

National Science Foundation grant to aid Berry archaeological site excavations

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The National Science Foundation has awarded a grant of \$167,012 to Warren Wilson College professor David Moore and fellow archaeologists Robin Beck and Christopher Rodning for two summers of excavations at the Berry site near Morganton.

The 12-acre Berry site along Upper Creek is the location of an ancestral Catawba Indian town named Joara, at which the Spanish captain Juan Pardo built Fort San Juan in 1567. The garrison was the earliest European settlement in the interior of what is now the United States, predating the "Lost Colony" by 20 years.

Under the auspices of the Upper Catawba Archaeology Project, the archaeologists are researching the long-forgotten episode of Fort San Juan's founding and subsequent fiery destruction in the spring of 1568. Professors Beck, of the University of Oklahoma, and Rodning, of Tulane University, are working with Moore to help write this early story of European exploration and settlement in eastern North America.

"When we began planning our research project and field school in 2001, it was our goal to work systematically to have a legitimate chance to receive a major award such as this," Moore said. "Chris and Rob and I are really excited to receive this grant, and appreciate the support we have received. We're now actively engaged in planning for next summer." As in years past, several Warren Wilson students will be involved in the excavations.

On Dec. 1, 1566, Juan Pardo departed Santa Elena – the capital of Spanish La Florida and located on present-day Parris Island, S.C. – with a company of 125 men. Pardo had been commissioned to explore the interior, to claim the land for Spain while pacifying local Indians and to forge a route from Santa Elena to Spanish silver mines in northern Mexico.

In January 1567, Pardo arrived at Joara, a large native town located at the foot of the Appalachian Mountains. Pardo renamed the town Cuenca, after his native city in Spain, and built Fort San Juan de Joara, leaving 30 men to defend the fort and occupy the town.

In May 1568, news reached Santa Elena that the native people had destroyed Fort San Juan during a surprise attack, rebuffing Pardo's attempt to extend Spanish colonial ambitions into their domain. Evidence of the burning of five large buildings serves as a chilling testament to how relations between the Spaniards and the people of Joara ended tumultuously after what appears to have been a peaceful beginning. Only one Spanish soldier survived the disaster, which ended Spain's effort to colonize the interior of eastern

North America.

Moore, Beck and Rodning have discovered numerous 16th-century Spanish artifacts in a small area on the northern end of the Berry site, including pieces of Spanish ceramics, lead shot, brass lacing tips and wrought iron nails. Excavations have revealed five remarkably intact burned buildings that form a distinct compound around a central plaza. Their research indicates that these were the buildings that quartered Pardo's soldiers stationed at Fort San Juan.

The National Science Foundation award will fund complete excavation of one of the burned buildings and extensive sampling of two others. Given the extraordinary degree of preservation within the buildings, the work will require a broad range of specialist analyses. The project thus will bring together archaeological specialists from numerous institutions, including Southern Illinois University, Washington University, the University of Tennessee and Penn State University.

Images and reports of research at the Berry site can be found at www.warren-wilson.edu/~arch . A March 2006 article in Smithsonian Magazine, titled "Spain Makes a Stand," can be retrieved at <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/issues/2006/march/digs.php> . David Moore may be contacted at dmoore@warren-wilson.edu or (828) 771-2013.

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