

2005 Cleveland Archaeological Society Internship Report

An Internship in Action

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My internship with the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, generously funded by the Cleveland Archaeological Society, entailed working on an archaeological excavation with the Museum's Archaeology in Action program and conducting a project with a collection in the Museum's archaeology laboratory. I spent the first six weeks of my internship at the Danbury site teaching archaeological field methods to groups of volunteers running the gamut from high school sophomores to retired teachers. The volunteers and I scraped 2 x 2 meter units; mapped floor plans and soil profiles; identified features; excavated, mapped, and removed burials; and used dry and water-screening techniques to recover artifacts and ecofacts (plant and animal remains) from excavated units and features. During the final three weeks of my internship, I worked on a research project developed by Dr. Brian Redmond and myself. I examined animal bone elements from a unit in the Sheriden Cave site in north central Ohio, identifying genus and species (when possible), recording and describing any marks on the bone (i.e. anthropogenic cut marks, carnivore damage, rodent chew marks), and noting any evidence of burned bone.

As the archaeology intern, I was actively involved in the scientific process that is archaeology – a process that offered me incomparable field experience and introduced me to extraordinarily dedicated archaeologists, both professional and volunteer. Although I cannot introduce you to everyone I met or show you every unit and feature I worked on this summer, I would like to offer this narrative describing my wonderful internship experience to the members of the Cleveland Archaeological Society as an expression of gratitude for this opportunity. I also hope to convey how beneficial this internship has been to my professional development in the field of archaeology, and I hope to encourage your respective members to support this internship program in the future.

My internship officially began at the Danbury site on June 13 – but I prepared for it soon after being awarded the position. Anticipating fieldwork and research with the museum's archaeology collection, I was eager to learn more about the Danbury site, the culture history of northwestern Ohio, and Brian Redmond, the archaeologist with whom I would be working. I sought the advice of my mentor, Dr. Elliot Abrams, to suggest readings about the prehistory of northwestern Ohio. He gave me *Cultures Before Contact: The Late Prehistory of Ohio and Surrounding Regions*, and recommended I read anything Dr. Redmond had written on the culture history of the area. Articles about northwestern Ohio from *Archaeology of Eastern North America* were very informative as well. After reading up on the Museum's work at Danbury and visiting the Museum's Danbury exhibit, I felt familiar with the site and well prepared for six weeks of fieldwork.

In the Field

My work at the Danbury site this summer focused on excavating new units in the west and northern portions of the site. I excavated burials and features with experienced volunteers who have been working with the Museum for years, as well as excavating a unit alone. I also spent a few weeks teaching archaeological field methods to volunteers enrolled in the Cleveland Museum of Natural History's Archaeology in Action program. I instructed groups of two to five volunteers, beginning with lessons on how to scrape the surfaces of 2 x 2 meter units using

proper trowel techniques, emphasizing the importance of excavating units in ten centimeter levels and digging flat unit floors and straight walls. Opening a new unit began with scraping the remaining few centimeters of plow zone to expose the subsoil and identify any features, or distinct soil stains, within it. We used a quarter-inch mesh screen to sift excavated soil and recover artifacts. When we reached the plow zone / subsoil interface – usually characterized by a change in soil texture and color – we sprayed the subsoil with water to reveal any dark soil stains. I taught my group how to identify soil stains within the subsoil based on their shape: a long oval stain could indicate a burial feature, circular stains characterize possible post molds, and amorphous meandering stains are the hallmarks of anomalies such as rodent burrows and tree roots. After identifying soil stains within unit floors, we outlined the soil stains with pushpins and used these as points whose northing and easting coordinates would be transferred to the floor plan map. I taught my group how to set up a floor plan and how to plot the coordinates of each pushpin onto the map. We sketched the shapes of the stains and I taught my group how to describe soil texture and color using a Munsell soil chart. My group and I finished work with each unit and level by recording the provenience of the artifacts we found and entered the information into the artifact logbook.

This excavation process, exposing subsoil stains, identifying, and mapping dark soil stains, characterizes the methods I taught to volunteers all summer and particularly exemplifies my work during the first week of my internship. During my first week at Danbury, there were two significant discoveries in the units I excavated with my group. While scraping the surface of unit North 878, East 1042, I found a ground stone tool used as an axe, a tool archaeologists call a celt. Native Americans living at Danbury probably used the celt to clear unwanted plants from their village and to collect useful plants. A cranium found with a large marine shell pendant – later identified as a lightning whelk shell, or *Busycon* species, indigenous to the coastal areas of the Gulf of Mexico and the southeastern Atlantic coast – was the second significant finding of the first week. After further excavation, this burial (Burial Feature 05-02) expanded to reveal a burial feature containing three individuals.

During weeks two and three, my work at Danbury focused on the excavation, mapping, photographing, and removal of the triple burials. I worked with both experienced volunteers and students for I had never excavated human remains before. After uncovering the cranium and shell pendant in the first week, we expanded our excavation to include two concentrations of cranial fragments that were the remains of two other individuals interred in the feature. We carefully exposed all three skeletons using bamboo tools, finding two more whelk shell pendants, shell disk beads made from whelk shell and marginella shell beads. All of the soil removed from the burial feature passed through the water screen to ensure that even small artifacts – beads, small bone fragments, and plants remains, for example – would be recovered. Once we exposed a burial, it was photographed and mapped. I taught volunteers how to map the burials by measuring the point proveniences of the bones and shell disk beads while another field supervisor used our coordinates to skillfully draw the burial's contents. The final stage of the triple burial excavation was the removal of all bone elements and shell from the feature, identifying each bone and recording its provenience as we removed it from the ground.

