.</b>
2.1 Soil Records.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
2.2 Artifact Catalog .....	20
APPENDIX III: PROJECT MAP .....	<b>ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.</b>

### List of Figures

Figure 1. Location of the project area in Sullivan County and New York State. ....	2
Figure 2. Location of the Main Stage and Performer's Area within the Woodstock site. ....	3
Figure 3. Preliminary model of landscape features in the main stage area.....	6
Figure 4. Metal Detecting Lanes with metal hits and clusters. ....	11
Figure 5. North and east wall profiles of Unit 3. ....	12
Figure 6. South and west profiles of Unit 1.....	13
Figure 7. Profile of post mold (Feature 2) located in Unit 1.....	14
Figure 8. Project Map showing archaeological testing areas, cultural features, and possible alternative locations for 1969 features.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>

**List of Photos**

Photo 1. Metal detecting survey lanes with marked hits .....	8
Photo 2. Unit excavations at Woodstock .....	8
Photo 3. North wall profile, Unit 3 .....	12
Photo 4. West profile of Unit 1.....	13
Photo 5. Profile of post mold (Feature 2) in Unit 1. ....	14
Photo 6. Woodstock stage area showing fence and speaker positions.....	16
Photo 7. Main stage showing area between the stage and Peace Fence and speaker positions .....	16

**List of Tables**

Table 1. Functional Groups .....	7
----------------------------------	---



## I. INTRODUCTION

The Museum at Bethel Woods, Bethel Woods Center for the Arts contracted with the Public Archaeology Facility (PAF) to conduct archaeological investigations in the main stage area of the 1969 Woodstock concert on Yasgur's farm in the Town of Bethel, New York (Figure 1, p. 2). The Bethel Woods Center for the Arts developed in the early 2000s on the site of the original Woodstock concert. Originally focused on the performing arts, The Museum at Bethel Woods was added in 2008. The Museum is dedicated to preserving and interpreting the legacy of the sixties counterculture through the Woodstock site. The Woodstock site was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2017 and museum staff are currently developing interpretive plans for various areas of the concert site. In the Fall of 2017, a PAF crew assisted Museum personnel with locating 20 of the Bindy Bazaar vendor areas so that interpretive trails and signage could proceed. Current plans address the main stage and performer's areas so that interpretive installations can mark the location of the 1969 stage, fences, speaker towers, and performer's facilities. In June of 2018, archaeologists from PAF conducted a systematic metal detection survey and archaeological excavations in an attempt to locate and identify any subsurface evidence of cultural features related to the 1969 main stage area.

The fieldwork summarized in this document was performed under the supervision of Dr. Nina M. Versaggi, Director of the Public Archaeology Facility, Binghamton University. Maria O'Donovan served as the project director; Josh Anderson designed the metal detection survey and served as field director. Edgar Alarcon, Jesse Pagels, David Hanley, Kevin Sheridan, and Paul Brown were field crew. Maria Pezzuti performed all related administrative duties.

### 1.1 Main Stage Area Facilities at Woodstock

The main stage at Woodstock was nestled at the base of a hill, creating a natural amphitheater effect. Plans called for it to be approximately 80 ft (24.4 m) on a side (O'Donnell et al. 2015). The stage was surrounded by six speaker towers and separated from the crowd by a wooden fence that came to be known as "the Peace Fence". Chain link fencing connected to the Peace Fence on the sides and ran perpendicular to West Shore Road and behind the stage. The poles for this fence would have been set in concrete to help them withstand the push of crowds. The performers' area was located on the opposite side of West Shore Road and was connected to the stage by a wooden bridge that spanned the road. Support poles for the bridge were placed on either side of the road. The performers' area included a central pavilion and dressing tents. The performers' pavilion was a large, circular tent supported by telephone poles (Wade Lawrence, pers. comm. 2018; O'Donnell et al. 2015). The stage was apparently supported by a surface framework, leaving very little structural evidence once demolished. However, there were concrete footers for the speaker towers (O'Donnell et al. 2015) and a concrete pad for the stage (S. Tolly, pers. comm. 2018) would have left more definitive traces. Poles that were erected for the performers' bridge and pavilion may also have left subsurface evidence.

### 1.2 Current Setting

The Woodstock concert site, particularly the main stage area, began to undergo modifications immediately after the concert. The main stage area is currently an open field while a new structure and driveway have been built in part of the performers' area on the opposite side of West Shore Road (Figure 2, p. 3). The open field surrounding the main stage, however, is not the same as it was in 1969. Festival goers left an immense amount of trash scattered over this area, which was cleared by bulldozing the trash (and probably a few inches of grass and soil) down the hill to be carried off site. In the 1980's, further land modifications occurred when the field surrounding the stage was reshaped with heavy equipment to smooth out the original contours of the hill.

The main stage area seems to have sustained the most significant impact, probably during festival construction of the 1998 "Day in the Garden" concert. Aerial photos clearly show scraping and gravel deposition in this area. Visual inspection revealed a compacted ground surface covered in gravel. Art installations consisting of a painted door and stacked, patterned rocks are also currently located on the surface in the stage area. An L-shaped drainage feature around the main stage, which consists of a gravel filled trough, may also relate to the 1998 concert.



Other features visible on aerial imagery are two large circles on the west side of the stage area near the probable 1969 chain link fence line. These mark water facilities constructed for the 1998 concert and visual inspection suggested that their construction caused relatively deep disturbance.

