

Museum developing two new exhibits

By VINCE H. ENRIQUEZ
News-Press/Gazette Staff Writer

Floor and will be 14 feet long, "one of the longest in the museum."

Staff members of the St. Joseph Museum have begun work on two new exhibits — one that will showcase the history of the Plains Indian, the other to give visitors an idea what an archaeological dig site looks like.

Bonnie Watkins, curator of collections, says the dig exhibit will give the layman the perspective of an archeologist as he or she works on a dig site. The exhibit will be on the second

Working in conjunction with Mike Fisher, president of both the Missouri and St. Joseph archaeological societies, Watkins will strive to give the dig a realistic look. Dirt will be applied to foam rubber attached to the walls and ground of the dig site.

"Not many people have seen one in progress," she said. "It will be as close as we can make it."

Noting the purpose of the dig exhibit, Richard A. Nolf, museum

director, said, "There are several ways of looking at exhibits: You can have a display which doesn't say much to the lay person," but with an archaeological dig "one understands more of the objectives of an archeologist... It's more of a teaching exhibit. It's our way to teach subtly so the person is learning, but doesn't know he's learning."

The dig exhibit will be divided into historic periods, noted Watkins. Each period will be indicated by a layer of "rock," which will change color slightly to reflect the changes in soil condition caused by climate changes over thousands of years.

Beginning in 12,000 B.C. with the paleolithic or old stone period, the exhibit will move through the archaic, woodland, Mississippian and the proto-historic period, so called because it was around this time, 1725, when the first white settlers came in contact with the Plain Indians and left a written record of them.

Several of those tribes (the Ioways, Kickapoo and Sacfox, among them) moved into the area from their lands east of the Mississippi River fleeing the white settlers. When Platte, Buchanan, Andrew, Nodaway, Holt and Atchison counties became part of Missouri in 1837 as a result of the Platte Purchase, the Indian

tribes in the area moved on to Kansas and Oklahoma.

The second exhibit, or Historical Indian exhibit, will pick up the history of those tribes as indicated in the records dating from 1725. This time period chosen as a link between both exhibits, which are tentatively scheduled to be ready by August of 1988, when St. Joseph will host the annual Oregon-California Trails Association meeting.

4-2-78-47

Krug Park may have been settled anciently

Recently discovered artifacts thought to be 2,000 years old

6-5-97

By JESS DeHAVEN
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St. Joseph News-Press

Parks and Recreation Director Bill McKinney always thought there was something to the stories that American Indians once lived in the hills of Krug Park, and now he may have the proof.

About 40 American Indian artifacts, including weapons, tools, beads and pottery fragments, all believed to be more than 2,000 years old, have been found in the park during the past month. The first pieces were found May 5, but officials kept the discovery under wraps until they could verify the items' authenticity and age, Mr. McKinney said.

"We're exuberant about this discovery because it proves that these people

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Officials with an int can or plo with plans history mu would like 5500 or 2 information

Check with the Boy Scouts

I hate to deflate the city park director, but those Indian findings of his make me laugh. Probably I should call him and tell him that with the Boy Scout troupe I scout master for that we go up there and make Indian stuff all of the time. The good

arrowheads that we make the boys take home with them. The so-called tools we just leave up there. So, before someone says that they are 2,000 years old, someone better check with the Boy Scouts.

Mr. McKinney said he overlooked the stone and shell items if he had not been accompanied by Mike George, a local expert on American Indian artifacts.

The discovery was made while offi-

re scouting sites for the Sacred ritual, which celebrates the his- American Indians and pioneers e lived in this area.

orge said the items are believed nants from the Woodland peo- hunter-gatherer culture that d the area from about 1,000 B.C.

just walking down a ridge and -thing that looked like it didn't here, so I started searching," he

if the artifacts are believed to he early- and middle-Woodland which would make them about ,000 years old, Mr. George said. orge said no digging was done he items, which were under

Mr. McKinney won't say exactly where in the park the items were found because they do not want people dis-

Please see **Artifacts/Page A7**



ERIC KEITH/St. Joseph News-Press
Mike George displays arti- facts found in Krug Park.

