

Field Notes

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Looking Forward to the 2026 Field Season at the Guard Archaeological Preserve by Larry Sandman, Editor

Every year about this time there's a heightened feeling of anticipation at ARI. The beginning of a new field season is always an exciting event, and this year feels extra special because we're returning home to the Guard Archaeological Preserve (GAP) and launching a multi-year investigation of the corridor that runs between the Fort-Ancient-period Guard site and the adjacent Hopewell-period Jennison Guard site.

This edition of *Field Notes* is devoted to articles about the 2026 field season and the people who lived here before Europeans arrived.

ARI is a community-minded organization, and our Director of Public Archaeology Rachel Sharkey starts this issue off with a description of the 2026 field season and an invitation for you and your family and friends to observe our 2026 dig, and if you'd like, to join in as a volunteer. (Page 3)

On page 4, Louis Herzner, our Archaeology Coordinator and Rachel's right-hand man in the field, addresses the history of archaeological research in the Guard and Jennison Guard sites. Louis has worked at both locations, and he brings a lot of knowledge to the project.

Lee Strange, associate editor of *Field Notes* and presenter of the Mid-western Archaeology Podcast, writes about the people who lived at the Guard (Fort Ancient) and Jennison Guard (Hopewell) sites (Pages 8-9).

On pages 10 and 11, Betsy Dulle, ARI Field Manager, explains how an excavation works. Betsy shows that there is a lot more to the science of archaeology than just digging for artifacts.

Speaking of "more to the science," Nathan Thomas and Alex Kleier of ARI's Land Stewardship team write on pages 12 and 13 about the native plants they will be adding and invasive plants they will be removing this year with the goal of returning the Guard Preserve to a more natural state—one that reflects the way the area looked to the people who lived here 800 and 2,000 years ago. Their article includes a fascinating pie chart that shows a comparison of the numbers of different types of seeds found in the earth at the Guard site. Some of the seeds are so small, a microscope is needed to identify them.

No discussion of the Guard Archaeological Preserve would be complete without a mention of Mike and Connie Sedler, who purchased the Guard site in 1989 to make sure it would be preserved for future generations. The Sedlers created ARI to preserve the site, to study it, and to make its story available to interested people all over the tri-state. Our editor sat down with Mike to talk about how the organization came to be (Page 14).

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Digging into the Past - Together

The 2026 ARI Field Season

By Rachel Sharkey, Director of Public Archaeology



The Archaeological Research Institute (ARI) is bringing archaeology back to its roots in 2026—with a renewed focus on public engagement, hands-on learning, and community connection at the Guard Archaeological Preserve (GAP).

Guided by its four core pillars—Explore, Research, Preserve, and Educate—ARI has dedicated each of the past several field seasons to one of these themes. In 2026, the focus turns to education, creating new opportunities for the public to experience archaeology, not just as observers, but as active participants.

This year, ARI is launching a multi-year project in the access corridor along the gravel road leading into GAP. The findings from this work will also guide future improvements to the corridor, helping ARI's Land Stewardship team create a space that is both visually appealing and respectful of sensitive cultural resources. In this way, the project supports not only research, but also long-term preservation and thoughtful site development.

First, however, archaeologists need to better understand what lies beneath the surface. Researchers hope the project will help determine whether this corridor was used by the people who lived at the Guard Site 800 to 1,000 years ago, or by earlier communities associated with the nearby Jennison Guard/Whitacre Site, which dates to roughly 2,000 years ago. Understanding how these groups used the landscape will provide valuable insight into the broader history of the area. Public engagement will be a central part of the

project. The larger excavation trenches will create more opportunities for the public to observe archaeology in action, giving community members a chance to watch the process unfold as soil is screened and artifacts are uncovered, and to gain a closer, real-time understanding of how discoveries are made. ARI also plans to host monthly site tours throughout the project, offering visitors a behind-the-scenes look at active archaeology and a chance to learn directly from researchers in the field about the Guard Site and the people who called it home.

For ARI, the 2026 field season represents more than just a new project—it is a return home. The Guard Site has long been central to the organization's mission, and this renewed focus brings fresh energy, new discoveries, and expanded opportunities for the public to engage with the past in a direct and memorable way.

Get Involved!

Field Season runs from June 1 Through October 31.

