Stones & Bones

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The Trail Less Traveled: A Brief Look at the Effects of De Soto's Expedition

De Soto's route through the Southeastern portion of America between 1539 and 1543 has been the object of discussion, debate, and ill-tempered argument among scholars, particularly archaeologists, for quite some time. It at times seems that the only topic discussed that evokes more passion on a college campus is the Southeast, or at least in Alabama, is that concerning what university will triumph in the SEC during football season. Extensive archaeological research has been conducted in order to find De Soto's "footprints." One team of archaeologists, through grueling and tedious research, will provide what appears to be sound evidence to De Soto's route, only later to have their findings contested by another team of archaeologists.

A definitive answer to exactly where De Soto led his expedition through the state of Alabama has not been found. There is only general knowledge of the expedition left behind by sixteenth– century Spanish chroniclers. Archaeologists have combined their research with information found in these chronicles in hopes of providing a more accurate model of De Soto's route, but so far have not really been able to provide a definitive answer to what route De Soto took.

This uncertainty of the route taken by De Soto has not only been a topic of concern among scholars, but people living along projected routes of the "De Soto Trail." These people are eager to be a part of history during the Spanish contact period. Unfortunately, this eagerness to secure a place in American history perpetuates the misconception of De Soto as a romantic hero.

De Soto's expedition through the American Southland had little if any influence on the colonization of North America. Regardless, De Soto has become considered what historian David Duncan describes as "Dixie's first white hero." Some Southern towns attach De Soto's name to lakes, creeks, parks, and schools. One Alabama town having a contested claim to being part of De Soto's route is Childersburg, Alabama, home of "De Soto Caverns Park." At the park, De Soto is referred to as "Happy Hernando" and adorning the grounds are plywood caricatures of De Soto and American Indians portrayed with smiling cheerful faces. This carefree depiction of De Soto and the native inhabitants of the Southeast is a far cry from historical accuracy.

Visit the AAS website:
http://www.southalabama.edu/aas/

In order to understand the extent of De Soto's expedition it is necessary to first take a look at the people he encountered. The native inhabitants of the southeast at the time of De Soto's arrival were a part of what is commonly referred to by anthropologists as the Mississippian culture. To understand Mississippian culture to its fullest would be impossible, simply because it is a prehistoric culture. Records of events were not methodically documented and archived, most of what we have to understand these people by are accounts written by culturally biased explorers and research preformed by anthropologists, both of which should be reviewed with certain levels of skepticism. This is not to say archaeological/anthropological research fails in providing sound information pertaining to culture groups, but merely to mention that a complete understanding of a prehistoric people cannot be deduced by analyzing pottery remains and fragments of stone tools.

What can be said about the people of the Mississippian culture with a level of confidence is that they were descendants of the Mongolian peoples of Asia who migrated to North America during the last Ice Age in pursuit of their food source, the mega fauna. The Mississippian culture developed around A.D. 800 and lasted to the sixteenth century. It is distinguished by its dependency on corn agriculture, military competition, and the development of chiefdoms. The chiefdom was a form of social hierarchy that gave supreme power to one person. The Spaniards saw the people of these societies as uncivilized heathens who practiced **abhorrent** customs such as deifying the sun and matrilineal descent.

The Spaniards evaluated the Mississippian people based on how closely they mirrored their own customs. The mindset shared by De Soto and his men was that they were, according to anthropologist Charles Hudson, "...pitted in a great struggle against infidels and devil-worshippers everywhere, both home and abroad." The Spaniards, on the bases of their perverse and overly zealous understanding of Christianity at that time, saw fit to treat the Mississippian people with disdain and cruelty. The Spaniards considered themselves superior to the native people they encountered during their expeditions to the New World. They believed themselves to be favored by God, and that they were attending to a divine mission. This mission entailed colonizing the New World and evangelizing its inhabitants.

Ironically, the native inhabitants of Southeastern America shared many similarities with their uninvited visitors from Spain. The Spaniards considered themselves the "favored people" while the Southeastern Indians through of themselves as the "principle people." The Mississippian people did not see themselves as a collectivity, they identified themselves by specific groups, such as the Coosas, and Chicazas, and Apalachees, as did the Spaniards who took great pride in being identified with specific towns or regions.

