

MENU

History-changing archaeology site puts Warren Wilson applied learning on the map

August 23, 2016

Public “Dig Days” planned for Berry site in September, October

To the casual observer, a smooth stone or a small piece of hardened clay could seem insignificant, but others might recognize the pieces as artifacts with the ability to change world history. The latter is common at Warren Wilson College as students and archaeology professor David Moore



(<https://www.warren-wilson.edu/content/uploads/2016/06/pt.jpg>) Warren Wilson College professor David Moore, center, Tulane University professor Christopher Rodning, second from left, and Michael Thorpe '17, second from right, a member of Warren Wilson's Archaeology Crew, survey the Berry site as fellow crewmember Amanda Bates '17, left, works alongside a Tulane student. Photo: Kyle McCurry/Warren Wilson College

(<http://science.unctv.org/content/what%E2%80%99s-my-story-archaeologist>) work to unveil an ancient Native American town and the remnants of a 16th-century Spanish fort.

“I’m a believer in a good story. I believe in history,” said Michael Thorpe, a senior majoring in history and political science (<http://www.warren-wilson.edu/academics/history-and-political-science>).

“Everything we do out here, from troweling to sifting, it all goes to complete the story of the Berry site and Fort San Juan.”

Named for the current landowners, the Berry site outside of Morganton

(<https://exploringjoara.org/research/berry/>) was once known as Joara, one of the largest Native American towns in western North Carolina. Spanish soldiers establishing a route to Mexico arrived in 1567 and erected Fort San Juan (<https://exploringjoara.org/research/berry/fort-san-juan/>). Initially,

the residents of Joara were “cooperative and generous hosts,” according to Moore, but changed their approach when the Spanish did not reciprocate. By 1568, Fort San Juan and five other Spanish outposts in the region were destroyed, and the Spanish colonial capital on the coast of South Carolina abandoned its inland quest.

“This is one of the few instances when you have indigenous people in a successful act of resistance against the colonizing Europeans,” said Moore, who first excavated the site in 1986. “In the short run, this was a victory for Native Americans, but we know that didn’t last. Even so, it forever changed the history of the United States (http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/23/science/fort-tells-of-spains-early-ambitions.html?_r=2&), and as a result, that of the world.”

The political and economic dynamics of the Catawba Valley, coupled with disease, led to a decline in indigenous populations. By the time new European settlers arrived roughly 150 years later, the area was devoid of Native Americans, according to Moore.



Through Warren Wilson College’s Work Program (<https://www.warren-wilson.edu/work>), students use the Berry site to enhance academic study with applied learning (<http://www.warren-wilson.edu/news/warren-wilson-college-creates-roadmap-to-student-success-through-liberal-arts-and-applied-learning>). Thorpe works on the Archaeology Crew (<http://inside.warren-wilson.edu/~arch/>), which cares for and assists in cataloging the Joara artifacts.

(<https://www.warren-wilson.edu/content/uploads/2016/08/berrysite.jpg>)

a member of Warren Wilson College’s Archaeology Crew, Michael Thorpe ’17 helps excavate a 16th-century Spanish fort in Morganton. Photo: Kyle McCurry/Warren Wilson College

Undergraduate graduates on the Archaeology Crew have the broadest interaction with the project. “The crew is involved in processing this material every summer. They contribute to all of our studies and publications. We have to understand what we uncovered each year. Their work helps us do all the fundamental

analysis,” Moore said.

Students are members of the research team and “learn the goals of collaborative scholarship,” he said. “They see the teamwork involved. They understand the long-term planning and all the different elements that are involved in an internationally significant research project.”

Warren Wilson College, Tulane University and the University of Michigan are the primary supporters of the research project while the site is also affiliated with Western Piedmont Community College. [warren-wilson.edu/.../history-changing...](http://www.warren-wilson.edu/.../history-changing...)

College. The collaboration helps make the Berry site a networker's haven. Through Moore and his research partners, professors Robin Beck of the University of Michigan (<http://archaeology.lsa.umich.edu/people/beck.php>) and Christopher Rodning of Tulane University (<https://www2.tulane.edu/liberal-arts/anthropology/faculty/christopher-rodning.cfm>), students connect with their peers at other schools.