Do you want to get your hands dirty? Volunteer with us! Contact Casey at casey.cleary@exploreari.org or sign up on our website: <https://exploreari.org/volunteer/>

Just want to visit? Book an experience! https://exploreari.org/adult_experiences/adult-outdoor-experiences/

Archaeological Investigations of the Guard and Jennison Guard Sites

By Louis Herzner, Archaeology Coordinator &
VALOR Program Director

As ARI's Public Archaeology Director Rachel Sharkey explains in her page 3 article, "Digging into the Past," we will be excavating this summer along the corridor that connects the nearly 1,000-year-old Guard Site to the 2,000-year-old Jennison Guard Site to see if this corridor was utilized in either of these time periods. In science, as in technology, past research provides the foundation for present research. In this article, Archaeology Coordinator, Louis Herzner summarizes what we know about the two sites through previous excavations. – Ed.



The Jennison Guard Site (12D29S / 12D246)

Long before towns, roads, and farms lined the Ohio River, people were already living, working, and traveling through this landscape. One of the most fascinating places where we can see this early history is the Jennison Guard Site in Lawrenceburg, Indiana.

The site was first discovered in 1982 by Debbie and Bob Whitacre, who noticed artifacts scattered across the ground on a high terrace above the Ohio River. This wasn't just any hill—it was the perfect place to live. From here, people could stay safe from floods while still being close to water, fish, plants, and animals.

Archaeologists later learned that this site dates to around 282–392 CE, during a time known as the Middle Woodland period. The people who lived here were part of what archaeologists call the Hopewell culture, a group of communities connected by trade, shared ideas, and remarkable craftsmanship.

Unlike the large Hopewell ceremonial centers, famous for their monumental earthworks and mounds, the Jennison Guard Site tells a different story. This was not a place built for ceremonies or burials. Instead, it was a place where people lived their daily lives.

Excavations at the site, including work by the Whitacres and the University of Cincinnati in the 1980s and again between 2019 and 2022, uncovered evidence of a busy and active community. Archaeologists found finely decorated pieces of limestone-tempered pottery, which people used for cooking and storage. They also found fishhooks made of deer bones that indicated the people living at the site fished with hooks. Additionally, they were likely constructing fishing traps in the rivers and tributaries.

One of the most exciting discoveries at Jennison Guard is the presence of exotic materials—objects that came from

far away. These include thin sheets of mica (from the Carolinas), copper artifacts (from the Upper Peninsula of Michigan), and special types of stone called chert. Some of this chert came from sources over 100 miles away, like Flint Ridge in Ohio and Wyandotte chert from Corydon, Indiana.



University of Cincinnati excavation at the Jennison Guard site in 2020. The slough in the background was once a channel of the Great Miami River.

The people living here were not isolated. They were part of a large trade network that stretched across much of eastern North America. Items—and ideas—traveled long distances, connecting communities in ways we are still trying to understand today.

Among the most intriguing finds are carefully shaped mica cutouts, including one that appears to show the profile of a human head. This piece was found deep in a midden—a layer of soil made up of trash and discarded materials. Even though it was thrown away, it may have once had special meaning, or was it a mistake that didn't mirror the individual it was meant to be?



The mica human head effigy (left) in the ground and (right) in hand.

Archaeologists have also found charred plant remains, including sunflower and chenopodium (also known as goosefoot). These plants were not just gathered—they

were likely being grown. This suggests that the people at Jennison Guard practiced small-scale horticulture, an early form of farming.

So, what was life like here? Rather than living in a tightly packed village, people at Jennison Guard likely lived in a more spread-out community. They may have built homes that were used for part of the year, returning seasonally to take advantage of different resources.

However, some archaeologists, including Sue Ellen Kozarek, a graduate student at the University of Cincinnati in the 1980s, have suggested that the site may have been occupied year-round. The variety of tools, food remains, and trade items hints that people could have stayed here through all seasons, adapting to the changing environment. The Jennison Guard Site helps us understand a



Jennison Guard site artifacts cleaned and sorted by type, date, unit and depth at which they were found.

way of life that was flexible, connected, and deeply tied to the natural world. People here were farmers, hunters, gatherers, and traders all at once.

Today, the site is part of the Oxbow Nature Conservancy, and through partnerships with the Archaeological Research Institute, ongoing research, and public programs allow visitors to learn how archaeologists uncover the past and piece together stories from fragments left behind.

When you stand on that terrace overlooking an ancient channel of the Great Miami River, with the Ohio River just beyond, you are standing in the footprints of people who lived nearly 2,000 years ago—people who shaped their world in ways we are still discovering. Through future efforts and research, we will continue to discover their story.

The Guard Site (12D29)

Hundreds of years after the people of Jennison Guard lived along the Ohio River, a different kind of community took shape nearby. This place, known as the Guard Site, shows us how life changed over time—and how people adapted to new ways of living.

The Guard Site was first recorded in the 1930s by Glenn Black, one of Indiana's earliest professional archaeologists. During his survey of Dearborn and Ohio Counties in Indiana, he identified the site as a Fort Ancient Site by the shell-tempered ceramics with curvilinear incised pottery rim sherds, as well as triangle-shaped flaked stone tools, and added it to the growing record of archaeological sites in the region.

