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<http://www.k-state.edu/sasw/anthro/fieldschool.htm>
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K-STATE GROUP VENTURES BACK IN TIME, AGAIN

MANHATTAN — Just as prehistoric peoples kept returning to a riverbank in Leavenworth County, so too do Brad Logan and his troop of anthropology students from Kansas State University.

The Kansas Archaeological Field School takes place in even years. Through June 27, Logan and 10 students are back in the Stranger Creek watershed, this time along Nine Mile Creek.

"I've been back there every year since 2001, when a flood exposed the floor of a late prehistoric house," said Logan, a research associate professor in K-State's department of sociology, anthropology and social work. The late prehistoric era ranged from AD 900 to 1500.

As a doctoral student Logan based his dissertation on the watershed's trove of tools, pottery and other relics of diverse prehistoric populations, some as young as 800 years old, others stretching beyond 5000 B.C. The work he and his students now are pursuing could result in a National Historic Register of Historic Places listing exclusive to prehistoric sites in the Stranger Creek basin.

Logan attributes the area's enduring popularity among Stone Age peoples in part to readily available, high-quality chert and to a landform that was rarely flooded, even though it was along the tributaries of a major waterway.

"It's called Toronto chert, after the limestone in which it formed, and it attracted Stone Age people throughout the watershed and adjacent areas," Logan said. "A good flintknapper can shape it into any sort of tool.

"And the tributary valleys, during times of flood, have these nice terraces, or a 'second bottom,' that would generally remain flood free."

Stranger Creek is the last major watershed to empty into the Kansas River before it joins the Missouri River, and the area has always formed a natural boundary, Logan said. Centuries ago, it marked the transition between the wooded East and grassland West.

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"It's kind of a frontier area," he said. "You can almost see people coming out of the woods and seeing the prairie and saying, 'I think this is about as far as I want to go.'"

"Accounts by travelers across Stranger Creek, including Francis Parkman and Horace Greeley, show how they were struck by the contrast in vegetation," Logan said. "So you can imagine that Native Americans, whose livelihoods depended on the varied resources of these major plant communities, would have been impressed as well."

Though many groups occupied the area over thousands of years, Logan is particularly interested in the Steed-Kisker culture, whose members built the house the K-State team is studying. It now appears that this summer's dig will recover evidence of the westernmost occupation by those people, whose territory centered on the Missouri River in the modern Kansas City area.

"Some archaeologists had suggested that Steed-Kisker groups hadn't crossed the Missouri, that they stayed in northwest Missouri," he said. "What I'm hoping to get is more information on that particular culture this summer, but the frosting on the cake is all these artifacts from older cultures, too."

Students work five days a week and are housed a mile from the site. In addition to dirt-under-the-fingernails field methods, they learn laser surveying, topographical map interpretation and even the right way to walk around a site. They will document it for a geographic information system database maintained by the Kansas Geological Survey; the information is transmitted via the Kansas State Historical Society. Lectures by Logan and guests include the region's prehistory and general geographic information science.

Eric Skov, a May 2008 bachelor's graduate in anthropology, Olathe, is Logan's teaching assistant this year. Skov is a veteran of the summer 2006 expedition.

K-State students participating include:

Sarah Trabert, a May 2008 bachelor's graduate in anthropology, Dodge City.

From Greater Kansas City: Angelica Otting, sophomore in anthropology, Kansas City, Kan.; Cody Underwood, junior in anthropology, Olathe; Julia Vorndran, sophomore in anthropology, Overland Park; and Jessica Gisler, junior in anthropology, Prairie Village.

Scott Gnadt, junior in anthropology, Wamego; Patrick McClung, junior in biology, Wichita; and Frank Weber, freshman in social science, Wilson.

From out of state: Katherine Wartell, senior in anthropology, Superior, Colo.

The 10th student involved in the project is from Washburn University in Topeka.