“Different institutions have different institutional cultures,” said Rodning. “Students learn more about the field of archaeology and how to do archaeology, and they find out more about the diversity of opportunities and experiences their peers are having across the country.”

Rodning also believes the project is greater than the sum of its parts. “There are not that many longstanding research projects in archaeology, like this one, that are conducted at this scale with multiple institutions. Our collaboration enables an exchange of ideas and a scale of operation that would be difficult to maintain if it was just one of us,” he said.



The Berry site excavation

is a research project primarily supported by Warren Wilson College, Tulane University and the University of Michigan. The site is also affiliated with Western Piedmont Community College. Photo courtesy of David Moore.

Moore estimates over 600 students from across the U.S. have worked at the site since 2001. As of 2016 and after 16 years, he thinks the project is less than halfway to completion.

“There’s so much here,” said Moore. “There is nothing like this site anywhere else so far. This is the most intact 16th-century colonial fort in the U.S.”

As Thorpe begins his final year as a Warren Wilson College student, he reflects on his applied learning experience on the Archaeology Crew at the Berry site. “It’s a very special kind of place and a unique opportunity that you might think is just limited to a cast of professional archaeologists,” Thorpe said. “But the student’s contribution to the Berry site research through their experiential learning is reinforced at Warren Wilson. This is where it’s happening.”

Exploring Joara Foundation



warren-wilson.edu/.../history-changing...

In addition to their research, Moore, Rodning and Beck help to support the



(<https://www.warren-wilson.edu/content/uploads/2016/08/berrysite3.jpg>) Warren

Wilson College professor David Moore excavates a portion of the Berry site. Photo: Kyle McCurry/Warren Wilson College

Exploring Joara Foundation

(<https://exploringjoara.org>), a nonprofit public archaeology organization located in Morganton. The foundation provides archaeological and historical programming for schools and the general public. Foundation members and friends also have an opportunity to work and learn at the Berry site.

In partnership with Warren Wilson College, the foundation is launching a series of open excavation days (<https://exploringjoara.org/upcoming-events/fort-san-juan-field-school/>). “Dig Days,” according to the foundation, are “for those who want to discover the thrill of archaeology but are unable to commit to the time and expense of the traditional June field school.”

Led by Exploring Joara Foundation and Warren Wilson staff members, “Dig Days” are slated for Sept. 9, 10, 16, 17 and 30; and Oct. 1, 14, 15, 21 and 22. Cost is \$15 per day, and registration is required. No experience is necessary, but participants 14 and younger must be accompanied by a parent or guardian.

For more information about fall Berry site “Dig Days” and tours, email ed@exploringjoara.org (<mailto:ed@exploringjoara.org>) or visit <https://exploringjoara.org/upcoming-events/fort-san-juan-field-school> (<https://exploringjoara.org/upcoming-events/fort-san-juan-field-school>).

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US News and World Report latest to name Warren Wilson among the “Best Colleges” (<https://www.warren-wilson.edu/draft/us-news-and-world-report-latest-to-name-warren-wilson-among-the-best-colleges>)

September 13, 2016

Students graduate with lower debt than most liberal arts colleges



<https://www.warren-wilson.edu/news/warren-wilson-college-is-one-of-sierra-magazines-cool-schools-2>

Warren Wilson College is one of Sierra magazine’s “Cool Schools” (<https://www.warren-wilson.edu/news/warren-wilson-college-is-one-of-sierra-magazines-cool-schools-2>)

September 6, 2016

Asheville campus ranked among schools like the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and George Washington University.



<https://www.warren-wilson.edu/news/warren-wilson-college-phone-system-outage>

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

September 5, 2016

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



<https://www.warren-wilson.edu/news/legendary-singer-songwriter-finds-a-home-at-warren-wilson-college-pens-honorary-song>

Legendary singer-songwriter finds a “home” at Warren Wilson College, pens honorary song (<https://www.warren-wilson.edu/news/legendary-singer-songwriter-finds-a-home-at-warren-wilson-college-pens-honorary-song>)

September 1, 2016

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Warren Wilson College named one of The Princeton Review’s “Best 381 Colleges” (<https://www.warren-wilson.edu/news/warren-wilson-college-named-one-of-the-princeton-reviews-best-381-colleges>)

August 30, 2016

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August 23, 2016

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