The first excavations at the Guard Site began in the 1970s, when teams from museums and universities started exploring the area to learn more about its past. At a time when many archaeological sites in the region were being damaged or lost to development, an important step was taken to protect this one. In 1986, the Sedler family purchased the land, helping ensure that the site would be preserved for future study.

The Sedlers partnered with Dr. Wes Cowan of the Cincinnati Museum Center to carry out excavations and better understand the history of the site. Their work helped uncover important clues about how people once lived there and why the site mattered.

In 1990, a new federal law called the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) changed how archaeologists work, especially when it comes to respecting Native American burials and cultural items. This law created new responsibilities and encouraged closer collaboration with Native American communities.

Following these changes, Dr. Rob Cook of Ohio State University began leading a more research-focused approach at the Guard Site. Archaeologists worked in detail, asking new questions, recording their findings in greater detail, and better understanding the lives of the people who once called this place home.

Work continued for many years, building a strong foundation of knowledge about the site. In 2019, a new chapter began with the creation of the Archaeological Research Institute. Since then, ARI has continued research and preservation efforts at the Guard Site, while also opening the door for students and visitors to experience archaeology firsthand.

The research conducted at the site has shown that the

Guard Site dates to around 1030–1275 CE and has been immaculately preserved by the silts and soils brought in by the many floods through time. This places the Guard site in a time when many Native American communities were becoming more settled and organized. Life was changing, and the Guard Site helps us see how.

Unlike the spread-out Hopewell settlements, typified by the Jennison Guard Site, this was a village. People here lived closer together, with more houses arranged in a planned circular/half-circular layout. These homes/structures were built around shared spaces where people gathered, worked, and supported one another. This kind of settlement tells us something important: people were staying in one place for longer periods of time.

One of the biggest reasons for this shift was agriculture. By this time, communities in the Ohio River Valley were cultivating crops such as maize (corn), beans, and squash—often called the “Three Sisters.” These crops provided a reliable food source, allowing families to settle down instead of moving frequently.



This diorama at ARI's home base in Lawrenceburg depicts life in a Fort Ancient period village much like the Guard site, with homes arranged around a central plaza and enclosed by a wooden palisade.

At the Guard Site, archaeologists have found evidence that supports this idea. What was this evidence? Archaeologists have found corn kernels and cobs that were preserved by carbonization from fire. This suggests planning, organization, and a deeper connection to the land.

Daily life in the village would have been busy. People farmed, cooked, made tools, built homes, and cared for their families. They also likely continued to hunt and gather wild resources, but farming played a much larger role than it had in earlier times.

The layout of the Guard Site reflects this more structured way of life. Instead of scattered activity areas, the site shows signs of a community that was designed and maintained over time.

While long-distance trade may still have occurred, it was probably less central to daily life than it was for the Hopewell communities. Instead, the focus shifted toward local resources and community stability.

This doesn't mean life was simpler—just different. People at the Guard Site were part of a changing world, one that would eventually lead to the rise of large Mississippian towns and complex societies across the Midwest and Southeast.

Today, the Guard Site is preserved and studied by the Archaeological Research Institute (ARI). It serves as both a research location and a place where visitors can learn about archaeology firsthand.

Through ARI's field schools and public programs, students and visitors can experience what it's like to uncover the past—carefully digging, recording, and interpreting what they find.



ARI excavations at the Jennison Guard site revealed that the site was occupied early in the Fort Ancient time period between 800 and 1000 years ago.

When you visit the Guard Site, you're not just looking at an old village. You're seeing a snapshot of a major turning point in human history—the shift from mobile lifeways to settled communities.

It's a story of innovation, adaptation, and resilience. Can you imagine the American Midwest without corn today? As you are enjoying some good grilled Burwinkle's Honeybun Sweet Corn from the grill at your family cookout, thank the people who first figured out how to grow fields of corn in the area.

And like Jennison Guard, it's a story that is still being uncovered—one discovery at a time.

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Upcoming on the Midwestern Archaeology Podcast...

Tune in to the next episode of the Midwestern Archaeology Podcast. Dr. Robert Cook of the Ohio State University sat down with us to discuss the Early Fort Ancient period and the fascinating communities that inhabited the Middle Ohio River Valley. We trace the cultural threads that connect Fort Ancient people to both the earlier Hopewell traditions and the powerful Mississippian societies. Learn about this and much more on the latest episode of MAP.