### 1.3 Goals of the Archaeological Investigations

The archaeological investigations aimed to provide another line of evidence to support or modify the oral histories about the Woodstock landscape and cultural features. Our first goal was to see if we could confirm the removal of trash from the field. If trash was still embedded in the ground, that could help us define the demarcation between the stage area and where the festival goers stood. Using aerial and other photographic images along with the cultural landscape report (O'Donnell et al. 2015), our second goal was to use archaeological techniques to see if evidence of the chain link fence and Peace Fence could be discovered. Finding evidence of either would not only help locate the fences but also provide a means for measuring back to approximate the stage location and possibly the speaker towers. The final goal was to conduct a thorough surface inspection to see if any evidence of the performers' bridge and pavilion was visible to confirm the locations of these features. PAF's archaeological methods were designed to address these goals.

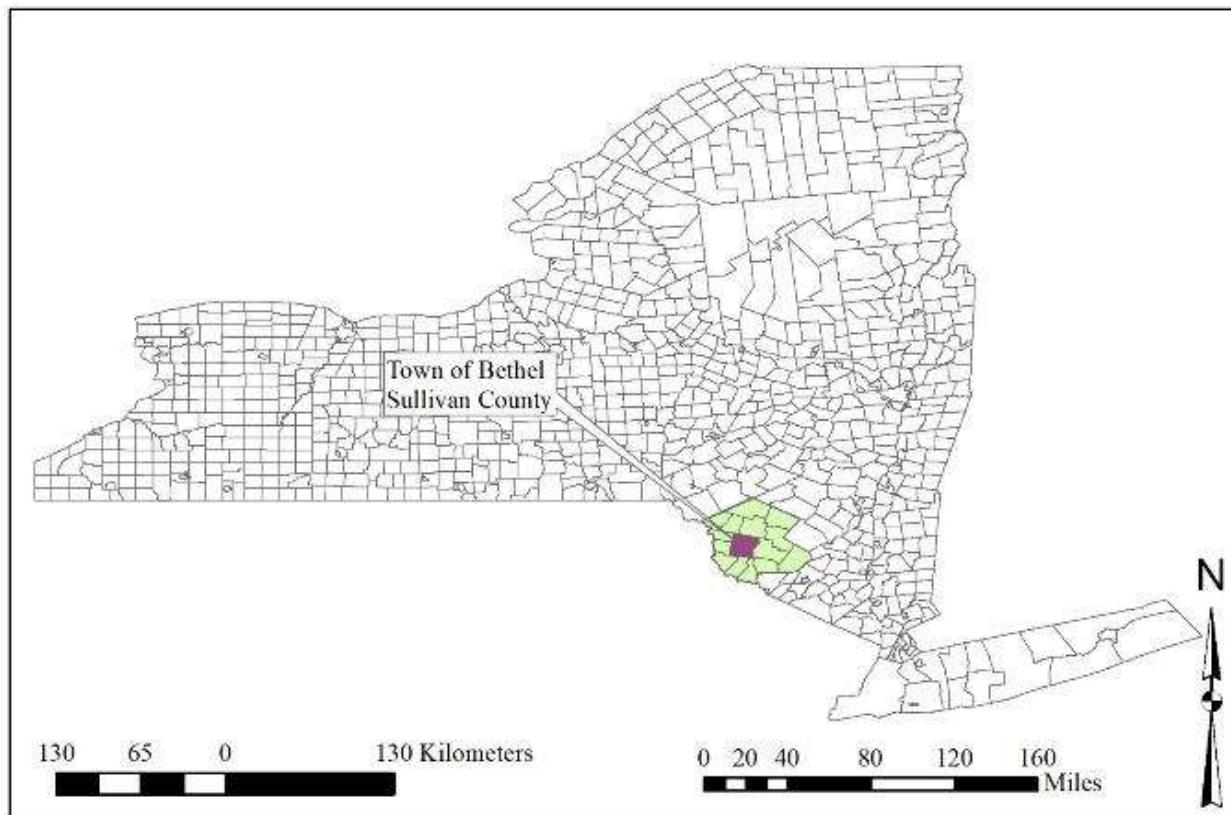


Figure 1. Location of the project area in Sullivan County and New York State.



Figure 2. Location of the Main Stage and Performers' Area within the Woodstock site.



## II. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Introduction

The current plans for the main stage area focus on marking the main stage, fence lines, speaker towers, and performers' bridge over West Shore Road to convey a more authentic, period experience for visitors to the site. A cultural landscape report for the Woodstock site estimated the positions of all these features based, in part, on the 1969 plans for the concert (O'Donnell et al. 2015). Archaeologists from PAF employed three field methods to ground-truth these plans and locate original features from the 1969 concert, and assess the physical integrity of the landscape. We first conducted a surface walkover to determine if visible signs of cultural features persisted or if major ground disturbances were evident. This was followed by a systematic metal detection survey to collect additional information with which to evaluate the proposed model of this area. Finally, we placed excavation units in areas we thought would overlap some of the cultural features. These areas were mostly along the 1969 fence lines and near the towers.