Furthermore, the Mississippian people placed great importance on bloodlines, as did the Spaniards. The bloodline for the native inhabitants (traced most often matrilineal) was a determining factor in deciding who would rule as chief. And as mentioned before, the chief, according to the native belief system descends from the deified sun. The Spaniards like the Mississippian people placed great importance on connecting themselves to God through a pure bloodline; they saw Christian ancestry as something that was a genetic inheritance.

Spain justified its expeditions to the New World as an obligation of divine right to save souls. De Soto's interest in the New World did not have saintly origins; his motive was to gain wealth and in doing so took souls in place of saving them. In Panama he practiced methods of torture to find gold, in Nicaragua he enslaved its inhabitants and worked them to death by the thousands, selling those he did not kill to the established Spanish colonies, and in Peru he sanctioned organized rape of Inca virgins.

Hernando De Soto's mentality was a product of a cruel age and his actions reflected that. His interaction with the Southeastern Indians was one desperately lacking pleasantries. He had no hesitation about killing, and no guilt about subjecting people to mutilation, torture, and death. His expedition was not one welcomed by the native inhabitants of the Southeast. When faced with opposition, De Soto and his men took extreme and brutal measures. These measures included burning to death those who exhibited resistance, mutilation by way of cutting off hands and noses, and the use of war dogs that would hunt Indians down, kill and eat them. De Soto's conduct was consistent with that of the Spaniards during the conquest of Mesoamerica, it was, as historian Tzvetan Todorov explains, tempered by "[t]he desire for wealth and the impulse to master..." De Soto, as all Spaniards during the sixteenth century, viewed the Indians "as inferior beings, halfway between man and beasts."

De Soto's motives for coming to the southeastern portion of present day America, which he referred to as *La Florida*, is not in accordance with the Spanish notion of a divine mission to evangelize or establish colonies, his primary objective was to obtain personal wealth. If in fact De Soto had taken cause in establishing colonies across *La Florida*, Spain would have most likely become the predominant European nation during the lucrative fur and deer skin trade that two centuries later was controlled mainly by France and Britain. Instead, De Soto obsessed with the notion of finding a second Inca Empire somewhere in the midst of the Mississippian societies of America's southeast.

De Soto's expedition set sail from Spain on April 7, 1538 on route to Cuba, a land granted to De Soto where he held the title of governor. Once in Cuba, efforts were focused toward training personnel and procuring supplies. These supplies included hogs, a reproducing food source. On May 18, 1539, the expedition sailed from Havana toward *La Florida*. Over six hundred Spaniards landed in what is present day Florida, 330 of which were foot soldiers and most of the rest mounted on horses.

During the winter of 1539 the expedition made its first contact with the natives of the southeast near Tampa Bay and took possession of their town. While the expedition made its way through Florida they etched out what would be the template for their journey; fighting and killing native people, torching towns to ashes, and spreading diseases such as small pox and measles.

De Soto's expedition traveled a distance of four-thousand miles across the southeastern United States in search of an abundance of wealth, which was not found. The expedition toured some of America's most fertile lands, highly suitable for establishing colonies, which was not even attempted. De Soto's expedition passed through some of the world's most productive regions for trapping, hunting, and trading for fur bearing animals, but this was not part of the agenda. Even the grade school definition of De Soto being the man who discovered the Mississippi River is not entirely accurate; the Indians were well aware of the river's existence. When you get down to it, De Soto accomplished nothing more than reeking havoc, evoking terror, and spreading diseases that the American Indians were not equipped to fight because of their lack of immunity.

It is impossible to know exactly how many Indians died as a result of the diseases brought to them by De Soto. Some reports claim the Mississippian population in the southeast was, at the time of De Soto's arrival, around one million and by the time of the American Revolution the number of Indians in the southeast was less than one hundred thousand. This dramatic decrease in the American Indian population gives reason to believe De Soto's expedition was the cause of an American holocaust.

The devastation placed upon the Mississippian culture due to De Soto obsessed quest for gold is almost beyond comprehension. The epidemics introduced by his expedition attacked the young and old with the greatest force, they were the weakest and most susceptible of the culture. The loss of a culture's young in essence destroys the future of a culture while the loss of its old kills its history. The history of the Mississippian culture was maintained orally, not written down, so with the death of the old so dies the culture's customs.

One aspect of De Soto's expedition having positive repercussions in America's history is the permanent introduction of swine to the Southeast. The long-legged and long-snouted razor back hog introduced by the Spaniards was well suited to thrive in the environment of the Southeast. It proved to be an easily domesticated form of livestock, providing a good food supply for the American Indians and the droves of white settlers and fur traders that would arrive in the Indian Territory years later.