Artifacts found at Krug Park

Continued from Page A1

turbing the site.

Jerry Zimmerman, a soil scientist with Natural Resources Conservation Services, an office of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, inspected the Krug site and agrees with Mr. George's belief that the items were left by the Woodland peoples. He said the site has been placed on the state's archeological register.

"This find basically confirmed what a lot of archaeologists think — that there were native encampments in the hills along the Missouri River," Mr. Zimmerman said.

Mr. Zimmerman and Mr. George said the items found at Krug are typical of Woodland artifacts. Other Woodland items dating from about the same time have been found in Andrew and Holt counties and other parts of Northwest Missouri, they said.

The artifacts will be displayed at the Sacred Hills festival June 13, 14 and 15.

Parks news is mixed bag

N-P 6-8-97

Artifacts discovered, but trash messes up picture

It was those classically good news/bad news weeks for Krug and other city parks.

The good news is that about 40 American Indian artifacts were discovered last month in the hills of Krug Park. Actually, that is exciting news that city officials waited until Wednesday to announce so that they could verify the authenticity of the items.

The artifacts include arrowheads, tools, beads and fragments of pottery. Each artifact adds an important, rich thread to St. Joseph's historical tapestry.

Mike George, an area expert on American Indian artifacts, believes the remnants come from the Woodland people, who inhabited the area from 1000 B.C. to 800 A.D. The Natural Resources Conservation Services division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture also has inspected the site and confirms Mr. George's theory. The site has been placed on the state's archeological register.

City officials won't say where the artifacts were found. That's appropriate. They promise the artifacts will be on display at the Sacred Hills Festival on June 13, 14 and 15. That's great, too. But it also would be nice if park officials could secure the archeological site so that visitors could observe where the artifacts were found and even watch any exca-

vation for additional artifacts. That would bring history to life.

The bad news is almost as discouraging as the good news is exciting. City crews have begun digging through mounds of garbage bags piled up at Krug, Bartlett and Wyeth parks and Corby Pond.

Parks and Recreation Director Bill McKinney estimates 20 percent of the trash collected at the parks actually is illegally dumped residential trash.

"We've got enough to pick up with the people who are using the park," Mr. McKinney says. "We don't need to be picking up people's home garbage as well."

The park crews are looking for any material in the trash that might include an individual's address. A warning letter will be sent to that person. And city officials will check to see if that person is complying with a city ordinance that requires everyone to contract with a trash service. A second offense will result in the complaint being turned over to police.

That's too bad. Our parks and parkways are the sparkling gem of our community. It is criminal that a handful of people think they can turn our parks into their private landfills.

We are sorry that some city workers has to dig through someone's trash. But we're glad someone is doing it.

Ancient camp remnants four

By JERRY NACHTIGAL
Associated Press

VAN BUREN, Mo. — The soothing, sparkling-blue waters of the Current River in southern Missouri have been a magnet for campers, canoeists, fishermen and nature lovers for years.

Ages, actually.

At the junction of two service roads in the Big Spring area of the Ozark National Scenic Riverways, just a couple hundred yards from a campground filled

with recreational vehicles and tents, prehistoric man also set up seasonal camps.

From about 10,000 years ago to 4,000 years ago, man repeatedly camped at this site on what was then a riverbank. He likely hunted deer, turkey and songbirds, caught fish and collected plants from the surrounding forest.

Beneath a tall canopy of oak and hickory trees, about a dozen professional and amateur archaeologists are spending the summer using shovels and trowels to peel

back history, one thin layer at a time.

On hands and knees, enduring stifling heat and mosquitoes, the excavators dig painstakingly through about 6 feet of caramel-colored soil, which is actually silt deposited by thousands of years of flooding.

Their reward: unearthing artifacts that provide insight into a 6,000-year span of prehistoric life in the Ozarks.

"We find tools, various kinds of knives, scrapers, drills and

projectile points or spear points from all these periods of the past," said James E. Price, an archaeology researcher from the University of Missouri who is in charge of the dig.