### 2.2 Surface Walkover and Evaluation

Archaeologists conducted a surface walkover of the area prior to finalizing the design for metal detection and subsurface testing. Information from Bethel Woods staff (Wade Lawrence, pers. comm. 2018) regarding grading and filling of the main stage area was confirmed during surface inspection. The area is sparsely covered with vegetation and gravel is visible on the surface, which is fairly level and appears to have been compacted. A ditch has also been constructed around the main stage area (this is also probably related to the 1998 concert since it would protect the stage area from flooding). The field surrounding the main stage consisted of mowed grass and there were no visible signs of significant disturbance. Archaeologists also evaluated the probable areas of the performers' bridge and pavilion and compared current conditions to photos of the 1969 event. West Shore Road has been widened since the concert and areas where the large posts were that supported the bridge over the road are now covered by a gravel pull off, road pavement, and a modern asphalt driveway. The performers' pavilion area also appears to be partially located under a modern driveway. Some of the performers' area may also have been cut; 1969 photographs appear to show a more gradual slope on the north side of West Shore Road (Figure 3, p. 6).

The surface survey enabled archaeologists to establish priority areas for investigation. The major impacts in this area were from grading and filling activities after the 1969 concert. Impacted areas included the main stage, most of the speaker towers and the section of the Peace Fence directly in front of the stage. These were all excluded from our investigations. The performers' bridge and pavilion were also deemed a low priority for testing due to asphalt paving and modern impacts.

### 2.3 Metal Detector Survey

The rationale for employing metal detection relied on the prevalence of trash left on the Woodstock site after the 1969 concert (O'Donnell 2015). In this era, metal trash, including pull tabs and cans, was more common than today's ubiquitous plastic. Barriers, such as fences or speaker towers, would tend to create a line or area where the trash distribution would decrease and metal associated with stage construction and demolition would predominate. We proposed that metal detection might help us discern the area where concert goers stood from the area where the stage stood.

Systematic metal detecting was performed by professional archeologists who received training through the Advanced Metal Detecting for Archeologists (AMDA) course sponsored by the Register of Professional Archaeologists (RPA). Teams used high-end detectors that were less than five years old. Metal detecting transects were spaced at 5 and 10 m (16 and 32 ft) intervals. The shorter (5 m) interval was used along the western side of the main stage area where preliminary models indicated traces of the chain link fence and Peace Fence were more likely



to be encountered. Metal detector operators surveyed along transects and marked any “hits” with a fiberglass pin flag (Photo 1). Hits were not excavated since the goal of the survey was not to examine material culture but to establish metal spatial patterning that would relate to concert features. All finds were mapped in with a GPS receiver and the resultant map plotted over the preliminary model to determine high potential areas for subsurface testing (see Figure 4, p. 11).

#### **2.4 Subsurface Testing Methods**

Excavation units were placed based on the results of the metal detection survey, analysis of the preliminary model for this area and existing historic photos of Woodstock. All units and features were recorded in relation to a systematic reference grid with an arbitrary central datum. Horizontal and vertical control of the site was maintained through this systematic grid. Units were referenced according to a standard grid coordinate system with the site datum as origin point.



Figure 3. Preliminary model of landscape features in the main stage area (O'Donnell et al. 2015).

Excavation units measured 1 by 1 m (3.3 by 3.3 ft) square. Crews excavated units by hand within natural or cultural soil horizons. An initial plowzone level of 25 cm (10 in) was excavated. Arbitrary levels of 5 cm (2 in) were used after the initial 25 cm (10 in) level. All excavated soil was sifted through 1/4 in mesh onto plastic and all recovered material was bagged and submitted for laboratory analysis. Decisions regarding fill deposits, disturbance, and other processes that affected excavation strategy were made in the field by project directors, who are trained in the analysis of formation processes and deposition. All units were excavated at least 10 cm (5 in) into sterile B-horizon soils.

Crews followed a standard recording procedure for all units. They recorded characteristics for each arbitrary or natural level, including starting and ending depths, soil type, texture, and color, artifact composition, and presence and type of features. At the completion of each unit, profiles were drawn documenting stratigraphy and recording the Munsell value of each soil type. Profiled walls were also photographed for permanent record keeping.



All features had their horizontal boundaries defined by troweling prior to any vertical excavation. At this stage, the feature was cleaned, mapped in plan view and photographed. The feature was then bisected and drawn and photographed in profile view.

## **2.5 Processing and Cataloging**

Following fieldwork, artifacts were processed and analyzed in PAF labs. Processing included washing and dry-brushing fragile materials, as well as checking and re-tagging of the artifact bags. The historic artifacts were catalogued according to a non-hierarchical catalogue system developed at PAF. The system used is a modification of South's artifact classification (South 1977), which is geared toward identifying the gross artifact patterning of functional groups. Following South, each artifact was classified as to functional group (Table 1), as well as a specific type attribute (e.g. nail, bottle, etc.). The type field is used as a very specific description of the artifact in question, potentially allowing the creation of various other groupings as the material and analysis of each site may dictate. Where possible, time ranges for the manufacture of these artifacts were assigned. The resulting artifact catalog was entered into a relational data base management program (Paradox) to facilitate subsequent analysis.

**Table 1. Functional Groups**

Functional Group	Description
1	Food-related
2	Food remains
3	Architectural
4	Hygienic/medicinal
5	Furniture
6	Clothing
7	Personal
8	Lighting
9	Tools and arms
10	Smoking
11	Modern (post WWII)
12	Transportation/mechanical
13	Manufacturing/production



Photo 1. Metal detecting survey lanes with marked hits.



Photo 2. Unit excavations at Woodstock.