De Soto is in no way a historical hero, if anything his actions make him nothing more than a European terrorist. He came to the southeast for one purpose, to acquire wealth at the **expensive of many upon many American Indian lives.** The debate concerning exactly where De Soto's route meandered through America's Southeast will for a long time be labored over. Knowing the exact locations of where particular events occurred is without a doubt interesting and important, but ultimately, it does not add any crucial information to the history of De Soto's expedition. Learning the precise route De Soto took is trivial when compared to the importance of understanding the effects his expedition had on the native cultures of the southeast. *Submitted by Chuck Burns.*

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Cottonfield Meditations 15

I have probably visited hundreds of prehistoric sites in my lifetime. Almost always, in the back of my mind, was the question, "I wonder if PaleoIndian people ever visited this place? I have noticed that at those sites where I found evidence that they had, indeed, been there, the site was very often located at a spring. Apparently, PaleoIndian people appreciated a drink of good, cold, clean fresh-tasting water, and I made a point of placing their camps at a place where that was available.

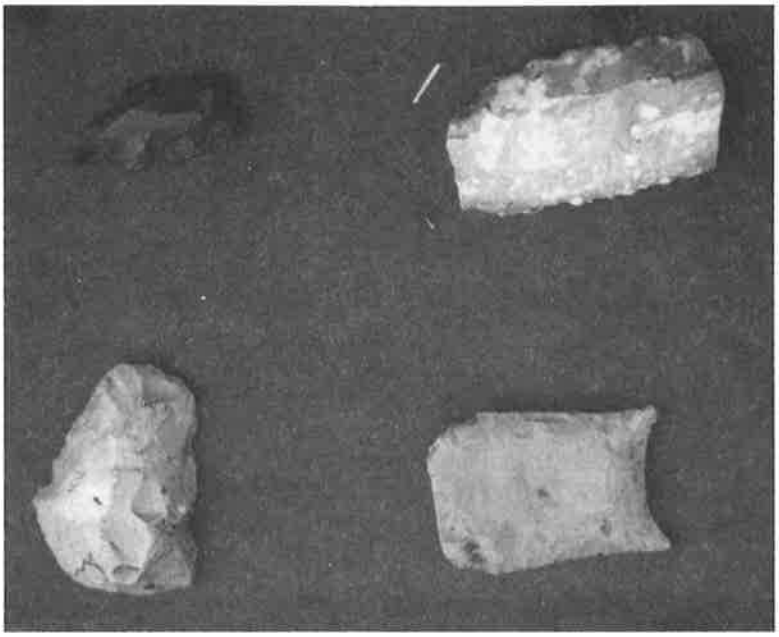
A few weeks ago I spent some time looking carefully at a contour map. Along with other things the map showed an area where I had never been. This particular area I had missed. It was not that the area was not interesting....it is! Its just that I was always on my way to somewhere else. I suspect that we miss out on a lot of good things in our lives, because when we encounter it we are on our way to somewhere else.

From the symbols on the map I recognized a place where a "blue-hole" spring rises from the surface of the Tennessee River floodplain. I have observed that where springs flow onto the river floodplain the banks of the spring branch will often have PaleoIndian sites scattered along them. That is the situation at the well known Quad site, and the Beaverdam Creek site in north Alabama and at the Carson-Conn-Short in Tennessee. I thought to myself, "hmmm...there should be some kind of observable evidence of PaleoIndian here at this place. This is a place they would have chosen." And so I went there.

Large, elongated cotton fields extend toward a hardwood tree line. At the tree line the elevation drops sharply for about fifty feet, down to the water level of the TVA lake. At the foot of a limestone bluff, shaded by the overhanging hardwood limbs, is a clear pool where the spring bubbles up. One can see fish swimming several feet below the surface of the water. Unfortunately, the banks of the spring branch are covered by the backed-up TVA lake waters of the impounded river. I will never be able to walk along the banks of the spring branch and search for evidence. As I stood there thinking, it seemed to me that there should be some evidence on top of the bluff, immediately overlooking the spring. If PaleoIndian people stayed at this place very long, surely some activity must have taken place on top of the bluff.