"It's just simply a layer cake, literally. The earliest (history) at the bottom, the youngest at the top."

Price discovered the site in 1989 as part of a surveying project for Peavine Road, a back entrance into the Big Spring recreation area that is slated for widening.

nd along river

He and his crew have dug at the site for three summers and will wrap up the so-called Peavine Road Dig for good Aug. 4.

The project is a joint venture between the National Park Service, which oversees the Ozark National Scenic Riverways, and the University of Missouri. The wilderness area is located about 140 miles east of Springfield.

Complex maps are drawn listing where each artifact is found, down to tiny flakes of rock left over from tool and weapon mak-

ing. All the artifacts are cleaned, washed and analyzed, then sent to the National Park Service's Midwest Archaeological Center in Lincoln, Neb., for further analysis.

Soil is carefully skimmed and scooped into buckets, then sifted by hand through a boxlike contraption with a metal screen.

The excavation is open to the public. A National Park Service interpreter is at the site, and Price and members of his crew also answer questions.

dom Seen' featured ilm 'Kansas City'

a crap game in another building as well as a casino and nightclub.

During raids, the affable Seldom Seen always doffed his hat and addressed police as "gentlemen of the jury." One police officer even sent Seldom Seen a Christmas card each year.

M.C. Ruffin, a former cabdriver, remembers Seldom Seen as a classic Depression era gangster: a dapper, generous tipper who was always looking for a crap game or an angle.

Mose Covington, a club owner during the late 1930s and through the 1940s, said Seldom Seen often turned up at such famous events as "Blue Monday." That was a weekly, daylong party when, on their traditional day off, the city's prostitutes, hustlers and musicians would dress up and hit the clubs by 7 a.m.

"He was always out there," Covington said. "Everyone was out there on Blue Mondays. Tell the truth, everyone was out there almost every night. But he always

The lost treasure of Prospect Hill

N-P 10-10-03

Thar's gold in that thar hill. The hill referred to is Prospect Hill, the south end of the Missouri River bluffs on which Huston Wyeath Park is perched.

I first heard the story back in pre-World War II days when it was related by the late Mary Alicia Owen, one of St. Joseph's distinguished trio of extra-intelligent siblings. I will tell more about them later.

According to the legend about the Gold Rush event, an Indian orphan boy made a living by toting luggage from



Fred Slater
Timely Observations
Emeritus

steamboats docking at the St. Joseph wharf. One day he spotted two riverboat gamblers in the company of a young man. The chap had made a fortune selling furs and live-stock in St. Louis for himself and his father.

After stopping in Weston, Mo., to buy a farm where he and his betrothed would live, the young man came to St. Joseph with his and his father's gold to deposit the wealth in a bank. As the folklorist told the story, the two gamblers first allowed the young man to win a little. Then they bore down and soon won the victim's gold and that of his father.

In a desperate effort to recoup his lost fortune, the man wagered his farm and lost. Seeing his hand was lost, the youth pulled a pistol from his pocket and shot himself in the head. In his hand was found the ill-famed dead man's hand — two black aces, two black eights and a jack of diamonds.

Deciding to hide the gold until the situation cooled, the two gamblers headed for Prospect Hill and selected a ravine as a place to secrete the gold. As one of the sharpies was digging a hole, he noticed the Indian lad had followed them. So the man swung his shovel, killing the lad. The pair threw the body on top of the gold, saying "Maybe his ghost will watch it for us."

Months later, the tale continues, Jules Robidoux, the postmaster, received a letter from one of the gamblers. The fellow said he was in a New Orleans hospital and his partner had been killed. The man said he had repented and asked the gold be dug up and given to a priest to say Masses for him, the Indian boy and his partner.

Robidoux tried to find the gold but failed, as did others who heard the tale. The tale concluded, "The little Indian boy guards the treasure well."

About the sisters: Mary Alicia Owen was a writer, folklorist and ethnologist. She was a graduate of Vassar and wrote a number of books. Luella Agnes Owen was a geologist, professional traveler and made a trip around the world in 1890, as well as being a portrait painter. Juliette Owen was also an artist and an ornithologist. The three lived in a century old house at the northwest corner of Ninth and Jules streets.