### III. RESULTS

#### 3.1 Metal Detector Survey

The metal detector survey identified a definite pattern of “hits” (Figure 4, p. 11) that was consistent with the oral history regarding clean-up efforts after the Woodstock concert. Trash disposal, along with many other services, failed in the wake of the massive attendance at the festival. There are several pictures of the trash strewn aftermath in the area of the main stage and at least one showing bulldozing of trash (Levine 2007). This accords well with eyewitness accounts of trash being bulldozed down the hill and loaded into trucks for removal (S. Tolly, pers. comm. 2018). The distribution of metal objects near the main stage is also consistent with trash being moved downhill. The confirmation of the removal of concert trash also meant that we confirmed the potential that few if any artifacts related to the Woodstock festival would be found in this field. One unusual discovery was a break in the distribution of material in the vicinity of one of the towers. This may have been a coincidence, but the overlap of this feature with a null zone for metal was striking. The remainder of the archaeological testing was aimed at discovering buried soil anomalies that could be related to the fences or other features.

#### 3.2 Subsurface Investigations

Archaeologists placed excavation units in areas that had the potential to intersect the lines of the fences and areas where the towers once stood. Subsurface investigations defined a soil stratigraphy within the units that confirmed the bulldozing not only of trash but also a re-sculpting of the ground surface.

Soil stratigraphy was relatively consistent with the soil series mapped for this area (NRCS 2018). Units generally featured of a topsoil of dark red silt loam or channery loam underlain by subsoil of red to reddish yellow very channery loam (Appendix 2.1, p. 18; Figure 5, Photo 3, p. 12). The average end depth of the topsoil was 31 cm (12 in). This is somewhat deep for the Oquaga-Arnold Series which is associated with this area (NRCS 2018) and this may reflect subsequent modifications to the site, including re-deposition of soil downhill during trash cleanup after the Woodstock concert. Unit 1 appeared to contain a “buried” A horizon or topsoil horizon approximately 8 cm (3 in) below the surface of the unit that could be related to flipping or overturning of topsoil during bulldozing activities (Figure 6, Photo 4, p. 13). Unit 5 also had evidence of some disturbance along its northern wall at about 35 cm (14 in) below surface that consisted of a strong brown soil with charcoal flecking and rocks. It is unclear what may have caused this disturbance. All units were excavated at least 10 cm (4 in) into sterile subsoil. The average end depth of unit excavation was 62 cm (24 in).

Excavations also produced 117 artifacts, more than was expected. Artifacts collected from the units consisted primarily of bottle glass and plastic (Appendix 2.2, p. 20). Wire nails, aluminum pull tabs, and a carbon battery rod were also recovered. Very few of the items from the excavations can be definitively dated to the Woodstock concert but it is likely that many are associated with this relatively intensive depositional event. An aluminum “stay tab” from a can (1985+), a black plastic item used for a “Tension Enclosure System” with a patent date of 1986, and the cap from a Paper Mate blue stick pen (1971+) all post-date the Woodstock concert.

Most importantly, excavations identified a post mold (the outline of the pit the post was placed in) that is probably from the chain link fence in the main stage area. A large post mold was found close to the north wall of Unit 1. The post mold was first identified at approximately 69 cm (27 in) below surface as a somewhat mottled dark red brown stain. Soil in the post was a loose silt loam. It measured 30 cm (12 in) in diameter at its widest point and was 58 cm (23 in) in depth (Figure 7, Photo 5, p. 14). Given the dimensions of this post mold, its depth, and its location, it is most probably a pit that was dug by shovel or auger to receive the post and concrete to anchor the post securely in the ground. This post mold occurs near the predicted line for the chain link fence constructed along the west side of the stage perpendicular to West Shore Road. The post mold feature is about 187 ft from the edge of the current road. West Shore Road has been widened since the 1969 concert but given the distance from the current road edge, it



is likely that this post marks the corner, or is near the corner, where the chain link security fence intersected the wooden Peace Fence.

### **3.3 Summary**

The metal detector survey at the Woodstock site established a pattern of hits that is likely related to the process of trash removal after the concert. Along one metal detection transect, a gap in metal hits corresponds to the approximate location of one of the towers. In terms of artifacts collected, all units contained relatively modern artifacts but there is no evidence that definitively links this material to the actual 1969 concert. Trash removal activities may also be evident in at least one unit excavated at the site. The six test units were placed based on the results of the metal detector survey, analysis of the preliminary model of the 1969 concert site, and examination of photographs from the concert. One unit contained a post mold probably related to the chain link fence that ran perpendicular to West Shore Road at the western side of the stage. This post mold, and the results from excavations and metal detection, suggest some alternative possibilities for the location of features related to the Woodstock concert.