I returned to the cotton field directly overlooking the spring and began to search. In a few minutes I had picked up the basal half of a fluted Clovis point, a uniface backed-blade, a uniface end-scraper, and some kind of little biface tool with a burin on one end. It seemed to me that my little hypothesis about an association between PaleoIndian sites and springs was sup-

ported by my finds. I believe that excellent water was a factor in PaleoIndian decisions about camp locations. After all, they could camp anywhere they wanted to. Why settle for anything but the best? *Submitted by Charles McConnell Hubbert..*



Wilcox County Outreach

Students and faculty from the anthropology program at Auburn University spent four days at the Liddell-Hall-Stroud archaeological field property in Wilcox County as part of the 2006 Black Belt Environmental Science and Arts Program. During this time several programs were offered to about 50 students from the 8th grade at the Camden School for the Arts and Technology. Students were involved in a simple archaeology program designed to involve the participants with basic archaeological skills. Several one by one meter tests were conducted in an eroded context off the actual site. While Woodland period artifacts were recovered their placement was within an eroded plow zone. An additional study module included a ceramic exercises that involved students making small clay pots using pottery methods such as coiling, stamping, and so forth. The final module provided a brief introduction to forensic anthropology and students were divided into small groups and presented a simulated crime scene for analysis. This forensic exercise also required the students to study a physical anthropology laboratory skeleton to better understand information that might be gained from a human skeleton. Several local individuals assisted in the program including Mrs. Missy Burford, science teacher at the Camden School for the Arts and Technology. Logistical and educational support was provided by a large number of individuals including Kay Stone of the Auburn University Environmental Institute and Mr. Jack Johnson, CEO of Storage World, Atlanta, Georgia. The Black Belt Environmental Science and arts Program targets middle-school children in traditional black belt counties and offers outdoor learning experiences to enhance classroom curriculum while also exposing students to professionals from a variety of disciplines. The goal of the program is to generate learning interest in environmental sciences as well as other fields. *Submitted by John Cottier.*

Publications

The Archaeology of Warfare
Prehistories of Raiding and Conquest
Authors: Edited by Elizabeth N. Arkush and Mark W. Allen

These essays explore the development of warfare in pre-industrial, non– Western societies, addressing why some societies fight endemic wars while others do not and how frequent warfare affects the basic choices people make about where to live, whom to fight, on whom to confer power, and how to form social groups. Archaeological research dispels the myth of a peaceful past and demonstrates the sobering fact that war played a greater role in human prehistory than previously thought. These detailed regional case studies from leading archaeologists show the inextricable web of warfare and other social institutions and highlight their complex co-evolution in pre-state and early state societies.

The volume includes chapters on the pre-Columbian cultures of North America of the last millennium, the origins of statehood in Mesoamerica and Neolithic China, a centuries-long sequence of warfare in Andean South America, warring peoples of Oceania, and East African cultures devastated by the slave trade. In addition, the contributors offer new insights into how to study warfare in the past and point toward new directions in this field.

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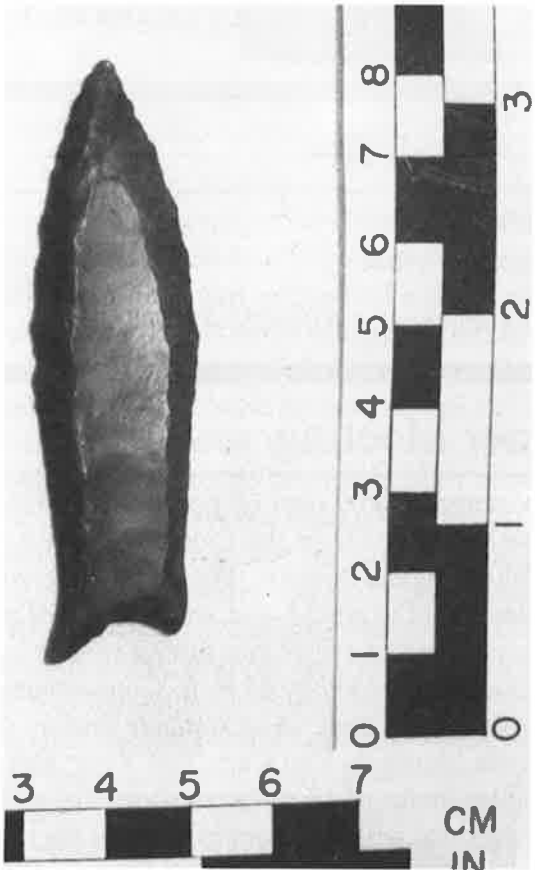
AAS 2006 Summer Meeting