A final true Owen story. The board of Zion Evangelical Church at the southwest corner of Ninth and Faraon streets, paid their janitor \$5 a month to kill pigeons, which flew from elm trees on the nearby Owen property and "bombed" some church members on Sunday mornings.

Learning of the matter, the Owens, who loved birds, paid the janitor \$5 a month not to kill any birds in his blasts. All went well until a church member saw the janitor deliberately missing pigeons and the janitor lost his extra \$10 a month.

Fred Slater's column runs on Fridays.



Rocky Bentilla of Maryville, Mo., recently found a mastodon skull while rock hunting in a creek bed near Clearmont, Mo. The more than 400-pound skull is proudly displayed in Mr. Bentilla's garage.

TODD WEDDLE
St. Joseph
News-Press

Mastodon skull great conversation piece

By **ALONZO WESTON**
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St. Joseph News-Press

MARYVILLE, Mo. — In the two years since Rocky Bentilla took up digging for artifacts as a hobby, he's never found much worth talking about.

"Just some bottles, rocks, horseshoes, pieces of pottery and driftwood, and lots of footprints," he said.

But the 55-year-old Maryville man was determined not to spend another unfruitful year. So, on a cold and wet Dec. 16, he decided to turn to God for help.

"I prayed to God to let me find an arrowhead or something better than that," he said.

With faith in God — and a sled made from the roof of an old golf cart and loaded with duct tape and garden tools — he went trudging through woods near the town of Clearmont in Northwest Missouri. He found the answer to his prayers in the bottom of a creek bed. It came in the form of a huge mastodon skull.

"I didn't know what it was at first," Mr. Bentilla said. "When I got up to it, I couldn't believe it, but I thought it was a wooly mammoth or mastodon skull."

A mastodon is an extinct prehistoric animal that looked much like an elephant. According to the World Book Encyclopedia, the animal originally lived in North Africa more than 40 million

years ago. They supposedly migrated to America about 14 million years ago and lived here for about 10,000 years.

Finding the remains of a mastodon in this area is fairly rare, said Michael Fisher, president of the St. Joseph Archaeological Society.

"They're pretty rare all right. I've never stumbled across one myself," he said. "But mammoth or mastodon remains have been found in just about every county in the state."

Finding a mastodon skull was a rare enough find for Mr. Bentilla.

When he saw the skull in Nodaway County, he quickly went to work with his garden trowel and bucket, digging it out of the sand and mud. Two hours later, he had the skull, which he estimated to weigh more than 400 pounds and be about 36 inches wide, out of the ground and loaded onto his small sled.

"I prayed to God to give me the strength to tip it over and, guess what, I could tip it over and onto the sled. I thank God for that," he said.

He ran into problems when he tried to pull the sled to his truck, so he ran to a nearby farmhouse for help. He got a farmer and his son to come down with a pickup and a four-wheeler to help tow it back to their farm.

"They said I could come back and pick it up in a few days," Mr. Bentilla said.

A few days later, two of his friends — father and son Bob Horn and Rick Horn — went to the farmhouse and picked up the skull. They took it to Mr. Bentilla's house and put it in his garage.

He invited an archaeology professor from Northwest Missouri State University in Maryville to come over and examine the skull.

But he already knew what he'd found.

"I had already checked

it out on the Internet, and it is a sub-adult mastodon. It's not a full-grown adult," he said.

Mr. Bentilla doesn't know what he'll do with the mastodon skull yet. He's not sure if he wants to put it in a museum. As for now, it has its own place in his garage.

"I want to keep it and enjoy it," Mr. Bentilla said. "I might have the school kids come over and get their pictures taken with it."

Tales of the Midland Empire is published weekly. If you know an unusual story, unusual bits of history or an unusual person in the area, call Alonzo Weston at 271-8574, (800) 779-6397 or e-mail him at alonzow@npgco.com.