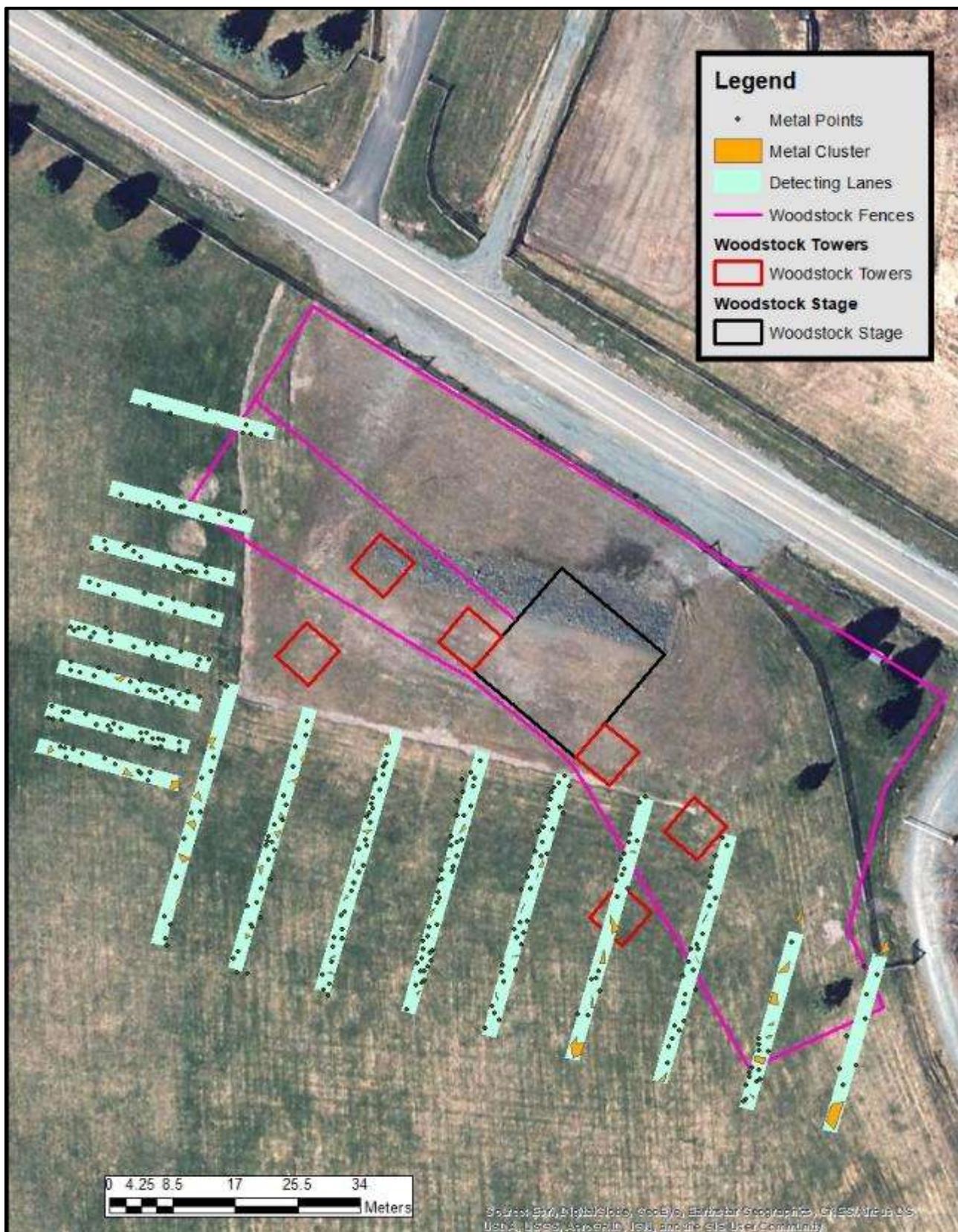


Figure 4. Metal Detecting Lanes with metal hits and clusters with the preliminary landscape model (O'Donnell et al. 2015) as a base map.

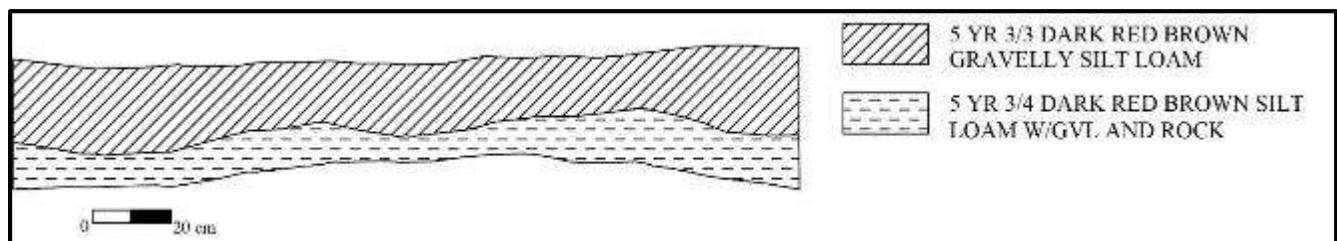


Figure 5. North and east wall profiles of Unit 3.