2,000 Years Ago.... Hopewell in the Ohio Valley

By Lee Strange, Associate Editor



In 2023, the Mound City Group in Chillicothe, Ohio was one of eight “Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks” that were, collectively, designated as the nation’s 25th UNESCO World Heritage site.

For many, the name Hopewell brings to mind grassy mounds, intricate artifacts, and mysterious symbols. But who were the Hopewell? The answer is more complex—and more surprising—than most people expect.

The Ohio Hopewell are known for creating a far-reaching religious and cultural movement that spread across much of Eastern North America. They are perhaps most famous for the enormous geometric earthworks that still shape the landscape of Central and Southern Ohio. These monumental constructions formed a sacred landscape that seems to have drawn people from across the region, making Ohio a ceremonial hub for centuries.



The razor-sharp blades in the top two rows are flaked from Ohio Flint Ridge chert cores such as those in the bottom row. They are colorful and uniquely Hopewell.

What makes the Hopewell especially fascinating is how they defy many assumptions archaeologists once held about societies that predate large-scale agriculture. It’s important to note, though, that “Hopewell” is an archaeological term, not the name of a single tribe or ethnic group. Hopewell-style artifacts—defined by distinctive shapes, materials, and symbolic motifs—have been found from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico. It would be inaccurate to imagine all of them being produced by one unified people. While Ohio was the heart of the movement,

the broader Hopewell world included many different communities connected through exchange, shared ideas, and participation in long-distance networks.

In Ohio, Hopewell builders produced some of the most impressive earthworks in North America. Building on earlier Adena mound-building traditions, they constructed enormous geometric complexes on a scale never seen before. One of the most striking examples, the Great Circle Earthworks in Newark, Ohio measures about 1,200 feet across and encloses more than 30 acres. These structures weren’t random; their precise alignments with the movements of the sun and moon reveal a sophisticated understanding of astronomy and geometry, translated directly into the landscape.

When they weren’t gathering for ceremonies at these monumental sites, Ohio Hopewell groups seem to have lived in small, scattered settlements—sometimes described as seasonal hamlets or hovels. During the colder months, these smaller communities allowed people to remain mobile while hunting and foraging.

Although maize had reached the Midwest by the Hopewell era, it wasn’t yet a dietary staple. Instead, Hopewell groups relied heavily on the Eastern Agricultural Complex, a group of native domesticated plants that included squash, sunflower, and knotweed. These crops, combined with hunting, gathering, and fishing, supported their communities for centuries.

Earthwork construction declines sharply after about 400 CE, but the idea that the Hopewell “disappeared” is inaccurate. Their traditions, knowledge, and descendant communities continued to evolve, shaping later cultures of the Eastern Woodlands.

Notable Hopewell Sites:

Great Circle Earthworks • Octagon Earthworks • Mound City • Hopewell Mound Group • Miami Fort • Fort Ancient

800-1,000 Years Ago The Fort Ancient Period in the Ohio Valley

By Lee Strange, Associate Editor



The Guard Site with locations of Fort Ancient structures laid out with flagging tape. Notice the semi-circular arrangement of the village.

Like the Hopewell, many people are familiar with the name Fort Ancient, though the term itself is often misunderstood. Rather than referring to a single fort or a specific tribe, it describes a cultural tradition that thrived in the Ohio Valley from roughly 1000 to 1650 CE.

The Fort Ancient tradition is significant because it emerged during a period of major cultural and social change in Eastern North America. Along with their Mississippian neighbors, Fort Ancient communities were among the first in the region to build their lives around maize agriculture.

To us—modern-day grocery shoppers spoiled for choice—the difference between hunting for food and growing it might not seem particularly dramatic. But for archaeologists, these transition periods are some of the clearest windows into sweeping changes in belief systems, social organization, and daily life. Across the world, the shift from hunting and gathering to farming stands out as a pivotal turning point in human history.

Geography shaped Fort Ancient life in important ways. Their villages were spread across what is now Ohio, Indiana, and Kentucky, especially along the fertile floodplains of the Middle Ohio River Valley. Like many early farming societies, they developed as a river-oriented culture, situating their communities near the Ohio River and the Little and Great Miami rivers to support their maize fields. From what is today the Greater Cincinnati area, Ft. Ancient-style villages expanded over time to encompass large swaths of the Lower Midwest.

Fort Ancient sites share numerous features with Mississippian sites: shell-tempered pottery, circular settlement layouts, and structures built by digging trenches to set walls in place. Over time, their society appears to have become more hierarchical, with evidence of emerging leaders or chief-like

roles. Many villages included wooden palisades for protection that might denote a growing concern with security over time and a tall central pole that served as the physical and ceremonial heart of the community.

