

Saturday is Archaeology Day at the History Museum of Burke County

By Tammie Gercken Staff Writer | Posted: Tuesday, February 9, 2016 10:06 am

Folks will get a chance on Saturday to see some artifacts that have been discovered at a Burke County archaeology site.

The Exploring Joara Foundation and the History Museum of Burke County will present the foundation's annual Archaeology Day from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the museum on Saturday. The museum is located at 201 W Meeting St., Morganton. All activities will be free.

Archaeologists Dr. David Moore of Warren-Wilson College, Dr. Alan May of the Schiele Museum in Gastonia and Melissa Timo, EJJ staff archaeologist, will be at the event to give updates on the Berry site project.

The Berry site in Morganton was once a large Native American town called Joara, founded around 1400

A.D., that was visited by explorers Hernando deSoto and Juan Pardo in the late 16th Century. The visits are believed to be some of the earliest European explorations of North America, predating the Jamestown colony, according to EJJ's website, www.exploringjoara.org.

"The Berry site history is interesting because it's so unique to this region," Timo said. "It's always good to remind ourselves of who came before us that made us the great people we are today."

Timo said they will display a collection of artifacts Saturday that have been unearthed from the site, including tobacco pipes, game pieces, pottery shards and tools.

"These were different things that were important in the daily lives of the Native Americans (that lived in Joara)," Timo said.

EJJ staff members have planned hands-on archaeology-related activities for visitors. Timo said they will be able to participate in a craft activity that teaches them how to use a 90,000-year-old technology to make rope, which they will then be able to make into a necklace.

"It's geared towards kids, but really anyone can do it, because it was a skill that everyone had to know," Timo said.



Archaeology Day pic

Visitors have their artifacts examined by archaeologists at last year's Archaeology Day at the History Museum of Burke County

Those interested also will be able to clean and sort artifacts from the site that have not yet been processed. Timo said this will be a great learning opportunity for those not familiar with archaeological methods.

“Everyone knows about digging, but what happens when artifacts come out of the ground?” Timo said. “This is something useful and interesting to do even if you can’t lift a shovel.”

Timo added that EJF plans to hold labs at its office in the Wall Center on New Street twice a month that will let the public come in to clean and sort items as they are discovered, which also will be free to participants. The next lab will be held on Feb. 23.

EJF and the museum invite community members on Saturday to bring in artifacts they have dug up over the years so the archaeologists can examine and identify them. They specified that each person may bring up to 10 items.

The History Museum’s Director Judge Claude Sitton said some pieces brought to previous Archaeology Day events were significant enough to become part of the museum’s collection.

“We have collaborated for the last three years,” said Sitton of the museum and EJF. “It’s interesting to see the artifacts that people bring in.”

Sitton added that volunteer docents will be available to give visitors free tours of the museum during the event.

Timo said she got involved with EJF last October, in part, because the organization was working on innovative projects like recreating two Native American houses and a village wall at a site in Catawba Meadows Park.

“I’m excited about being allowed to share this great story we’re discovering here,” Timo said. “There are a lot of great things happening in this organization that showcase some unique aspects of North Carolina history. We’re becoming a gem in the crown of cool North Carolina historical stuff.”

To learn more about the Exploring Joara Foundation or the Berry site, visit www.exploringjoara.org.

To learn more about the History Museum of Burke County, visit www.thehistorymuseumofburke.org.

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