On June 24th, the Summer Meeting in Moundville was attended by over 60 people. In addition to 11 non-members, 3 of whom joined the society, we had guests from the Emerald Coast Archaeological Society and the Cumberland Valley Archaeological Society. We had folks come from Tennessee, Kentucky, Georgia, Florida, and Mississippi to attend, and were delighted to welcome others from all over Alabama. By 8:30, the conference center was already abuzz with people enjoying the coffee, donuts, and muffins graciously provided by M.R. S. Consultants of Tuscaloosa, who also supplied the watermelon for an afternoon treat. An extensive display of Alabama rocks were provided by Eugene Futato, Steven Meredith, Phil Carr, Van King, and Richard Kilborn. Included in this display were labeled samples of 18 different rocks that were available for everyone to take. It is hoped that these samples will help people identify the rocks that make up their artifact collections. With this information, we can assemble a more complete record of what ancient Native Americans were using to make their stone tools, thereby tracing the movement of rocks and people through time. John Blitz gave a tour of the current excavations at Moundville during the morning, and then several hardy participants braved the heat to

help him test portions of the site. The testing and excavations are part of the Alabama Museum of Natural History's Expedition program, during which high school students learn about archaeology and paleontology. This year's AAS meeting was part of a long tradition of AAS Summer Meetings being held in conjunction with Museum Expeditions. A few folks volunteered to work in the expedition's laboratory, where they washed some of the artifacts found by Expedition participants the previous week. The smell of barbeque from Pappy's BBQ of Moundville had people lined up for lunch at 11:45, so it was served up for sandwiches right away. Mactec, Inc. of Birmingham provided lunches for the Board of Directors and all of the hard-working volunteers. Iced watermelon followed shortly. Throughout the afternoon, people continued to view the rock displays and get their collections photographed and identified. Richard Kilborn wins a year's membership in the AAS for bringing in the most artifacts to be recorded, (over 500 Big Sandy points!). Generally, folks enjoyed being able to share stories, catch up, and talk archaeology. One long-time AAS member commented that it reminded him of "the old days." *Submitted by Ashley Dumas.*

The Alabama Paleo-Indian Point Survey (APPS)

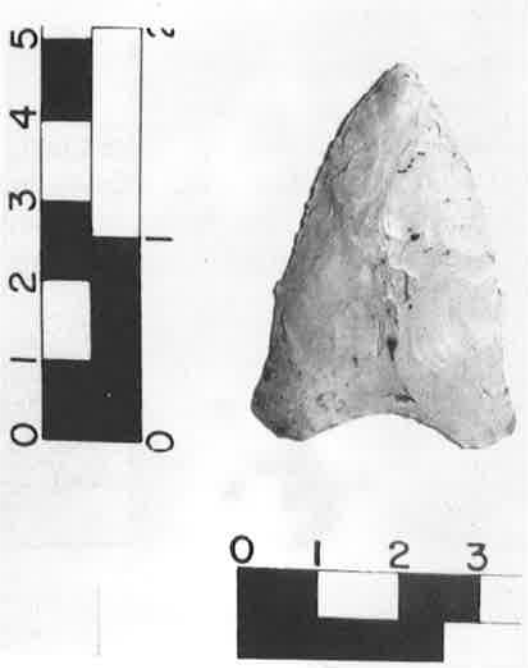


APPS Artifact #505

Type: Cumberland
Found: Lauderdale County
Material: Ft. Payne Chert
Description: Old break on the right auricle; fluted three-fourths of length on the reverse side.

Measurements:
73 mm. long (2 7/8 inches)
20 mm. wide (13/16 inch)
7 mm. thick (1/4 inch)

THE DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS FOR THE NOVEMBER/DECEMBER ISSUE IS OCTOBER 1ST.



