

A DAY OF ARCHEOLOGY IN NE ARKANSAS

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There is no “typical” day as the Station Assistant at the Blytheville Station of the Arkansas Archeological Survey. I can find myself doing anything from initial site survey, to mapping, to excavating, to lab work, to final report write-ups. So I thought a more fun blog would be to show you around my area of NE Arkansas and the kinds of places that I find myself throughout my days. We have some amazing archeology out here and I’m lucky to get to work on it every day.

As a general rule I start out my day by coming out to my office. This summer we planted two gardens out front as part of our public outreach/engagement. One is a tenant farmer garden and the other is a native (3 sisters) garden. These two gardens show people not only how the crops differ, but also how planting techniques differ between cultures and time periods.



Tenant farmer garden (left), Native garden (right), Survey Station building in the background

We also have an up-and-coming museum in Blytheville called the Delta Gateway Museum that is located on Main Street in the old Kress department store building. We have loaned some of our collections to the museum for display and we work with them on various events and displays throughout the year.



Delta Gateway Museum



Mississippian Pottery on display at the Delta Gateway Museum

We have more than just a museum in NE Arkansas though. We also have a lot of archeological sites. Despite being so close to the Mississippi River and having it meander and destroy most very old archeological sites over the years, we do still have some Archaic (8500BC-600BC) sites! Though they don't look like much during the summer while the field is in beans...



Archaic Site, NE Arkansas

We also have a lot of small, nearly abandoned historic cemeteries. You can be driving down the road and just run across one. Someone is keeping this mowed, but the headstones are falling down and the church that was likely near it is long gone.



Historic Cemetery

Just down the road from our office is the city of Armorel, named for Arkansas (Ar), Missouri (mo), and Robert E Lee Wilson (a local cotton Barron in the early days)(rel). They don't have a huge headquarters there anymore, but this is their old headquarters building and also possibly the company store.



Armorel Headquarters

Armorer is just inside the levee that protects the low lying ground of NE Arkansas from flooding on the Mississippi. Seeing the levee makes you really think about the days before the levee was built and how people must have constantly worried about the river flooding, which would have wiped out everything in the area.



Mississippi River Levee

The huge Mississippian site called Knappenberger is also in our area of NE Arkansas. It used to have giant mounds on it, but farming over the years has reduced them to hills on the landscape. Here they are planted for the season.



Knappenberger Site

Another nearby Mississippian site has a mound that hasn't been plowed over. It has been severely looted over the years, but not taken down in the same way that plowing does. It is called the Chickasawba mound and has a large site associated with it.



Chickasawba Mound

Back to our historic roots, there are a few shotgun houses still standing around the area. Why are they named shotgun houses? Maybe because they are long and thin, or maybe because if you take your shotgun and shoot, you can reach from the front of the house to the back through the doorways in the center. Most are uninhabited, but this one has a satellite dish...



Shotgun house...with satellite dish

In the more recent past, the NE Arkansas area was home to Eaker Airforce Base, where B52's were stationed during the Cold War. The base is now closed, but many of it's buildings, including our office, are still extant; as is the razorwire on the top of the fences and some of the old guard towers. A bit of a chilly reminder of no-too-distant American history.



Razor-wire topped fence



Guard tower near bunkers

So there you have it, a fly-by tour of archeology in NE Arkansas as seen by the Station Assistant at the Blytheville Station of the Arkansas Archeological Survey. This is an amazing area with so much archeology that no one could ever possibly get bored. Come out and see it for yourself!