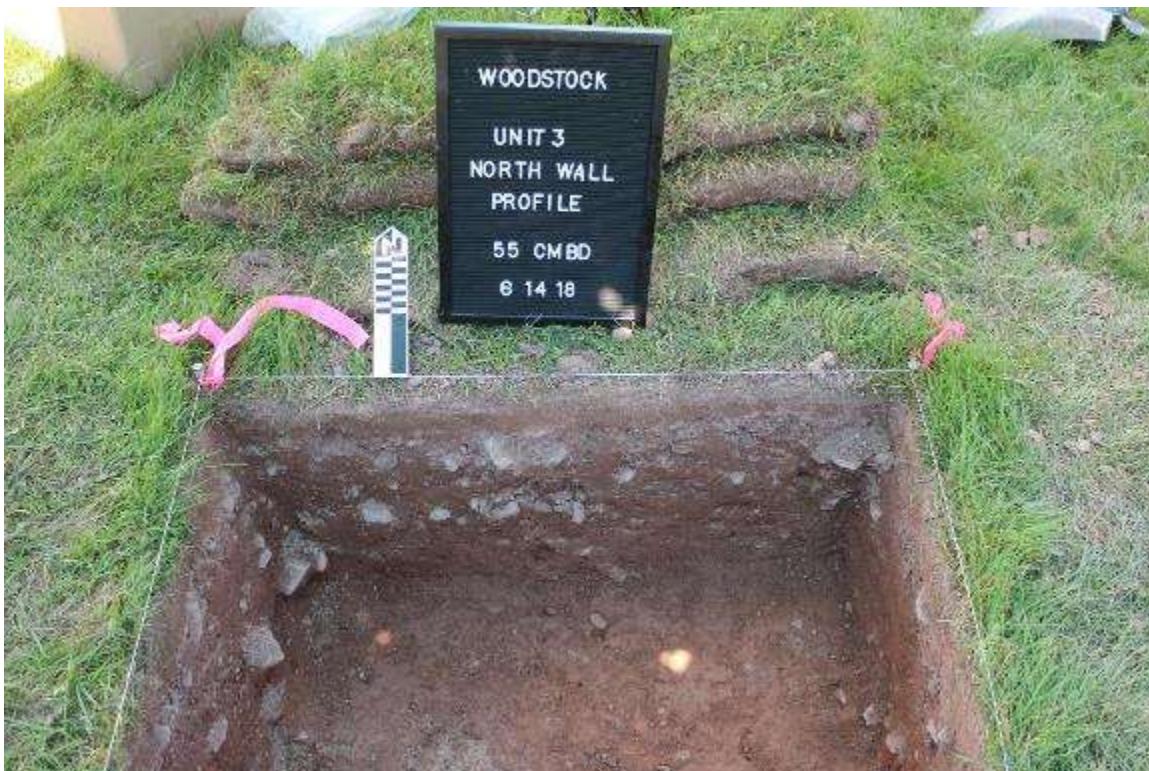


Photo 3. North wall profile, Unit 3.

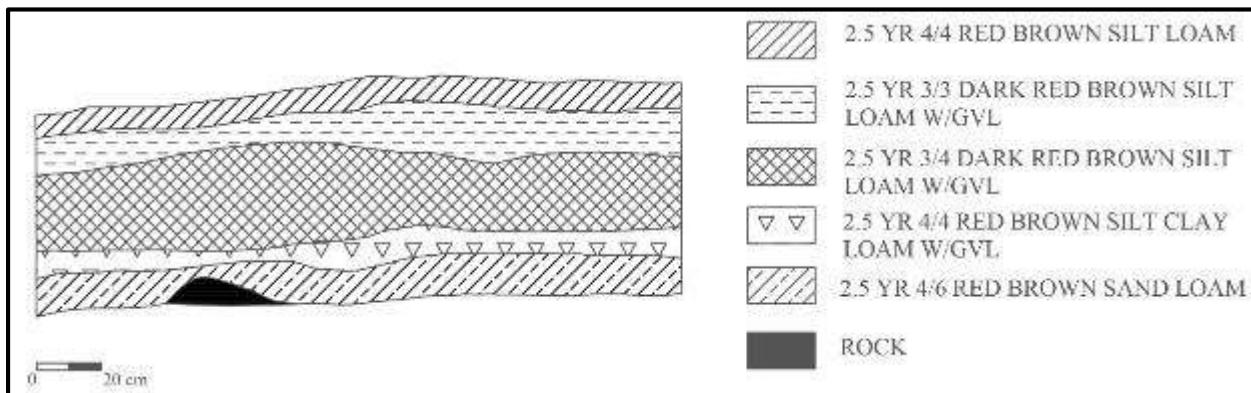


Figure 6. South and west profiles of Unit 1.

