This summer, I was privileged to be accepted as the Cleveland Archaeological Society’s 2012 summer intern. With this opportunity, I was able to work under Dr. Brian Redmond at the Heckelman site and expand my knowledge of and skills in the excavation of prehistoric Native American archaeology. Located in rural Ohio, Heckelman was the site of several different periods of occupation representing multiple unique cultural traditions. Following the completion of the five-week field season, I spent three weeks in the laboratory at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History analyzing the artifacts associated with one specific feature.

My first introduction to the Heckelman site was the morning of June 18. Along with the other new participants, I spent the morning in an orientation led by Dr. Redmond. The purpose of this orientation was to learn about the history of the site, the work already done in previous seasons, and what the goals of the upcoming season were. Following this, the volunteers were taught the functions of various tools and the processes involved in recording archaeological data by Jim Bowers and Brian Scanlan, respectively, while I was assigned to a crew to begin work.

Heavy rains unfortunately made starting the season in the pre-bulldozed transect impossible. Thus, the decision was made to open several two-meter-by-two-meter test units in the southern end of the field. The purpose of these units was to test the remainder of the site, particularly around any anomalies detected in the magnetic map of the site. I was assigned to units 479N 503E and 479N 505E, where we discovered several post molds related to the stockade line. These posts were mapped, recorded, and then backfilled. By the middle of the week, the ground had dried enough to move north to our original three-meter-by-three-meter
units. Along with supervisor Char Shryock and several of our volunteers, I worked on opening unit 517N 515E, which involved shovel scraping, troweling, and brushing. Five zones and 38 PPMs (Possible Post Molds) were isolated and marked for further testing.

The beginning of week two focused on testing these zones and PPMs. Of the five zones, two were identified as features, while three were attributed to rodent disturbance. One of these features was a small, shallow basin labeled feature 12-27. This feature yielded three flint flakes and, most interestingly, a complete but roughly made drill point. This drill point allowed us to identify the basin as a Late Prehistoric feature. After the basin was recorded and back-filled, myself and several other volunteers worked to open a new unit, 517N 518E, in which we identified 34 PPMs but no zones. Of the positive post molds, the majority were small and likely related to temporary structures. However, one post mold, PPM 22, was very large and very deep. At the bottom of this post mold, volunteer Marcia discovered a nearly complete corner-notched point from the Middle Woodland period. We finished the week by testing and mapping the remainder of the post molds.

Week three began similarly to week one. Heavy rain the night before made work in the transect impossible, so we moved to the southern part of the field and opened more two-meter test units. Along with supervisor Meghan Marley and two volunteers, I worked in unit 485N 531E. After shovel-scraping and troweling down to subsoil, we identified one feature, which was assigned feature number 12-36, seven PPMs, and two zones. On the surface, feature 12-36 contained an anvilstone and several pottery sherds. As excavation of the feature progressed over the next several days, we uncovered more of what we determined was a crushed pottery vessel. The cord-marking on the pottery was indicative of a Green Creek style, allowing us to date the vessel to the early Late Woodland period. On Friday, I moved back north to unit 514N 521E to
supervise two volunteers, Karen and Audrey, in excavating a large Middle Woodland basin feature. Within this feature, identified as feature 12-34, we discovered a wide range of artifacts, including bone, pottery, mica, bladelets, and nutshell.

At the beginning of week four, Audrey, Karen, and I continued our excavation of feature 12-34. After concluding the excavation of the south half of the feature, we removed the north half. We recovered more of the same artifacts and also took a float sample before back-filling the feature. The amount of firecracked rock, burnt bone, and charcoal suggests that the basin was used as a waste receptacle for a nearby cooking pit. From Wednesday through the end of the week I helped open a new unit, 517N 521E. In this unit, we found four zones and 23 PPMs. For the remainder of the week, myself and several others worked to test these PPMs and zones. By the end of the week, it was determined that these four zones, all identified as features, were large post molds. One of these large post molds, feature 12-52, yielded several large sherds of cross-hatched pottery, including rim sherds.

The final week was spent in unit 517N 527E, excavating feature 12-57 alongside supervisor Michelle Neudeck. This originally appeared to be a medium-sized, typical basin feature, that when excavated yielded large amounts of fish and mammal bone, charcoal, flint flakes, a few broken arrowpoints, and a worn-out celt. There was also a thick ash layer in the soil. With two days left in the season, the decision was made to remove a one-meter-by-five-meter strip along the northern edge of the unit to reveal the other half of the feature. Surprisingly, the feature turned out much larger than anticipated, over two meters across. This feature, which was excavated over the remainder of the week and into the following week, produced a surprising range of artifacts, which included unusual types and amounts of bone, another celt, the remnants of a small pottery vessel, more arrowpoints, grinding stones, flint flakes, and nutshell.
Once in the lab, I embarked on my project for the season, which was focused on analyzing the artifacts of feature 12-57. The feature’s flat bottom suggests that it was originally used as a storage pit, yet the size and contents were highly unusual for this purpose. To begin, all the artifact bags associated with the feature had to be logged. Then, the contents of each bag had to be washed, labeled, weighed, inventoried, and rebagged. Because of the immense amount of work, Meghan Marley helped me with this task.

One of the most interesting and enjoyable tasks associated with this analysis was the reconstruction of the pottery vessel. Although I had a large amount of the rim and the body, I was unfortunately not able to fit the two parts together. However, what I was able to reconstruct revealed a beautiful tool-impressed pattern consistent with Late Prehistoric Mixter-style pottery. There was also a large amount of cooking residue on the inside of the rim, which was scraped off and saved for later analysis.

Although the pottery was interesting and eye-catching, one of the most important components of the feature in relation to our overall understanding of the site was the detailed subsistence record provided by the bone and nutshell. These remnants of meals offer an idea of what would have constituted a normal diet for the Late Prehistoric population. Everyday diet is an important factor in our understanding of a population and one that can be difficult to reconstruct.

After my analysis was complete, it seemed likely that this feature started life as a storage pit, possibly associated with a nearby house structure that was discovered in the same week as the feature. However, at some point it ceased to be used as a storage pit and thus instead was used as a midden for the deposit of broken tools, ash from cooking fires, and food residue.

I would like to thank the Cleveland Archaeological Society and the Cleveland Museum
of Natural History for such a fantastic internship experience, for putting their faith in me, and for allowing me the opportunity to expand my knowledge and skill set. I would also like to thank Dr. Brian Redmond for sharing his knowledge and passion for the site with me these eight weeks. I feel like this experience has been invaluable to me in many ways; not only was I able to immerse myself in an unfamiliar field of archaeology, but I met many fantastic individuals who were willing to share their knowledge and experience with me. This was a summer I know will contribute greatly to my future education and take me far in my archaeological career. Once again, thank you so much for the opportunity!