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K-STATE ARCHEOLOGY DIG IN LEAVENWORTH COUNTY REVEALS POTTERY, ARROW POINTS AND THE URGENCY TO STUDY SITES THREATENED BY DEVELOPMENT

MANHATTAN — An archeology excavation led by Kansas State University in June revealed further evidence of a culture living in the Stranger Creek watershed of Leavenworth County between 500 and 1000 A.D., a time known as Plains Woodland.

Brad Logan, associate research professor of anthropology at K-State, led 14 K-State students and two students from other institutions in unearthing hundreds of artifacts, including arrow points, pottery shards and pieces of chipped stone material. Floods in recent years, including a dramatic one last year, exposed objects and made them easier to find, Logan said.

"We didn't find as many in an undisturbed context as we'd hoped, but I think it was enough to keep the students interested in what they were doing," Logan said. "The field school gives students training, and it helps them decide if this is what they want to do as a career. Of course, the other thing is that it allows us to do research."

For the next several months, Logan said K-State will be identifying the artifacts, sorting them into different categories and interpreting what they mean in terms of the people who lived there. That means determining the function of the site and why people chose it instead of other locations. Logan said the excavation produced enough charcoal to narrow down the site's age within the 500-year time range with radiocarbon dating. He also will compare the information from this site with that from other Plains Woodland sites in the region.

The field school also offered an opportunity to survey other sites, including one in the watershed closer to Lawrence that Logan said shows promise. But finding an adequate site isn't easy in a rapidly developing corner of the state. Logan said the group had to look at several areas before it found a site undisturbed by recent agriculture.

The residential development in Leavenworth County offers a further sense of urgency. Logan said when he began working in the Stranger Creek area more than 20 years ago, Tonganoxie was still a small town.

"It's become a growing bedroom community, and that puts a lot of pressure on these archeological resources," he said. "That's one of the key things to get across, to point out that these sites are vulnerable. We're trying to do what we can, if not to preserve them, at least study them before they're gone."