APPS Artifact #707

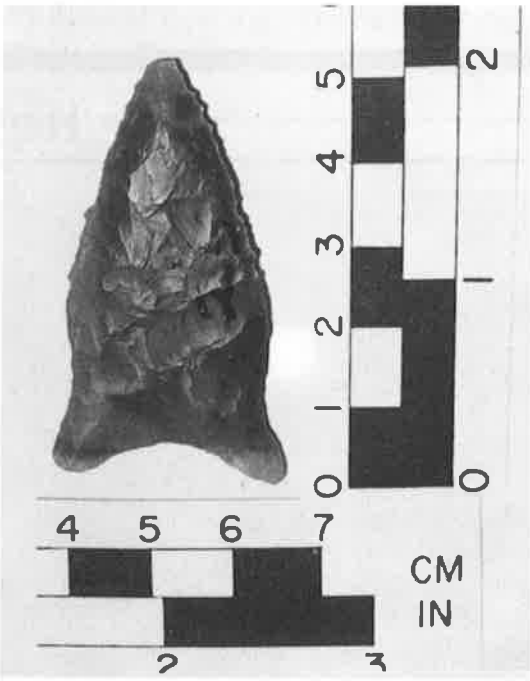
Type: Quad
Found: Madison County
Material: Bangor Chert
Description: Basal thinning on both faces. Unifacially beveled on each edge of each face during resharpening process.

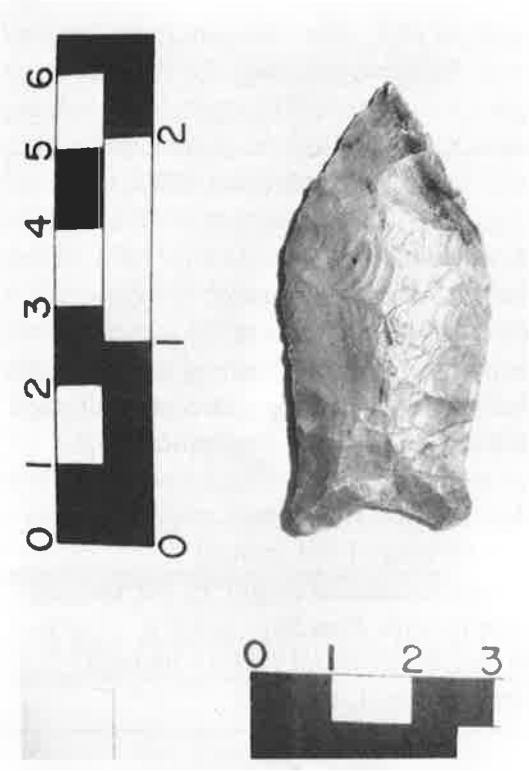
Measurements:
45 mm. long (1 3/4 inches)
70 mm. estimated length (2 1/2 inches)
26 mm. wide (1inch)
31 mm. basal width (1 3/16 inches)
6 mm. thick (1/4 inch)

APPS Artifact #603

Type: Quad
Found: Morgan County
Material: Bangor Chert
Description: Thinning flakes along basal edges; bifacially beveled on each edge during resharpening process; impact flute on reverse face. Excellent pressure flaking along edges; heavily ground along the proximal edges and the basal edge.

Measurements:
52 mm. long (2 1/16 inches)
70 mm. estimated length (2 3/4 inches)
24 mm. wide (15/16 inch)
28 mm. basal width (1 1/8 inches)
6 mm. thick (1/4 inch)





APPS Artifact #709

Type: Beaverlake
Found: Madison County
Material: Blue-Gray Ft. Payne Chert
Description: Basal thinning flakes on both faces. Bifacially beveled on each during resharpening process.

Measurements:
53 mm. long (2 1/16 inches)
80 mm. estimated length (3 1/8 inches)
25 mm. wide (1inch)
21 mm. basal width (13/16 inches)
6 mm. thick (1/4 inch)

All photos by Dr. Hoyt Price.

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Happenings

Members of the AAS help in shovel testing at Moundville. This was part of the activities available to AAS members during the Summer Meeting. Photo by Howard King.

Shown above are (left to right) are Ed Kilborn, Van King and Phil Carr looking over Ed & Richard Kilborn's collection of Big Sandy projectile points at the AAS Summer Meeting. Photo by Howard King.

Below are members of the Cullman and Huntsville archaeological chapters visiting the Oakville Mound and Museum Park as part of their yearly summer field trip. The members enjoyed their visit to the Museum which contains a large collection of ancient American artifacts discovered in Lawrence County. Photo by Howard King.

