

North Carolina Archaeology Day 2009

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On an unusually brisk fall afternoon, approximately 400 visitors, volunteers, and teachers attended the first North Carolina Archaeology Day. The free event took place on the campus of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and was funded in large part by a SEAC Public Outreach Grant. Co-sponsors included the North Carolina Archaeological Society (NCAS), UNC's Research Laboratories of Archaeology (RLA), and UNC's Society of Anthropology Students.



Archaeology Day was designed to raise public awareness about North Carolina's ancient past, its American Indian heritage, and the importance of preserving archaeological resources. It featured presentations, demonstrations, tours, displays, and activities related to archaeology and 12,000 years of North Carolina's unwritten history.

Fire making, dart throwing, flintknapping, and pottery making demonstrations fascinated visitors of all ages. Seven family-friendly presentations by archaeologists and a storyteller were also popular among visitors ages 10 and up.

About 100 children explored more than a dozen hands-on activities developed primarily by UNC students. Colorful footprints and "history hunt" clues led to stations where kids "excavated" cookies, identified plant remains, built their own pots, created rock art, and pieced together pottery puzzles. An education specialist formally evaluated the activities before and during the event, and instructions and materials for some of them are available through the RLA's website.

A brief teacher's workshop held in conjunction with the public event introduced formal and informal educators to resources available through the RLA. Participants received a copy of North Carolina's *Intrigue of the Past* curriculum and modeled several exercises. The workshop facilitators also shared examples of student work to demonstrate how the curriculum fits into the state's standard course of study.

Archaeology Day exceeded expectations for a new event, especially with respect to participation by North Carolina's archaeological community. Exhibitors included UNC's American Indian Center; Elon University; Exploring Joara Foundation; Fort Bragg's Cultural Resources Management Program; Friends of Town Creek; Friends of QAR; New South Associates; NC Museum of History; NC Archaeological Council; Office of State Archaeology; East Carolina University;



Schiele Museum; UNC-Greensboro; Trading Path Association; TRC Garrow, Inc.; UNC-Charlotte; USDA National Forests; Wake Forest University; and Western Carolina University.

Visitors came from many areas of the state and learned about the event through a variety of sources. The event's website was linked to the homepages of the RLA and NCAS. The UNC community was invited through Facebook, an announcement on the university's homepage, and class visits. Information was also distributed through a press release, community calendars, public service announcements, local festivals, the NC Environmental Education office, and the NC Commission of Indian Affairs. Finally, fliers were posted around Chapel Hill and sent to schools and youth organizations.

For evaluation purposes, visitors were encouraged to leave comments in a guest book. The children's "history hunt" also included survey questions. Additional feedback was solicited by contacting a sample of visitors and participants after the event.



Overall, feedback has been very positive, especially for a new event. Visitors and participants alike were pleased with the variety and quality of activities. In general, the demonstrations were the most popular stations and attracted the most diverse audiences. The presentations were a big draw for older visitors, with some adults staying for multiple shows.

Volunteers, parents, and our independent evaluator all reported that children at the hands-on activities were very engaged. One 10-year-old was overheard saying in a rather surprised tone, "This is really fun. I want to stay longer!" Another mother wrote that her 11-year-old son, "tried not to get interested, but at one point, looked at me and said 'this is actually kind of cool.'" The history hunt surveys indicated that most children learned something about the science of archaeology, North Carolina's ancient human past, and the importance of preserving archaeological resources.

An NCAS board member summed it up well when he said, "Wow! I can't imagine how SEAC could have spent its money in a better way." We intend to make Archaeology Day a regular event, with future plans involving forming partnerships with local schools and scheduling the event for a warmer month.