

Higher education

Digging into Ohio's past: State history funding helps archaeological research at area universities

By Marilyn Miller

Beacon Journal staff writer

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Researchers at The University of Akron and Kent State University are getting funding to dig deeper into Ohio's ancient history.

The universities received two of the seven annual grants distributed this month from the Ohio History Connection, formerly the Ohio Historical Society.

Kent State University's Department of Anthropology received a \$2,500 grant to conduct an archaeological survey of the Berlin Lake Reservoir. Berlin Lake lies at the junction of Stark, Portage and Mahoning counties.

"We know there are artifacts there because some of the sites are quite old, so the possibility of finding sites that go all the way back to the Stone Age seems pretty high," Kent State anthropology professor Metin Eren said.

"We're going to do the expedition of all 80 miles of the lake's shoreline to document every archeological site we find, but since nothing has been done systematically we don't know what we will find and that's exciting."

The codirector of the project, Michelle Bebber, a KSU graduate student, said the project will also focus on student involvement.

"It will give them field experience, learning real survey techniques and how to process the findings back in the lab," she said. "Conservation is also a key part. We want to identify at-risk areas...to reveal those cultural resources most in danger of being permanently lost through the things that exposed them in the first place: flooding, erosion, freeze — that or modern human activity."

A survey with legs

The grant will help cover student stipends, materials and supplies and travel costs. The survey will begin in August and continue through the fall.

Review panelists said they were impressed that the grant request was small, "given the expected impact of the project."

Eren said other than some basic field equipment, the only equipment needed are legs to do the hiking.

"Once we identify the sites we can apply for more funding to get more specialized equipment to excavate and analyze the sites," he said.

'Keen on these sites'

The University of Akron's Department of Archaeology and Classical Studies received a grant for \$12,500 to analyze a range of objects found in Ohio from American Indian cultures, including copper, period ceramic and stone artifacts.

"A lot of sites existed for thousands of years but early Ohio settlers came and they plowed the land under," said Kevin Kern, associate professor of history at UA. "They didn't care about archaeology, they just wanted to plow their corn. So the sites that do exist in some form are more precious,

especially the Hopewell (North American Indian) culture sites, because they show there was a great deal of sophistication and they had a lot of astronomical knowledge. I'm keen on these sites being preserved, studied and recognized on a larger level."

Michael Shott, a professor of anthropology and classical studies, will oversee the project, which will focus on artifacts collected from Ft. Ancient in the Cincinnati area and the Newark Earthworks, east of Columbus.

"We'll be concentrating on two sites, but not on the sites themselves, but on the material that the Ohio History Connection curates from those sites. It's a collections grant," said Shott.

Shott said it's a continuation of an earlier study by a former student, Eric Olson, who will help collect data.

The analysis and interpretation is expected to determine the size of the Native Americans' territories and social networks between different populations and whether they overlap or were exclusive.

The study should take about a year. The history fund support will cover a portion of the project's personnel and travel costs.

The Ohio History Fund grants help support local history projects in communities throughout Ohio and are funded entirely through Ohio taxpayers' voluntary contributions on their state tax returns.

For more information on programs and events, visit ohiohistory.org.

Marilyn Miller can be reached at 330-996-3098

or mmiller@thebeaconjournal.com