The end of the Fort Ancient period begins around the time of European contact, circa 1650. The effects that European diseases had on the sedentary, corn-growing people of the Ohio River Basin was devastating, and by the time European settlers arrived en masse in the latter half of the 18th century the land was severely depopulated from what it once was.



Hoes, made from drilled fresh-water mollusk shells, often found on Fort Ancient Period sites, are indicative of the importance of farming at that time.

There are many Native American tribes that have close ties to the Fort Ancient tradition, among them: the Shawnee, the Peoria, and the Kickapoo.

Notable sites:

Guard Archaeological Preserve • Madisonville • Turpin • Stateline • Sunwatch

What is an Archaeological Dig?

A Discussion of the Steps and Procedures

By Betsy Dulle, ARI Field Manager



An archaeological dig, formally called an excavation, is the careful process of uncovering and documenting physical remains from past human activity. Archaeologists conduct excavations to learn how people lived and interacted with their environment. Contrary to pop culture's portrayal of archaeology, real archaeological digs are slow, systematic processes designed to gain and preserve information rather than to find treasure.

Before an excavation begins, archaeologists complete background research and survey the site. This stage is known as site assessment. Researchers review historical records, maps, and previous studies to understand the area's potential significance. They may also conduct a pedestrian survey, which is an organized walkover of a landscape to identify artifacts or features on the ground's surface. In some cases, archaeologists use remote sensing tools such as ground-penetrating radar, which sends radar signals into the soil to detect buried features without disturbing the ground.



Aaron Comstock, assistant professor of anthropology at the University of Louisville, using ground-penetrating radar to see what lies below the surface at a mound site in Dearborn County, Indiana

Once archaeologists determine that a site may contain important cultural material, they often begin with a series of shovel test pits (STPs). STPs are small, systematically spaced holes dug across the site to sample the soil and detect buried artifacts or features. Each pit is typically uniform in size, and the soil removed is sifted through a screen to recover even the smallest artifacts. The precise location of each STP is recorded, which allows archaeologists to identify patterns in artifact distribution across the landscape. By analyzing these patterns, researchers can pinpoint areas of concentrated activity. This helps decide where archaeologists will place their excavation units.

Excavation then begins layer by layer within a unit, a carefully measured square or rectangular section of the site designated for systematic digging. Archaeologists



Shovel test pits, laid out in a grid, help archaeologists determine where specific activities occurred.

remove soil slowly, using hand tools such as trowels, brushes, and small shovels. They excavate in measured layers (typically 10 centimeters at a time) and analyze the stratigraphy, the soil layers that build over time, and the artifacts found within them. In archaeology, each layer represents a different period of activity. By carefully documenting these layers and artifacts, archaeologists can establish a timeline of human use at the site.

As soil is removed, archaeologists screen it through a sifter to recover small artifacts such as metal nails, pottery sherds, or stone flakes. An artifact is any portable object made or modified by humans, including tools, pottery, and ornaments. Larger, non-portable remains, such as postholes or building foundations, are called features. Features provide important information about how people organized and used space.



ARI Archaeologist excavating a feature within a unit at our boarding house site

Documentation is one of the most critical parts of excavation. Archaeologists photograph, map, and record everything they uncover before removing it. Once an item is removed from the ground or its original context, the exact position and layer where it was found is permanently altered. Context refers to the relationship between an artifact and its surrounding environment, including soil layers and nearby objects.

Maintaining accurate records allows archaeologists to piece together the puzzle and get a better idea of who these people were and how they lived.



The author and Volunteer Tim screening for small artifacts that could otherwise go unnoticed in the dirt.

After fieldwork ends, archaeologists move to the laboratory stage. They clean, catalog, and analyze artifacts to determine their age, materials, and possible uses. Methods such as radiocarbon dating, a scientific technique used to estimate the age of organic materials, can help establish when a site was occupied. Researchers then interpret the findings and often publish their results to contribute to broader knowledge of past societies.



Volunteers Vicki and Kay identifying and organizing artifacts and other materials that were separated from the soil through a filtering process known as "flotation."

In essence, an archaeological dig is not just about uncovering objects or obtaining materials. It is about carefully recovering information preserved in the ground. Through systematic excavation, detailed documentation, and scientific analysis, archaeologists transform buried remains into stories about human history.

What's Growing at GAP? Then & Now

By Nathan Thomas & Alex Kleier

This year, if you visit the Guard Archaeological Preserve (GAP) near Lawrenceburg, Indiana, you'll see quite a few things growing that you would have encountered almost a thousand years ago at the Fort Ancient village we now steward. ARI's mission to preserve and interpret the remains of the past is taking on a whole new life, thanks to some diligent research, some new seed sources, and a lot of good old-fashioned dirt.

