

MENU

A major discovery at the Berry archaeology site

August 12, 2013

Story by Ben Anderson; photos courtesy of the [Exploring Joara Foundation](http://exploringjoara.org/)
(<http://exploringjoara.org/>).

This article is part of The Story Behind, a regular series that features extraordinary photos from Warren Wilson life. (Click here to see more.) (<http://warren-wilson.edu/blogs/blog/category/story-behind/>)



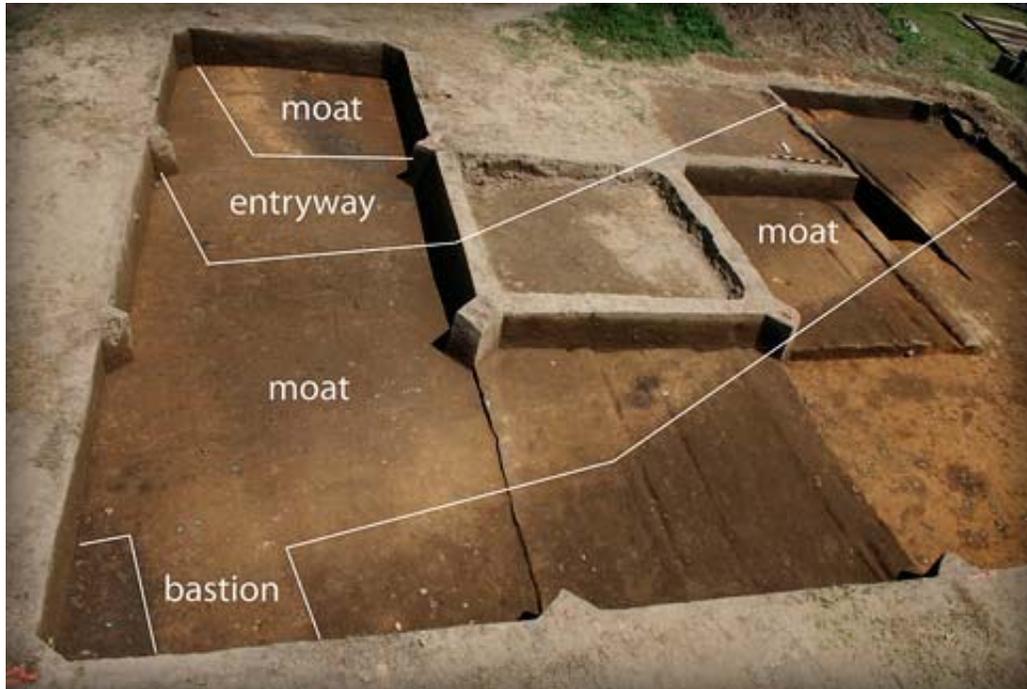
A painting by John Vanderlyn (1775-1852) ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Landing_of_Columbus_\(2\).jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Landing_of_Columbus_(2).jpg)) depicting Columbus in the West Indies.

*Conquistador there is no time
I must pay my respect...
And though you came with sword held high
You did not conquer, only die*
— Procol Harum
“Conquistador” (1967)

In the end there was only one survivor – an Ishmael of the interior, if you will. Just one escapee among the 125 or so Spanish soldiers who had established early in 1567 the first European

8/19/2016 A major discovery at the Berry archae... settlement in the inland of what later became the United States, at Fort San Juan near present-day Morganton, N.C.

By the spring of 1568, the fort and several others the soldiers built in the southern Appalachian region had been wiped out by Native Americans, who reclaimed their ancient village of Joara where Fort San Juan stood. But Fort San Juan's significance endures as truly the first "lost colony," predating Roanoke Island by 20 years. Exposed remnants of several large burned structures, discovered at what is now known as the Berry archaeology site, have long suggested that the Spanish garrison put in place by captain Juan Pardo met a fiery end.



The Spanish moat, corner bastion, and entryway are revealed.

Now, archaeologists including Warren Wilson College professor David Moore, the site's field school director, have made what seems to be a definitive discovery removing any doubt that the Berry site is the location of the ill-fated Fort San Juan. They are confident they have now located the remains of the fort itself – not just the structures 25 soldiers lived in as part of the renamed village of Cuenca. Specifically, part of a defensive feature has been found, in the form of a V-shaped moat. It is a major breakthrough more than 25 years after Moore first gained archaeological access to the site, thanks to the generosity of landowners James and Pat Berry.



A cross-section cut from the remains of the V-shaped moat.

“Our work at the Berry site helps us to learn more about the early and critical period of interaction between the Native peoples and European colonizers,” Moore says. “It’s a complex and compelling story that foretells the troubles and tragedies faced by Native Americans over the next several centuries. At the same time, it is a story of native resilience, a story that also reflects the position of native peoples today.”

And the story at the Berry site will continue to be explored for years to come by a team including student members of the WWC archaeology crew, explorations that hinge upon sufficient funding via the [Exploring Joara Foundation \(http://exploringjoara.org/\)](http://exploringjoara.org/) and other sources. Specific plans are being developed for excavations over the next few years, including the summer of 2014. The fort’s defensive moat will be excavated, as will a possible strong house where weapons, lead shot and tools would have been stored. In other words, the fascinating 450-year-old story of Fort San Juan is only beginning to unfold in the upper Catawba Valley of western North Carolina.



From left: Rob Beck, Dave Moore, and Chris Rodning.

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Warren Wilson College phone system outage (https://www.warren-wilson.edu/news/warren-wilson-college-phone-system-outage)

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Technicians are working to repair the problem, but an update is not anticipated until Tuesday.



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