

He digs it OCC teacher leads excavation

**By Janice Brunson
staff writer**

The shard of blackened stone discovered atop a flat hill on a stream in Washburn County offers clues to the past.

After a successful day of hunting some 5,000 years ago, a Native American hunter returned to the hilltop and prepared his game by roasting it in a stone oven dug deep into the earth.

The shard, one of thousands recently uncovered at the site, is part of the ancient roasting oven, according to Rick Zurel, a teacher of anthropology at Schoolcraft College in Livonia and Oakland Community College in Auburn Hills.

Since May, Zurel, his students and others have been excavating the hilltop, searching for clues to ancient

man.

In addition to shards, they have also uncovered dozens of stone fragments from tools and spears, including a stone-age continually once flourished there during the Late Archaic era before man had discovered the bow and arrow or pottery.

"AT ONE TIME, everybody in the world lived this lifestyle," Zurel said of his hunter, adding the man might also have boiled game by heating a stone red hot and then dropping it into a bowl crafted from tree bark.

"There is always a sense of mystery in finding things that are very ancient, in being able to say that right on this very spot 5,000 years ago, someone made a tool. Seeing a fiberglass or plastic replica is not the same thing."

Zurel first located the spot in 1988,

during a drive in the countryside while earning a degree in anthropology from Oakland University in Rochester Hills. After graduate studies in Georgia, digs in Missouri and New Mexico, and a brief career in banking, he has returned to the hilltop located in the center of a hayfield.

To provide hands-on experience in an outdoor classroom of sorts, Schoolcraft College has leased the field for use by students and others who are members of the Schoolcraft Anthropological Society.

Since May, they have gathered artifacts plowed to the surface by modern farmers and mapped distribution of the found objects in order to pinpoint areas called "features."

Archeological features include areas once used to make or sharpen tools, cooking and habitation areas and roasting or garbage pits, clues to life in an ancient stone-age community.

"There are definitely houses, but they might be tricky to find," Zurel said, because all that remains to be found are "stains" from decayed poles that once served as house beams.



JIM JAGDFELD/staff photographer

Marking off the dig site using the grid system is Rick Zurel, a teacher of anthropology at Oakland Community College in Auburn Hills. Joining Zurel at the site are (from left) Cori Pilcher, Gary Blain of Clarkston Kristin Miller and Todd semblance to today's Indians.

Rita Brown, a Westland resident who for two years has been president of the Schoolcraft Anthropological Society, is most interested in cultural aspects of the dig might uncover.

"My favorite study is their life style, how they married, foods they ate, that sort of thing." A new mother, she is unable to spend much

time in the field.

"It's interesting," said Clody McGowen of Livonia, "to find something that old that's still around." On her first trip to the hilltop last month, she discovered a stone spear head.

Carl Wall, a retiree from Plymouth, has helped Zurel map the finds, plotting their location on the hill for clues to potentially promising future excavation.

The site was targeted for work partially due to its proximity to Schoolcraft College, Zurel said. While other sites are located closer, many have been built on.

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