The next time you come to GAP, try to imagine your surroundings without anything modern. You might be surprised to find that the living landscape you encounter there today is not terribly far removed from what you would have experienced outside the palisade that protected the circular Fort Ancient village in 1100 CE.

Fort Ancient people would not have had to tussle with aggressive honeysuckle. And they didn't have to fight against the invasive teasel seeds brought in by passing trains.

But, the Guard village's residents absolutely would have seen beans, corn, grapevines, pokeweed, pumpkins, sunflowers, and locust trees, just as we do today.



Amur Honeysuckle, with its pretty and fragrant flowers, was imported from Asia to control erosion and provide habitat and food for wildlife. Unfortunately it has proven to be far too aggressive; it spreads too quickly and crowds out native plants. Efforts are now underway at the GAP to control the spread of Amur Honeysuckle and other invasive plants.

How are we able to say this with certainty? Analysis of soil samples from the 2012-13 and 2016-17 investigations at GAP provided the surviving seeds of dozens of recognizable plant species; all of those listed above and many more. Sifted from soil samples by careful flotation in water and straining through repeated sieves, these small seeds provide invaluable

evidence of an ancient ecosystem. Among other species identifiable from the Fort Ancient village at GAP were amaranth, bedstraw, cattail, copperleaf, goosefoot, nightshade, pawpaw, sumac, and tobacco.



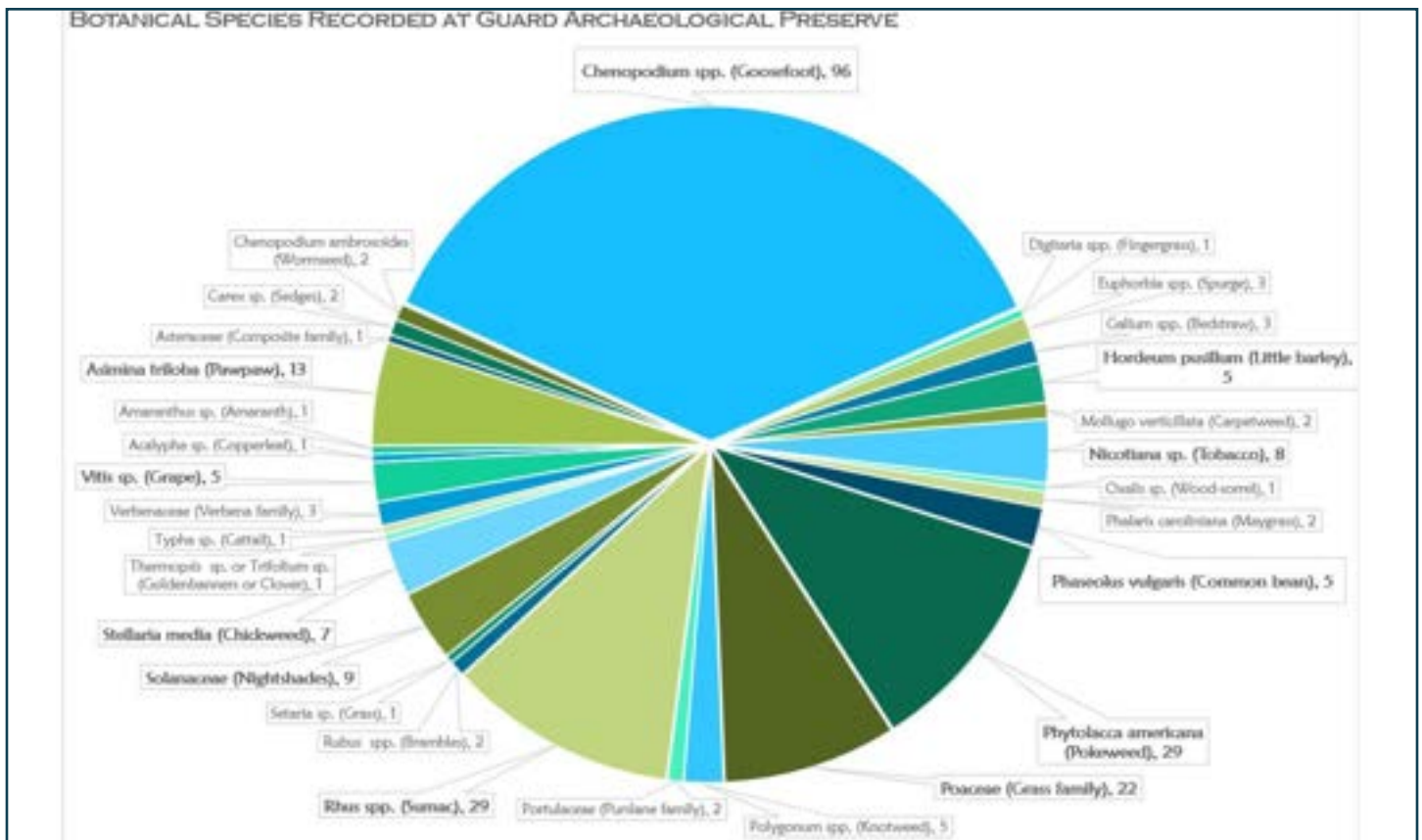
The carbonized pawpaw seed in the top photo was discovered in an ancient trash pit at the Guard site, evidence that pawpaws were a part of the Fort Ancient people's diet. Given the abundance of pawpaw trees in the area today, could the fruit in the bottom photo, come from trees that fed the earlier inhabitants of the Ohio valley?