After I finished excavating the triple burial, I helped other experienced volunteers excavate burial 05-04 in unit North 878, East 1044. Unlike the fully articulated skeletons found in burial 05-02, burial 05-04 was disarticulated and, when interred, was most likely wrapped in a bundle. We found a large, well-preserved clamshell in the buried with the individual. I exposed, mapped, and removed the bundle burial, finding flint flakes, bone fragments, and a few seeds in the water screen.

Once I finished working on the bundle burial, I excavated feature 05-07 in unit North 892, East 1046. I excavated a cross section of the feature, revealing a basin-shaped profile containing charcoal and several pieces of shell. The basin-shaped stain resembled a cache pit that would have been used as a storage space. I drew a profile of the feature's west wall and then removed the other half of the feature for a flotation sample.

For the fifth week of my internship in the field, I taught excavation methods to two recent high school graduates. We scraped the plow zone from unit N 892, E 1054 and found three post molds. We excavated a cross section of each post mold to test whether the stains were truly post molds or just anomalies. All three of the post molds tested positive and I taught my group how to draw a cross-sectioned post mold. One of the post molds became a larger feature (F 05-10), where I found a charcoal concentration that most likely represented the remains of a hearth. After mapping and photographing the feature profile, my group and I removed the rest of the feature for a flotation sample.

During the last week of the field season, I worked on burial feature 05-08 unaccompanied and with volunteers. While excavating a cross section of the burial feature, we found chert flakes, pottery sherds, rodent bones, clamshell fragments, disarticulated human rib bones, phalanges, teeth, fish bones and scales, and a rodent cranium. I drew a profile of the feature's west wall and then excavated the other half of the feature, finding fragments of a human femur, a large, well-preserved clamshell, and a sherd of Mixter Dentate pottery. I also recovered cordmarked and undecorated pottery sherds, fish scales and bones, and animal bones from the dry-screen. Burial 05-08 contained disburied bone elements, and after drawing the feature's north wall profile, Dr. Redmond and I came to the conclusion that the burial's context was disturbed.

Burial feature 05-08 was the last project I worked on during my internship at the Danbury site. I spent the last day of the six-week field season backfilling excavated units and features, covering the unexcavated portion of the site with permeable construction fabric, and surrounding the unexcavated portion of the site with fencing to protect it until the 2006 field season.

Working at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History

During the last three weeks of my internship, I worked at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History. I spent the first week learning artifact processing methods and the cataloging system used in the Museum's archaeology laboratory. I also learned how to float the soil samples taken from the Danbury site. Archaeologists use flotation to isolate small plant and animal remains, as well as small artifacts, from archaeological deposits. We floated 21 soil samples, all of which came from features and burial features using a modified 55-gallon drum with water and compressed air flowing from pipes directly beneath the sample. We poured the sample into the drum and a double-layered screen collected the heavy materials (heavy fraction), and the light materials (light fraction) flowed over an attached spigot into a bottomless pail fitted with a fine mesh. We found bone fragments, minute chert flakes, seeds, shell disk beads, and marginella shell beads in the light and heavy fractions of the flotation samples.

For the remaining two weeks of my internship, I worked on a project examining faunal remains recovered from the Sheriden Cave site, a Late Pleistocene sinkhole and archaeological site located in Wyandot County, Ohio. Sheriden Cave is a Paleoindian site which was occupied by Native Americans approximately 11,000 years ago. The cave contained an abundance of Late Pleistocene animal bone, representing both extinct and extant species. Two bone projectile points, a fluted projectile point made of chert, and a chert side scraper were found at the site, providing evidence for the Paleoindian occupation of the site. My project focused on the animal remains found in unit South 1, West 2 by carefully examining each element, identifying the

name of each element (left femur, for example), classifying each element to a species when possible, and examining each element for evidence of burning, anthropogenic cut marks, carnivore damage, and rodent chew marks. I brought little experience with animal osteology to the Sheridan Cave faunal analysis, but during the course of the project, I became skilled in identifying elements of mammalian and fish osteology and determining which genus and species each bone represented, which was often the most difficult aspect of the project.

To conclude this summary of my internship experience with the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, I would like to express how I benefited from this experience. First, working on five burials – a rare opportunity for an undergraduate – helped me become a more cautious, disciplined excavator. I gained significant understanding of human bones while excavating and removing burials, which benefits me immediately because I am currently taking a course in human osteology. My experience working with human remains in the field and with artifacts and animal remains in the lab will make me an attractive candidate for employment with a Cultural Resource Management firm when I enter the field this winter. Second, instructing and supervising volunteers refined my field methods and improved my leadership skills. I learned to anticipate and judiciously plan for the next step of the excavation process, a perspective that allowed me to understand the larger context of our work at Danbury, to effectively direct my groups' efforts. Every week my approach to teaching field methods to the volunteers improved, and the leadership skills I developed while supervising fieldwork will benefit me as a teaching assistant in graduate school. Finally, the Museum's exceptional archaeologists and volunteers taught me much about archaeology this summer, and simply working alongside them made me a better archaeologist.

I would like to thank the Cleveland Archaeological Society once again for making my invaluable experience possible. I would also like to thank Dr. Redmond, the Museum staff, and all of the amazing volunteers I worked with this summer for helping me become a better archaeologist. As I look forward to graduating from Ohio University this November, I feel well prepared to begin my career in archaeology, first working in Cultural Resource Management to gain more field experience and then attending graduate school to study anthropological archaeology. Regardless of the site I work at or the graduate school I attend, I will benefit from this internship for the rest of my professional career.