

K-State students digging into past along the banks of Wildcat Creek



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While many students spend their summers on the beach or by the pool, some in Manhattan are digging in the dirt near Wildcat Creek.

A K-State anthropology class called Field Methods in Archaeology is spending the month of June digging for artifacts and evidence of prehistoric American Indian communities that lived in the Manhattan area. The course allows students to learn and train for archaeology jobs, but it also serves as research for the university.

The students in the class are digging several 1-meter-square holes in a field close to Wildcat Creek, which is a great place for archeological digs because communities through history have been attracted to flowing water,

said Lauren Ritterbush, the associate professor teaching the class.

"Where there is good water, good arable land, lots of wildlife, people have been attracted to these for more than 13,000 years," she said. "We're looking at the whole cultural landscape, and we're trying to get information of who lived where at different times."

There are many archaeological sites in the Manhattan area, Ritterbush said, but identifying time periods can be tough because farming practices can move artifacts from corresponding dirt levels.

"What we're trying to do is learn more about this site and determine if any of that cultural material is still intact in the original place it was dropped," she said.

K-State has been offering the

course to students since 1966, said Brad Logan, a research associate professor who is also working on the site. He started teaching the class with a K-State professor when he was still working at the University of Kansas in 1986, he said.

Eventually Logan moved over to K-State, and KU dropped out of participating in the joint research in the 1990s, but K-State

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WEATHER FORECAST



Mostly
sunny

LOW HIGH

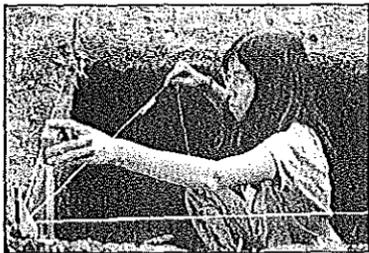
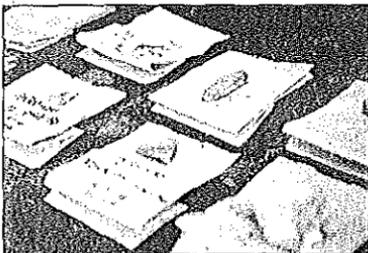
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Clockwise from top: Chase Oswald scrapes the soil looking for artifacts at an archaeological dig site in Manhattan. Susan Schmidt takes measurements at her dig site. Artifacts, mostly Native American pottery fragments, are labeled and stored away for further investigation at a later date.

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continues to dig. K-State has worked on several sites in the area on private property with the blessing of the owners.

While the digs have often been near Wildcat Creek, Manhattan has continuously expanded westward, removing research area opportunities for the group, Logan said.

"We try to stay one step ahead of them," he said.

The students dig up about 10 centimeters of soil and move the loose dirt to a large screen to sift through it and find artifacts. The students are digging precisely 10 centimeters to keep track of how deep artifacts are found to help determine the corresponding time period, Ritterbush said.

So far the students have found about 10 artifacts spanning many periods. Among the most complete and recognizable artifacts the students found is an arrow tip for a spear that is estimated to be 2,000 years old and a knife estimated to be 600 years old, among other items, she said.

Ritterbush said the researchers also can identify estimated time periods for the artifacts because "there are different styles, just like we have different fashions at different times."

The big get the group hopes to find evidence of houses built near the creek, Ritterbush said. The class is not only looking for artifacts but changes in the soil that could show evidence of a post in the ground to support a dwelling.

In the 1960s, K-State researchers found small pieces of evidence of a house along Wildcat Creek where Seth Child Road now sits, she said. While the current group is now further west from Manhattan, Ritterbush suspects some dwellings were built near the creek about 700 years ago.

"We think there was probably someone living here," she said of the field. "There was a community, but not a tight-knit village. There were probably people who were related to each other who had these farms scattered up and down the valley."

Jakob Hanschu, a K-State sophomore from Hillsboro, said he's taking the class because he's interested in an anthropology and archeology career after college.

"I'm looking to go on in archaeology, and I figured this class would be a good experience and confirm that interest," he said. "If I hated it, obviously I would need to readjust my career, but it's been good. That's been reassuring that I'm actually doing the right thing."

Hansch, who is studying anthropology and geography, said he and his team haven't found full artifacts in their pit, but they have uncovered plenty of flakes of artifacts and pieces of pottery.

"It's definitely more meticulous work than I would have thought," he said. "When you actually find something it's very rewarding... That hope of finding something that will give us a little information about that past gives us a reason and meaning for what we're doing."

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— Lauren Ritterbush