Creating a Botanical Database

ARI's Land Stewardship team is currently putting together a comparative database of the botanical information for Fort Ancient sites in Dearborn County and the wider Tri-State area.

(See the pie chart on the next page that shows the number of seeds of each plant type found in the Guard site excavations.)

We are using the inventories of these ancient seeds to inform our reconstructed gardens.



This year's plantings will be only plants identifiable from the archaeological record at the GAP and Ft. Ancient Sites in the direct vicinity. In addition to the heirloom varieties of corn, beans, squash, and sunflower for the Three Sisters' Gardens, look forward to archaeologically verified plantings of nodding wild onions, wild strawberries, and even an Eastern prickly pear or two. In addition to the gardens, our native pollinator prairie areas will be receiving special plant-

ings of pollinators identified from Ft. Ancient archaeological sites. Among our incoming favorites will be New England aster, tall verberna, and Black-eyed Susan. With our efforts this year, next spring and summer, the colors of the prairie and corn will be closer than ever to what you would have seen so many hundreds of years ago. We look forward to making our living projects at the Guard Archaeological Preserve even more of a comprehensive and immersive experience in the coming year.



(Left) A Miami Tan Pumpkin. This heirloom squash is a traditional product of the Myaamia or Miami people, one of the tribal descendants of the Guard Village. (Center) This Central Indiana sunflower's color, the result of a mutation, shows the diversity possible in a domesticated crop. (Right) A bean blossom from the reconstructed ancient garden at Strawtown Koteewi Park, Noblesville, Indiana.

A Conversation with Mike Sedler

Co-founder of the Archaeological Research Institute

By Larry Sandman, Field Notes Editor

Mike Sedler and his wife, Connie, created the Archaeological Research Institute in 2019 dedicated to archaeology education, site preservation, and public engagement in the tri-state region. I sat down with Mike to talk about how his boyhood interest in "collecting arrowheads" led to the formation of ARI. – L.S.

Field Notes (FN): When did you become interested in early Native American culture?

Mike Sedler (MS): I found my first arrowhead when I was eight and it just went from there.

FN: At what point did your interest take you beyond just collecting artifacts to becoming actively involved in archaeology?

MS: I collected where I lived at home until I got S.F. Starr's book, *The Archaeology of Hamilton County, Ohio*, and I found a lot of sites from there, such as the Turpin site and Mt. Nebo. Once I became familiar with the area, I began meeting other people through surface hunting. A couple of those guys were diggers (which was not controversial at the time). I was digging garbage pits at a site near Ross, Ohio, when Dr. Wes Cowan of the Cincinnati Museum of Natural History called. I told him we were digging at a site near Ross that had never been recorded. Wes wanted to see the site, so we invited him out and I showed him how I used a probe to locate garbage pits. Wes was working on an archaeological survey of the Great Miami River valley, so we went with him up the Miami, hitting all the Fort Ancient sites. That's how I met Wes, and got into archaeology.

FN: There's a lot more to archaeology than just digging in the ground and seeing what you find. Where did you learn how to do a proper, scientific excavation?

MS: I did a lot with Wes over the years. I would use a probe to locate pits, then help with the excavations.

FN: When you learned that the Guard site was for sale, what made you and Connie decide to buy it?

MS: We knew it was a Fort Ancient site, and we wanted to excavate it and make sure it was preserved.

FN: To your knowledge, has the Guard site ever been excavated deeper than the Fort Ancient level to see if there is evidence of earlier use?

MS: We never purposely dug looking for older arti-



facts. I know that the back side of the house I dug there was up against a mound. And I found (2,000-year-old) Hopewell stuff along the edge of the mound. Elsewhere, every once in awhile I found a Hopewell point, but it was probably dug up by Fort Ancient people. We also found Hopewell material while we were looking for the stockade fence that surrounded the Fort Ancient village.

