

JULY EXCAVATIONS AT FORT OSAGE

by Mary Conrad

Presently a small museum sits nearby to the south of the reconstructed Ft. Osage, located on the Missouri River northeast of Independence, Missouri. Jackson County Parks and Recreation plans to replace this museum with a new education center, which will be placed between the present museum and the reconstructed fort. This education center will extend out over the bluff edge toward the river.

In preparation for the beginning of construction in early 2003, Jackson County Parks hired Jim Feagins, an archaeologist, to survey and test the proposed location of the education center. This location is within sight of 23JA266, the Sibley blufftop site. Feagins and John K. Peterson, an archaeologist with Jackson County Parks, worked together to implement a research plan.

Archaeological activities extended over a two and a half week period--on Monday through Wednesday of July 1st through the 3rd, on Monday through Friday of July 8th through the 12th, and on Monday and Tuesday of July 15th and 16th. On the last two days of the Ft. Osage dig, some KCASers had moved to the Oxford School site to begin a week of excavations.

Feagins recruited a number of KCAS volunteers, so that more units could be dug in the time allotted for the excavation. The excavation team consisted of: Mary Conrad, Jim Feagins, Jerry Finke, Dave Faulk, Bill Ghiselli, Steve Kaub, Dick Keck, Kara Kelly, Gail Lundeen, Mark McGinnis, Ron Nelson, Eric Niewoehner, John Peterson, Bill Pfantz, Mary Rack, Randy Ritchie, Carl Slusser, Linda Slusser, Rodney Staab, Ian Thompson, Bert Wetherill, and Josh Wetherill.

Before excavations began, Jackson County maintenance workers had cleared brush from the slope extending down the bluff and they had sprayed for mosquitoes.

Bucket auger tests showed a pattern of extreme variability. Most tests indicated the soil is quite disturbed in the area of the proposed education center on the blufftop except in the northwestern portion.

In addition to the auger tests, a number of squares were excavated. Most diggers found evidences of recent picnicing in the first inches just below the grass. In the squares, the volunteers also ran into many pockets of shale and sand. This confirmed the presence of the incredibly disturbed soil from fill.

In one area, two former trenches were located. One was empty, and the other contained a two-inch black pipe.

During the excavations, a trench parallel to and near the bluff edge was dug with a backhoe. This is where Feagins suspected the course of a gully. As with the square profiles, the archaeologists could see fill, a buried plowzone, and subsoil. A deep gully which had been filled with shale and limestone was discovered.

All excavated units sloped toward the gully. While some of these units contained few artifacts, others showed a variety of activities. A number of crown caps appeared many inches below the ground surface. This type of bottle cap was patented in 1892 and was common on beer and pop bottles by the late 1920s.

The squares to the northwest revealed undisturbed prehistoric artifacts below the old plowzone, which had both early historical and prehistoric items jumbled together. A Kansas Hopewell component was represented by both ceramic and lithic fragments.

The Kansas City Hopewell artifacts may have been left by the same group of people who also resided on the nearby Sibley site, (23JA73), which Feagins had tested in 1983.

It is unusual to find Kansas City Hopewell habitation sites on blufftops. When Feagins recorded the Sibley blufftop site in 1983, the modern Ft. Osage knap-ins had not yet begun. Thus the chert fragments found in 1983 had not yet been mixed with modern knapped debitage as may have occurred elsewhere on the site.

In addition to items representing picnicing activity located close to the surface, historical artifacts found in the plowzone included a fractured French gun flint; pieces of window and container glass; small chunks of brick and mortar; fragments of redware, whiteware and decorated ware; bullets; square nails; kaolin pipe fragments; and metal buttons.

On the last day while Feagins was drawing profiles, he located a metal military button with the word "rifle" written inside the loop of a bugle. Two rows forming 15 stars were arched above the bugle. This button, issued in 1814 to 1815, was from the U. S. Army attachment stationed at the fort.

The findings of this recent excavation, along with the artifacts from a number of other Ft. Osage archaeological projects, will help tell a detailed story of the site. Visitors will be able to read and see exhibits about the prehistory and history of the bluff site when the new education center opens, probably in June of 2004.

Mary Conrad wishes to thank Jim Feagins for commenting on the draft of this article.

J. METT SHIPPEE AWARD

Usually KCAS presents the J. Mett Shippee Award in May. However, due to the absence of the recipient, the award this year's was not given until June.

Bill Pfantz, the secretary of KCAS, was the recipient in June. Bill, a retired meat cutter, has volunteered at many archaeological digs in the area, including at Line Creek, Fort Osage and the Vaile Mansion.

As usual, Joan Wagner chaired the J. Mett Shippee Award Committee.

ELECTION OF KCAS OFFICERS

At the June 2002 KCAS meeting, the following officers were elected: Bert Wetherill as president, Jeanne McGuire as first vice president, Mary Conrad as second vice president, Joe Falk as third vice president, Bill Pfantz as secretary, Florence Peaslee and Jeanette Wotton as co-treasurers, and Ron Nelson as a trustee. Bud Kroencke's term as trustee will end June 2003. Jim Roberts's term will end in June 2004.

Mary Conrad chaired the nominating committee.

OBITUARY: LEONARD BLAKE

Dr. Leonard Blake of the St. Louis area has been an active MAS member for over 50 years. He died on August 19, 2002, after battling pneumonia.

Blake's speciality in archaeology was plants. His work continues to be cited not only in Missouri publications, but also in works published throughout the United States.

News item submitted by Marilyn Finke.

REMINDER OF KCAS PICNIC

ANOTHER REMINDER: PLEASE JOIN KCAS AT THE KCAS PICNIC. This year the picnic is in Independence at the Vaile historic home on September 29th at 1:00.