Passings

Dr. Paul Parmalee

Dr. Paul Parmalee, a noted specialist in zooarchaeology who was also former director of the University of Tennessee's McClung Museum died on July 4th. He served as the museum's director in 1977-1989 and was a noted specialist in the field of zooarchaeology and had gathered a collection of 65,000 specimens of freshwater mussels. Although he retired from the classroom and became a professor emeritus when he stepped down from the helm of the museum, Mr. Parmalee continued his research and in 1998 co-authored a book on Tennessee's freshwater mussels that is considered definitive in its field. Dr. Parmalee's extensive collection will be preserved by UT, according to McClung Museum Director Jeff Chapman. "The collection will be named by colleagues who praised the contributions he hade to science. One friend, UT Emeritus Professor of Zoology Dr. Dave Etnier, said they were "Both naturalists, both duck hunters, both a little bit unconventional." *Submitted by Ashley Dumas.*

Dr. Emma Lila Fundaburk

Emma Lila Fundaburk, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus of Bowling Green State University, died June 3, 2006, in Daphne, Alabama. Dr. Fundaburk, daughter of Albert Donlin and Lila (Douglass) Fundaburk, was born December 14, 1922 in Luvurne, Alabama.

After receiving her doctoral degree, she taught at the University of Hawaii, 1963-1966, and Bowling Green University as Professor of Economics, 1966-1988. Dr. Fundaburk was fundamental in forming the Crenshaw County Historical Society. She also was the author of over a dozen books, her most popular works, Sun Circles and Human Hands and South Eastern Indians—Life Portraits: A Catalogue of Pictures 1564-1860. Dr. Fundaburk retired to Luvurne, Alabama in 1988. Dr. Fundaburk is survived by her sister Mary Douglass Foreman. *Submitted by Sharon Bagget.*

Fort Cusseta, Place in Peril

Fort Cusetta, in Chambers County, Alabama, was listed by the Alabama Historical Commission and the Alabama Trust for Historic Preservation on its 2006 "Places in Peril" list. Following the signing of the Creek Treaty in 1832, the early white settlers built a 16 by 30 foot hand-hewn log fort for protection from a possible uprising from the Cusseta Indian village on Osanippa Creek just north of Cusseta. Walls were four and six feet high with portholes at a height of four feet. The fort was never used in battle and, following the removal of the Indians, was incorporated into a building that had various uses over the past 172 years including that of a country store. In 1987, the family who owned the historic Fort Cusseta deeded their property to Chambers County with the stipulation that it be preserved. Two grants enabled a tin shell to be erected around the old fort to halt further decay. However, the county was unable to acquire additional funds for further restoration or to come up with a long-term preservation plan. Today the structure is vacant with its surviving hewn heart pine walls exposed and beginning to deteriorate. County commissioners are open to alternative plans or private support to preserve this historic site. *Reprinted from Chattahoochee Tracings, Volume 34, Summer 2006.*

Archaeofest

Celebrate Alabama Archaeology Week
Brushy Lake Campground—Bankhead National Forest
Saturday, September 30th from 11:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
HAVE FUN AND LEARN ABOUT THE PAST

Archaeology Festival programs and exhibits will be family oriented and include stone arrowhead manufacture (flint knapping) and making prehistoric pottery, as well as, stone carving, blowgun and spear thrower (atlatl) demonstrations. Since Brushy Campground is located on an archaeological site, there will be a small scale archaeological excavation with a few test units to show archaeological techniques and tools of the trade. "This Land is Your Land" is an anti-looting exhibit that will explain why archaeologists don't want non-archaeologists to dig. "Living History" performers, wearing costumes of the early Southeastern Indians will be set up in a small "camp". There will be storytelling, a "hands on" archaeology box for children, face painting, beadwork, basket making and a Southeastern Indian snake lore exhibit. Other features include exhibits on Indian uses of plants and animals, ancient sky watchers, and science and archaeology. Music, including Indian courting flute and drumming, will add to the festival atmosphere. There will be programs on cave archaeology, rock art, the Civil War in North Alabama, other local history, and information on protecting the past.

Food will be served at noon: hotdogs, soft drinks, and Indian Mound cake. Everyone interested in archaeology is invited. The event is free to the public. Bring lawn chairs and/or a blanket.

Directions: To get to Brushy Lake Campground from Double Springs, take Highway 33 north 15 miles to the Pine Torch sign and turn right. Follow the paved road and turn left at the sign pointing to Brushy Lake.

From Moulton, take Highway 33 south 9 miles to the Pine Torch sign and turn left. Follow the paved road and turn left at the sign pointing to Brushy Lake.

For more information call 205-489-5111 and ask about Archaeofest.

Rain date will be October 14th.

Submitted by Jean Allan.

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