FN: While our focus this summer is on the two time periods represented by the Guard site and the Jen-nison Guard site, there is also evidence of human presence some 3,000+ years ago just a few hundred yards northwest of Guard. What was it about this area that attracted so many people over time?

MS: Rivers. The Whitewater and the Miami were like expressways. And the people fished. And in the Oxbow, look at all the birds. You couldn't find a better place to be.

FN: Do you think there are ancient sites still to be discovered in the tri-state area?

MS: There are many, many sites, just like the one we had up near Ross. Nobody knew it was there. You can imagine—places that got flooded—the old site could be four feet down.

FN: How did you and Connie come to form ARI?

MS: For several summers, Rob (Dr. Robert Cook) held his Ohio State University archaeological field schools at Guard, but when the University stopped funding the excavations here, we decided to create a non-profit organization to engage the public and continue the work. Rob was instrumental in helping us get that done.

Latest Happenings at ARI!

By Lillie Daniel

As the days get longer and field season draws near, ARI is shaking off the winter chill and stepping into one of our most exciting seasons yet. Across the organization, teams are researching, building, experimenting, teaching, and growing—quite literally. From conferences and workshops to Lego Leagues and brush clearing, spring has brought a burst of energy and creativity to every corner of ARI.



Team Bot Builders, participating in the FIRST Lego League Unearthed challenge, showcased their looting detection device and put it to the test with Gus, our GIS Specialist.



Families joined us for a special reading of “Rex Goes to Field School,” where young archaeologists-in-training got to meet author Constance Sedler and celebrate everyone’s favorite Barkeologist.



Teams raced through an Indiana Jones–style archaeological escape room, solving puzzles and decoding symbols to protect a powerful lost relic. A fast-paced, hands-on adventure from start to finish.



The team traveled to Carter Caves to share their research ranging from salt-pan experiments, to electrolysis, to medieval climate change, at the 43rd Annual Kentucky Heritage Conference.



Our volunteers and Land Stewardship crew have been putting in serious work at Hidden Valley Lake, clearing brush and removing invasive species to help restore the health of the landscape.



Archaeological Research Institute

Calendar of Events

May

16th.....Lawrenceburg Historical Preservation 101 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM
23rd.....Hands in the Land: Invasive Plant ID & Foraging Hike 10:00 AM - 1:00 PM
26th.....ARI CLOSED for Memorial Day
27th.....First Day of Field School
29th.....Member & Donor Preview Party 5:00 PM - 8:00 PM



June

2nd.....Happy Hour History: Speaker Series- Dr. Bill Kennedy 5:30 PM - 8:00 PM
6th.....Adventure Trek 5K 8:00 AM - 10:00 AM; Adventure Trek & Festival 10:00 AM - 2:00 PM
9-12th.....Exploring History: High School Camp 10:00 AM - 3:00 PM
12th.....Guard Site Tour 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM
13th.....Artifact, Rock, & Fossil Identification Day 10:00 AM - 2:00 PM
13th.....Hands on History: Natural Dye Making 10:00 AM - 2:00 PM
16-19th.....Exploring History: Ages 9-12 Camp 10:00 AM - 3:00 PM
17th.....Oxbow & ARI Hike 4:30 PM - 6:00 PM
19th.....Wildcrafted: Herbal Medicine Workshop with ARI Outfitters
20th.....Summer Solstice Celebration 4:00 PM - 8:00 PM
27th.....Hands-On History: Patterns of the Past 1:00 PM - 4:00 PM

July

4th.....ARI CLOSED for 4th of July
7th.....First Day of University of Cincinnati Field School
7th.....Happy Hour History: Speaker Series- JeMiah Israel 5:30 PM - 8:00 PM
7-10th....Exploring History: Ages 5-8 AM Session: 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM/ PM Session 1:00 PM - 4:00 PM
11th.....Artifact, Rock, & Fossil Identification Day 10:00 AM - 2:00 PM
11th.....Hands on History: Flint Knapping 10:00 AM - 2:00 PM
15th.....Oxbow/ARI Hike 4:30 PM - 6:00 PM
17th.....Wildcrafted: Paint Making with Botanicals 5:30 PM - 7:00 PM
18th.....Hands on History: America is 250! 10:00 PM - 12:00 PM
25th.....Hands in the Land: Native Tea & Flower Bar 1:00 PM - 4:00 PM



Scan to learn more
& sign up TODAY!

Kickoff to Summer Festival

Save the Date: Saturday, June 6, 2026

Join the Archaeological Research Institute for our Adventure Trek and 5K.

Run, walk, and celebrate summer's arrival in Lawrenceburg, IN.