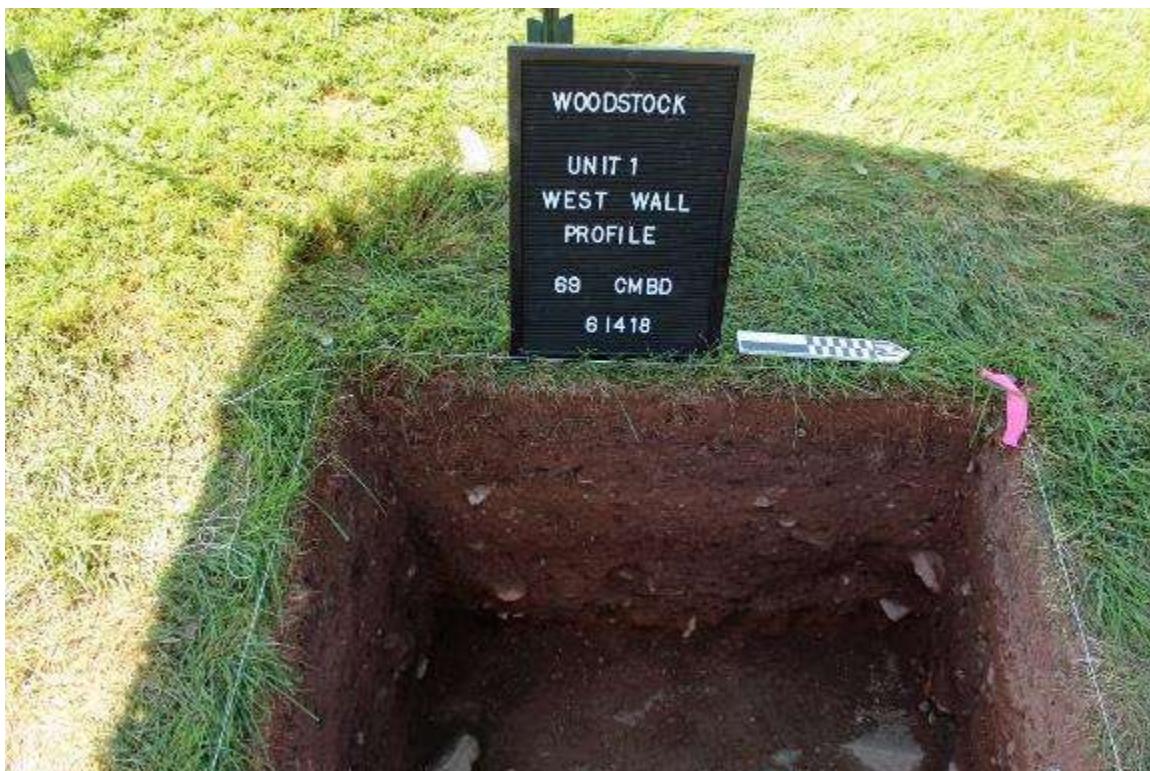


Photo 4. West profile of Unit 1.

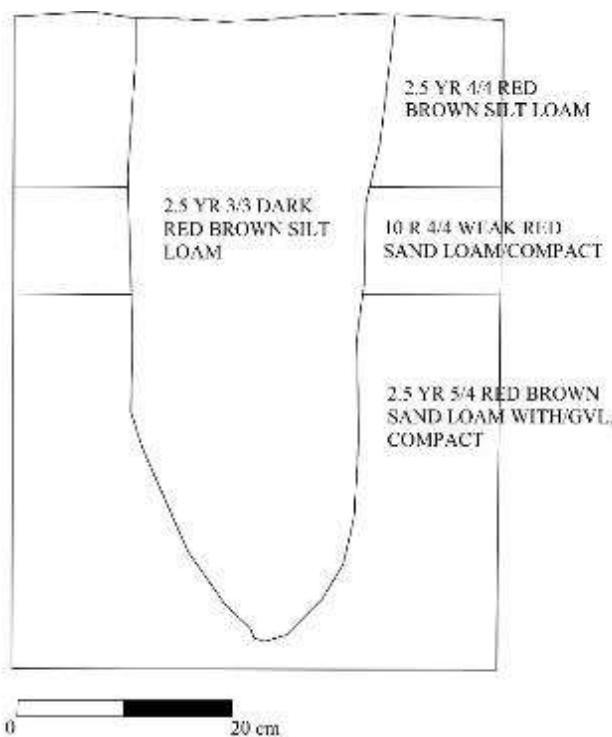


Figure 7. Profile of post mold (Feature 2) located in Unit 1.

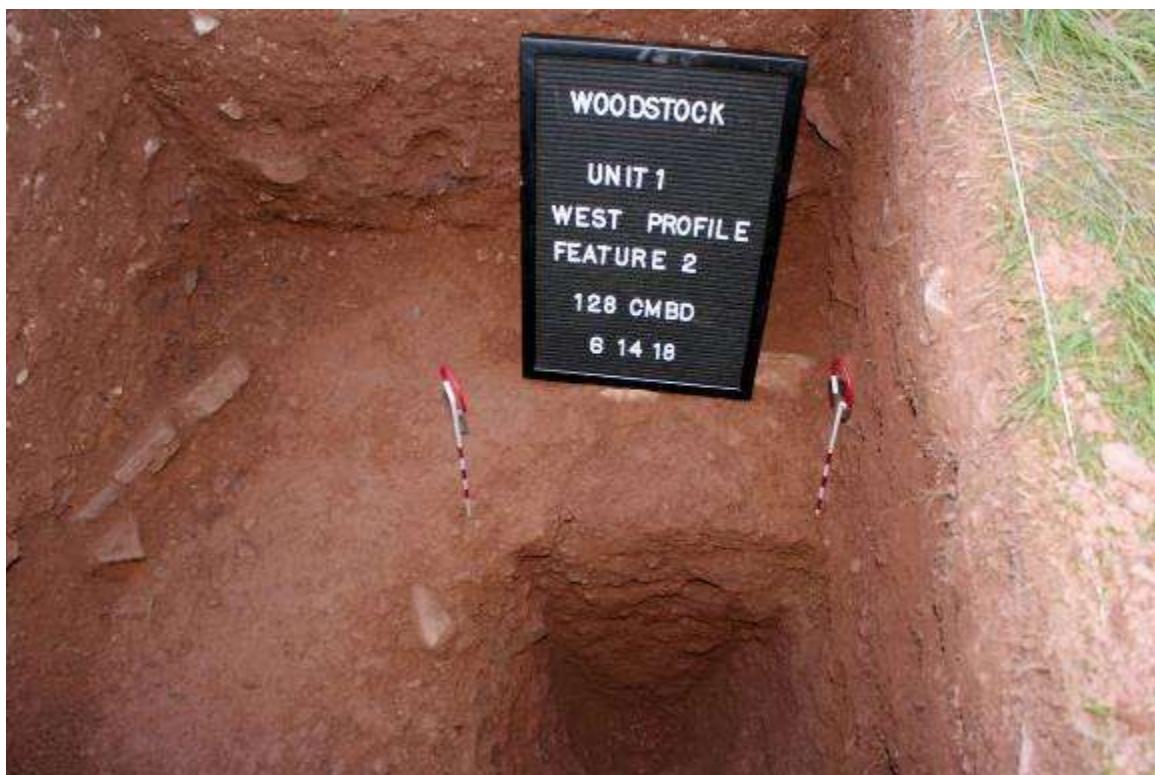


Photo 5. Profile of post mold (Feature 2) in Unit 1.



