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September 11-15, 2017

Iowa celebrates archaeology in September and October



Travis K. Fischer
Mid-America
Publishing

September and October will be big months for Iowa's Archaeologists as the Office of the State Archaeologist coordinates educational programming throughout the area.

Based out of the University of Iowa, the Office of the State Archaeologist is a research unit that employs 25 professional scientists who investigate, study, and archive the histories of all the people that have lived in Iowa throughout the ages. Mandated by Iowa Code, the State Archaeologist is tasked with preserving knowledge of Iowa's human past and acting as stewards for important cultural artifacts.

While many towns in Iowa are celebrating their 125th anniversaries, that history barely scratches the surface of Iowa's past. Long before Iowans loaded up their rifles and shotguns for deer and pheasant season, Paleo-Indians hunted mastodons with stone spears as the last ice age came to a close. Traces of their pre-historic civilization, such as pottery or carved animal bones, can still be found today.

"Many people don't know the time depth that we have here in Iowa," said Archeology Technician Specialist Cherie Haury-Artz. "People have been in Iowa for more than 13,000 years and we've got artifacts from that whole time period."

People often associate archeology with globe trotting adventures, navigating jungles and deserts in search of ancient cities and ruins. The reality isn't quite as dramatic, particularly in Iowa where the prehistoric civilizations were relatively nomadic, leaving behind few permanent structures outside of burial mounds and earthworks.

Still, that doesn't mean all evidence of Iowa's first settlers has been lost to time. The State Archaeologist office collects and catalogues historical artifacts from Iowa's history, maintaining two large repositories of ancient discoveries that shed light on the cultures that have inhabited the area.

"We have a huge database that



University of Iowa photo

University of Iowa archaeologist on an exceptionally well-preserved site north of the Des Moines river. The site, nearly 7,000 years old contained what were among the oldest-known structures and human remains discovered in the state.

collects all that information," said Haury-Artz. "It's available to any researchers that want to learn more about archeology."

The State Archeologist also works closely with the Iowa Department of Transportation to protect historical sites across Iowa. Before bridges and highways can be built, cultural resource surveys are done to make sure new projects don't destroy archeological properties.

If the survey does find items of historical significance, sites are excavated to make sure Iowa's history is preserved before literally being paved over.

Occasionally more than just tools and weapons are found as well. The bio-archeology program is charged with identifying and protecting human remains. Working closely with area Native American communities, the department can determine which tribe an ancient skeleton might belong to so that the remains can be dealt with in an appropriate manner.

Few people may know that the state has an archaeology department, but upcoming outreach plans may help remedy that. From September 18 through October

21 is Iowa Archaeology Month, where the state's archaeologists will team up with other like-minded organizations to promote a series of programs for the general public.

"This is a time where we focus on archeological programming that takes place all across the state," said Haury-Artz. "Not everybody can make it to Iowa City for a talk, so we advertise for programs all over the state to give people an idea of what's going on in their area."

On September 21, the Louisa County Conservation Board will host a program about the protection of ancient human remains. It will be Archaeology Day in Cherokee on September 24 as the

Iowa Archeological Society hosts a day of activities for children and adults. Over in Elkader, Osborne Heritage Days will take a look at the pioneer era at Osborne's Pioneer Village on October 14-15.

"We just hope to make people aware of the heritage of our state. We think it's pretty interesting," said Haury-Artz. "It's also a great hook for education."

Area museums will also have ongoing special exhibits throughout the month. A complete list of events will be updated on the State Archaeologist website at archaeology.uiowa.edu.

"As we get more things scheduled, that's where they'll find them listed," said Haury-Artz.

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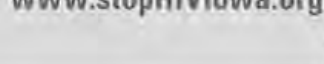
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