



Published: June 21, 2011

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Field day exposes Berry site buildings, trash pits

By Julie n. Chang



If you've ever discarded a corn cob or other food in a fire pit, you might inspire archaeologists of the future to keep digging.

Burnt corn cobs are just what archaeologists, students and volunteers have found at the Berry site as they continue to unearth what is possibly the earliest European settlement in the interior United States.

You'll have the chance from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday to take a look at those corn cobs in small trash pits as the Exploring Joara Foundation, Western Piedmont Community College and Warren Wilson College host the annual archaeology field day at the Berry site.

"They're pretty interesting because we don't see those normally," David Moore, a professor from Warren Wilson who runs the field school, said.

In addition to small pits with corn cobs, field school workers at the site found two large trash pits, Moore said.

The field school hopes to have one of the large trash pits under excavation for the field day.

Students and volunteers are also working to uncover the corners of two burnt buildings, Moore said. The trash pits are located between the two buildings.

The Berry archaeological site dates to the 15th and 16th centuries and archaeologists believe it is the location of the Catawba Indian town of Joara. Spanish explorer Juan Pardo built Fort San Juan in 1567 by Joara and renamed the native settlement Quenca.

“(Field day is) such a unique opportunity to see a window of time in our history that most people don’t get a chance to,” Moore said. “It’s always an opportunity to learn a little more about the story.”

Visitors can also walk around on their own and tour a partially reconstructed building, or they can take guided tours from Moore and other archaeologists.

Beckee Garris of the Catawba tribe and Freeman Owle of the Cherokee tribe will tell stories and Catawba National Cultural Resource Office representatives will also be on site.

Primitive skills experts will demonstrate crafting weaponry and tools, fire skills and Spanish ceramic methods.

Activities for children include pottery making, blow guns, the chunky game, face painting and temporary tattoos.

The event is open to the public. There is a \$5 entrance fee per car, \$12 for vans and \$20 for buses. Refreshments are available on site. Anyone requiring special accommodations should contact the WPCC Disability Access Office by Wednesday at 438-6050.

For more information or directions to the Berry site, visit www.joarafoundation.org or call 439-2463.