#### **IV. INTERPRETATIONS**

Archaeological investigations of the main stage area combined with photographic evidence suggested several alterations to the preliminary landscape model (Figure 3, p. 6). The post mold located in Unit 1 corresponds to the general location of the chain link fence predicted from photographs and the cultural landscape study. However, its location slightly modifies the angle of the fence on the western side of the stage. This post mold could represent the corner of the chain link fence where the wooden Peace Fence in front of the stage ran. It could also have been close to the end of the fence line and not the corner. Either alternative indicates that the chain link fence line ran further south and west than is currently suggested by the preliminary model of the main stage area; the post's location also suggests that the chain link fence met the Peace Fence at a more acute angle than predicted (Figure 8, p. 22). This is supported by photographic evidence showing the relationship between the Peace Fence and the main stage. These photos also suggest a gap of at least 5 feet existed between the main stage and the Peace Fence (Photos 6 and 7, p. 16).

The speaker tower locations associated with the main stage area primarily fall within the area that was graded and filled for the 1998 Day in the Garden concert. Unit 6 was placed in the one possible speaker location that fell well outside this disturbance to test for possible indications of the tower. This was also the area where the metal detection survey found a gap in metal hits that corresponded to the predicted tower location. However, Unit 6 did not produce any definitive evidence of the tower. It is possible that construction of the speaker towers entailed few activities that would leave subsurface traces. Examination of aerial photos supplied by The Museum at Bethel Woods suggests that the two southern speaker towers in the crowd area were angled toward the audience (Photo 6, p. 16). Other photographic evidence showing the main stage and speaker positions directly to the west of the stage suggests that they were not parallel as indicated in the preliminary model. Rather, they were offset to each other with the one farthest from the stage positioned slightly forward (Photo 7, p. 16). The photographic evidence of speaker tower positions accords well with the evidence from archaeological investigations regarding fence positioning (Figure 8, p. 22).

Artifacts from unit excavations were typical of artifacts that would be discarded at a concert and included glass bottle fragments, plastic, and aluminum pull tabs. However, there were very few diagnostic items, and several chronologically diagnostic artifacts post-dated the 1969 concert. This is to be expected since this area has been open to deposition since 1969 and there was a subsequent concert in 1998. The low density of artifacts within the area is also consistent with reports that trash was bulldozed off the site following the concert.

Revised interpretations of the preliminary model based on archaeological investigations are indicated on a plan map of the main stage area (Figure 8, p. 22). These are possible interpretations that could change with new evidence but will, hopefully, aid in compiling a more accurate reconstruction of the main stage area within the Woodstock site.

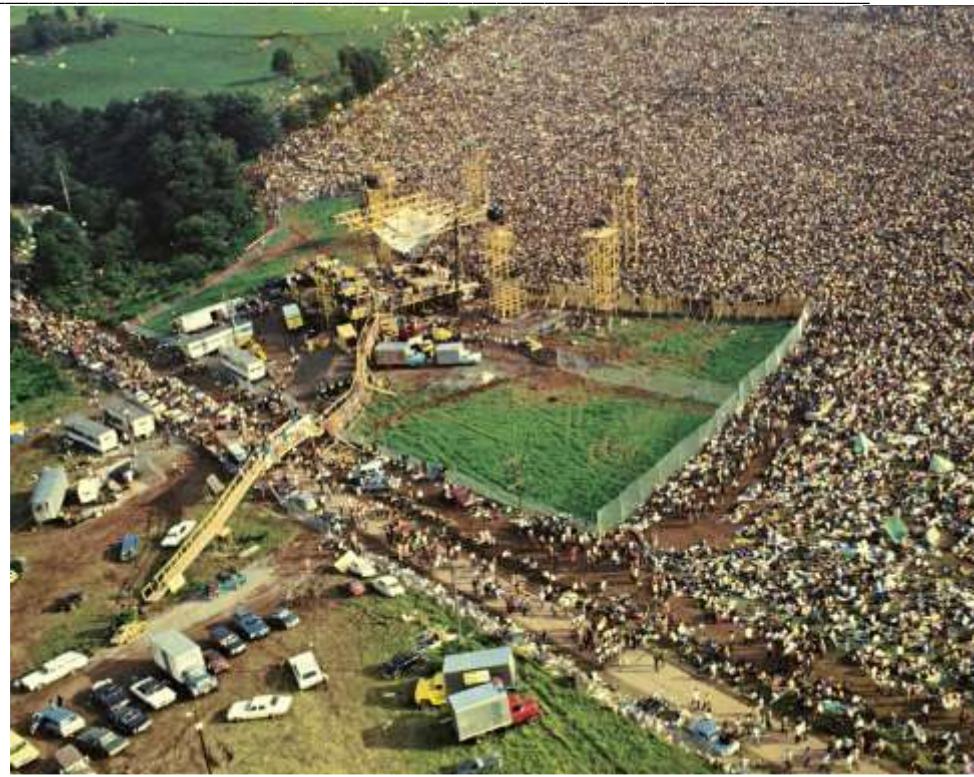


Photo 6. Woodstock stage area showing fence and speaker positions.  
(Photo supplied by The Museum at Bethel Woods.)



Photo 7. Main stage showing area between the stage and Peace Fence and speaker positions. (Courtesy of Freeyork.org; Mathews 2015.)