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University of Michigan archaeologist discovers 16th century Spanish fort

By [MICHIGAN RADIO NEWSROOM \(/PEOPLE/MICHIGAN-RADIO-NEWSROOM\)](#)

The University of Michigan archaeologist Robin A. Beck Jr. discovered a 16th century fort in western North Carolina this week.

According to [an article](#)

http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/23/science/fort-tells-of-spains-early-ambitions.html?_r=0&pagewanted=print) in *The New York Times*, the fort was located pretty far inland, just five miles north of Morganton, North Carolina.



[http://www.michiganradio.org/files/2013/07/23/20130723Morganton.jpg](#)
Credit Lucy Perkins / Google Maps

This is where the archaeological site is located in North Carolina.

Dr. Beck was working with other archaeologists from the University of New Orleans and Warren Wilson College in Asheville, N.C. when they found evidence of a fort's moat, that indicated the fort could definitely be the remains of Fort San Juan.

Fort San Juan was built in 1567 by Juan Pardo, an explorer who led an expedition from the Atlantic coast, inland from 1566-68:

A vast interior seemed open for the taking. This was almost 20 years before the failure of the English at Sir Walter Raleigh's "lost colony" near the North Carolina coast or their later successes in Virginia at Jamestown in 1607 and at Plymouth Rock in 1620 -- the 'beginnings' emphasized in the standard colonial history taught in American schools.

The *Times* wrote that Beck and his team first discovered the fort's moat when excavating a ceremonial Native American burial mound. The moat was indicated by different colored soil under the mound.

Part of the fort's defensive moat had been cut through the southern side of the mound. Dr. Beck said that further excavations and magnetometer subsurface readings showed that the moat appeared to extend more than 70 to 100 feet and measured nearly 12 feet wide and 6 feet deep, in a configuration of "typical European moats going back to the Romans."

Other remote sensing surveys showed subsurface anomalies suggesting burned timbers of the palisades and an irregularity that may well be ruins of the "strong house" inside, where tools, weapons and lead shot were stored. Investigating these artifacts is on the agenda for next summer's excavations, Dr. Beck said.

-- Lucy Perkins, Michigan Radio Newsroom

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